

How the Eunuch Works:  
Eunuchs as a Narrative Device in Greek and Roman Literature

Dissertation

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## Abstract

Until now, eunuchs in early Greek and Roman literature have been ignored by classical scholars, but this dissertation rectifies that omission. In the ensuing chapters, eunuchs in literature ranging from the Classical to the early Christian period are subjected to a scholarly analysis, many of them for the first time. This comprehensive analysis reveals that eunuchs' presence indicates a breakdown in the rules of physiognomy and, consequently, a breakdown of major categories of identity, such as ethnicity or gender. Significantly, this broader pattern manifests itself in a distinct way, within each chronological and geographical period.

Dedication

Pro Cognationibus Amicisque

## Acknowledgements

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who were castrated by men, and there are eunuchs who castrate themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever is able to do this, may he do so.

εἰσὶν γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήθησαν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνουχίσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισαν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω.

Matt. 19:12

Jesus' commandment for every man who can castrate himself to do so seems a rather radical exhortation. His sentiment here, however, draws on a conception of eunuchs whose origins stretch back to at least the fifth century BC. Classical Greek authors such as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Ctesias write about eunuchs, as do authors of the Roman Republic—who also pre-date the New Testament—such as Terence and Catullus. To date, no one has examined how eunuchs work in these earlier works, and my goal is to rectify that omission. Eunuchs, by their very nature, seem to be an ideal medium for blurring the boundary between male and female, but in Greek literature they erode distinctions between ethnicities, not genders. In this dissertation, I argue that eunuchs in Greek literature draw into question the hard and fast division between “Greek” and “barbarian.” Literature of the Roman Republic, on the other hand, does focus on eunuchs' destabilizing impact on gender. Moreover, I will show that, in both cases, this destabilization of ethnicity or gender often impacts characters who are not eunuchs. In many instances, in fact, eunuchs are irrelevant to the action at hand, and could be



removed from the texts entirely, without any disruption of the narratives. Their presence is still significant in itself, however, as they *signal* to an audience that a text is grappling with the definitions and boundaries of ethnicity or gender.

The later second sophistic authors Lucian and Favorinus merge and manipulate these two literary traditions for their own ends. Favorinus is especially significant for understanding the quote from Matthew above, as he gives himself a unique and nearly unimpeachable form of authority, using the ethnic and gender ambiguity that eunuchs had come to represent by his time. After one considers these earlier literary traditions concerning eunuchs, it becomes apparent that the quotation above is not a radical sentiment, but a logical and nearly expected evolution of a long running pattern.

### **Scholarship and Models**

Although no scholarship focuses on eunuchs in Classical Greek and Roman Republic literature, there is certainly no dearth of references to these eunuchs in scholarly works. They are never, however, the main concern. Despite this imperfect overlap, a review of modern scholarship on eunuchs is still beneficial, as it reveals the nature of the broader interrogation into eunuchs and how that interrogation has developed over time. And just as my focus differs from that of other eunuch scholars, so too does the nature of my investigation. That having been said, my approach—which I describe in more detail below—is a natural continuation of the development that the extant scholarship displays. Broadly speaking, scholarship on eunuchs falls into one of two categories: the first focuses on eunuchs in the Byzantium empire; and the second strives to imbue eunuchs with universally applicable symbolic value.

Both branches of scholarship often cite eunuchs from earlier literature, but they

are not the foci of the arguments.<sup>1</sup> Rather, they are brought up as tangential evidence for claims about eunuchs in the Byzantine empire or about the significance of the category of eunuch. In *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, for example, Shaun Tougher refers to eunuchs in Xenophon as corroborating evidence for an argument about Samonas the Arab—chief eunuch of emperor Leo VI (886-912)—and other Byzantine eunuchs.<sup>2</sup> In his defense, Tougher is meticulous about acknowledging the geographic and chronological chasm involved in such claims.

Contrary to Tougher's carefulness, there is a tendency amongst scholars focused on the overarching symbolic meaning of eunuchs to wholly collapse space and time, without any concern. Gary Taylor, for example, marshals the Hebrew Bible book *Wisdom of Solomon*; unspecified “Mesopotamian, Persian, Egyptian, and Greek cults;” a eunuch in Catullus; a twelfth century bishop named Theophylact of Ochrid; and Thomas Middleton—a seventeenth century English playwright—to explain that eunuchs are barren and “barrenness is virtue's grace.”<sup>3</sup> Piotr Scholz draws upon a similarly wide-ranging field of evidence, and also has a tendency to misrepresent that evidence. For example, he says that “Zeus was *both the son and grandson* of castrated gods” and that “Dionysos, who emerged from either Zeus' hip or his thigh, suffered 'sparagmos,' the loss of his penis while he was being torn asunder.”<sup>4</sup> There is no evidence, however, that both Zeus' grandfather and father were castrated or that Dionysus' phallus was severed when

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<sup>1</sup> Hopkins (1978), Ringrose (2003), Tougher (2008) & (2013) on Byzantine empire; Taylor

<sup>2</sup> Tougher (2008) 44.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor (2000) 200-208.

<sup>4</sup> Scholz (2001) both quotes on 49.

he emerged from Zeus.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, Dionysiac worship often centered on the god's marvelous penis.<sup>6</sup> The penchant for treating geographically and chronologically far-flung events as synchronic and coterminous severely undermines this branch of eunuch scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

While each work that attempts to explain the universal symbolism of eunuchs largely ignores its predecessors, scholars who focus on eunuchs in the Byzantine empire are engaged with each others' works. Consequently, there is a more conventional dialogue about the merits and demerits of particular points. One of the major questions that such scholarship aims to answer is why eunuchs acquired such powerful roles in the Byzantine empire.<sup>8</sup> Keith Hopkins, in his book *Conquerors and Slaves*, was one of the first modern scholars to put forth a possible explanation. Hopkins argues that eunuchs rose to power as emperors' need for an expanded bureaucracy increased. Managing this

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<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, Zeus' father Cronos castrated Zeus' grandfather Ouranos (Hesiod *Theogony* ll. 176-180). Centuries later, some Orphic cults seem to have transferred this down a generation, resulting in Zeus castrating Cronos (Lopez-Ruiz 2010). In no case are both castrated.

<sup>6</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 365

<sup>7</sup> I am trying to be diplomatic about these works. I think it is best to let them speak for themselves, by providing representative quotations. Taylor (2000) 118-119 says that "In [an unspecified] Caesar's (pleasure) [*sic*] palace, every man's penis becomes, potentially, the enemy of any woman... women like that good Catholic wife Lorena Bobbitt whose husband's 'weapon' was an instrument of sexual tyranny from which she could only defend herself by amputating it while he slept; women like the hundreds of Thai wives who, in the 1990s, cut off the cocks of their philandering husbands." Similarly, and without citing any sources, Scholz (2001) 10: "Yoga, a product of Hindu philosophy, is a further example... [that] dance can serve as a vehicle to enable people to cross the threshold of sensory experience and cognition and create space in their imaginations where principles different from those that define the orderly structures of more enlightened societies can operate. This is why the adherents of the cult of Cybele performed the rite of castration in a state of frenzy, when they were carried away by music and dancing. Reports of magical fertility rites performed by shamans are particularly instructive since they show the continuity of magical and ritual acts from the days of ancient Egypt and classical Greece to recent times."

<sup>8</sup> For clarity's sake, I separate my review of the relevant scholarship from my historical summary of eunuchs. For more details about eunuchs' roles in the Byzantine empire and other historical details, see the following section.

bureaucracy required help, but emperors did not want to enable local aristocracy. Consequently, Hopkins explains, they relied on eunuchs.<sup>9</sup> One of the court eunuchs' jobs was management of the emperor's schedule, and this gave them control over who was granted an audience with the emperor. Therefore, would-be petitioners often bribed eunuchs to gain access to the emperor. Others had no need of an audience with the emperor but did need his approval of their petitions and proposals. Since eunuchs had regular contact with the emperor, one could pay them to argue on behalf of one's petition, in hopes of influencing imperial policy.<sup>10</sup>

One of the consequences of this arrangement was that the nobles had to pander to eunuch slaves in order to reach the emperor. This both demeaned the nobles and emphasized the emperor's distance from and power over them.<sup>11</sup> The emperors' desire to demean other aristocrats explains what might otherwise seem to be a gap in Hopkins' argument. In particular, it explains why it is eunuchs (as opposed to any other group, apart from the aristocracy) to whom an emperor would turn, when he required help managing the ballooning bureaucracy. A eunuch slave, Hopkins argues, occupied the nadir of the traditional social hierarchy. By making the nobles rely on eunuchs, the emperor emphasized their lack of social standing. This also explains why Byzantine authors—most of whom would have had occasion to interact with court eunuchs—

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<sup>9</sup> Hopkins (1978) 182.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins (1978) 176-178.

<sup>11</sup> Another major facet of Hopkins' chapter is the question of whether eunuchs came to power in the Roman court quickly or gradually. He argues the latter (pp. 192-193), and pinpoints Diocletian as the emperor responsible for establishing the practice of relying on eunuchs. For the opposite position see Stevenson (1995) 495-511, who argues for a gradual shift beginning with Hadrian, and and Tougher (2008) 51 who also argues for a gradual shift, but does not attribute its beginning to any particular emperor.

express such disdain for them.<sup>12</sup>

Hopkins' argument is focused on eunuchs in the fourth to sixth centuries, and Kathryn Ringrose concurs with his assessment that eunuchs were universally reviled during this period. In her book *The Perfect Servant*, Ringrose argues that eunuchs transitioned from objects of widespread disdain in the fourth century to objects of great admiration and respect by the ninth.<sup>13</sup> According to Ringrose, the hostility that early Byzantine authors have for eunuchs did not stem from aristocrats' humiliation, as Hopkins argues, but from Christianity's dim view of castration. Ringrose explains: "Christianity, or rather the Judaic tradition within Christianity, emphasizes the integrity of the physical body and is uncomfortable with bodily mutilation and its results... The male body must be preserved in its 'natural' state."<sup>14</sup> Ringrose foregoes citations for this claim, and one cannot but wonder how she would account for the Jewish custom of circumcision and Jesus' mention of eunuchs "who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 19:12).<sup>15</sup> Mathew Kuefler's *The Manly Eunuch* does put forth an explanation for why Christian literature holds eunuchs in contempt. He argues that Christian leaders and authors frowned on castration, but most early followers did not. In fact, many early Christians went so far as to castrate themselves. This practice jeopardized the religion's continued existence, hence the leaders' repeated and lengthy condemnations of both castration and eunuchs.<sup>16</sup> Kuefler explains that church fathers had

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<sup>12</sup> Hopkins (1978) 183-196.

<sup>13</sup> Ringrose (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Ringrose (2003) 11.

<sup>15</sup> Brown (2008) 66-68 notes that Athenagoras and Eusebius both refer to eunuchs as exemplary Christians.

<sup>16</sup> Kuefler (2001) chapter 8, "Eunuchs for the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven." Tougher (2008) 64 reiterates this point.

to develop the dogma of “spiritual castration” to combat the popular practice of physical self-castration among early Christians. Notably, the popularity of castration among the masses contradicts Ringrose's position that eunuchs were generally despised until the ninth century. On the contrary, it suggests that many wanted to join their ranks.

The catalyst of eunuchs' transition from popular scorn to admiration from the fourth to ninth century, according to Ringrose, was the development of a third gender identity that they occupied. Until this third gender developed, eunuchs occupied a poorly defined position between masculine and feminine that caused unease about traditional gender roles. The third gender was defined by “separation from one's own background, with asexuality and asceticism, and was linked to service in the household of both secular and religious masters—*oikoi*, rulers, and gods.”<sup>17</sup> Tougher conjectures that Ringrose's thesis is attractive because it “makes Byzantine thoughts about eunuchs very neat,” but he presents a compelling case against her.<sup>18</sup> He points out that the inability to father children does not necessarily sever one from one's background and pre-existing family members, and he cites numerous examples from the ninth century through the twelfth of eunuchs aiding their relatives, often to the detriment of the eunuch's sovereign.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Tougher cites many positive statements about eunuchs in Byzantine literature that exist earlier than they should, if Ringrose is correct, as well as many negative views penned after Ringrose says eunuchs were held in high esteem.<sup>20</sup> Ringrose herself acknowledges these texts, but she does not reshape her argument to fit them. Instead, as Tougher points out, she refers to early, positive views of eunuchs as anomalous and later, hostile ones as

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<sup>17</sup> Ringrose (2003) 209.

<sup>18</sup> Tougher (2008) 99.

<sup>19</sup> Tougher (2008) 46-71.

vestiges of an earlier rhetoric.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Ringrose is able to claim that until the ninth century, hostile rhetoric was normative, and that afterwards the positive view of eunuchs became dominant, despite the concurrent existence of both positions, for centuries.

Tougher's own argument is that Byzantine authors were free to choose between a positive and a negative image of eunuchs, each of which was an established literary *topos*.<sup>22</sup> In support of the existence of these *topoi*, Tougher cites Pierre Briant's opus *From Cyrus to Alexander*, in which Briant argues that Ctesias established a negative paradigm for eunuchs in his *Persika* and Xenophon a positive one in the *Cyropaedia*.<sup>23</sup> Both Tougher and Briant note that although these *topoi* existed, "the historian clearly does not need to choose between Ctesias and Xenophon" and "could choose between positive and negative images which co-existed in society, and which could even feature simultaneously in a single text."<sup>24</sup> While Ringrose maintains that eunuchs were first perceived as generally bad and gradually came to be perceived as good, Tougher and Briant both maintain that either opinion, and the range of opinions between these two poles, was always an option.

Briant and Tougher's position is attractive because it makes Byzantine thoughts about eunuchs very neat. It creates a spectrum with two clear poles between which one can situate any Byzantine author's evaluation of eunuchs. Unfortunately, it is rather too simple. First, one must consider the issue of perspective. One of the traits of Ctesias'

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<sup>20</sup> Tougher (2008) 99-111.

<sup>21</sup> Tougher (2008) 102.

<sup>22</sup> Tougher (2008) 102-103.

<sup>23</sup> Briant (2002) 268-272.

<sup>24</sup> Briant (2002) 272 and Tougher (2008) 102.

eunuchs that causes Briant to label them “bad” is their tendency to kill Persian kings. On the other hand, Briant labels the eunuchs in the *Cyropaedia* “good” because of their unwavering loyalty to Cyrus. Significantly though, both Ctesias and Xenophon wrote in Greek, and their target audience consisted of Greeks. A Greek audience's ethical assessments of the eunuchs in Ctesias and Xenophon's eunuchs is more difficult to discern than Briant and Tougher make out, given the hostility and warfare between the Greek poleis and the Persian empire. Surely, a significant portion of Ctesias and Xenophon's initial audiences would have considered being loyal to a Persian king worse than killing one. There is also the possibility that what Briant and Tougher assume are polar opposites are not necessarily such. Being a loyal slave of the Persian king and being a homicidal slave who kills one's master are not inherent opposites. Additionally, the experiences that Ctesias and Xenophon had with Persian eunuchs have little in common with the experiences of Byzantine authors, apart from the presence of eunuchs. In Ctesias and Xenophon, eunuchs are Persian foreigners, inhabitants of a far-off realm, exotic curiosities that could be observed in an Eastern setting from which they rarely strayed. Byzantine authors, on the other hand, lived in an empire that not only had a significant eunuch population but also was largely managed by eunuchs.

All of the scholars above dedicate no small number of pages to the question of whether the Byzantines had a positive or a negative view of eunuchs. Ringrose, for instance, begins with the premise that there was a shift from a negative opinion to a positive one, and then forges an argument about the development of a third gender to account for this transition. Likewise, Hopkins' argument about the social status of eunuchs in the fourth century is largely based on the fact that aristocratic Byzantine



authors are hostile to eunuchs. Although Tougher's major concern is sorting out the historical details of eunuchs' official titles and duties in the Byzantine empire, he still includes a significant discussion about eunuchs' popularity. On the other hand, Caroline Vout's *Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome*, a rare piece of scholarship that discusses eunuchs in the pre-Byzantine Roman empire, demonstrates another approach to thinking about eunuchs. Vout's thesis is that the supreme masculinity and power of Roman emperors solicited erotic responses in those who gazed upon either the emperor or a likeness of him. Her focus is the early Roman empire, and although eunuchs are not her primary concern, she does discuss two early imperial eunuchs—Sporus and Earinus—at length. Unfortunately (for my purposes), her discussion of Sporus makes only a cursory mention of his being a eunuch. On the other hand, her discussion of Earinus—a courtier and presumed lover of Domitian—thoroughly grapples with this fact.<sup>25</sup> Vout contrasts Martial and Statius' descriptions of Earinus, which focus on the young eunuch's beauty, to the more exotic and violent figure of the self-castrated Attis in Catullus 63.<sup>26</sup> This contrast, according to Vout, demonstrates that the lovely, desirable Earinus is unlike other eunuchs. She also argues that the numerous direct comparisons between Earinus and Ganymede elevate Domitian's status, indirectly but obviously, to that of Zeus: “There is a strong sense in which Martial and Statius are accountable for Domitian's status as 'Dominus et Deus.’”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Martial and Statius' poems about Earinus are also implicitly about his lover—the emperor Domitian, and therefore impact her arguments about imperial power and eroticism.

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<sup>25</sup> Vout (2007). On Sporus, see pgs. 136-166; on Earinus, 167-212.

<sup>26</sup> Vout (2007) 191-201.

<sup>27</sup> Vout (2007) comparisons to Ganymede at 170, 173, 190, 204. Quote from 202.

Vout also notes that Martial and Statius repeatedly use *puer* (rather than e.g., *iuvenis*, *vel sim.*) to describe Earinus, and argues that this particular noun, coupled with the specific aspects of Earinus' beauty that the poets chose to include, form an allusion to Cupid. This allusion to Cupid serves as a synecdoche for imperial Rome, since both Cupid and the Iulio-Claudians were descendants of Venus.<sup>28</sup> Vout concludes that by associating imperial Rome with a eunuch and passive sexual behavior, Martial and Statius are commenting on the less potent and passive role that Roman men were forced to adopt after the republic ended. As Vout puts it, "Earinus' power is in forcing this reader to face the implications of getting close to the emperor" and in "mak[ing] 'arma virumque cano' speak of emasculation."<sup>29</sup> Although a later article by Tougher convincingly decimates the underpinnings of Vout's arguments about Earinus, it is worthwhile to consider how different her approach is from the scholars discussed above.<sup>30</sup> She does not fret over whether Martial and Statius liked Earinus, and instead asks to what ends these poets use him.

Instead of investigating what Romans thought about eunuchs, Vout investigates what they used eunuchs to think about. Following Vout's lead, my focus in this dissertation is decidedly *not* what Greeks and Romans thought about eunuchs. My concern is what Greek and Roman authors employed eunuchs to think about. As an example, Claude Levi-Strauss's *Totemism* marks a similar paradigm shift, albeit in a very different field.<sup>31</sup> The practice of totemism manifests as a symbolic association between either an individual or a group and a particular animal or plant. The nature and cause of

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<sup>28</sup> Vout (2007) 203.

<sup>29</sup> Vout (2007) 203.

<sup>30</sup> Tougher (2013) 48-72.

this association was much debated, in the early twentieth century. Many of Levi-Strauss' predecessors had argued that it stemmed from the utilitarian value—usually as a food source—of a particular plant or animal.<sup>32</sup> Levi-Strauss, however, counters that this understanding of totemism fails to account for the fact that inedible objects (such as shooting-stars) and animals that were not consumed (such as flies, mosquitoes, and crocodiles) all served as totems.<sup>33</sup> He notes that animals conduct themselves and interact with each other in myriad ways and argues that humans, through empirical observation of animals, came to perceive certain animals as “embodiments of [particular] ideas and relations.”<sup>34</sup>

He corroborates this by referring to myths in which “the world of animal life is represented in terms of social relations similar to those of human society.”<sup>35</sup> A totem animal, then, was a metaphorical medium based on observable animal behavior through which a group could define itself and its engagement with others. It was the culmination of an intellectual process that required the empirical observation of animal behavior, extrospection of other groups, and consideration of one's (ideal) interactions with them. “Natural species,” Levi-Strauss explains, “are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think.’”<sup>36</sup> Levi-Strauss shifted the totemism discussion away from the question of what different peoples thought about their totems to what broader issues the totems were used to think about.

My approach to the question of how eunuchs work is similar to Levi-Strauss’

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<sup>31</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963).

<sup>32</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963) 56-71.

<sup>33</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963) 64.

<sup>34</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963) 89.

<sup>35</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963) 87.

approach to the question of totemism. Unlike Levi-Strauss, however, my theoretical framework for answering this question does not rely on structuralism. That is to say, *Totemism* is not a predecessor of my methods of answering the question of eunuchs. Rather, this work and *Totemism* reflect a similar break from previous scholarship with regards to the questions under consideration. Just as Levi-Strauss does not focus on what people thought about totem animals, I am not concerned with what Greco-Romans thought about eunuchs (as other scholars of eunuchs are). Rather, I investigate what eunuchs were “good to think” about in the Greek and Roman worlds. The answers, I argue, are the nature and solidity of the boundaries of ethnicity and gender.

Robert Kaster's *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* is as far afield from eunuchs as Levi-Strauss' *Totemism*, but since my discussion of eunuchs does use methods similar to those which he employs to discuss Roman emotion, a review of those methods is beneficial. Kaster focuses on the difficulty of accurately understanding the vocabulary of Roman emotion, noting that although there are conventional translations, “their *amor* is not always and exactly our 'love,' their *odium* still less our 'hate.’”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Kaster argues, an emotion is more than just any particular word. Rather, it is a word and the processes that accompany it. Kaster calls this word-action combination a script, and describes that process thus:

Any emotion-term is just the lexicalized residue of what happens when the data of life are processed in a particular way—through a sequence of perception, evaluation, and response... By 'lexicalized residue' I mean that if you are a Roman monitoring your emotions, you will register the playing out of this process by saying (for example) '*hui! fastidium!*' Typically, you will also link this registering closely with the last stage of the process, the response, and in particular a bodily response, or an

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<sup>36</sup> Levi-Strauss (1963) 89.

<sup>37</sup> Kaster (2005) 6.

affective response, or a pragmatic response, or some combination of these. The emotion properly understood, however, is the whole process and all its constituent elements, the little narrative or dramatic script that is acted out from the evaluative perception at its beginning to the various possible responses at the end.<sup>38</sup>

Kaster forms his conclusions about how a particular emotion-word's script plays out by analyzing the contexts in which that word is used. Noting the common threads that appear alongside the word *verecundia*, for example, he concludes that it signifies more than just a "sense of shame" or "modesty." The contexts in which *verecundia* appear demonstrate that it is "the art of knowing your proper place in every social transaction... exerting its force both vertically, across the different ranks of society, and horizontally, among members of comparable status."<sup>39</sup> When one is accused of having too little or too much *verecundia*, it prompts a script—a response in which the accused perceives the accusation, evaluates its accuracy, and then responds. If the accused evaluated the accusation as accurate, then he would respond in a particular fashion. For example, one charged with a lack of *verecundia* would, if he considered the charge accurate, express embarrassment and apologize.<sup>40</sup> Significantly, Kaster is able to deduce the association between *verecundia* and social niceties based on the contexts in which the word appears. Likewise, my argument that eunuchs signal impending ethnic or gender destabilization is based on context and not the word itself. One might object that the very word "eunuch" indicates a person of ambiguous gender, and thus the context is irrelevant. As we will see, however, eunuchs often signal the impending destabilization of *someone else's* gender or ethnicity. Eunuchs operate as emotion-terms do, according to Kaster's model, and *not* the

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<sup>38</sup> Kaster (2005) 8.

<sup>39</sup> Kaster (2005) 27.

<sup>40</sup> Kaster (2005) 21-22.

people to whom the emotion-terms are directed. That is to say, eunuchs prompt scripts to occur in others, as opposed to performing them themselves.

A Roman reader, Kaster argues, would have engaged not only with the word *verecundia* itself, but also with its “lexicalized residue.” Although experiencing the action vicariously, a reader would still act out the script and form expectations. Upon reading *verecundia*, for instance, he would perceive that someone has been accused of deviating from the behavior expected of their social station, evaluate the charge's accuracy, and, based on that evaluation, forecast the subsequent behavior of the accused. Furthermore, a reader would expect that the accused—even if he is a fictional character—is also carrying out the same script. Likewise, I argue that a Greek or Roman reader would perceive the word “eunuch,” and then form expectations about forthcoming events. The word possesses lexicalized residue that signals the destabilization of ethnicity or gender. A significant difference between *eunuchus* (*vel sim.*) and Kaster's emotion-terms is that those who encounter the latter seem to act with knowledge of the proper script. To apologize for excessive *verecundia* is a volitional act, indicating that the one who apologizes has evaluated his behavior and found it lacking in decorum. On the other hand, there is no indication that those who encounter eunuchs and subsequently undergo a radical transformation in ethnicity or gender do so willingly. A reader perceives the presence of eunuchs, and then forms expectations about what will happen, but those who encounter eunuchs within the texts fail to do so. In Kaster's terms, it is as though the reader knows the script, but the characters involved do not. This concept of a script is especially significant for eunuchs in the classical Greek authors Herodotus, Xenophon, and Ctesias, wherein the destabilization of ethnicity that eunuchs signal is accompanied

by the same five recurring themes. Upon perceiving the presence of a eunuch, a reader knows exactly what to expect.

Indeed although eunuchs are merely characters in narratives, their persistent role as accurate indicators of what to expect elevates their standing closer to that of more structural aspects of a text, such as genre. In his analysis of the genre of folktales, Vladimir Propp explains how one can discern whether a particular story fits the parameters of the genre: “[They] possess a quite particular structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it.”<sup>41</sup> Propp breaks down this “particular structure” into thirty-one discrete functions, which always appear in the same order. The characters and settings, according to Propp, can be endlessly substituted, without changing the story.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, whether eunuchs in Greek literature appear alongside Alexander or Cyrus the Great, the same function—destabilization of ethnicity—occurs. As Eric Csapo notes, Propp endorsed a radical disconnect between form and content, and he treated the former as far more significant than the latter.<sup>43</sup> I want to clarify that I am not advocating for such a divorce, and in no way mean to imply that a story about Alexander becoming more Persian is the same as Cyrus becoming more Greek. Especially for a largely Greek audience, the difference between the two is of monumental significance. That having been said, eunuchs in Greek literature do indicate that the text is now telling a particular *type of story*—one in which a character who associates with a eunuch is going to shed the expected behavior of their ethnicity and adopt its antithesis. Eunuchs signal to a reader that one particular function is

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<sup>41</sup> Propp (1968) 6.

<sup>42</sup> Csapo (2005) 180-212.

<sup>43</sup> Csapo (2005) 204.

about to occur, just as the genre of folktale signals that thirty-one particular functions are in store. Because of this uniformity in how eunuchs work in Greek and Roman literature—uniformity which I detail in the following chapters—it is not wholly inapt to refer to the parts of texts in which they appear as eunuch-tales.

Significantly, however, Greek eunuch-tales and Roman ones are not identical. And authors of the second sophistic combine and manipulate both of these earlier traditions in original ways. Unlike some earlier scholars who argue that eunuchs hold eternal and universal symbolic resonance, I maintain that eunuchs operate differently in literature from different cultures and times.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the variety of roles that eunuchs have held in disparate cultures over the last three millennia reveal the futility of assigning any static symbolic value to them.

### **A History of Eunuchs and Castration**

The origins of deliberate human castration are unknown, but our earliest sure evidence for the practice comes from China's Shang Dynasty (ca. 1766-1122 BC).<sup>45</sup> Chinese eunuchs thereafter often functioned as servants of the emperor within the palace but took on other roles such as ambassador, diplomat, or commander at times, especially during the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th c. AD). The last imperial Chinese eunuch, Sun Yaoting, died of natural causes at the age of 94 in 1996. His biography, *The Last Eunuch of China*, details the many household tasks with which eunuchs were entrusted, as well as the readiness of the imperial family to blame them for calamities, such as fires in the palace and illnesses.<sup>46</sup> In China, a eunuch's genitals were sometimes pickled and kept in a jar,

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<sup>44</sup> I discussed these scholars above.

<sup>45</sup> Tougher (2008) 7; Scholz (2001) 22; Bullough (2002) 1.

<sup>46</sup> Yinghua (2008). Yaoting himself provided a great amount of the material.



which the eunuch was expected to keep, for two reasons. First, to establish that he was in fact a eunuch, should the need arise, and second so that they could be buried with him, allowing his masculinity to be restored in the afterlife.<sup>47</sup>

The method of castration employed in China entailed the removal of both the penis and the testicles, a technique sometimes referred to as “total castration” or “double castration.” Historically, this practice is significantly rarer than severing or crushing the testicles only and has a higher mortality rate. The first step in total castration is the chopping off of the penis and testicles. Once they've been severed, the exposed urethra was plugged with a metal rod, which was removed three days later. During this three day period, patients were forbidden from eating or drinking. If the patient survived the dehydration and if urine gushed out upon the rod's removal, then his prognosis was good.<sup>48</sup>

There is a possibility that castration was also practiced in Egypt, at a very early date. A relief at Medinet Habu shows the victorious Ramesses III and piles of his enemies' severed genitals.<sup>49</sup> In his chronicles, Pharaoh Merneptah (19th dyn.) bragged that he had taken 6,359 uncircumcised penises as trophies, providing a written complement to the pictorial evidence from Medinet Habu.<sup>50</sup> The current consensus is that the removal of these penises occurred posthumously, although the dearth of evidence precludes any certainty.<sup>51</sup> One scholar has suggested that the story of the dismemberment of Osiris and his subsequent reconstruction by Isis, who cannot find Osiris' penis and

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<sup>47</sup> Bullough (2002) 2.

<sup>48</sup> Bullough (2002) 2-4.

<sup>49</sup> Tougher (2008) 28.

<sup>50</sup> Bullough (2002) 6.

<sup>51</sup> Bullough (2002) 6.

therefore builds him a new one, “strongly suggests that castration was a common practice among human beings as well.”<sup>52</sup> That Osiris was dead when his phallus was taken, however, raises questions about whether he actually was a eunuch and whether the story truly reflects the popularity of castration in ancient Egypt. Indeed, the Medinet Habu relief—which seems to indicate the practice of posthumous castration—offers another explanation of the Osiris story. Furthermore, the castration of a deity in a myth does not necessarily demonstrate that a culture practices castration. For example, the Greek poet Hesiod speaks of the castration of the god Ouranos, but castration was not a common practice in Greece.<sup>53</sup> Barring more evidence out of Egypt, one can assert no more than a possibility of castration.

Achaemenid Persia seems to have relied extensively on castrated servants. Since our knowledge of Achaemenid eunuchs comes exclusively from Greek literature, we are only able to discuss them in Greek terms.<sup>54</sup> The Greek word θλάδιας, which refers to eunuchs, stems from the verb θλάω, “to crush,” suggesting that the testicles alone were crushed, leaving the penis intact. This is corroborated, albeit at a much later date, by Paul of Aegina, who says in his 7th c. AD *Epitome of Medicine* that castration could be performed κατὰ θλάσιν (by compression) or κατ’ ἐκτομήν (by excision).<sup>55</sup> His description of the procedure makes it clear that the testicles alone are destroyed or removed:

That by compression is performed thus: children, still of a tender age, are placed in a vessel of hot water, and then when the bodily parts are softened in the bath, the testicles are to be squeezed with the fingers until

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<sup>52</sup> Scholz (2001) 53.

<sup>53</sup> Hesiod *Theogony*, ll. 176-180.

<sup>54</sup> Kuhrt (2007), Llewellyn-Jones (2002).

<sup>55</sup> *Epitome of Medicine* 6.68

they disappear, and, being dissolved, can no longer be felt. The method by excision is as follows: let the person to be made a eunuch be placed upon a bench, and the scrotum with the testicles grasped by the fingers of the left hand, and stretched; two straight incisions are then to be made with a scalpel, one in each testicle; and when the testicles start up they are to be dissected around and cut out.<sup>56</sup>

The existence of both methods of castration also appears in the *Souda*. The entry for ἐντομίας reads: “*Entomias*: A eunuch. And a *thladias* is one who has undergone crushing.”<sup>57</sup> Our earliest attestation of θλάδιας, however, is not until Philo Judaeus in the first century. Ἐκτομίας, on the other hand, appears in Herodotus, where it is used interchangeably with the far more common εὐνοῦχος (6.9, 6.32). Therefore, it is likely that the cutting method was used earlier than the crushing method in Persia, although one cannot be certain. Furthermore, there is no certainty as to whether both the testicles and the penis were cut, or simply the testicles, in Achaemenid Persia.

While θλάδιας and ἐκτομίας came to signify eunuchs based on their etymological links to methods of castration, the origins of εὐνοῦχος are less clear. The two most common arguments concur that the word stems from the function of eunuchs in Achaemenid Persia, but they differ on which role in the court led to the word's creation. The logical assumption underlying both arguments is that since the vast majority of eunuchs in Greek literature appear in the Persian court, the Greek word εὐνοῦχος likely refers to a role that eunuchs played in that court. One of these arguments is that εὐνοῦχος stems from the Greek phrase “guardian of the bed” (ὁ τὴν ἐνὶν ἔχων).<sup>58</sup> According to proponents of this etymology, Persian eunuchs' primary job was guarding the women

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<sup>56</sup> Tougher's translation. Tougher (2008) 30.

<sup>57</sup> Ἐντομίας: ὁ εὐνοῦχος. Θλαδίας δὲ ὁ τεθλασμένος

<sup>58</sup> Ringrose (2003) 16, Tougher (2008) 22.

within the royal harem.<sup>59</sup> Since eunuchs could not infringe upon the emperor's role as these women's sole sexual partner, they were ideal for such a job. And although some eunuchs can, in fact, achieve an erection, none of them can impregnate.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, employing them as guards of the royal harem ensured that any offspring born to a harem woman was a descendant of the king. The other common position is that εὐνοῦχος is a confusion of the Greek word for cup-bearer (οἶνοχόος).<sup>61</sup> Both of the two etymological possibilities have their merits, as eunuchs in Greek literature do regularly function as cup-bearers and guardians of the bed.<sup>62</sup> One minor issue with the latter position is that it is not women's beds that eunuchs usually guard, but that of the Persian emperor himself.<sup>63</sup> Barring the discovery of new evidence, the veracity of these etymological arguments will remain unsolved. In all likelihood however, one of these options—or perhaps a combination of both of them—is the origin of the Greek word εὐνοῦχος.

The preponderance of eunuchs in the Persian court described by our Greek sources has caused some consternation among scholars. Briant turns to Assyrian evidence to argue that several words have been conflated. The Hebrew word that is translated into

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<sup>59</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2002) 21, Briant (2003) 273.

<sup>60</sup> More on the biological affects of castration, in a bit.

<sup>61</sup> Tougher (2008) 22, Briant (2003) 276.

<sup>62</sup> As I discuss many of these in ensuing chapters, an exhaustive list here is superfluous. One example of a eunuch cup-bearer is Ctesias F8d\*.1-7 and eunuchs as guardians of the bed appear at Hdt. 3.77-80.

<sup>63</sup> Hdt. 3.77, Xen. *Cyropaedia* 7.5.58-65, Curtius Rufus 5.12.10-11. On the other hand, those who argue that eunuchs were guardians of harem women's beds cite passages in which eunuchs are associated with women or women's quarters, but a number of these are problematic. Llewellyn-Jones (2002) 27, for instance, cites a passage in Herodotus in which eunuchs escort the doctor Democedes from the king's chambers to the chambers of queen (Hdt. 3.130) as evidence that eunuchs were in charge of guarding the women. But the king does not have to summon the eunuchs in order to have them escort Democedes, i.e., they are already in the king's chambers and not those of the women. Furthermore, the eunuchs take Democedes to the women's quarters and relay the king's instructions. There is neither an indication that the eunuchs stay with the women nor one that they leave, although their initial positioning alongside the king suggests the latter.

εὐνοῦχος in the Septuagint is *saris*, which comes from the Akkadian expression *ša rēš šarri*, rendered in English as “he who is stationed at the head of the king.”<sup>64</sup> Briant records a joke expressed by P. Garelli concerning the “absurdity” of always translating *ša rēš šarri* as “eunuch”: “Is it necessary to castrate half the Assyrian administration and nearly everyone at court?”<sup>65</sup> Briant concludes: “It is moreover highly doubtful that all of the counselors and intimates of the Great Kings whom Ctesias and others call eunuchs were castrated men. The most reasonable hypothesis is to accept that *eunuch* is how the Greeks transmitted a term that the court of the Great King considered a title.”<sup>66</sup> Tougher counters that *ša ziqni*—“the bearded ones”—is often paired with *ša rēš šarri* to indicate all Assyrian officials, and that in Byzantium, officials were in fact divided between “eunuchs” and “bearded ones.”<sup>67</sup> Consequently, Tougher concludes, everyone described as *ša rēš šarri* could very well be castrated, and their non-castrated counterparts, who were also court officials were the *ša ziqni*. This debate has significant implications for Assyriologists and scholars working on the Achaemenid court for its own sake, but for the purposes of this dissertation it is less significant. As I am concerned with what the Greeks and Romans used eunuchs to think about, whether or not an individual actually was physiologically a eunuch is largely incidental. If a Greek or Roman author calls someone a eunuch, then I will consider him as such.

During the Classical and Hellenistic periods, eunuchs seem to have been a rarity in mainland Greece. The only attestation of a eunuch dwelling there in the classical period is an unnamed doorman who receives Plato and Hippocrates at Callias' house in

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<sup>64</sup> Briant (2002) 276.

<sup>65</sup> Briant (2002) 276.

<sup>66</sup> Briant (2002) 277.

the *Protagoras*.<sup>68</sup> There are slightly more references to eunuchs in Ionia, but nothing like what we see further east. Alexander did not discontinue use of eunuchs in his eastern palaces, but the practice did not significantly expand westward during the Hellenistic period. It is during this period in Egypt, however, that clear references to eunuchs begin, suggesting that Alexander's conquest did cause the practice of castration to spread at least southward.<sup>69</sup> According to Curtius Rufus, Alexander himself had a sexual relationship with a eunuch named Bagoas, whom he received as a gift from Nabarzanes of Persia (6.5.23, 10.1.25).

Rome was not home to a significant number of eunuchs until the late third century BC. The spread of eunuchs to Rome was largely the result of the decision to import the cult of Cybele from Asia Minor in 204 BC. Cybele's priests—the *galli*—were eunuchs, who castrated themselves in honor of her mythical consort Attis, who had done the same.<sup>70</sup> Cybele's cult had come to Greece in the sixth or fifth century, but there is no mention whether her priests there were castrated. Indeed, the evidence for castrated priests of Cybele in Asia Minor itself is very limited until the third century BC, although it does seem to have taken place.<sup>71</sup> From Cybele's arrival in Rome onwards, however, the *galli* attracted a great deal of attention and comment. In contrast to the austerity of traditional Roman priests, the *galli* engaged in ecstatic dancing, tambourine and drum revelry, public self-flagellation, and (also public) self-castration.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Tougher (2008) 22.

<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Protag.* 314c.

<sup>69</sup> Tougher (2008) 9.

<sup>70</sup> Beard (1994) is an excellent discussion of the cult's role in Rome. Gruen (1990) Ch. 1 dispels many common errors regarding Rome's motive for bringing the goddess from Asia Minor.

<sup>71</sup> Roller (1998). Vermaseren (1966).

<sup>72</sup> Beard (1994) 164-165; Lightfoot (2002) 72; Hales (2002) 91.

In the first and second centuries AD, eunuchs became more prominent because several Roman emperors of the first century associated with them. Nero, infamously, had a boy named Sporus castrated and then married him (Suet. 28.1). Suetonius says that Titus surrounded himself with a band of eunuchs and that Domitian forbade the sale of eunuchs and reduced by fiat the price of those eunuchs whom slave traders had already acquired (7.1). Dio Cassius corroborates this, and explains that Domitian's motivation was to spite Titus—who had enjoyed the company of eunuchs—posthumously (67.2.3). Domitian himself, however, had a eunuch slave named Earinus, whom he had acquired before he passed this law. Apparently, Domitian's law was either not enforced or just needed reiterating, as Hadrian also passed a law against castration.<sup>73</sup> Roman satirists also refer to eunuchs regularly. Although their portraits of Roman life cannot be taken at face value, the inclusion of eunuchs in their poems suggests that a Roman audience would have known enough about eunuchs to understand the satirists' points.<sup>74</sup>

In its section on the significance of particular terms in Roman law, Justinian's *Digest* elucidates the terms that Romans employed to refer to eunuchs. Although the text is rather late compared to those on which I focus, it attributes its definition to the much earlier Ulpian.<sup>75</sup> Ulpian says, according to the *Digest*: “*spadonum* is a general title for eunuchs, as well as the cut (*thlibiae*), the crushed (*thlasiae*), and if there is any other type of eunuch (*spadonum*), it is also contained by this term.”<sup>76</sup> As in the Greek terminology, there is a distinction between eunuchs who were castrated by cutting and by crushing, as

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<sup>73</sup> *Dig.* 48.8.5: *Hi quoque, qui thlibias faciunt, ex constitutione divi Hadriani ad ninnium hastam in eadem causa sunt, qua hi qui castrant.*

<sup>74</sup> For more on the spread of eunuchs during this period see Stevenson (1995).

<sup>75</sup> The *Digest* is from the 6th c. AD, Ulpian the late 2nd.

well as an over-arching term referring to eunuchs generally. Indeed, the Roman term for eunuchs created via the crushing technique (*thlasiae*) is a transliteration of the Greek term for the same (θλάδιας). The *Digest* omits another term drawn from the Greek lexicon, despite its popularity in Roman literature: *eunuchus*.

In the Byzantine empire, the role of eunuchs in emperors' courts gradually expanded, although the precise causes of this are debated.<sup>77</sup> They “formed a distinctive group... usually categorized as chamberlains (*cubicularii*), having at their head the grand chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*).”<sup>78</sup> These chamberlains managed the emperor's schedule and the day-to-day operations in the palace. In these roles, they held significant control of what matters an emperor attended to and who had access to the emperor. Additionally, it was not unusual for them to serve as imperial treasurers and ambassadors, several served as generals, and one was even a consul.<sup>79</sup> Although the social forces that elevated them from butlers to these more significant roles may never be clearly understood, what is clear is that eunuchs largely ran the Byzantine government, from the fourth to the twelfth centuries.

Apart from their roles as officials of the imperial court, eunuchs from the fourth century onwards were also employed in ecclesiastical choirs.<sup>80</sup> Although the *castrati*—as eunuch singers were called—of the seventeenth and eighteenth century are the most famous, the tradition of eunuch choral singers goes back to the fourth century. The founder of the practice has been tentatively identified as Bishop Ambrose of Milan (340-

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<sup>76</sup> *Dig.* 50.16.128 *spadonum generalis appellatio est, quo nomine tam hi... [sunt] item thlibiae et thlasiae, sed et si quod aliud genus spadonum est, continentur.*

<sup>77</sup> For this debate, see above.

<sup>78</sup> Tougher (2008) 36.

<sup>79</sup> Tougher (2008) 40-42.



397).<sup>81</sup> Our best evidence for this practice comes from the remnants of musical notations, which indicate pitches that only castrati would have been able to hit. This notation also indicates that boys would have been castrated prepubescently, as it requires a boy's voice.<sup>82</sup> In an ironic twist, the castrati became sex symbols not unlike modern pop stars, prompting Pope Sixtus V to issue an edict in 1586 that banned them from marriage and sexual activity.<sup>83</sup> The movie *Farinelli* details the life of one of the most famous eighteenth-century castrati: Carlo Broschi, known on-stage as Farinelli (1994). The practice of castrated singers continued until the 20th century—recently enough that we have a recording of the voice of the last one of them: Alessandro Moreschi (1858-1922).

In addition to church singers, two other major groups of eunuchs survived into the twentieth century. The first is a Christian sect from Russia call the Skoptsy (“the castrated ones”). This sect began in the eighteenth century, and, despite being outlawed soon after its inception, continued until the 1930s. Its members were encouraged to castrate themselves, but not required to. Those who removed their testicles were considered more pious than those who did not, and those who removed both their penis and testicles were the most pious of all.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the defunct Skoptsky, the *hijras* of India still exist today. The *hijra*, who practice total castration, dedicate themselves to the worship of Bahucharā Mātā, a mother goddess figure. The most common terms used to discuss their gender are *tr̥t̥yām prakṛtim* (third gender) and *napuṃsaka* (not male).<sup>85</sup> In an interview, an anonymous *hijra* supported this gender ambiguity, telling an

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<sup>80</sup> Scholz (1999) Ch. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Scholz (1999) 272-273.

<sup>82</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> Scholz (1999) 279.

<sup>84</sup> Tougher (2008) 12; Ringrose (2003) 9; Scholz (1999) 292-293.

investigator, “We are neither men nor women.”<sup>86</sup> They live mostly in collectives, fund themselves largely through begging, dress as women, and regularly engage in prostitution. They also engage in non-sexual ritual activity, such as prophesying and blessing.

Although this dissertation is only concerned with a subsection of the eunuchs discussed above, this review of eunuchs throughout the ages reveals the often-unacknowledged (or at the very least, understated) prevalence of eunuchs in both Asia and Europe for over two millennia. A discussion of how the ancient Greeks and Romans thought about eunuchs is not about how they perceived an idiosyncrasy of their time. Rather, it is a discussion of the beginnings of western thought on a tradition that lasted millennia, and indeed still continues in some parts of the world today.

### **The Biological Effects of Castration**

An understanding of the biological effects of castration, according to both modern and ancient science, is beneficial for comprehension of the discussions of eunuchs in the ensuing chapters. As we lack detailed psychological analyses of eunuchs or texts written by eunuchs themselves, we are limited to a review of the physiological effects of castration. In modern medicinal terms, a male castrated prepubescently lacks many of the defining physical features of an adult man because his body does not produce the hormone androgen. The medical name for this condition is primary hypogonadism, and its distinguishing features are a lack of facial hair; a lack of extensive hair on the torso and limbs; fat deposits on the hips, buttocks, and breasts, and, occasionally, around the eyelids; swollen and wrinkled skin; disproportionately long arms and legs; an infantile

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<sup>85</sup> Roscoe (1996) 208-209.

penis; and a high-pitched voice.<sup>87</sup> Since childhood castration is no longer a widespread practice, instances of primary hypogonadism in modern times are not caused by purposeful genital mutilation, but other medical issues, such as mumps infections in the testicles, testicular cancer, or chromosomal abnormalities.<sup>88</sup> These medical issues do not necessarily require the removal of the testicles, but they do impact the testicles' ability to produce androgen hormones in the same way that the removal of the testicles would. This means that our understanding of the effects of prepubescent castration is indirect, as it comes from other medical phenomena thought to impact the body's hormonal production in the same way.

For postpubescent castration, we are on firmer ground, thanks to the modern practice of chemically castrating sex offenders. In a study performed on ninety-nine sex criminals who opted for (postpubescent) chemical castration, Wille and Beier conclude that seventy five-percent of subjects fall into the category “Libido and sexual activity practically extinct within a period of six months” after castration and fifteen percent fit the category “Libido and sexual activity possible with intensive stimulation.”<sup>89</sup> While it is impossible to know for certain whether the effects of chemical castration are identical to those of the crushing or cutting techniques, Wille and Beier's data does match the results of studies on the effects of physical (as opposed to chemical) castration on non-human, adult mammals. These studies concur that the lack of androgen production significantly

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<sup>86</sup> Nanda (1990) 15

<sup>87</sup> Peschel and Peschel (1986) 27.

<sup>88</sup> Mayo Clinic (2014): <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/male-hypogonadism/basics/causes/con-20014235>>

<sup>89</sup> Wille and Beier (1989) 128.

hampers sex drive and potency.<sup>90</sup> In addition to whether their subjects actually did engage in intercourse, Wille and Beier also study whether they could. They conclude that “approximately twenty-five percent of all castrated men were still capable of intercourse after three years and twenty percent still after five years, admittedly at greater intervals and only after extensive stimulation. There was an increased new need for skin contact and petting without coitus.”<sup>91</sup> In short, most eunuchs castrated after puberty lack a sex drive and are sexually impotent, although a fifth of them retained the potential to engage in sexual activity.

Since Wille and Beier's subjects were castrated postpubescently, their bodies had developed secondary male features before castration. Therefore they do not fit the physical description of prepubescent eunuchs provided above. On the contrary, Wille and Beier's subjects would be physically indistinguishable from uncastrated adult men. And as part of their bodily development during puberty, they also developed an active sex drive, before castration. Their castration, then, diminished an already extant libido. Whether eunuchs castrated *prepubescently* (i.e., before a sex drive had ever developed) would conform to Wille and Beier's statistical findings concerning libido and sexual potency is unknown. Physically, childhood primary hypogonadism precludes a male body from pubescence, so those mutilated before puberty would definitely have different physical features than Wille and Beier's subjects. It is likely that prepubescent eunuchs' failure to develop secondary male bodily characteristics would be accompanied by a complete absence of libido and sexual potency, but there is no definitive proof that this is

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<sup>90</sup> Peschel and Peschel (1986) 30.

<sup>91</sup> Wille and Beier (1989) 129.

the case.<sup>92</sup>

Although we lack modern medical data on the biological effects of prepubescent castration, Peschel and Peschel review stories of liaisons between women and castrati—who were mutilated prepubescently—to glean as much knowledge as possible about the sexual prowess (or lack thereof) of such eunuchs. Extant literature about castrati often describes their sex appeal, but Peschel and Peschel note that this appeal manifests in descriptions of women's infatuation with castrati and the reactions of the women's jealous husbands. The castrati's own desires (or lack thereof) go unmentioned, and there is no reference to sexual intercourse ever actually occurring. One letter written by the castrato Giovanni-Battista Velluti details a time when he found himself naked with an enamoured duchess, but nothing happened because “some utensils were missing from [his] knapsack.”<sup>93</sup> The knapsack seems to be an allusion to Velluti's scrotum and the missing utensils a reference to his testicles. This letter seems to imply that Velluti was unable to engage in sexual intercourse and that he attributed this inability to his lack of testicles. Without more evidence, however, it is impossible to say whether Velluti is an isolated case or all males castrated prepubescently were sexually impotent. Furthermore, the tone of Velluti's letter is ambiguous, and it is difficult to discern if his comments indicate that he felt any sexual desire for the duchess. Barring the discovery of new evidence or the (unlikely) re-emergence of the practice of childhood castration, the sex-lives of people castrated prepubescently will remain largely unknown.

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<sup>92</sup> Although there are modern instances of prepubescent primary hypogonadism, these are treated with hormone supplements, prompting puberty and the development of adult male bodily features, libido, and sexual potency. Since treatment begins upon diagnosis, there are no studies about the long term effects of untreated primary hypogonadism.

<sup>93</sup> Peschel and Peschel (1986) 31-32.

Ancient medicine seems to have acknowledged many of the physical characteristics of eunuchs rather early. In *On the Nature of the Child*, Hippocrates says:

And whenever people become eunuchs, since (or while) they are still children, on account of this they neither go through puberty (οὔτε ἡβῶσιν) nor grow a beard, but become entirely smooth. Since the path to the testicles never developed, they do not become porous with respect to their skin; indeed, the path from the testicles is cut off, as I said a bit ago. Women become smooth on their chins and their bodies, since their moisture is not agitated in the same way by coitus as is a man's, and therefore it does not make their skin porous. And whoever goes bald is also phlegmatic; the phlegm in their heads is agitated and heated up by intercourse, and when it hits against the skin it burns the roots of the hair, and the hairs fall out. On account of this, eunuchs do not go bald because their movement is not powerful and burning phlegm does not scald the roots of their hair during coitus.<sup>94</sup>

Hippocrates accurately recognizes that prepubescent eunuchs do not go through puberty or develop male adult features, which agrees with modern medical assessments.

Hippocrates also seems to have been correct concerning eunuchs' retention of head hair.

Balding is usually caused by what is known as the “androgen paradox,” which refers to the role of the androgen hormone stimulating the growth of facial hair while stunting the growth of head hair.<sup>95</sup> Elsewhere in *On the Nature of the Child*, Hippocrates mentions eunuchs' inability to have children (2), and in *Aphorisms* he again notes that eunuchs do not go bald and adds that they do not suffer from gout (6.28).

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<sup>94</sup> *On the Nature of the Child*, 20:

Ὁκόσοι δὲ εὐνοῦχοι παῖδες ἔοντες γίνονται, διὰ τοῦτο οὔτε ἡβῶσιν, οὔτε γενειῶσι, λεῖοί τε γίνονται ὅλοι, ὅτι ἡ ὁδὸς τῇ γονῇ οὐκ ἐπιγενομένη οὐκ ἀραιοὶ τὴν ἐπιδερμίδα ἐπὶ τῷ ξύμπαντι δέρματι· ἀπολέλαπται γὰρ ἡ ὁδὸς τῆς γονῆς, ὥσπερ μοι εἴρηται ὀλίγω πρότερον. Καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες δὲ λεῖαι γίνονται τὸ τε γένειον καὶ τὸ σῶμα, ὅτι ἐν τῇ λαγνείᾳ σφέων τὸ ὑγρὸν οὐχ ὁμοίως κλονεόμενον ὥς τὸ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τὴν ἐπιδερμίδα οὐ ποιεῖ ἀραιήν. Ὁκόσοι δὲ φαλακροὶ γίνονται, οὗτοι δὴ φλεγματοδέες εἰσι· καὶ ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ αὐτέων ἅμα τῇ λαγνείᾳ κλονεόμενον καὶ θερμαίνόμενον τὸ φλέγμα, προσπίπτον πρὸς τὴν ἐπιδερμίδα καίει τῶν τριχῶν τὰς ρίζας, καὶ ἐκρέουσιν αἱ τρίχες· οἱ δὲ εὐνοῦχοι διὰ τοῦτο οὐ γίνονται φαλακροὶ, ὅτι σφέων οὐ γίνεται κίνησις ἰσχυρὴ, οὐδὲ θερμαίνόμενον τὸ φλέγμα ἐν τῇ λαγνείᾳ καίει τῶν τριχῶν τὰς ρίζας.

<sup>95</sup> Inui and Atami (2012)

Aristotle also discusses the effects of castration, and his observations agree with those of Hippocrates, although his reasoning differs. Aristotle explains that the brain is the coldest part of the body, but the great warmth of the body's semen keeps the head and brain warm enough to support hair. Ejaculation, however, results in the loss of the semen's warmth, which is vital for hair, and consequently results in baldness.<sup>96</sup> Because they do not ejaculate, Aristotle concludes, eunuchs' heads stay warm enough to stave off balding. In his discussion of the reasons for eunuchs' hair retention, Aristotle explains, “Eunuchs do not go bald because of the change into femininity. And the hair that comes later in life they do not produce, or if they happen to have it, they lose it... This mutilation is the change from the masculine to the feminine.”<sup>97</sup> In these lines, Aristotle corroborates both modern biology and Hippocrates' opinion that those castrated prepubescently do not develop the physical features of a man, when he notes that eunuchs do not grow significant amounts of body hair. This comment also demonstrates an awareness of the fact that some eunuchs were castrated postpubescently, which Hippocrates does not address. On the other hand, since men castrated postpubescently do not lose their body hair, it is uncertain whether Aristotle actually encountered anyone castrated as an adult.<sup>98</sup>

Elsewhere, Aristotle makes a distinction between men who are born with mutilated genitals and eunuchs: “Men and women alike are sterile from birth if they are deformed in the regions employed for copulation; as a result... the men do not grow a

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<sup>96</sup> *Generation of Animals*, 784a.

<sup>97</sup> *Generation of Animals*, 784a: εὐνοῦχος οὐ γίνεται φαλακρὸς διὰ τὸ εἰς τὸ θῆλυ μεταβάλλειν. καὶ τὰς ὕστερογενεῖς τρίχας ἢ οὐ φύουσιν ἢ ἀποβάλλουσιν, ἂν τύχωσιν ἔχοντες οἱ εὐνοῦχοι... ἢ δὲ πῆρωσις αὕτη ἐκ τοῦ ἄρρενος εἰς τὸ θῆλυ μεταβολή ἐστιν.

<sup>98</sup> Whitby (2000), Davis (2014).

beard but remain like eunuchs (εὐνουχίας).”<sup>99</sup> The rare εὐνουχίας—an adjectival form of the noun εὐνοῦχος that I have translated “like eunuchs”—makes clear that men born with deformed genitals are similar to but different from eunuchs (εὐνοῦχοι) who have undergone castration.<sup>100</sup> After all, if they were actually eunuchs, then one could simply use the noun, instead of resorting to the adjective. That Aristotle uses an adjective to describe men with the physical features of eunuchs who did not undergo castration suggests that he does not include men born with defective genitals in the category of “eunuch.” Therefore, undergoing castration was key to Aristotle's understanding of what constituted a eunuch. In *Airs, Waters, Places*, Hippocrates' description of the Scythians as “like eunuchs” (εὐνουχίαι) supports this conclusion. Hippocrates says that most Scythians are εὐνουχίαι due to blood flow problems and joint issues in their hips and groins, as a result of their spending excessive time on horseback (22). Such men still retain their penis and testicles but suffer from erectile dysfunction, an affliction that the Scythians believe is the result of an angry deity (*Airs* 22-23). Hippocrates variously calls those who suffer from this affliction “like eunuchs” (εὐνουχίαι) and “unmanly” (ἀνανδριεῖς), but never as actual eunuchs (εὐνοῦχοι). Hippocrates' use of εὐνουχίαι in this passage (as opposed to εὐνοῦχοι) suggests that he, like Aristotle, considers castration essential for becoming a eunuch.

The few references to eunuchs in Greek medical literature show an awareness of the primary symptom of prepubescent primary hypogonadism, namely the subject's failure to ever undergo puberty. The inability to have children is also recognized, and

<sup>99</sup> *Generation of Animals*, 746b. καὶ γὰρ ἐκ γενετῆς, ὅταν πηρωθῶσι τοὺς τόπους τοὺς πρὸς τὴν μίξιν χρήσιμους, ἄγονοι γίνονται καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ ἄνδρες, ὥστε... εὐνουχίας διατελεῖν ὄντας.

<sup>100</sup> The two uses discussed here are the earliest. In total, the word only appears 46 times. *TLG*



there is a focus on hair-loss that suggests that modern obsessions with balding are not idiosyncratic. The use of the adjective εὐνουχίας to describe men who have some of the traits of eunuchs but who have not been castrated shows that being castrated was essential to becoming a eunuch properly speaking. The paucity of references to eunuchs in the medical literature shows that eunuchs were not common enough in Greece at this time to warrant a great deal of discussion, but the accuracy of those references suggests that eunuchs, or at least reliable sources of information about them, were available.

### **Nature, Customs, and Gender**

In their discussions of baldness, both Hippocrates and Aristotle concur that men are inherently “hotter” than women and children. This assumption about the difference between the two sexes’ temperature is not isolated. Rather, it is one of several essential biological differences in the composition of men and women, according to ancient medicine. From these differences grew the science of physiognomy—a means of classifying the world based on the opposite traits allocated to each gender. In addition to its importance for defining gender roles, physiognomy played a key role in how Greeks viewed other ethnicities. The stock attributes of each ethnicity were based on the perceived direction (e.g., hotter or colder than Greek men) and degree (e.g., how much hotter) of its deviances from an agreed-upon standard, namely, the Greek male specimen. In the ensuing discussion, I review the tenets of physiognomy, and then explain why eunuchs were perfectly situated to disrupt that system.

In *The Science of Man in Ancient Greece*, Maria Sassi charts the development of physiognomy over time. At first, physiognomy relied on what were at the time accepted

biological differences between the genders. Adult males were considered hot, dry, and tan, while women were cold, wet, and pale.<sup>101</sup> From these basic categories (hot/cold, dry/wet, dark/pale), the field expanded until the gender-relevance of virtually every physical trait was mapped out. The significance of these traits expanded to indicate every aspect of one's character, based on each trait's perceived gender. Although there is evidence that physiognomy already played a major role in the Greek worldview as far back as Homer, a fourth century BC physiognomic treatise by ps.-Aristotle is our earliest extant source dedicated wholly to explaining how it worked.<sup>102</sup> Ps.-Aristotle's text shows us how physiognomy relied on the transitive property to assign human characteristics either male or female value. For example, it explains that since women do not participate in war and have soft hair, whereas men do participate in war and have bristly hair, "soft hair means cowardice and bristly hair means courage."<sup>103</sup> Based on a historical reality—men fought in wars and women did not—and a general pattern in hair texture, a physiognomic association between manliness, bravery (a trait required for warfare), and bristly hair was born.<sup>104</sup>

As the Greeks encountered other peoples, they relied on physiognomy to develop stereotypes of each ethnicity. Since the system was Hellenocentric, it underwent shifts as the Greeks encountered other cultures, with the Greek male as the ideal mean. As a result of this change in scope from dividing genders to dividing ethnicities, it became possible

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<sup>101</sup> Sassi (2001) 1-5; Gleason (1995) xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>102</sup> Boys-Stones (2007) 20-22 and Sassi (2001) 36-38 concur that this fourth-century text conforms to the ideas about gender and ethnicity that Aristotle himself expresses and that it was written by someone else (likely a student of his) attempting to collect Aristotle's thoughts on these matters into one volume.

<sup>103</sup> Ps.-Arist. *Physiognomics* 806b from Sassi (2001) 48.

<sup>104</sup> Sassi (2001) 47; Gleason (1995) 29.

to have too much of a traditionally masculine trait. For example, “darkness” initially indicated masculinity, and Greek men were supposed to be darker than Greek women. When the Greeks began to have more contact with the Persians, however, being too dark (i.e., darker than an average Greek man) took on a new meaning. A Greek man was still supposed to be darker than a Greek woman, but a man who was too dark was untrustworthy.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, the northern Scythians—who were just as much paler than the Greeks as the Persians were darker—were considered too foolish to concoct an effective lie.<sup>106</sup> Physiognomy treated the average traits of a Greek man as a perfect average of human traits, and deviations from those traits indicated character flaws.

A subsequent expansion of physiognomy from human characteristics to climatology also played a role in dictating the expected behavior of other ethnicities. Just as soft hair became a sign of cowardice, so too did a region's meteorological phenomena define the nature of those who lived in that region. This expansion of physiognomy to meteorology allowed one to have a good sense of another person's character based on the climate in which that person lived—a practice known as “environmental determinism.”<sup>107</sup> Perhaps the best example of this style of thought is the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*. In Asia, the climate is too gentle, crops grow of their own accord, and the happy animals require little wrangling or oversight (*Airs* 12). As a result, the people lack both perseverance and courage. They are feeble and suited for monarchy (*Airs* 16). On account of their climate, “their souls are enslaved” and overly obedient (*Airs* 23). Scythia, on the other hand, is too cold and wet, resulting in unmuscle, squat, unintelligent people,

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<sup>105</sup> Sassi (2001) 52.

<sup>106</sup> Sassi (2001) 118-120.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas (2000).

unable to organize a government of any sort (*Airs* 19-22). Once again, Greece is the ideal middle-ground. As Maud Gleason puts it, “Define Greece and Ionia as the geographical center of the earth, partition off north from south and east from west, define moral and physical excellence as the mean between extremes, and—presto!—the ‘pure Greek’ becomes the ideal.”<sup>108</sup>

Physiognomy, then, allocated a particular nature (*physis*) to an individual, based on their gender, ethnicity, and climate. This assigned nature (*physis*), dictated one's typical mode of behavior (*nomoi*), and these *nomoi*, in turn, reinforced the expectations dictated by *physis*. For example, men are supposed to be tanner than women, and working outside makes one tan. Therefore, women are innately suited to remaining indoors. Remaining indoors, of course, leads to continued and increased paleness.<sup>109</sup> As one becomes paler, one also becomes progressively more feminine and more suited for working indoors.<sup>110</sup> There is, therefore, a closed loop between *physis* and *nomoi*, with each reinforcing the other. Likewise, *Airs, Waters, Places* explains that the “effeminate” climate in Asia precludes those who live there from possessing the fortitude required for self-governance. Their climate dictates their mode of government. Being ruled by a monarch in and of itself is an indication of feebleness, and therefore reinforces the notion that the people of Asia are overly obedient. Physiognomy assigned a person a particular *physis* based on the gender valence of their ethnicity and climate, and this *physis* dictated *nomoi*. These *nomoi*, in turn, reinforced that *physis*.

Castration marks a radical change of one aspect of *physis*—gender—but eunuchs'

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<sup>108</sup> Gleason (1995) 33.

<sup>109</sup> Sassi (2001) 6-8; Gleason (1995) 28.

<sup>110</sup> Sassi (2001) 6-8; Gleason (1995) 28.

ethnicity and the type of climate in which they dwell can still be situated into the expectations of physiognomy. For example, a Persian living in Asia should be deceitful and feeble. As we have just seen, however, *physis* and *nomoi* depend on and reinforce each other. A change in *physis* demands a change in *nomoi*. Yet, the nature of the change from man to eunuch is ambiguous, as it marks a loss of masculinity, without any clear gain of femininity. Eunuchs can neither sire nor give birth to children. Their genitals are neither male nor female. Depending on whether someone is castrated pre- or post-pubescently, his physical features may be markedly feminine or indistinguishable for an uncastrated male. Just as computers can only process ones and zeroes, so too does physiognomy process everything—from hair texture to melanin levels to amount of precipitation—as either male or female. Eunuchs' liminal gender status is a glitch in this strictly binary system. Their castration changes their *physis* into an unknown value, and all of the rules of physiognomy break down around them. After all, a Persian living in Asia should be deceitful and feeble, but castration—a change in one part of *physis*—demands a change of *nomoi*, which in turn impacts the other aspects of their *physis*. Indeed, the mere presence of a eunuch in an ancient text signals that a reader cannot trust any of her expectations of ensuing events, if those expectations are based on physiognomy or the stereotypes linked to it.

### **Structure of this Study**

Eunuchs create a type of void zone in which the normal strictures of physiognomy do not apply, and this void extends to encompass those around them. The nature of this void differs, based on authors' culture and time period. Within a particular time and place, however, there are clear patterns governing how eunuchs work in literature. In the

ensuing chapters, I elucidate these patterns. The next chapter argues that eunuchs signal a failure to uphold the expected modes of behavior dictated by ethnicity, in the classical Greek authors Herodotus, Xenophon and Ctesias. Eunuchs in this literature are almost exclusively Persian, but they fail to conform to Greek stereotypes of Persians. These eunuchs are not at all Greek, however, as their non-Persian behavior is always carried out in a manner that transgresses the basic tenets of Hellenicity. They are then, a true representation of an ethnographic void zone. Chapter three examines Greek authors who wrote during the early Roman empire such as Arrian, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch, and the focus is again ethnicity. Eunuchs no longer signal deviance from all ethnic norms, however. Rather, they signal that either a Greek is acting like a Persian, or vice versa. Whereas eunuchs in classical Greek literature signal an ethnic deadzone, their counterparts in later Greek literature signal ethnic transgressions. In chapter four, I argue that the Roman authors Terence and Catullus use eunuchs similarly to the classical Greek authors, only with respect to gender. Eunuchs in these authors do not signal a transition from men to women, but a collapse of masculinity. The final main chapter focuses on two second sophistic authors—Lucian and Favorinus—each of whom employs eunuchs in a complicated and unique way. For now, I will simply say that each manipulates these earlier traditions for his own ends. I conclude with a brief discussion of the Christian appropriation of these earlier eunuch traditions.

## **Chapter 2: Eunuchs in Classical Greek Literature**

In classical Greek literature, eunuchs appear in scenes in which either they or someone else is behaving contrary to the behavioral standards of both Greeks and Persians. Their destabilizing impact on ethnicity most commonly manifests as a cluster of four particular themes that subvert the foundations of both the Greek and Persian cultures. In classical Greek literature, it is almost always the case that eunuchs are both Persian and appear alongside other Persians. Their appearance, however, signals to a reader that the rules of physiognomy and climate determinism that dictate standard Persian *nomoi* are not functioning. The inclusion of eunuchs in a scene heralds the erosion of the stereotype of the overly obedient easterner who is subservient to a monarch. Significantly, failures to adhere to expected Persian *nomoi* are always accompanied by transgressions of fundamental tenets of Greek identity. This ensures that Persians failing to act as such are still clearly not Greeks. They do not transition from Greek to Persian and are best defined by a double negative—neither Greek nor Persian.

The four themes with which eunuchs are associated in classical Greek literature are civil violence; the destruction of lineages; revenge; and political upheaval. The significance of each of these themes for either Greek or Persian culture is essential for understanding how eunuchs work in classical Greek literature, and therefore I discuss them at some length in the following section. After that, I demonstrate that this same cluster of themes always accompanies eunuchs in Herodotus, Ctesias, and Xenophon.

Then, I analyze how all of these examples are indicative of a collapse of physiognomy and the significance of this. Lastly, I turn to eunuchs in Plato, who violate this pattern, and explain why they do so.

### **Breaking Down Society: The Four Themes**

Collectively, the themes that appears alongside eunuchs in classical Greek literature demonstrate a breakdown of fundamental aspects of both Greek and Persian culture. The first of these themes I refer to as I use the phrase “civil violence,” by which I mean violence that takes place inside of a *polis*, *oikos*, or a place where either the swearing of oaths or rules of *xenia* would normally preclude violence.<sup>111</sup> Although martial violence was a not unexpected element of ancient Greek life, the violence that is associated with eunuchs moves beyond the arena of war and intrudes into domestic and ritual spaces.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, one of the unifying features of classical Greek *poleis* was a pan-Hellenic “adherence to the hoplite ethic... conducted according to set rules,” such as the exchange of corpses and respect of sacred spaces.<sup>113</sup> Often, the Greek cities extended the courtesy of a formal declaration of war to each other, and it was not unusual for potential combatants to debate the matter. For example Thucydides describes the Corinthians, Athens, and Spartans arguing about whether Sparta should declare war on Athens (1.68-88). Unlike these rather polite dust-ups, the violence that eunuchs signal is accompanied by subterfuge and treachery or abject cruelty. It does not occur during war but crops up either suddenly during times of (ostensible) peace or as excess punishment after the

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<sup>111</sup> Herman (1987) 1-9.

<sup>112</sup> The importance of *xenia* to Greek society is widely accepted and needs little discussion, but see Herman (1989) *passim* for a detailed discussion. Likewise for oaths, but e.g., Burkert (1985) 250-254, where he says that the institution of oaths was indissolubly linked with “the very organization of [Greek] society” (250).



conclusion of a war. In modern terms, the civic violence associated with eunuchs is more akin to war crimes than combat casualties.

This civic violence extirpates lineages, usually (but not always) through the violent deaths of children, and this destruction of lineages is the second element of the thematic pattern that follows eunuchs. Notably, it too represents a breakdown of the broader civic community, as it precludes the continuation of the *oikos*, and without *oikoi*, there can be no *polis*.<sup>114</sup> Unlike the previous example, we are dealing in this case with something that is less distinctly part of Greek culture. Indeed, one is hard pressed to come up with any society that does not place significant value on family ties and lineages. That family lineages are held in nearly universal esteem, however, strengthens my argument that eunuchs in classical Greek literature signal deviation from the expected ethnic behavior of both Greeks and Persians. With respect to this particular theme, it is fair to say that eunuchs mark a collapse of a basic aspect of nearly every human society.

The third theme that consistently appears alongside eunuchs is a desire for revenge. The deleterious effects of revenge on civic life are less immediately apparent than those of civic violence and the destruction of lineages, but both of the pan-Hellenic Homeric epics and the epichoric Athenian *Oresteia* reveal the harm that a lust for vengeance could do to Greek society. In her analysis of revenge in the ancient Greek world, Fiona McHardy reviews numerous instances in Greek literature in which the pursuit of revenge has deleterious effects on an entire society. Perhaps the most famous instance is the civil strife that permeates the Greek camp for the majority of the *Iliad*,

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<sup>113</sup> Hunt (1998) 7-13.

<sup>114</sup> The *polis* as a collection of *oikoi* is generally accepted. See MacDowell (1978) 84-86; Hall (1989) 8-18; Roy (1999) 1-2; Van Nortwick (2008) 50-52.

which Achilles causes by seeking revenge for Agammemnon's taking Chryseis from him.<sup>115</sup> Similarly at the end of the *Odyssey*, the gods prevent civil war between Odysseus and the slain suitors' families by erasing his killing of the suitors from the families' minds.<sup>116</sup> Civil war is averted only by removing the cause of the desire for vengeance.

In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the mythical conflict between the brothers Thyestes and Atreus sparks a series of vengeful parricides that spans three generations. At the conclusion of the *Eumenides*—the final play in the trilogy—Orestes, who killed his father's killers, is found not guilty of murder. McHardy interprets this as evidence that revenge is acceptable and even approved, when the object of that revenge is the murderer of a close family member.<sup>117</sup> On this point, I respectfully disagree with McHardy. Orestes is tried in the court, and a guilty verdict would grant the Furies—goddesses of vengeance—the right to kill him (*Eum.* 307-321). Ultimately Orestes is acquitted, the Furies cede their claim to revenge, and they transform from goddesses of vengeance into the titular *Eumenides* or “kindly ones.” Through this transformation, the trilogy shows that even if there had once been patron deities of revenge (i.e., the Furies), the institution of civic systems such as courts have eradicated the need for them. Aeschylus even presents Orestes' trial as an aetiology for the formation of the actual court in which Athenian murder cases were tried—the Areopagus. The *Oresteia*, then, details the creation of a real Athenian institution that is divinely sanctioned and whose purpose is to end a cycle of violent revenge, at least in the trilogy. Far from expressing approval for revenge, the *Oresteia* suggests that the pursuit of vengeance undermines both civic and

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<sup>115</sup> McHardy (2008) 23-25.

<sup>116</sup> McHardy (2008) 24, citing *Od.* 24.484-4856.

<sup>117</sup> McHardy (2008) 103-111.

religious values. The association between eunuchs and revenge, then, is a third way—alongside civic violence and the destruction of lineages—that eunuchs are anathema to foundational aspects of Greek culture.

Whereas the previous three themes preclude eunuchs from seeming in any way Greek, the fourth element—political upheaval—distinguishes them from uncastrated Persians. Significantly, whenever a Persian eunuch is involved this political upheaval is the result of regicide. As discussed in the previous chapter, excessive obedience, especially obedience shown to kings is a quintessential characteristic of Persians and other easterners.<sup>118</sup> Castration, however, changes the *physis* and *nomoi* of Persian eunuchs, and they are no longer subservient to monarchs. One might object that eunuchs' association with political upheaval is no more than coincidence, since the works in which eunuchs appear focus on the rise and fall of Persian kings and dynasties. Although that is true, the consistency with which eunuchs play a key role in regicide is too great to be discounted as coincidental. In Ctesias' *Persica*, for example, eunuchs are responsible for the deaths of more Persian kings than all other causes combined. Elsewhere, we see eunuchs play a disproportionately significant role in regicide, compared to their overall function in a text. For example in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, the eunuch Gاداتas kills the Assyrian king who is the primary obstacle between Cyrus—the work's protagonist—and kingship.

One of the most striking things about this clustering of themes around eunuchs is what is absent, namely issues of eroticism and sex. Indeed, some modern authors seem to

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<sup>118</sup> There is no doubt that the Greeks considered the Persians as innately slavish people who chose to be ruled by a king. Said (1978) *passim*; Hall (1989) 157; Hunt (1998) 48-50; Sassi (2001) 101-111; Isaac (2009) 34-42.

take for granted that this must be part of the Greek discourse on eunuchs, and go to great lengths (perhaps without realizing it) to incorporate these issues, when they discuss Greek eunuchs. In his discussion of Achaemenid eunuchs, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones laments the lack of Persian sources on eunuchs and then states that he will rely on Greek evidence in his analysis of Achaemenid eunuchs.<sup>119</sup> Having established that he is relying on mostly Greek evidence, Llewellyn-Jones later tells us, “Of course, another facet shared by eunuchs and women is their ready sexual availability... our Greek and Roman authors often hint at eunuchs’ sexual availability for their royal masters.”<sup>120</sup> The only author that he cites for this sexual availability, however, is Curtius Rufus—a Roman. Llewellyn-Jones’ seemingly inadvertent transition from his initial claim to use Greek evidence; to his subsequent claim to use both Greek and Roman evidence; to his ultimate reliance on only Roman evidence is entirely logical, given the nature of castration. The mutilation of male genitals does indeed seem to inherently involve issues of gender and sexuality. While it certainly does in Roman literature, as we will see in a later chapter, eunuchs in Greek literature are (contrary to expectations) used to explore divisions of ethnicity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I demonstrate that the four themes of civil violence (as defined above), the violent destruction of lineages, revenge, and political upheaval are constant companions of eunuchs in classical Greek literature. I do so by means of individual analyses of eunuchs in Herodotus’ *Histories*, Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, and Ctesias’ *Persica*. I then discuss the significance of this pattern for our understanding of the Greeks’ perception of eunuchs, easterners, and themselves. Finally,

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<sup>119</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2002) 22

I address why eunuchs in Plato deviate from this pattern.

### **Herodotus' *Histories***

In this section, I discuss the five stories from Herodotus' *Histories* that contain eunuchs and the thematic pattern discussed above. Significantly, this is not a selective sample, but represents all of Herodotus' eunuchs. With one exception, eunuchs are not the focus of the passages in which they appear, but their presence in a scene is still quite significant, as it signals to a reader what sort of events are about to happen. I discuss Hermotimos the Pedasian first, as he has the largest role of all of Herodotus' eunuchs.

#### **1. Hermotimos and Panionios**

Hermotimos appears towards the end of the *Histories*, after the battle of Salamis (8.104-106). Xerxes orders Artemisia and Hermotimos, his most trusted eunuch, to collect his sons and take them to Ephesus (8.104.1). At this point, Herodotus breaks off from his main narrative to explain why “of all the people we know of, it was [Hermotimos] who managed to get the greatest revenge for an injustice done to him” (8.105.1).<sup>121</sup> In Hermotimos' youth, Pedasa was conquered by the Medes and its inhabitants sold into slavery (Hdt. 1.175). Panionios of Chios, who made his living by purchasing young, male slaves, castrating them, and then selling them to the Persians, did exactly this to Hermotimos.

Years later, Hermotimos, now Xerxes' favorite eunuch, runs into Panionios in the city of Atarneus and, feigning delight, informs him of the many benefits that he has gained on account of being a eunuch. Hermotimos tells Panionios that he can have a

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<sup>120</sup> Llewellyn-Jones (2002) 35

<sup>121</sup> Trans. by Purvis. Throughout this section on Herodotus, when only English is provided it is Purvis' translation. When both Greek and English are present, the translations are mine.

share of these benefits, should he settle in Atarneus with his family. After Panionios has done this, Hermotimos invites Panionios and his family to dinner, having promised to give them gifts. Panionios arrives with his four sons, at which point Hermotimos forces Panionios to castrate his own four sons and then them to castrate their father.

Although there is no political upheaval, this story clearly includes violence in a domestic setting, revenge, and the loss of children.<sup>122</sup> By castrating Panionios during a banquet to which Panionios has come expecting promised gifts is a clear intrusion of violence into a situation of *xenia*. Herodotus' inclusion of the seemingly unnecessary detail that Hermotimos uproots his family and moves to Atarneus increases the degree to which Panionios and his sons are Hermotimos' guests and emphasizes that this story takes place within a *polis*. As mentioned above, Herodotus introduces the story by telling us that Hermotimos got the greatest revenge of anyone about whom he has heard. He concludes the story, "Thus Hermotimos and his vengeance came upon Panionios" (8.106.4).

There are several examples of children being lost to violence in this story. The castration of Panionios' sons destroys any of their future children, but there is also the case of Hermotimos himself. As Hermotimos reveals his intentions to Panionios, he asks him, "What evil did I myself or one of my ancestors do to you or one of your family members that caused you to make me into nothing instead of a man?" (τί σε ἐγὼ κακὸν ἢ αὐτὸς ἢ τῶν ἐμῶν τίς σε προγόνων ἐργάσατο, ἢ σὲ ἢ τῶν σῶν τινα ὅτι με ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς ἐποίησας τὸ μηδὲν εἶναι) (8.106.3). Hermotimos' words show that he considers himself to be neither man nor women, hence the neuter form. Since he was a male youth when

Panionios bought and castrated him, one could say that Panionios destroyed the previous, male Hermotimos, and created a new, genderless one. As eunuchs were often castrated during boyhood, their very creation was analogous to the destruction of children; in this particular case, we are told that Hermotimos was taken as a child from Pedasa and that Panionios made his living by castrating “beautiful boys” (παῖδας εἵδεος). However, the destruction of the masculine identities of the castrated children is not the only deprivation that occurs during castration.

There is also the obliteration of the potential for Hermotimos to create children; his castration destroyed any future children he might have had. Although this is always true of eunuchs, Hermotimos’ specific words show that he is acutely aware of this loss, and therefore it deserves consideration. In the passage quoted above, the delayed and emphatic positioning of ‘ancestors’ (προγόνων) reminds us that for Hermotimos, the only relatives are his ancestors; Panionios robbed him of future children. Furthermore, the second ‘you’ (σε), referring to Panionios, literally stands in a position between Hermotimos and any relatives. On the other hand, Panionios’ relatives are described as simply his (τῶν σῶν τινα), and there is no need of a limiting descriptor, such as ‘ancestors’ (προγόνων), to limit the scope of these relatives, as he has both ancestors and descendants. This relationship helps explain how Panionios’ castrating Hermotimos and Hermotimos’ castrating Panionios and his sons are nearly equivalent.<sup>123</sup> By castrating the sons, Hermotimos prevents any future growth of Panionios’ family tree. For Herodotus

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<sup>122</sup> This is the only story involving eunuchs not associated with political upheaval in the *Histories*; the significance of this is discussed in the conclusion to this chapter.

<sup>123</sup> McHardy (2008) 43-44 concurs with this reading, saying: "If Hermotimus were to leave the sons of Panionius unharmed, he would not cause Panionius to suffer the same fate as he has suffered... the castration of Panionius and his sons signifies the end of his family line."

then, the damage of castration is not limited to the effects on the castrated individual, but also the damage to the *oikos* as a whole.

## 2. Harpagus' eunuchs

While the story of Hermotimos and Panionios is the longest and most explicit story involving eunuchs in the *Histories*, they do make other appearances. When Herodotus tells of the upbringing of Cyrus, he says that King Astyages entrusts the infant Cyrus to Harpagus to expose, and Harpagus agrees to carry out the order; once Harpagus has arrived home with the child though, he decides that he cannot kill him (1.108.5-1.109.1). Therefore, he entrusts the child to a herdsman named Mitradates to expose. When Mitradates returns home, he learns that his wife has just given birth to a stillborn baby (1.111). They decide to “expose” their own dead child and raise Cyrus as their own. To verify that the child has been exposed to death, Harpagus sends his most trusted bodyguards to view the corpse, and upon seeing the stillborn baby, they report to Harpagus that Cyrus is dead (1.113). Years later, Cyrus’ inherent nobility reveals itself during a dispute with some of his peers. This leads to Astyages summoning him to the palace, recognizing Cyrus as his own grandson, and forcing Mitradates to explain the whole plot (1.115-1.117).

At this point, Astyages summons Harpagus who confesses that he had entrusted the baby to Harpagus the herdsman and relied on others to verify the child’s death. Herodotus’ initial narration of events and Harpagus’ later summation of them to Astyages contains a significant difference, however. Herodotus describes Harpagus sending “his most trusted bodyguards” (τῶν ἐωυτοῦ δορυφόρων τοὺς πιστοτάτους) to verify that the infant Cyrus is dead. On the other hand, when Harpagus defends his actions before



Astyages, he says that his most trusted eunuchs (τῶν ἐννούχων τοὺς πιστοτάτους) verified the infant's death (1.113.3 & 1.117.5). This switch from “bodyguards” to “eunuchs” may seem inconsequential, at first, but ensuing events reveal the impact of Harpagus' introduction of eunuchs into the story.

Astyages pretends to be pleased with Harpagus for failing to kill Cyrus, and he asks Harpagus to send his own son to the palace so that he can reward him. In actuality, however, Astyages is enraged at Harpagus' failure. When Harpagus' son arrives, Astyages butchers him, cooks him, and feeds him to Harpagus at a banquet (1.118-1.119). Astyages' actions are a warped reflection of Harpagus' earlier behavior and can be read as a form of revenge. Harpagus was charged with murdering Astyages' offspring but instead allowed him to live. Astyages, in turn, promises to reward Harpagus' son—which implies letting him live—but kills him instead. Herodotus' narrative then jumps forward in time and details how Harpagus got his own revenge by convincing Cyrus to lead a revolt against Astyages. This successful revolt marks the transition of power in Asia from the Medes to the Persians (1.120-130).

The early part of this story centers on the survival of the infant Cyrus, whom Astyages had ordered killed. In other words, it is about a child who is supposed to suffer a violent death, but does not. Significantly, Herodotus describes the men who are duped by the infant switch as “bodyguards” (δορύφοροι). When Harpagus tells Astyages what happened, however, he switches to “eunuchs” (ἐννοῦχοι). Regardless of whether the bodyguards are eunuchs, there is nothing about the word δορύφοροι that indicates this to the reader. Immediately after the eunuchs are introduced (1.117.5), Astyages summons Harpagus' ill-fated son (1.118.1). The reference to eunuchs marks a shift in narrative

focus from the survival of the infant Cyrus to one that includes civic violence, the violent destruction of lineage, revenge, and political upheaval. Astyages demonstrates the first two by inviting Harpagus' son to the palace and killing him, which is clearly a violent transgression of *xenia*. Furthermore, Astyages murders Harpagus' son as a form of retribution. Just as Harpagus treated Cyrus—Astyages' descendant—contrary to Astyages' wishes, Astyages in turn treats Harpagus' son contrary to his wishes. By feeding Harpagus the roasted remnants of his child, Astyages makes clear that his actions are motivated by a desire to extract revenge on Harpagus. There is no indication that Astyages has any problem with Harpagus' son *per se*. Astyages' behavior leads, in turn, to Harpagus extracting his own revenge on Astyages, and this revenge takes the form of political upheaval.

Herodotus does not mention the role of eunuchs in this story until the themes that accompany eunuchs are about to appear. Based on the text, it seems that Harpagus' δορύφοροι are eunuchs, as they appear in nearly identical clauses: τῶν ἐωυτοῦ δορυφόρων τοὺς πιστοτάτους (1.113.3) and τῶν εὐνούχων τοὺς πιστοτάτους (1.117.5). Nor does Herodotus seem to include this change simply for variety, as he elsewhere repeats δορυφόρος twice in a much smaller interval than this.<sup>124</sup> That he does make this switch and the events that immediately follow the direct mention of eunuchs embody all of the four themes suggests purpose. The switch from τῶν ἐωυτοῦ δορυφόρων to τῶν εὐνούχων creates expectations about exactly what sort of events are coming, and the events do, in fact, conform perfectly to that script.

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<sup>124</sup> Hdt. 7.146.2 & 7.146.3.

### 3. The Death of Smerdis

Eunuchs also appear in Herodotus' description of Darius and his co-conspirators' killing of the false king Smerdis—an ethnic Magus who had usurped the Persian throne (3.77-3.80). The outer guards, who are not described as eunuchs, let the conspirators walk past them. Since Darius and company are Persian aristocrats, the guards assume that they have legitimate business with the king (3.77.1). There is, however, a second layer of guards—one made up entirely of eunuchs—stationed just outside Smerdis' private quarters. All of them fight to the death (3.77.2-3). After they dispatch the eunuchs, the conspirators kill Smerdis, his brother, and all other Magi that they can find (3.79.2). Control of the empire transitions back from Magi to Persians, with the subsequent ascension of Darius.

By killing Smerdis and his brother, Darius and his companions end that family and establish a new royal dynasty, clear evidence of political upheaval. Also significant is that the outer guards, who are not eunuchs, let the conspirators walk past them, but the eunuchs inside the palace do not. Not only do they themselves fight to the death, but also Smerdis and his brother arm themselves, when they hear the commotion that the eunuchs raise (3.78.1). Eunuchs both engage in violence within the palace and prompt others to do so, as well. And since Smerdis and his brother are childless, their executions mark the end of a lineage, but Herodotus does not stop with that. Rather, he adds the detail that the Persians celebrate Darius' victory every year with a holiday on which ethnic Magi must stay in their houses or be killed (3.79.3). Although they are not all direct descendants of Smerdis and they are not wholly wiped out, the continuation of violence against the Magi in perpetuity reads as never-ending attempt to wipe out all traces of Smerdis' bloodline.

A case could be made that the persecution of all ethnic Magi is also a type of

retribution for Smerdis' usurption of the throne, but there is a more explicit way in which Herodotus casts the actions of Darius and the other conspirators as revenge. He sets this up in the passage that immediately precedes the execution of their conspiracy. Smerdis order a Persian named Prexaspes to publicly declare that Smerdis is a legitimate king. Prexaspes, who had been a trusted adviser of the previous king Cambyses, instead declares that Smerdis is neither Persian nor a legitimate king, and commits suicide (3.75). With his dying breath, Prexaspes calls on all Persians to take revenge (τισαίματο) on the Magi usurpers (3.75.3). Prexaspes' call for vengeance is immediately taken up by Darius, a sentence later (3.76.1). Significantly, Herodotus tells us that Darius' cabal had already decided to carry out their plan, before they hear of Prexaspes' fate (3.73). While they are en route to Smerdis' palace, however, they hear about Prexaspes, and at this point, they stop their trip and, once again, form a plan to kill Smerdis (3.76.1). This plan happens to be identical to their initial one (3.76.2-3). By including this unnecessary second round of planning and by expliciting describing its occurrence as a direct result of the conspirators learning of Prexaspes' death, Herodotus makes clear that their actions are a response to his exhortation for the Persians to seek revenge.

As in the Harpagus story, the fact that the eunuchs are eunuchs makes little to no impact on the plot. That is to say, the narrative would not suffer if there were no mention of these guards' mutilated genitals. This does not mean, however, that this detail is unimportant. Indeed, since one could so easily omit this point, one must ask why Herodotus bothers to include it. It is possible, of course, that the guards in question really were eunuchs, and Herodotus is simply relaying a historical fact. On the other hand, the inclusion of the conspirators' second planning stage suggests a purposeful inclusion of

revenge, and all of the other themes that accompany eunuchs in classical Greek literature appear in the story. It is likely, then, either that Herodotus chooses to include the detail of the guards' eunuchism because the other aspects of the story conform to the paradigm for how eunuchs work or that aspects of the narrative are influenced by the fact that Herodotus knew (or thought he knew) that these guards were eunuchs and therefore had expectations about how events would have played out. Regardless, the story of Smerdis' death is clearly another instance in which eunuchs and civic violence, the end of a bloodline, revenge, and political upheaval all appear.

#### 4. The Corcyraean Youths

Elsewhere, Herodotus details the motivation for a joint Spartan-Corinthian expedition against Samos that took place in the last quarter of the sixth century. The roots of the motivation trace back to King Periander of Corinth, who killed his pregnant wife in a fit of jealous rage.<sup>125</sup> When his son Lykophron discovers this, he moves to Corcyra and refuses to return to Corinth while his father is there. Years later, the now aged Periander is worried that his family will lose control of Corinth, unless Lycophron returns to rule. To facilitate his son's return, Periander agrees to move to Corcyra, if Lykophron will return to Corinth and rule. The Corcyraeans so loathe the idea of Periander ruling them, however, that they kill Lykophron, lest he move to their island (3.49-53).

To avenge his son, Periander captures three-hundred children from prominent Corcyraean families and sends them to be castrated in Lydia. When the Corinthian ship transporting them stopped at Samos, however, the Samians taught the boys how to supplicate in a temple, preventing the Corinthians from taking them on to Sardis (3.48).

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<sup>125</sup> R. Strassler (2007) adds that she was pregnant; this detail is not in Herodotus.

This intervention of the Samians is the Corinthians' motivation for joining the Spartans in an attack on Samos, years later.

This story is striking for what does and does not happen. Not only is castration averted, but also the themes that regularly accompany eunuchs in Greek literature are raised but never reach fruition.<sup>126</sup> As in the stories above, there is a strong link between the violent death of children, revenge, and castration. First, Periander kills his wife and unborn child. Then, the Corcyraeans rob Periander of his son, Lykophron, and he seeks revenge by capturing their sons and sending them to be castrated. The boys, however, take refuge in a temple and are not castrated. There is no violation of the temple's laws, and the boys retain their genitals. Likewise, Periander remains on the throne. And although Periander loses his wife, an unborn child, and his son Lykophron, his lineage continues through his oldest son (3.53.1).

In this story, we have an attempt to castrate, and all of the elements for a story involving eunuchs are present, but neither does castration occur nor do these themes fully burgeon. That both castration and the themes which normally appear alongside eunuchs haunt this passage but neither eunuchs nor any of the themes actually materialize corroborates my point that the two are intertwined. In this instance, the mere potential for castration is met by the potential for the eunuch script to play out, but neither the former nor the latter is substantiated.

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<sup>126</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) *passim* argues that the "father-son hostility" trope and the overall structure of the narrative show that this story is best read as an aetiology for a Corcyraean initiation ritual. My reading can coexist with hers, except for one point; she argues that the threat of castrating the boys is an allusion to the passive homosexual role that initiands had to play in initiatory rituals (pg. 171). However, she does not present any evidence that Greeks associated eunuchs with passive homosexuality; I believe that she is implicitly conflating Greek and Roman

## 5. The Ionian Castration

A number of passages concerning the Persians' quelling of the Ionian revolt also relate to eunuchs. The first of these occurs early in book six, when the Persians send several former tyrants of Ionian cities back to their respective cities to announce that if any of these does not capitulate to the Persians then, "We [i.e., the Persians] shall lead them into captivity as slaves and we shall turn their sons into eunuchs and drag their virgin daughters away and we shall give their land to others" (6.9.4). Later in book six, the Persians conquer Ionia and are true to their word. By making the adults and female children slaves and the male children eunuchs, the Persians obliterate the bloodlines of all who dwell in these cities. The Persians do not stop there, but proceed to burn down these cities' sanctuaries (6.32.2). The reference to the burning of sanctuaries recalls an earlier passage in book five, when the Greeks sack Sardis: "So Sardis had been burned, and in the fire a sanctuary... had also gone up in flames. The Persians later relied on this incident as their pretext for burning divine sanctuaries in Hellas" (5.102.1). The Persians' burning of the Ionian cities' sanctuaries, then, are a form of revenge. Notably, the Ionian cities are captured one-by-one in the passages between the delivery of the Persians' threat and their execution of that threat, but they do not burn each city's sanctuaries as they conquer them.

Only when all of the cities have been conquered do the Persians both burn the sanctuaries and castrate the boys, simultaneously. The synchronous burning of sanctuaries and mass castration clearly ties together castration and revenge. The fact that the Persians do not castrate the boys until after they conquer all of the Ionian cities is

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views on eunuchs. This is a not uncommon practice in modern scholarship; for more on this and

significant insofar as this severs their castration from the events of war. The Persians threaten the Ionians, beat them in war, and then inflict this punishment upon them once the war is over. Although this is closer to a wartime situation than we have seen in the other instances above, the delay of castration until after the war is over indicates that the castration of the Ionian boys is an intrusion of violence into already conquered cities, as opposed to an act of war.

Indeed, all of the themes that regularly accompany Herodotean eunuchs are present here. In addition to the boys' castration after the war's end, the burning of the sanctuaries marks a second example of violence intruding into a customarily protected space. The reconquering of Ionia by the Persians is a form of political upheaval in and of itself, but Herodotus goes a step further and explicitly tells us that entire eponymous populations are displaced. After the Persians sack it, "there were no Milesians in Milteus" (6.22). The Persians carry out their threats by employing violence against already-conquered cities by castrating the Ionians' sons, thereby also wiping out the Ionians' lineages. Their burning of the Ionians' sanctuaries demonstrates both revenge and a second intrusion of uncustomarily excessive violence. The castration of the Ionian children neatly encapsulates all of the themes that we have come to see associated with eunuchs in Herodotus.<sup>127</sup>

### Herodotus' Eunuchs

In all of the instances above, eunuchs in Herodotus' *Histories* appear alongside the themes of civil violence, the destruction of lineages, revenge, and political upheaval. One

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another example of it see my discussion of Llewellyn-Jones on pgs. 3-4 above.

<sup>127</sup> There does not seem to be any evidence beyond Herodotus' statement that an entire generation of Ionians were castrated to verify this story.



could argue that much of Herodotus is focused on these topics, and therefore too much has been made of the eunuchs' presence, especially since the eunuchs themselves usually play a minor role in the narrative. Admittedly, in most of these examples the fact that some of the people involved happen to be eunuchs could be omitted without damage to the narrative. Herodotus does, however, choose to mention that these particular characters are eunuchs, and whenever he does this the same thematic elements consistently appear. The regularity of this pattern suggests that the eunuchs are significant, at least on a thematic level.

And although much of Herodotus' work involves revenge and political upheaval, the same cannot be said of children dying violently. The settings of the passages in which eunuchs appear are also significant. Specifically, eunuchs show up in arenas where one would not expect violence. Although Herodotus never lingers long on eunuchs, when they do make an appearance in his text his narrative is focused on a particular set of themes. As we will see in the following section, these themes are exactly the same in another classical Greek author: Ctesias.

### Ctesias' *Persica*

Ctesias of Cnidus was the primary physician of the Persian king Artaxerxes II, who ruled 404-360 BC, approximately. How and why Ctesias came to even be in Persia, let alone serve as the king's doctor is unclear.<sup>128</sup> Diodorus Siculus says that Ctesias lived in Persia for seventeen years, although some scholars question whether he was really there that long.<sup>129</sup> Sometime between 399 and 397 BC, Ctesias left Persia and returned to Cnidus.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Llewellyn-Jones & Robson (2010) 11-12.

<sup>129</sup> Diod. 2.32.4; Llewellyn-Jones & Robson (2010) 13.

<sup>130</sup> Lenfant (2004) XIX-XXII

Sometime after this, Ctesias wrote his *Persica*—a history of the Persian empire. Although Ctesias' text is not extant, quotations from and epitomes of it are. These fragments suggest that the *Persica* traced Persian history down to around 398/7 BC. It also refers to events as late as 392 BC.<sup>131</sup> Although one cannot be certain, given that we do not have Ctesias' actual work, this evidence indicates that he authored the *Persica* during the 390s. Due to the nature of the evidence, one cannot wholly rule out the possibility that the textual evidence concerning eunuchs is wholly the work of later authors, who incorporated either their own writing or other authors' writing into alleged quotations of Ctesias' *Persica*. The wide breadth of the later authors involved mitigates this potential, however.<sup>132</sup>

The fragments from the *Persica* reiterate the pattern between eunuchs and the themes that appear in Herodotus.<sup>133</sup> At times, these themes are displayed in so brief and obvious a way that explanation seems almost superfluous. At other times, however, these themes expand and intertwine with each other over the reign of several kings and eunuchs in quite complex ways. In the face of this variety, I have elected to divide this section into six parts, some incorporating a number of shorter, less intricate examples, and others focused only on a single long example. Lest my argument seem to hinge too much on

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<sup>131</sup> Llewellyn-Jones & Robson (2010) 11.

<sup>132</sup> These authors include Diodorus Siculus and Nicolas of Damascus (1st c. BC), Photius (9th c. AD), and John Tzetzes (12th c. AD).

<sup>133</sup> For establishing what fragments can be attributed to Ctesias' *Persica*, I use Lenfant (2004) *Ctésias de Cnide. Le Perse. L'Inde. Autres Fragments*. Lenfant's decision to add to Jacoby's corpus has been widely lauded and the fragments she chose largely unquestioned. Support for Lenfant's additions can be found in Llewellyn-Jones and J. Robson (2010) 1-3; Mund-Dopchie (2008) 364-366; R. Rollinger (2007) *passim*. Romm (2006) 38-40 is less sure of Lenfant's choices and argues that the lack of a direct reference to Ctesias or his works in these fragments should preclude them from inclusion. Romm strongly maintains that the fragments from Nicolas of

later authors' idiosyncratic treatment of Ctesias' work, whenever multiple versions of a passage exist, I only discuss that passage if eunuchs appear in every version, with one exception.<sup>134</sup>

### 1. Semiramis

This exception is the story of the death of the Assyrian queen, Semiramis. Although her parents tried to kill her through exposure, Semiramis survives and marries Onnes, a general of the Assyrian king Ninus. When her beauty and bravery catch the attention of king Ninus, he demands her from Onnes, who refuses. King Ninus then decides to murder Onnes, but Onnes pre-empts him, by hanging himself. Semiramis then marries king Ninus, but he predeceases her, and the widow Semiramis continues to rule on her own. A number of authors claim to present Ctesias' version of Semiramis' death, but these accounts display significant variation. Diodorus Siculus writes that Semiramis' son Ninyas and an unnamed eunuch plot to kill her, but Semiramis uncovers their plan. Rather than punish them, she hands the kingdom over to Ninyas and then disappears (F1b). Eusebius and the anonymous author of a treatise on women concur with Diodorus that Ninyas plots against his mother, but maintain that his plot was successful. Neither Eusebius nor this treatise mentions that a eunuch played any role in Ninyas' plot (F1g; F1c). Eusebius, however, does mention that Ninyas' motivation is fear, when he learns that Semiramis had had several other children, whom she murdered in order to retain power (F1g). Athenagoras of Athens, in *Embassy for the Christians*, argues that

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Damascus should be attributed to Deinon of Colophon, but see Biltcliffe (1969) against Romm's view.

<sup>134</sup> Translations for Ctesias are my own. References to events in the narrative are based on Llewellyn-Jones and Robson's translation, and checked against the Greek text of Lenfant. The fragments are cited according to Lenfant's numbers, for more on which see n. 136 below.

Semiramis could not possibly have transformed into a dove, in lieu of dying, as Ctesias claims (F1m).<sup>135</sup> Finally, Nicolas of Damascus explains that the eunuch Satibaras coerces the children that Semiramis had with her first husband into hatching a plot to push her off of a mountain (F11δ).<sup>136</sup> Semiramis learns of this plot, climbs to the top of a mountain, and summons her treacherous children. Upon their arrival, she orders them to push her off, at which point the fragment ends, without telling us if they listened.

Diodorus and Nicolas' versions of this story refer to a eunuch's involvement, but none of the others do. Eusebius, on the other hand, does not refer to a eunuch, but includes Semiramis' penchant for murdering her children. Yet another fragment says that she killed her lovers (F1i). Although many of the eunuch-themes for which I argue appear in this fragments, the variation in these fragments makes it impossible to distinguish anything close to Ctesias' original *Persica*. Notably, even if a eunuch did not instigate Semiramis' death in Ctesias' own work, it is the sort of thing that later authors thought a eunuch would do in the *Persica*.

## 2. The Death of Astyages

As compared to Semiramis, the ground is quite firmer when it comes to the death of Astyages—the last Median king—from whom the Persian Cyrus the Great seized power.

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<sup>135</sup> Diodorus 2.20.1 also mentions this story; he reports that some storytellers (ἔνιοι δὲ μυθολογοῦντες) believe that she turned into a dove, which is why Assyrians worship doves. In 2.2.2, Diodorus tells us that he is basing his report of early Assyrian history on Ctesias of Knidus, and the reference in 2.20.1 to 'some storytellers,' especially coupled with the adversative particle, suggests that Ctesias is not to be counted among these storytellers, however it is impossible to be sure.

<sup>136</sup> =FGrH 90F1. Lenfant uses the same fragment numbers as Jacoby, for the fragments in both corpora. For the fragments that Lenfant adds, he developed a system designed to show parallels between the added fragments and the earlier ones. This system is helpful for navigating Lenfant's edition, but obscure elsewhere. For more on these numbers, see Romm (2006) 38. For citations to fragments situated elsewhere in Jacoby, I provide the FGrH number in footnotes.

Our two Ctesian accounts come through Photius and Ioannes Tzetzes, and both discuss the role of the eunuch Petisacas in Astyages' death (F9; F9a). When Cyrus takes power, he marries Astyages' daughter, Amytis, and spares the former king's life. When Amytis wishes her father to visit, Cyrus sends the eunuch Petisacas to fetch him from Bactria, where he is serving as a satrap. Cyrus' adviser Oebaras, however, covertly instructs Petisacas to abandon Astyages in a desolate place so that he dies of hunger and thirst. Petisacas does so, and Astyages dies. Amytis learns of her father's murder through a dream, and demands that Cyrus hand the eunuch Petisacas over to her. When she receives him, she cuts out his eyes, skins him, and then crucifies him. Oebaras fears that he will be next, and so he starves himself to death.

This passage manifests the thematic elements that we have repeatedly seen clustered around eunuchs. There are several elements of revenge at play in this story. In an earlier fragment that deals with Cyrus' revolt from Astyages, we are told that Oebaras tells Petisacas to kill Astyages because he wants revenge on the Medes for their maltreatment of the Persians (F8d\*.14-15).<sup>137</sup> Although the Persians have wrested control from the Medes, Oebaras goes an extra step and has a eunuch kill the last Median king. Of course, Amytis then gets revenge on the eunuch Petisacas for her father's murder, in a most brutal fashion. The death of Oebaras can also be understood as a type of revenge. Although he commits suicide, he kills himself in the same manner that Astyages was murdered, suggesting an element of retribution.

The manner of Astyages' death is also significant. Astyages has accepted an invitation to visit his daughter and son-in-law and believes that that is the place to which

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<sup>137</sup> =FGrH 90 F66

he is being led. He has every reason to think of himself as a guest, under protection of the laws of *xenia*. Furthermore, Oebaras does not tell Petisacas to do anything to Astyages but simply to abandon him in a desolate place. Finally, a lineage ends and there is political upheaval. While Astyages lived, there was potential for him to sire new sons, who would reclaim the throne for Medes from the Persian Cyrus. His only offspring, a daughter, is married to Cyrus, and will bear Persian, not Median, royalty. Astyages' murder marks the end of the Median royal line and insures the permanence of the transition from Median to Persian rule.

### 3. The Rise of Cyrus, Parsondes, and the Cadusians

The story of Asyages' death at the hands of Petisacas the eunuch closely resembles the eunuch tales that appear in Herodotus. An analysis of the events leading up to it, however, reveals that Ctesias was capable of adding complexity to the Herodotean pattern, when he so desired. By intertwining the stories of Cyrus and the eunuch Parsondes' rises to power, Ctesias subtly points out how befitting a eunuch many of Cyrus' actions are.

Ctesias' description of Cyrus' rise to power begins with Cyrus arriving as a young suppliant at the palace of Astyages (F8d\*.1-7).<sup>138</sup> Artembares, the head cup-bearer and a eunuch, takes Cyrus into his care, and Cyrus spends his youth as a cup-bearer for Astyages. Years later, the aged eunuch Artembares adopts Cyrus, and when he dies, Cyrus inherits his belongings and his status as lead cup-bearer. He performs his job well, until he is sent to engage in diplomatic talks with Onaphernes, the king of the Cadusians.

Before proceeding with the story of Cyrus, we must make a diversion into the

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<sup>138</sup> =FGrH 90 F66

relevance of the fact that Onaphernes is a Cadusian (F6b\*).<sup>139</sup> This relevance stems from a dispute that occurred during the reign of Astyages' great grandfather, Artaeus. A Persian named Parsondes tries to persuade king Artaeus to remove a certain Nanarus from his position as satrap of Babylon and install Parsondes himself in that position, on account of Nanarus' effeminate nature. However, Nanarus captures Parsondes by ordering beautiful women to invite him to a meal in a forest and seduce him, and sending soldiers to ambush him when he is sleeping, afterwards (F6b\*.2). Once the captive Parsondes arrives at Nanarus' palace, Nanarus instructs a eunuch to ensure that Parsondes is treated exactly as other slaves are. During his slavery, Parsondes serves as a singer and server in Nanarus' court. Years later, Parsondes escapes, returns to king Artaeus, and demands that Nanarus be executed. King Artaeus assures Parsondes that he will take the matter up with Nanarus.

When Nanarus hears that Artaeus is coming to Babylon, he is terrified and hides in the quarters of Mitraphernes, one of his eunuchs. Nanarus entrusts Mitraphernes with a great deal of money and instructs him to tell Artaeus that he can have it, if he will spare

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<sup>139</sup> =FGrH 90 F4; Stronk (2007) 20-30 does not agree with Jacoby, Lenfant, and Blitcliffe (1969) that this fragment belongs in the Ctesian corpus; Stronk cites Toher (1989) who argues that Nicolaus of Damascus' text cannot ever be used as evidence of earlier authors. Toher presents three case studies: he concludes that Nicolaus' discussion of Croesus on the pyre conforms with earlier texts (167); that his story of king Kamblites eating his wife does not (168-169); and that his story of Stryngaeus and Zareienaia also does not (169-172). Toher argues that of the three accounts of Kamblites eating his wife, which come from Athenaeus, Eustathius, and Nicolaus, Nicolaus' is the least like the others, and therefore most changed from the original. However, Eustathius changes the king from Kamblites to Kambyes; while Toher attributes this to a typo, its significance cannot be brushed aside, as the cruelty and madness of Kambyes go back to Herodotus. In fact, Herodotus concludes his section on Kambyes' cruelty with a story involving cannibalism (3.38). As for the story of Stryngaeus and Zareienaia, Toher argues that Nicolaus shifts all of the blame for Stryngaeus' suicide onto Zareienaia, while the version presented in P. Ox. No. 2330 does not blame her. However, Toher ignores that the third clause of Stryngaeus' letter to Zareienaia in the papyrus does blame her, "ἐγὼ (Stryngaeus) δὲ διὰ σὲ Zareienaia ἀπω[λ]όμην." Nicolaus' version is simply more blunt σὺ δέ με ἀπέκτεινας.

Nanrus' life. It so happens that king Artaeus knows and likes the eunuch Mitraphernes, and therefore he accepts the offer. Parsondes, however, is furious that Artaeus does not execute Nanarus, but he decides to remain silent, for the time being. Parsondes does, however, begin looking for a way to get revenge on Artaeus, Nanarus and the eunuch.<sup>140</sup> After his sister marries the most powerful of the Cadusians, Parsondes finds a means to get his revenge. He travels to Cadusia with his own troops and incites a rebellion against Artaeus (F5). King Artaeus invades Cadusia to quell the revolt, but Parsondes and the Cadusians drives him out. As a reward for his victory over the Assyrian king, Parsondes is named king of Cadusia, and he spends the rest of his life raiding the Median frontier.

Although there is no explicit discussion of castration in Parsondes' story, there are hints in the texts that he was, in fact, castrated. After Nanarus catches Parsondes, he asks him if Parsondes is ashamed that his genitals got the better of him (εἴτ' οὐκ αἰσχύνει . . . ἥπτων καὶ αἰδοίων ἐγένου;), referring to the seductive women's role in capturing him. Then Nanarus orders a eunuch to make Parsondes "the same as those women" (γυναικὶ ὁμοιωμένος). Shortly later, Parsondes begins to serve in Nanarus' court as a singer and server—both roles played by eunuchs.<sup>141</sup> After his escape, Parsondes forms an alliance with the Cadusians because his sister is married to an influential Cadusian, but there is no mention that Parsondes himself is ever married or has children (F5.33.6). Given his enthusiasm to use family ties for political gain, that he never forged any himself is suggestive.

Parsondes' story abounds with the tropes that we have seen surround eunuchs.

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<sup>140</sup> It is unclear if the eunuch here mentioned is the one in charge of effeminizing Parsondes or Mitraphernes, who convinced Artaeus not to kill Nanarus.

<sup>141</sup> Witt (2003) 236-238



Parsondes is ambushed and captured after a meal and sexual encounter with women who invited him to take part. After regaining his freedom, he urges king Artaeus to extract revenge from Nanarus on his behalf. When Artaeus declines to do so, Parsondes decides to get revenge on the king himself, by leading the Cadusians in a revolt. Their successful revolt creates the state of Cadusia. As Parsondes is dying, he makes his successor swear an oath that the Cadusians would never cease their hostility towards the Medes (F5.5-6). This oath of perpetual hostility brings us back to the story of Cyrus, but first it is necessary to address Parsondes' castration.

Given the presence in this story of the unnamed eunuch who trains Parsondes in the art of being a slave and of the eunuch Mitraphernes who bribes king Artaeus on behalf of Nanarus, my argument that Parsondes is also a eunuch may seem superfluous. The unnamed eunuch and Mitraphernes, however, are tied to Parsondes' own desire for revenge, political upheaval in Cadusia, and destroying Parsondes' lineage, but Parsondes, on the other hand, is at the heart of another eunuch tale: Cyrus' revolt.<sup>142</sup> If, as I argue, the text subtly indicates that Parsondes is castrated, then one question that arises is why this point is never stated explicitly. The answer is that Parsondes performs a decidedly non-eunuch deed, when he wages and wins a war. By abstaining from explicitly declaring Parsondes a eunuch, Ctesias allows the character to function as a eunuch, at times, and an uncastrated man, at others.

Parsondes' successors follow the dictates of the oath that he established, down to Onaphernes—the Cadusian king to whom Astyages sends Cyrus as an emissary (F8d\*.11). During his journey to Cadusia, Cyrus meets a Babylonian soothsayer and

Oebaras—whose eventual role in the death of Astyages is discussed above—and they decide to revolt against Astyages. Significantly, Onaphernes wants to broker a peace with the Median empire, although the rest of the Cadusians do not (F8d\*.16). Fully aware of the Cadusians' long-standing hatred for the Medians, Cyrus and Oebaras decide that the first step in their revolt is to recruit them (F8d\*.16). Parsondes' actions play an essential role in Cyrus' revolt.

There are several signs in Cyrus' story that it should be read with the story of Parsondes in mind. First, Cyrus' position in the palace is as a cupbearer, a role usually filled by eunuchs; he is adopted by the eunuch Artembares, and later inherits Artembares' possessions and position as head cup-bearer. Like Parsondes, Cyrus learns how to live the life of a eunuch slave, before later becoming a king (F8d\*). By abstaining from directly labelling Parsondes a eunuch, the text strengthens this parallel with Cyrus. Additionally, Astyages sometimes refuses Cyrus' permission to leave the palace, just as Parsondes was held captive in a palace. Cyrus relies on a eunuch to change king Astyages' mind, recalling the actions of Mitraphernes (F8d\*.20-23). Finally, Cyrus decides to revolt from the Medes when he is on his way to meet with the king of the Cadusians, a role once held by Parsondes. Collectively, all of these elements demonstrate the strong symbolic presence of Parsondes in the story of Cyrus' rise to power.

Historical reality prevented Ctesias from saying that Cyrus was a eunuch. The story of his rise to power, however, incorporates many of the themes that cluster around eunuchs, in classical Greek literature. By creating parallels between Parsondes and Cyrus, Ctesias draws a reader's attention to how close Cyrus' story is to a eunuch story.

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<sup>142</sup> Although his daughter has Cyrus' children, the husband that Astyages had chosen for her and

Astyages sends Cyrus as an ambassador to Cadusia because of his absolute faith in Cyrus. Upon reaching Cadusia, Cyrus conspires against Astyages and plans a violent revolt (F8d\*.14). Cyrus coyly returns to the palace while his troops gather, and when they are ready, he leaves Astyages' palace to join them, under the pretext of going out to perform sacrifices on behalf of Astyages (F8d\*.22). On several occasions, the text makes clear that Cyrus' army is motivated by earlier Persian mistreatment of Cadusians and Persians (F8d\*.32, .35-36). Cyrus is ultimately responsible for ending Astyages' lineage, and he certainly causes political upheaval. Through his description of Parsondes and by describing Parsondes' actions as the groundwork for Cyrus' revolt, Ctesias is able to make the story of Cyrus' rise to power into a eunuch tale, without saying that Cyrus was a eunuch, which his audience knew was not the case.

#### 4. Cambyses and Sphandadates

On his deathbed after a lengthy rule, Cyrus appoints Cambyses as his heir, but stipulates that his younger son Tanyoxarces will rule several provinces and be exempt from paying any tribute (F9.8). Some time later, Cambyses is in newly conquered Egypt, and Tanyoxarces whips a Magus named Sphandadates, who then travels to Egypt and tells Cambyses that Tanyoxarces is plotting to seize the throne.<sup>143</sup> Cambyses summons

Tanyoxarces to Egypt, and kills him. However, Cambyses fears his mother's reaction to

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his presumable heir to the throne is executed after Cyrus comes to power.

<sup>143</sup> Plato, *Laws* 695b says that Sphandadates himself is a eunuch. Although this is not in Photius' epitome of Ctesias, as we have it. The story of Sphandadates fits perfectly with what we would expect from a eunuch, however. Therefore, if Plato is correct that he was, then we have another example of a eunuch associated with standard eunuch tropes. If Plato is incorrect, then the fact that he thought that Sphandadates was a eunuch highlights how closely these behaviors were associated with eunuchs in the classical Greek mind. In their translation, Llewellyn-Jones and Robson (2010) 179 seem to mistake the Greek *ἐκείνου* for *εὐνούχου* when discussing Sphandadates, or they are silently alluding to Plato's passage.

this, and therefore he has Sphandadates pretend to be Tanyoxarces, whom he happens to greatly resemble. Only three people knew that Sphandadates was not Tanyoxarces, and these three were the most trusted eunuchs in Cambyses' retinue: Artasyras, Bagapatas, and Izabatas—all of whom play important roles in the death of Sphandadates (F13.13).

This state of affairs continues for five years, until a eunuch named Tibethis gets angry at Sphandadates for whipping him, and therefore he informs Cambyses' mother—Amytis—what is really going on (F13.13).<sup>144</sup> Amytis demands Cambyses hand Sphandadates to her for punishment, but he refuses, and so she kills herself. Shortly after this, Cambyses sacrifices an animal, but no blood flows from the animal. A soothsayer tells him that this means that he will die childless (F13.14). Soon after, Cambyses' wife miscarries, and he accidentally kills himself, by stabbing himself in the thigh while whittling (F13.14). As a result, Sphandadates takes control of the throne. The eunuch Izabatas, however, takes refuge in a temple and declares that Sphandadates is not actually Tanyoxarces. Sphandadates has Izabatas dragged out of the temple and beheaded. After Izabatas reveals Sphandadates' secret, seven Persian nobles, including the future king Darius, plot to execute him. To gain entrance, they rely on the eunuchs Artasyras and Bagapates, who abscond with Sphandadates' weapons, on the night of the assassination. The conspirators find Sphandadates in bed with a Babylonian concubine, and dispatch him easily; after the death of Sphandadates, Darius becomes king (F13.15-17).

All four of the elements associated with eunuchs in classical Greek literature are on full display in this narrative. After the death of Tanyoxarces, Sphandadates was able to successfully impersonate him for five years. However, when the eunuch Tibethis,

seeking revenge for a flogging, reveals his secret, events proceed quickly. After his mother's death, Cambyses is told that he will have no children, and his wife miscarries, bringing in the element of child loss. Then, Cambyses stabs himself to death in a freak wood carving incident, transferring control of the kingdom from the Persians to the Magi.

After Cambyses' death, the eunuch Izabates seeks refuge in a temple, a sacred place where violence is forbidden, but he is beheaded. The eunuchs Artasyras and Bagapates help the Persian conspirators get revenge on the Magus Sphandadates, causing the empire to shift back into Persian hands. Sphandadates is killed in his bedroom while engaged in intercourse, offering another example of eunuchs being involved in violence that takes place inside of an *oikos*. That Sphandadates is with a concubine when the assassins assault him can also be read as a type of violent loss of children. As we shall soon see, Cambyses and Sphandadates are not the only Persian rulers whose deaths are heavily wrapped up with the actions of eunuchs.

### 5. The Sons of Darius

After Darius took the throne back from Sphandadates, he ruled Persia for thirty-one years (F13.23). His son, Xerxes held two men in particularly high esteem, Aspamitres the eunuch and Artapanus, the (presumably adopted) son of Cambyses' eunuch Artasyras. One day, these two conspired together and then executed Xerxes. To escape blame, they convince his son Artaxerxes that Xerxes' eldest son and heir Darius had killed their father. Artaxerxes consequently enters Darius' home (εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν) and kills him (F13.33). Shortly after this, there is a plot against Artaxerxes that includes a certain Megabyzus as a co-conspirator; he informs Artaxerxes who actually murdered Xerxes.

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<sup>144</sup> There is no explanation for how Tibethis knows Sphandadates' identity. The text has just

Artaxerxes kills Artapanus in the way that Artapanus had planned to kill him; he also executes Aspamitres by having him exposed (F14.34). While he had been murdering members of the royal family, Artapanus had also been gathering troops, and upon his death, there is a civil war. Ctesias does not inform us how many total casualties there were, as he often does. However, he does state that three of Artapanus' sons were killed (F14.34).

King Xerxes is murdered by his two most trusted advisers, and the very-briefly-king Darius is murdered in his house by his brother, Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes later executes Aspamitres and Artapanus in revenge for those murders, and by choosing to execute Artapanus in the way that Artapanus had planned to kill him, Artaxerxes also gets a sort of pre-emptive revenge for his own murder. As a result of these murders, the Persian kingdom devolves into civil war, and the only casualties that we are informed of are identified only as "the three sons of Artapanus" (οἱ τρεῖς τοῦ Ἀρταπάνου υἱοί) (F14.34). As usual, the thematic pattern of civic violence, revenge, political upheaval, and the loss of children are all present in this eunuch driven story.

#### 6. The Sons of Artaxerxes

Artaxerxes' only legitimate son, Xerxes II, became king after his father's death (F15.47). Forty-five days into his rule, he held a festival at his palace; while in a drunken slumber afterwards, the eunuch Pharnacyas and his half-brother Secundianus enter the palace and execute him. Ctesias adds that the mules pulling the carriage with Artaxerxes' body on it refused to leave the city until this, as though they were waiting for the son's body to join the father's. Once Xerxes II's corpse is added to the wagon, they set off enthusiastically

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recently listed everyone, ostensibly, who knew the secret, but he is not mentioned.

(F15.48).

Secundianus' first act as king is to execute the eunuch Bagorazus, in revenge for an old quarrel (F15.49). However, Bagorazus had been quite popular with the army for unspecified reasons; when he is executed, the army abandons Secundianus and takes up with another of Artaxerxes' illegitimate sons, Ochus. Ochus asks to meet with Secundianus and swears oaths that he will not harm him. Secundianus agrees, and he and his eunuch Menostanes go to meet Ochus, despite Menostanes' urging against this plan. When they arrive, Ochus kills him, takes control of the empire, and changes his name to Darius II (F15.50).

Immediately after Darius II takes the throne, the narrative discusses his wife Parysatis and her children. Before Darius II became king, the couple had two children. After this, Parysatis gives birth eleven more times, but only three of those children survive (F15.51). The narrative then resumes discussing the fallout of this rapid succession of kings, and the violent revolts incited by Aristes and Artyphius. In the aftermath of these revolts, Pharnacyas, the eunuch who had helped Secundianus kill Darius II, and Menostanes, the eunuch with Secundianus when Darius II killed him, are both put to death (F15.52-54). After the revolts are quelled, Terituchmes, the husband of Darius II's daughter Amestris, decides to put her in a bag and stab her three hundred times (F15.55). Although Darius II learns of this plot and sends people to prevent it, we do not learn whether his intercession is successful. At the very least, Amestris is not mentioned again.

### Ctesias' Eunuchs

In all of the cases above, we can clearly see eunuchs involved in the murders of Persian kings. The settings of these murders include *oikoi* and meetings in which oaths have been sworn that there will be no violence. The turmoil that they cause is manifested in the violent revolts and revenge killings that follow. At times, eunuchs' ostensible motivation for revenge is patently absurd, such as Darius II's killing of Menostanes, who urged Secundianus not to walk into a trap. Furthermore, there is a consistent emphasis on the loss of children. The donkeys with Artaxerxes' body refuse to move until dead son is united with dead father and the narrative takes a sharp detour from revolts to discuss Parysatis' eight miscarriages and Terituchmes' strange plot to kill his wife. In all of these cases, we see the same thematic pattern associated with eunuchs. We turn now to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, which not only continues this pattern but also contains a character who relies upon it in his decision making.

### Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

The narrative of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*—in English, *Cyrus' Education*—is a rather straightforward biography of the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Many of its biographical details, however, disagree with all of our other sources on Cyrus and the Persian empire during his time. For instance, the *Cyropaedia* alone says that Cyrus inherits power from Astyages, whereas other sources describe a violent revolt.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, the *Cyropaedia* does not conform to the standards of Greek historical prose that appear in Xenophon's predecessors.<sup>146</sup> Admittedly, these standards were still nascent, but other works of Xenophon such as the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica* show that he was both aware of

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<sup>145</sup> Briant (2002) 31-33.



them and fully capable of using them, when he so desired. It is ambiguous, then, whether the *Cyropaedia* should be read as historical, philosophical, or biographical prose; whether it is an early instance of a Greek novel; or whether it is a unique work that defies generic categorization.<sup>147</sup>

The text is divided into eight books. Book one describes the type of education that all Persian children received, Cyrus' introduction to palace life, and his earliest military engagements. Books two through seven describe his tenure as a general in a war against the Assyrian empire. The eunuch Gadatas is one of Cyrus' major allies in this war against the Assyrians. After sacking the city of Babylon, Cyrus declares himself king of Assyria (7.5.37), and book eight details the institutions that Cyrus established as king. Among other things, Cyrus decides that his personal bodyguard will consist entirely of eunuchs, and Xenophon describes his reasoning in great detail. Both Gadatas and this eunuch excursus continue the thematic pattern that appears in Herodotus and Ctesias.

### 1. Gadatas

Xenophon's characterization of Gadatas incorporates all of the thematic elements that Herodotus' eunuchs did. Gadatas laments his loss of potential children, and his castration is described by a surrogate father, Gobryas, who equates Gadatas' castration to the death of his own son. Gadatas' soul is so filled with a need for revenge that he both exposes his own household to violence and resorts to committing acts of violence inside of houses. Ultimately, he gets his revenge by murdering the Assyrian king, leading to political upheaval.

Cyrus learns of Gadatas when Gobryas—one of his allies—tells Cyrus why many

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<sup>146</sup> Stoneman (1992) xiv; Sandridge (2012) 1-4.

men will join him, due to their desire to exact revenge on the king for personal grievances. Gadatas is the first individual in Gobyras' list of such men. During this initial description of Gadatas, Gobyras not only explains precisely why Gadatas wants revenge on the king, but also he incorporates references to the king's murder of his own (i.e., Gobyras') son and the death of Gadatas' father:

But what need is there to discuss the sort of outrages [the Assyrian king] commits against weaker men? Once, the king was drinking with one of his friends—the son of a man far stranger than I—in the very same way that he (i.e., the king) used to be a friend of and drink with my son. The king seized this friend and castrated him. Now, this man is a eunuch, and he rules a province, since his father is dead.<sup>148</sup>

ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ἀσθενοῦντας οἷα ὑβρίζει τί δεῖ λέγειν; ἐνὸς δὲ ἀνδρὸς πολὺ  
δυνατωτέρου ἢ ἐγὼ υἱόν, καὶ ἐκείνου ἐταῖρον ὄντα ὥσπερ τὸν ἐμὸν  
συμπίνοντα παρ' ἐαυτῷ συλλαβὼν ἐξέτεμεν... καὶ νῦν οὗτος εὐνοῦχος μὲν  
ἐστί, τὴν δ' ἀρχὴν ἔχει, ἐπεὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐτελεύτησεν.  
5.2.28

Clearly, castrating a friend during a drinking party is indicative of civic violence, but there is also more going on here. The brief reference to Gobyras' son in this quotation is elaborated in full, earlier in the text. Gobyras' only son had once been a friend of the king, but the king grew envious of his hunting skills. During Gobyras' son's wedding, the king gives vent to his jealousy by impaling him with a spear (4.6.2-4). This reference to Gobyras' son, then, raises the theme of the destruction of lineages. The final two clauses of this quotation (τὴν δ' ἀρχὴν ἔχει, ἐπεὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐτελεύτησεν) also raise this point, albeit in a manner opposite to examples thus far considered. Gadatas' lineage is eradicated not through the death of children but the death of a father. The castration of Gadatas—who is

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<sup>147</sup> Sandridge (2012) 4-7.

<sup>148</sup> My translation. It is less literal than I would prefer, but the preponderance of pronouns in the Greek renders a strict translation indecipherable. When both Greek and English are present, the translation is mine. When only English is present, the translation is by Stawell and Dakyns.

himself childless—does not *per se* preclude the continuation of his family line, while his father lives. By adding that Gadatas' father is dead and a eunuch rules his province, Gobyras shows that the castration of Gadatas has precluded further iterations of that family. This introduction of Gadatas the eunuch, then, refers to two instances of civic violence—murder at a wedding and castration at a drinking party—and the destruction of two family lines—one of Gobyras and one of Gadatas. Furthermore, Gobyras is only telling Cyrus about Gadatas because Cyrus asked him who might want revenge on the Assyrian king.<sup>149</sup>

At one point in the *Cyropaedia*, one of Gadatas' subordinates betrays him by literally stabbing him in the back, locking him out of his own palace, and writing to the Assyrians to inform them that were they to attack Gadatas immediately then he would be stuck between his own palace and their army. Fortunately for Gadatas, however, Cyrus arrives just in time and routs the Assyrians (5.4.1-12). At this point, Gadatas delivers a lengthy speech in which he notes that by joining Cyrus' revolt against the Assyrian king, he has put his land and life in the king's crosshairs. He then asks (himself), "And why then did you not think of this before you rebelled?" (καὶ τί δῆτα οὐχ οὕτως ἐνενοοῦ πρὶν ἀποστιῆναι), before answering his own question:

Because, Cyrus, on account of being violated and enraged, my spirit was not looking for the safest route, but was always pregnant with this question, whether it would ever be possible to get revenge against that enemy of gods and men.

ὅτι, ὦ Κῦρε, ἡ ψυχὴ μου διὰ τὸ ὑβρίσθαι καὶ ὀργίζεσθαι οὐ τὸ ἀσφαλέστατον σκοποῦσα διῆγεν, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ τοῦτο κυοῦσ' ἄρά ποτ' ἔσται

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<sup>149</sup> Gobyras refers to Gadatas' need for revenge several other times, before Gadatas even appears in the narrative (5.3.8 & 5.3.10).

ἀποτείσασθαι τὸν καὶ θεοῖς ἐχθρὸν καὶ ἀνθρώποις.<sup>150</sup>  
5.4.35

Gadatas' recognizes that by choosing to revolt he endangers both his own safety and his household's, but he is so obsessed with revenge that he is unable to make a smarter choice. His singular focus on revenge, Gadatas explains, subjects his home to danger. Since he has just been attacked by one of his own men—an instance of civic violence—it is fair to say that his assessment of the danger in which he has put himself and his household is accurate. The metaphor in which Gadatas says that his "psyche is pregnant" (ψυχὴ... κυοῦσα) with a lust for revenge is essential to understanding why Gadatas makes what he knows is a worse decision for himself and his household. In order show this works, a brief detour into the world of philosophy is required. After elucidating how this metaphor works in Plato, I discuss its significance for Gadatas.

The description of Gadatas' ψυχὴ as κυοῦσα seems at first glance to replace his lost masculine reproductive functions with feminine ones, and thus to bring issues of gender identity to the forefront. A ψυχὴ κυοῦσα is not the same, however, as a ὑστέρα κυοῦσα ("pregnant womb") and refers to distinctly masculine pursuits, in the one other text in which it appears: Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>151</sup> In Plato's text, the pregnant psyche is that

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<sup>150</sup> Although Cyrus is present, this series of questions and answers is clearly a monologue by Gadatas and not a dialogue.

<sup>151</sup> Among texts that pre-date the *Cyropaedia*, Stoneman (1992) xii: The *Cyropaedia* "is datable by internal references to 362/1 BC." He cites *Cyr.* 8.8., a passage whose authorship was debated in the late nineteenth century due to its marked shift in attitude towards Persia, but Sage (1994) rather convincingly shows that this shift is not nearly as radical as it was once made out to be. The *Symposium* was written 385-375 BC, according to Leitao (2012) 183 and Cobb (1993) 11. Thus, although the idea that Plato borrowed the image of the philosopher's pregnant psyche from Xenophon's vengeful eunuch has potentially marvelous ramifications, it is chronologically impossible. The technique of interpreting Xenophon through Plato is not an innovation of my own. Waterfield (2004) compares the presentations in Plato and Xenophon of the Delphic oracle that declares that Socrates' wisdom is superlative. He argues that Xenophon manipulated aspects

of the successful philosopher, and the author takes great care to suppress the biological fact that pregnancy occurs in women, and not men, using various techniques.<sup>152</sup>

The philosophical significance of the pregnant psyche is developed throughout Plato's *Symposium*, but it is Diotima who deals with it directly.<sup>153</sup> In her speech on love, Diotima explains that: "All men, Socrates, are pregnant both in body and in psyche" (κυοῦσιν γάρ, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) (206c). Then, she says that all men desire immortality in some form, and the nature of this immortality is dictated by the nature of their pregnancies (207-208b). Those men who are more pregnant in body (κατὰ τὸ σῶμα) procreate and leave children behind (208e). On the other hand, those who are more pregnant in psyche (κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) produce "the things fitting for the psyche" (ἃ ψυχῇ προσήκει) (209a). According to Diotima, "the thing fitting for a psyche" to be pregnant with is "wisdom [that] pertains to the management of cities and households."<sup>154</sup> For a philosopher, the psyche is pregnant with knowledge, which increases until he is inspired to beget philosophical *logoi* (210d).

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of Plato's version for his own ends. Waterfield (2004) 93-95 adds that Xenophon's use of the Platonic version of Delphi proves that Xenophon was well versed in Plato's works.

<sup>152</sup> Leitao (2012) 188-200. This is done in a number of ways. Women themselves are excluded from the symposium, as Eryximachus kicks out the flute girl (Leitao 189 citing *Sym.* 176e). When proposing the topic of *eros*, Eryximachus says, "I begin my proposal along the lines of Euripides' Melanippe. For 'the story is not mine' but Phaedrus' here" (*idem*, citing *Sym.* 177a). Leitao points out that the actual line from Euripides' *Melanippe Sophe* is: "The story is not mine, but my mother's" (*idem*, citing Eur. fr. 484.1 *TGF*). Eryximachus, then, cuts the "mother" out of the actual Euripidean quote and inserts his male friend Phaedrus. Later, Phaedrus does something similar, by cutting out the subject—Aphrodite—from a line of Parmenides that reads: "...thought into existence (μητίσαστο) Eros first of all gods" (Leitao 191 citing *Sym.* 178b which is quoting Parmenides fragment DK 28 B 13). By leaving out Aphrodite, Phaedrus suppresses a reference to maternal parturition. Additionally, Phaedrus' reliance on a description of Eros' origins that uses the gender neutral verb μητίομαι (literally "devise" or "contrive"), allows Phaedrus to present Eros as the result of an activity that is not restricted to females.

<sup>153</sup> Leitao (2012) 200-224.

Although the external production of philosophical *logoi* symbolically represents the philosopher's pregnant psyche "giving birth," the psyche's degree of pregnancy is increased, not diminished, by this birth. This is the case because the philosophical psyche is pregnant with knowledge, which is only increased through the creation of philosophical *logoi*. As David Leitao puts it in his monograph on philosophical psychic pregnancy, Plato presents "the very state of being pregnant as the ultimate goal of philosophy."<sup>155</sup>

According to Diotima, all men produce either biological or intellectual offspring. Philosophers—whose psyches are pregnant with knowledge—beget "offspring" that benefit their cities and households. And according to the Platonic model of the pregnant psyche, parturition simply increases the degree to which a psyche is pregnant, leading to subsequent creations. Castration precludes Gadatas from pursuing biological production, meaning that he must be intellectually pregnant. Gadatas corroborates that this is so, when he says that his soul is pregnant with revenge. And as noted above, the *Cyropaedia* makes clear many times that Gadatas' need for revenge is the direct result of his castration. Therefore, at the same time that castration cuts off a man from biological production, it also impregnates his psyche with revenge. For philosophers, the pursuit of philosophy fills their psyches with progressively more knowledge, and for eunuchs, the pursuit of revenge fills their psyches with an ever growing obsession with revenge. That is to say, once a ψυχή is κυοῦσα with a need for revenge, there is no way extract it, at least within Plato's model. When Gadatas makes such choices in pursuit of revenge, the

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<sup>154</sup> "Wisdom and the other goodness, and the best sort of wisdom pertains to the management of cities and households" (φρόνησιν τε καὶ ἄλλην ἀρετήν . . . καὶ καλλίστη τῆς φρονήσεως ἢ περὶ τὰ τῶν πόλεων τε καὶ οἰκήσεων διακόσμησις) (209a)

degree to which his psyche is pregnant with revenge only increases, and he cannot halt this process.

Unlike philosophers, whose “offspring” benefits their cities, Gadatas’ pregnancy causes him to make choices that endanger his province and household, despite knowing that this danger will occur. As he continues his quest for revenge, his psyche becomes ever more pregnant, causing progressively poorer choices that present increasing amounts of endangerment to the household. The end result of this process is the intrusion of civic violence into the household, which manifests itself as a knife in the back, in Gadatas’ case.

In this same speech, Gadatas twice points out that he is a eunuch and therefore has no family (5.4.12; 5.4.30).<sup>156</sup> On the one hand, this is certainly true, in Gadatas’ case, but Gadatas speaks as though being a eunuch necessarily implies being the last member of one’s family or castration causes the immediate death of all relatives. Conversely, one can be the last member of one’s family, without being a eunuch. Gobyras, for instance, is the final bastion of his own bloodline, but he is content to mention this only when he first allies with Cyrus and allude to it again in his initial description of Gadatas. Gadatas, however, mentions his dearth of relatives on a regular basis and each time he reminds his audience that he is a eunuch. Xenophon goes out of his way to emphasize the relationship between castration and the destruction of family lineages.

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<sup>155</sup> Leïtao (2012) 224

<sup>156</sup> 5.4.12: "If I were now as I had been born and I had children, I do not know if I could have begotten a child (who acts as well) as you do towards me" (εἰ ἦν οἷος ἔφυν ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐπαιδοποιησάμην, οὐκ οἶδ' ἂν εἰ ἐκτησάμην παῖδα τοιοῦτον περὶ ἐμέ). 5.4.30: "There is not and never will be a relative by blood to whom I will leave my house," he said, "but, necessarily, my family and name will entirely cease, when I die" (οὔτε γὰρ ἔστιν οὗτ' ἔσται ποτὲ ὅτῳ ἐγὼ ἅπ'

Near the end of the *Cyropaedia*, Gadatas is also the cause of significant political upheaval. While the Assyrian king is hosting a festival at Babylon, he sneaks into the city and joins in their revelry (7.5.26). When he sees that the palace gate is open, he rushes into the Assyrian king's chambers and kills him (7.5.29-30). As a result, the Assyrian empire is annexed by the Persian empire. Thus, by performing an act of civic violence the eunuch causes massive political upheaval.

## 2. The Excursus on Eunuchs

In addition to the character Gadatas, the *Cyropaedia* contains an excursus on the nature of eunuchs. Having conquered Babylon and established his court there, Cyrus decides that he needs a personal bodyguard and concludes that this group should be composed entirely of eunuchs. Fortuitously, the text lays out his thought process (7.5.58-65). Cyrus thinks that no one can be totally trustworthy who loves someone else more than the person that he is supposed to be guarding (7.5.59). Therefore, an ideal bodyguard will not have any family ties. Cyrus also reasons that many people look down on eunuchs, and therefore eunuchs are likely to be faithful to anyone who can help them get rich or aid them in getting revenge, when they have been wronged (7.5.60). Cyrus' eunuchs guard him only inside the palace, whereas ten thousand Persian spearmen are his guard when he leaves its walls. Xenophon's Cyrus seems to take for granted eunuchs' association with violence inside houses (7.5.68). Although eunuchs' penchant for getting wrapped up in political turmoil goes unmentioned here, the other three themes that shadow eunuchs in classical Greek literature do. Remarkably, they undergird Cyrus' reasoning. He is, in fact, counting on eunuchs' having no family, wanting revenge, and excelling at the



commission of violence within a home.

### Xenophon's Eunuchs

In the character of Gاداتas, Xenophon continues the thematic pattern associated with eunuchs that appears in Herodotus and Ctesias. In the excursus on eunuchs, Xenophon uses the association between eunuchs and these particular themes to justify Cyrus' decision making. Cyrus' recognition of how eunuchs work makes him unique. Whereas many characters encounter eunuchs and witness how they work, Cyrus alone recognizes this pattern and incorporates it into his decision making. And although he does not explicitly refer to the tendency of eunuchs to signal impending political upheaval, in the excursus, that he recognizes the rest of the patterns and selected Gاداتas in particular to kill the Assyrian king makes one wonder how purposeful that selection was.

### The Meaning of the Eunuch

According to the tenets of physiognomy, as discussed in the previous chapter, fundamental differences in people's customs and behavior (*nomoi*) were dictated by their gender, their ethnicity, and where they lived (*physis*).<sup>157</sup> Easterners, especially Persians, were by nature subservient and obedient, and thus they willingly lived under a monarch.<sup>158</sup> Not only did Persians live under a king, but also they believed that this was the means of government best suited to them, according to the prevalent Greek view. In his *Histories*, for instance, Herodotus describes Darius and his conspirators debating the merits of various forms of government and concluding that monarchy was best (3.80-97).

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ἡμέτερον γένος καὶ ὄνομα).

<sup>157</sup> See the previous chapter for a fuller discussion of this science.

<sup>158</sup> This is widely accepted, but see, e.g. *Airs, Waters, Places* 16 where it is explicitly stated. Hall (1989) 2: "Greeks are democratic and egalitarian; the barbarians are tyrannical." Miller (1997) 257; Hunt (1998) 45-49 & 145-146; E. Said (1978).

As the Greeks saw it, then, the Persians were suited to be ruled by a king, knew that about themselves, and therefore voluntarily chose to live in a monarchy.

These physiognomic “facts,” however, had to be reconciled with the myriad assassinations of the Persian kings by Persians. This is where the eunuchs’ role develops. In *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle explains that when one vital part of a thing changes, its nature transforms into the opposite of what it was before the change (716b). Later, Aristotle repeats this view and supports it by saying, “This is evident in the case of eunuchs” (766a).<sup>159</sup> Castration—a radical change of a vital body part—does not just change people’s bodies but transforms their nature and behavior into the opposite of what it once was.<sup>160</sup> If Persians are normally subservient to a king on account of their nature, then a Persian who has been castrated is, by nature, *not* subservient to a king. This explains why it is Persian eunuchs who are repeatedly responsible for the death of kings: they no longer share in the subservient nature that is inherent to Persians.

When Persian eunuchs are no longer naturally subservient to kings a tension arises, as the separation between Persians and Greeks is diminished. If Persian eunuchs no longer adhere to the usual characteristics of Persians, care must be taken, lest they become Greek. This tension is resolved by describing Persian eunuchs’ means of disobedience towards kings as exceptionally non-Greek. The result is that their disobedience manifests as violence that harms fundamental aspects of Greek life such as

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<sup>159</sup> Trans. by Peck.

<sup>160</sup> Bardel (2002) 61 concurs that these passages and this notion of transformation from one nature to another are key to understanding castration and eunuchs in Greek literature. He applies these ideas to a symbolic reading of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, and Klytemnestra’s treatment of Agamemnon’s corpse to argue that she symbolically castrates him. Bardel’s case is more convincing than one might expect, but I am not wholly convinced that a posthumously castrated corpse constitutes a eunuch.

the *oikos*, the *polis*, the rules of *xenia*, and the exchange of oaths.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, eunuchs' violence is limited within these arenas, and they do not share in martial prowess. The Greeks believed that they themselves naturally excelled in war, according to the same rules which dictated that the Persians were naturally subservient. Therefore Persian eunuchs cannot kill Persian kings in pitched battles, and, indeed, they do not.<sup>162</sup> The same principle explains other aspects of eunuchs' behavior and motivation in Greek literature. They cannot be motivated by a desire to be free, as this inherent need for liberty is reserved for Greeks. One thing that all eunuchs have in common is that they have suffered a severe injury. Consequently, the necessary motive presents itself: revenge.

The final thematic element that we have seen associated with eunuchs in Greek literature is the destruction of lineages. Eunuchs themselves were, by definition, castrated and therefore incapable of furthering a family line.<sup>163</sup> Family units are essential for the continuation of any society, and so the association between eunuchs and the destruction of bloodlines sets them off from both Greek and Persian culture. Beyond that, family lineage also had ramifications for another major Greek cultural institution: *xenia*. After two parties had hosted each other and exchanged gifts, they could declare themselves *xenoi* (guest-friends). This bond was inherited, and one's children were *xenoi* with one's *xenoi* and their children. It was not uncommon for children to be named after one of their father's *xenoi*.<sup>164</sup> While eunuchs' deleterious impact on family bloodlines segregates them from Greece, Persia and any other culture which held family lineage in great

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<sup>161</sup> For the importance of these in Greek life, see n. 3, above

<sup>162</sup> Sassi (2001) 108-120

<sup>163</sup> See above on Hermotimos in Herodotus and Gadatas in Xenophon

esteem, the connection between family lineages and *xenia* suggests that this theme marked eunuchs as not-Greek to an even greater degree than that to which it marked them as outcasts from other cultures.

While Persian eunuchs lose the ability to subserviently obey a monarch, Greek eunuchs do the opposite. The eunuch Hermotimos—a Greek—is Xerxes' favorite eunuch, to such an extent that he even entrusts the royal children to him. Hermotimos, then, must have excelled at obeying the king during his life. Although he says that he hates being a eunuch and gets revenge on Panionios for castrating him, there is no indication that he has a desire to disobey Xerxes. As a Greek, Hermotimos' natural disposition would have precluded him from being subservient to a king, but he is. Furthermore, that it is a Greek eunuch and not a Persian one who serves as Xerxes' most trusted eunuch demonstrates that Persian eunuchs did not excel at serving the king to the degree that the Greek eunuch did. Therefore, Hermotimos conforms to Aristotle's claim that a change to a vital part results in a change in nature. Hermotimos the eunuch serves the king in a way that Hermotimos the Greek would not be able to. This difference also helps explain why Hermotimos' story is the only example that does not include political change.

Because of Hermotimos' Greek origins, however, Herodotus must go to great lengths to separate Hermotimos from Greek behavior. Therefore, he embodies all of the divisions between Persian eunuchs and Greek men, in an extreme degree. Herodotus says that Hermotimos invites Panionios and his family to move from their old city to the city of Atarneus, where Hermotimos keeps a house. Then he promises Panionios that he will

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<sup>164</sup> Herman (1987) 16-20

give him a great number of gifts, if he and his sons attend a banquet at his house. When they arrive, Hermotimos makes them castrate each other. Herodotus seems to have gone out of his way to show that Hermotimos transgressions Greek values: he breaks an oath; he violates his guests, after promising them gifts; and he wipes out Panionios' family line. The other instance of Greek eunuchs discussed above is the Ionians whom the Persians castrate, in Herodotus. Like Hermotimos, they demonstrate marked subservience to a monarch. When Xerxes' fleet is approaching Greece, Themistocles of Athens leaves messages for the Ionians, asking them not to fight for the Persians (8.22). Herodotus, however, explicitly notes how well the Ionians fight for Xerxes, demonstrating a newfound penchant for subservience (8.85).

Castration changed Persians' natures, so that they were no longer subservient to kings. Consequently, they came to be associated with royal assassinations and political upheaval. However, in order to prevent eunuchs from seeming too Greek, particular themes that set them apart developed, all of which represent the undermining of central pillars of Greek life. The eunuchs are not completely Persian, but they are assuredly not Greeks. This arrangement causes eunuchs to exist as neither Persians nor Greeks, but as an entirely different "ethnicity."

### **Plato's Eunuchs**

There is one classical Greek author in whose works eunuchs do not conform to the pattern which I have laid out above: Plato. Eunuchs do not appear often in Plato's works, and when they do appear, they are far more innocuous than their counterparts in other classical Greek authors. For example, Socrates notes that eunuchs were responsible for educating Cyrus' children (*Laws* 695a-b). In the *Protagoras*, Callias' doorman is a

eunuch (314c). He does not allow Socrates to enter, until learning that he is not a sophist, at which point he opens the door for him. In his article on physiognomy and ancient philosophy, George Boys-Stones suggests why this might be the case.<sup>165</sup> Physiognomy could, ostensibly, describe one's character and behavior based on how far one's appearance deviated from the appearance of an ideal Greek man. Socrates, Plato's mentor, was infamously painful to look at (*Sym.* 215). Additionally, one of Plato's major teachings was that philosophy caused a positive change in one's nature.<sup>166</sup> Since this change affected the nature of the soul, however, one's outward appearance would not necessarily reflect this change. In other words, Plato was arguing directly against physiognomy—which thought that a beautiful body was a reflection of upright character—and he was making this argument by writing dialogues starring one of the ugliest men in Greece. As Boys-Stones concludes, physiognomy appears in Plato's writing only as something to be disproven.<sup>167</sup>

Above, I argue that eunuchs in classical Greek literature accompany four particular themes precisely because of physiognomy. Persians look a certain way and live in a certain climate, and as a result have a certain nature. Due to this nature, they engage in particular behaviors. Castration is a radical change in this nature, which causes radical changes in behavior. This all hinges on the basic physiognomic assumption that the way one looks (e.g., like a Persian) dictates how one acts (e.g., obedient). At first glance, Plato's eunuchs may seem to undermine my argument about how eunuchs work, but when they are considered alongside his hostile attitude towards physiognomy, they

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<sup>165</sup> Boys-Stones (2007) *passim*.

<sup>166</sup> Boys-Stones (2007) 33-42.

<sup>167</sup> *idem*.

actually corroborate it. He rejects the ancient science that I argue formed the pattern for how eunuchs work in classical Greek literature, and his eunuchs, uniquely, do not fit that pattern.

### **Chapter 3: Alexander and the Eunuchs**

In the previous chapter, I argued that the association between eunuchs in classical Greek authors and the themes of civil violence, the loss of children, revenge, and political upheaval stems from the fact that castration dissociated a person from his ethnicity, and not merely the natural functions of his sex. Hence, Persian eunuchs act in a markedly non-Persian fashion that corresponds neither to Greek understandings of how Persians behave nor Greek understandings of how Greeks behave. In this chapter, I extend this thesis to eunuchs in later literature concerning Alexander the Great. Their presence informs the reader that ethnic behavioral standards are being challenged, whether by the eunuch or another character who is present. In the authors addressed in this chapter, it is not unusual to see eunuchs associated with the four themes above that were the focus of the previous chapter, but they are far less consistent. The relationship between castration and ethnicity, on the other hand, is far more explicit. Another major difference is that, in the previous chapter, it was often the eunuchs themselves who acted contrary to the standards of their ethnicity, but in these later authors, it is uncastrated characters *in the company of a eunuch* who do so. Eunuchs exert a kind of deracinating “gravitational” pull on those around them.

#### **Background**

The most famous of the eunuchs with whom Alexander interacts is Bagoas, the protagonist of Mary Renault’s modern novel *The Persian Boy* (1972). Renault, drawing



on an ancient anecdote of Alexander kissing Bagoas in public, imagined a lengthy, erotic love affair between the two and incorporates Alexander's general Hephaestion as the third point of a love triangle. Renault's plot depicts Bagoas as playing a larger role in Alexander's life than our extant sources suggest, but the success of her novel may have influenced the description of Bagoas in R. Fox's more scholarly biography of Alexander, which came out shortly after Renault's book and refers to Alexander's lifelong love affair with the eunuch.<sup>168</sup> Decades before Renault's novel began to affect scholars' treatments of him, Bagoas had already been a linchpin in a scholarly debate. The great Alexandrian scholar William Tarn argues that Bagoas was the invention of peripatetic philosophers intent on showing Alexander's gradual moral decay.<sup>169</sup> E. Badian argues against Tarn's view, noting that Tarn's reasons for arguing Bagoas out of existence are founded on the assumption that Arrian's version of Alexander is true and the versions of Quintus Curtius Rufus and Plutarch are false.<sup>170</sup> Although Badian argues that there is no good reason to suppose that Bagoas did not exist, he does not argue that the eunuch played a more significant part in Alexander's life than the ancient sources reveal. Barring the discovery of new evidence, we will never be sure about Bagoas, whether he really existed or how close he really was to Alexander. As these examples reveal, Alexander's relationship with the eunuch Bagoas has been the subject of both popular and scholarly fascination. To date, however, no one has looked at Alexander's interactions with eunuchs collectively—and this chapter fills that void.

The debate between Tarn and Badian is indicative of one of the major foci of

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<sup>168</sup> Fox (1974) 274-275.

<sup>169</sup> Tarn (1948) vol. 2, 96-97.

<sup>170</sup> Badian (1958).

modern scholarship on Alexander: source criticism. This focus is a natural extension of this body of scholarship's goal, which is to develop a wholly factual biography of Alexander. This goal, in turn, is a natural extension of the problem presented by the relevant ancient sources. Although contemporary biographies of Alexander were written, none of them are extant.<sup>171</sup> Our earliest extant source is Diodorus of Sicily, who wrote his *Universal History* about three hundred years after Alexander's death. Two other major, extant sources, Plutarch and Arrian, wrote in the second century AD. Finally, the date of Quintus Curtius Rufus' history of Alexander is still unresolved, although it is generally agreed that he wrote sometime between Diodorus and Arrian.<sup>172</sup> In the parlance of the field, the lost works are called primary sources and the extant ones secondary sources. Modern scholarship on Alexander strives to discern which of the primary sources were used in each of the secondary sources. By attributing discrete parts of the secondary sources to primary ones, modern scholars try to reconstruct the primary sources on Alexander. Analyses of the historical accuracy of the (reconstructed) primary sources allows one, in theory, to discern which primary sources are credible and which are not. By then excluding those deemed unreliable, one can discover a 'true' narrative of Alexander's life.<sup>173</sup>

But Andrea Zambrini suggests another way of reading Alexander histories, in her article on historians of Alexander, noting that "Characters do not exist, only

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<sup>171</sup> Others include Aristobulus of Cassandria, Callisthenes of Olynthus, Chares of Mytilene, Cleitarchus of Alexandria, Nearchus of Crete (Worthington [2003] 1). Tarn, however, argues that Cleitarchus was a secondary source (Tarn [1948] v. 2 pp. 16-28).

<sup>172</sup> Bosworth (1988) 1. Although Quintus Curtius Rufus wrote in Latin and this chapter's primary focus is Greek authors, I have chosen to include him here because of his subject matter. There is, however, a significant difference between Rufus and the others. This difference is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

interpretations of characters exist.”<sup>174</sup> Although the extant histories of Alexander are based on lost, earlier histories of Alexander, the authors of the extant literature made conscious decisions about what to include and exclude and about which of the now-lost histories to draw upon or to ignore.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, even the primary sources were written by human beings and therefore not immune to the issues inherent in the writing of history. No human historian operates beyond the confines of a specific time and place or is wholly without bias, and it is a fallacy to assume that any of the primary sources on Alexander reflected the absolute truth. Rather than try to deduce the contents of the primary sources or to parse the exact point at which Diodorus Siculus switches from one source to another, my goal here is to better understand the role of eunuchs in the extant sources; in other words, to read the so-called secondary sources as primary sources. Whether or not the eunuchs in, for example, Curtius Rufus are a historical reality, the creation of an earlier author on whom Rufus relied, or Rufus’ invention, it is still nevertheless possible to discuss the role that they serve in Rufus’ text as we have it. And, as the discussion below demonstrates, eunuchs’ function in these texts is to draw attention to the fact that someone is acting in a manner foreign to the normative expectations for behavior based on ethnicity.

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<sup>173</sup> For criticism of this method of scholarship, see Zambrini (2011).

<sup>174</sup> Zambrini (2011) 211.

<sup>175</sup> Arrian mentions his sources explicitly (Ptolemy and Aristobolus). Diodorus Siculus is usually thought to be drawing solely and “slavishly” from Cleitarchus (Bosworth 1988). Tarn, however, disagreed, arguing that Aristobolus was Diodorus’ main, but not his only, source (Tarn [1948] v. 2, pp. 63-87). Tarn (1948), Welles (1958), Bigwood (1980), and Muntz (2012) each challenge the “consensus” that Diodorus mindlessly copied from his sources without adding anything of his own. If Diodorus did copy from one source without significant alterations, then my argument about eunuchs in Diodorus’ Alexander narrative remains intact, with that caveat that it also pertains to his source. Curtius Rufus relied on Diodorus’ source (prob. Cleitarchus), other disputed sources, and his own “imaginative reconstruction” (Atkinson 2009; Bosworth 1988).

The biographies of Alexander are especially useful for the examination of the role of eunuchs because when and where eunuchs appear in each is not consistent. This allows us to compare how a scene is narrated both when a eunuch is present and when a eunuch is not. As the comparisons below show, the presence of a eunuch in a particular scene marks a moment of “ethnic dissociation” on the part of the central narrative figure—often Alexander. One of the most striking examples of this phenomenon is the description of Alexander sitting on the throne at Susa.

#### **The Throne at Susa**

Diodorus Siculus’ Alexander narrative features only one eunuch, a palace servant living in Susa (17.66). Although the eunuch makes a brief appearance, his impact on Alexander in this narrative is long-lasting. After coming into contact with him, Alexander begins to clearly mirror the actions of earlier Persian kings in a process that culminates in the adoption of a full Persian court. In Diodorus, the eunuch at Susa functions as a signal of Alexander’s transformation into a Persian king.

After losing the battle at Arbela, Darius fled to Bactria to marshal more troops (17.64.2). To stall any pursuit by Alexander, Darius ordered Abuleutes, the satrap at Susa, to surrender the city to Alexander without a fight, in hopes that the vast store of treasure therein would distract Alexander, for a while (17.65.5). Upon entering Susa, Alexander mounts the royal throne, but the chair is too tall and his feet dangle in the air (17.66.4). A page places a table under Alexander’s feet, which causes a nearby eunuch to burst into tears (17.66.5). Alexander asks the eunuch why he is crying, and he responds, “It hurts to see that furniture which was most honored by [Darius] now be dishonored” (17.66.5). Alexander agrees that he has acted haughtily and in a manner opposite to his

respect for the Persians whom he has taken captive (17.66.6).<sup>176</sup> He orders the table to be taken away, but Philotas, one of his Macedonian companions, convinces Alexander that the table's placement under his feet is a good omen and explains, "This is not hybris. [The table] was not placed there by you but by the design and plan of some friendly god" (17.66.6).

This passage recounts the first time in this text that Alexander sits on the Persian throne. Although Darius is not dead yet, he has fled and no longer has the authority of a king. The next time Diodorus mentions him, it is to note that during his flight to Bactria he was taken hostage and executed by his own troops (17.73.1). The story of Alexander on the throne in Susa is effectively the beginning of his tenure as King of Persia, a position that embodied the East, to the Greeks. The passages that follow this scene show Alexander echoing the actions of previous Persian kings, a process that culminates in his donning the attire of Persian royalty and instituting a Persian-style court retinue. Indeed, Alexander's willingness to acquiesce to the eunuch's concerns about the table demonstrates that already in the throne scene he is amenable to following the customs of Persian royalty, with respect to both furniture arrangement and taking advice from eunuchs. Due to Philotas' intervention, however, Alexander does not act on his eastern inclinations—yet.

The passages that follow the throne incident in Susa show Alexander's continued appropriation of the outward form and behavior of the persona of a Persian king. Philotas is not constantly at Alexander's side to offer admonitions. First, during the battle at the Susian Rocks, Alexander plays the part of Xerxes' Persians at the battle of Thermopylae.

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<sup>176</sup> More on Alexander's treatment of these hostages below.

After Alexander sets out from Susa for Persepolis, he must pass the Susian Rocks, a narrow pass guarded by twenty-five thousand three hundred Persians (17.68.1). After unsuccessfully trying to force his way through, Alexander bribes a knowledgeable local into revealing the location of a hidden mountain pass that allows him to attack from behind. While traversing the mountain path, Alexander dispatches the Persians' guards (17.68.7).<sup>177</sup> After Alexander navigates the mountain path with a select group of men, he attacks from behind and easily defeats the Persians (17.68.7). The story is the same as the Persians' attack on Thermopylae, only with Alexander occupying the role once held by Xerxes.<sup>178</sup>

The next two sections establish another parallel between Alexander and earlier Persian kings. Having breached the pass, Alexander encounters a group of hundreds of Greek craftsmen, "some missing hands, some feet, some ears and noses (οἱ μὲν χεῖρας, οἱ δὲ πόδας, οἱ δὲ ὄτα καὶ ῥῖνας)" (17.69.2-3). They had been taken from their homes by an earlier Persian king who ordered that the limbs not required to practice their crafts be amputated. That "hands" spearheads the list of appendages that these men are missing is not coincidental. In the next section of Diodorus, Alexander orders his army to sack Persepolis (17.70). Diodorus describes the looting as so vociferous that Alexander's soldiers cut off each others' hands (χεῖρας ἀπέκοπτον), while competing for loot (17.70.5). An earlier Persian king had ordered the amputation of the craftsmen's limbs, whereas Alexander orders looting that happens to result in the loss of limbs. There is, admittedly, a great difference in these two actions. On the other hand, however, there is a

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<sup>177</sup> Compare the Phocians guarding the pass in Hdt. 7.218.

clear parallel on a broader level: both the Persian king and Alexander give an order that results in the loss of hands. Furthermore, this instance does not appear on its own, but is one part of a longer chain of events, all of which show Alexander becoming progressively more like a Persian king. The juxtaposition of the Greeks whose hands were severed at the behest of earlier Persian kings and Alexander's soldiers cutting each others' hands off while executing his command to loot Persepolis is another example of how Alexander has begun to mirror earlier Persian kings.

There are two other brief examples of Alexander copying Persian kings in the passages immediately following his encounter with the eunuch at Susa. The first pertains to the treasure at Susa. I mentioned above that Darius had ordered the satrap Abuleutes to let Alexander enter Susa unopposed, in hopes that the vast treasure there would distract him. Indeed, Alexander is awestruck by the forty thousand talents of bullion there. Diodorus explains how the Persian kings had amassed such wealth, saying "For a long time, the [Persian] kings maintained these untouched as a guard against the vicissitudes of fortune" (17.66.2). Upon sacking Persepolis, Alexander continues this tradition of the Persian kings. He divides the booty into two parts: one for war expenditures and one to be sent to Susa and left untouched and under guard (17.71.2). The second example comes after several days of banqueting at Persepolis. Alexander, his army, and a band of prostitutes get drunk and burn Persepolis down, an event which Diodorus explicitly compares to Xerxes' burning of the Athenian Acropolis (17.72.6). In *all* of the passages since the throne incident at Susa, Alexander's actions have paralleled earlier Persian

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<sup>178</sup> Arrian (3.18) adds the detail that when Alexander attacks from behind and Craterus from the front, the Persians retreat to a third location—a fort in the mountainside—where they are defeated.

kings. After he speaks with a eunuch, his Macedonian ethnicity is encroached upon by Persian tendencies.

The pattern continues after Alexander sets out from Persepolis. He soon encounters Darius, and Diodorus provides two alternative versions of events. Either Alexander found Darius already murdered by the traitor Bessus and staged a regal funeral, or Alexander found him barely breathing and accepted Darius' request to hunt down the assassin (17.73.3-4). Diodorus expresses his support for the former option, which raises the question of why he includes the latter one (17.73.4).<sup>179</sup> The inclusion of a scene, even one that Diodorus distances himself from, in which Darius recognizes Alexander's authority to uphold Persian law by hunting down the assassin Bessus transforms the narrative (17.73.4). Instead of Alexander the invader and Bessus the assassin of the king duking it out for power, the story results in Alexander, enforcing Persian laws on behalf of the deceased Darius, hunting down Bessus the renegade assassin. By ordering him to kill Bessus, Darius effectively appoints Alexander as his surrogate.

Soon after this scene, Alexander officially dons the Persian royal diadem, Persian-style white chiton and belt, and installs a Persian style court retinue (17.77.4-6). Diodorus says at this point Alexander “began (ἤρξατο) to desire Persian luxury and extravagance” (17.77.4).<sup>180</sup> One could argue that this clause shows that it is only at this point that Alexander starts to adopt Persian culture, but Diodorus here clearly marks out very specific aspects of Persian identity—luxury and extravagance—that Alexander adopts at

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<sup>179</sup> Diodorus introduces the story of Alexander and Darius speaking to each other with “Some, however, have written” (ὥς δ' ἔνιοι γεγράφασιν).

<sup>180</sup> ἤρξατο ζηλοῦν τὴν Περσικὴν τροφὴν καὶ τὴν πολυτέλειαν.



this point. As the examples above show, however, Alexander's actions have been closely aligned with other Persian kings ever since he encountered the eunuch by the throne at Susa.<sup>181</sup> Additionally, all of the examples discussed above are markedly Persian yet do not pertain to luxury and extravagance. These two appropriations are simply the last steps in a process that began when Alexander spoke with the eunuch in Susa. One might object that the presence of the eunuch in Susa is coincidental and that Alexander sitting on the Persian throne causes him to become more like Persian king. My argument, though, is not that the eunuch *caused* this transformation. Rather, the eunuch *signals* that a transformation like this is about to occur.

The existence of multiple sources covering the same material reveals eunuchs' role in signaling such changes. The throne scene at Susa in Quintus Curtius Rufus (5.2.13-15) is a revealing example. Once again, the throne is too large for Alexander and a table is placed under his feet, prompting a nearby eunuch to cry. The eunuch explains that Darius used to eat from that table, and therefore he (the eunuch) considers it sacred (5.2.14). At this point, the story diverges from Diodorus' version. Whereas Diodorus reports that the eunuch's words caused Alexander to pity Persia as a whole and consider whether putting his feet up on the royal table was arrogant, Rufus says that, upon hearing the eunuch's words, "the shame of violating (*violandi*) the gods of hospitality struck the

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<sup>181</sup> Bosworth (1980) 5 also notes the importance of the throne scene at Susa for Alexander establishing himself as the Persian king. His focus, however, is on the significance of Alexander sitting on the throne. The throne is clearly a symbol of regality that Alexander preempts en route to establishing himself as king. It is not a coincidence, however, that it is while Alexander is preempting this distinctly Persian chair that he encounters a eunuch.

king.”<sup>182</sup> Here, the concept of contravening a sacred aspect of domestic life is once again associated with a eunuch, as we saw regularly in the last chapter. The use of *violandi* in particular evokes the notion of real, physical violence in this domestic space, although violence does not actually occur here. According to Rufus, the eunuch’s words draw Alexander’s attention not to the fate of Persia (as they did in Diodorus), but to his violation of the gods of hospitality. By ignoring the sacred rules of hospitality, Alexander fails to adhere to a fundamental aspect of Greek civic life: *xenia*.<sup>183</sup>

To rectify his violation, Alexander orders the table taken away, but, as in Diodorus, Philotas convinces him not to (5.2.15). Philotas’ reasoning in Rufus is quite different from that in Diodorus. In Diodorus, Philotas argues that since Alexander did not order the table to be placed under his feet, he was not guilty of arrogance (17.66.7). In Rufus, on the other hand, Philotas simply orders, “Don’t [remove the table], but accept this omen. The table from which *libavit hostis epulas* has been thrown under your feet” (5.2.15). There is no explanation that Alexander is not at fault, as there was in Diodorus, and all that remains is an admonition to perceive the table as an omen. And although the meaning of *libavit hostis epulas* could mean “your foe ate his banquets,” as J. Yardley has translated it, a different meaning is possible, especially in light of the reference to *hospitales deos* in the previous sentence.<sup>184</sup> The meanings of the verb *libo* are “To pour a libation of something. **b** to make an offering (of the first part) of something. **c** (app.) to

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<sup>182</sup> Rufus 5.2.15 *Subiit ergo regem verecundia violandi hospitales deos*. I have conventionally translated *verecundia* as “shame.” Kaster (2005) 13-27 explores the many nuances of the term, fully.

<sup>183</sup> Although Rufus refers to particular deities (*hospitales deos*) and not an abstract concept, that he is referring to the concept of *xenia* is clear by the context. Furthermore, the association between the concept and particular gods is not foreign to a Greek context. In Greece, *xenia* was enforced by a god of hospitality, Zeus Xenios.

pour a libation on (an altar).”<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, the primary meaning of *epulae* is indeed a feast or banquet, but it seems to have originally signified a ritual feast or banquet.<sup>186</sup> If one reads Rufus’ words as conveying these more sacred meanings, Philotas is aware that Alexander is profaning the gods of hospitality and violating the sacred custom of *xenia*, but he encourages him to continue doing so, without explaining his reasoning. In the eunuch’s presence, Alexander violates a basic moral and religious tenet of his culture, and Philotas urges him on in doing so.

Immediately after this throne scene, Rufus includes an interaction between Alexander and Sisigambis, Darius’ mother and Alexander’s captive (5.2.16-22). Alexander has received a shipment of purple wool and sends it to Sisigambis, along with women to teach her how to make clothes. Sisigambis weeps, because among the Persians working with wool is the most degrading of activities (5.2.19). Alexander visits Sisigambis and says:

Mother... this outfit that you see I’m wearing is not only the gift of my sisters, but also their handiwork. [21] My customs misled me. Please, I beg, do not take my ignorance as an insult. The things I know of your customs, I hope, have been wholly preserved. [22] I know that among you it is considered impious (*nefas*) for a son to sit in the presence of his mother, unless she permits it. Therefore, whenever I came to you, I stood until you were assenting that I sit. You wanted to perform proskynesis before me, but I forbade it. The title that is owed to Olympia<sup>187</sup> I give to you, sweetest mother.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Yardley (2004) 97.

<sup>185</sup> *OLD*, s.v. *libo*.

<sup>186</sup> *OLD*, s.v. *epulae*.

<sup>187</sup> Olympia was Alexander's biological mother.

<sup>188</sup> 5.2.20-22: *Mater inquit hanc vestem qua indutus sum, sororum non donum solum, sed etiam opus vides. [21] nostri decipere me mores. Cave, obsecro, in contumeliam acceperis ignorationem meam. Quae tui moris esse cognovi, ut spero, abunde servata sunt. [22] Scio apud vos filio in conspectu matris nefas esse confidere, nisi cum ilia permisit. Quotiescumque ad te veni, donec, ut considerem, adnueres, ipse steti. Procumbens venerari me saepe voluisti; inhibui. Dulcissimae matri Olympiadi nomen debitum tibi reddo.*

In this passage, Alexander explicitly states a desire to shun his native customs and equates them to ignorance. He also expresses his hope that up until this debacle with the wool, he has meticulously upheld standards of Persian behavior in his dealings with Sisigambis. Strikingly, as an example of his adherence to Persian custom, he cites the fact that he has abstained from sitting without Sisigambis' consent because he knows that this would be impious (*nefas*) on *Persian* grounds. Of course, only a few sentences earlier, he briefly fretted that sitting with his feet up on a table might be impious according to the standards of his own people, but quickly brushed those concerns aside. And although by forbidding Sisigambis from performing proskynesis it might seem like Alexander is rejecting a Persian custom, the sentences before and after this point undermine that reading. It is not an aversion to Persian custom that motivates this prohibition, but Alexander's knowledge of the proper standards of interaction between a Persian mother and son and his transfer of the title of mother from Olympia, his biological mother, to Sisigambis.

In Rufus, the eunuch by the throne at Susa leads directly into Alexander's meeting with Sisigambis, where he apologizes to her if he has failed to be Persian enough. In the scene with the eunuch by the throne, Alexander and Philotas disregard their own Greek ancestral laws of hospitality, and in the very next scene Alexander brings up his meticulous adherence to Persian customs regarding the protocol for sitting—the very issue addressed in the throne scene. He also transfers the title of “sweetest mother” from Olympia to Sisigambis. Clearly, Rufus' version of the eunuch in Susa introduces a theme of ethnographic transgressions, or at least confusion, as Alexander seems unsure by which standards to behave.

Unlike in Diodorus, the scenes that follow Rufus' eunuch by the throne at Susa do

not show Alexander walking in the footsteps of earlier Persian kings. It is worthwhile to detail the differences in the two narratives because they support my argument that Diodorus sets up parallels between Alexander and earlier Persian kings. Although Diodorus and Rufus narrate the same events, the instances of Alexander copying Persian kings in Diodorus are missing from Rufus. This contrast corroborates my argument that Diodorus' Alexander becomes progressively more Persian after he speaks with the eunuch in Susa because the consistency with which his version of Alexander recalls earlier Persian kings, as opposed to the consistency with which Rufus' version of Alexander does not do so, is too great to be coincidental.

In his description of Alexander getting through the Susian rocks, Rufus does have Alexander take a secret mountain pass, enabling him to attack from the back. But in Rufus the mountain path is forked, enabling Alexander's army to attack the Persians on three sides, not just the front and back (5.4.20; 5.4.30). Rufus also downplays the parallel between Alexander and Xerxes by having Ariobarzanes—the Persian commander—and five thousand infantry men break through Alexander's battle line and escape (5.4.34). After breaching the pass, Alexander again encounters the band of Greek amputees, who in this version were mutilated not by Persian kings but Persians generally as a form of amusement (5.5.6). And during the sacking of Persepolis, Alexander's soldiers do not cut each others' hands off, as we saw in Diodorus. Instead, Rufus describes them as cutting the limbs off of statues (5.6.5). Finally, Rufus does not compare the burning of Persepolis to the Persians' earlier burning of the Athenian Acropolis, as Diodorus does. On the contrary, Rufus does the exact opposite. He says that Europe was flooded (*Europa inundata est*) by the army that once came from Persepolis (5.7.8). Whereas Diodorus had

explicitly compared Alexander's burning of Persepolis to Xerxes' burning of Athens, Rufus compares Xerxes' army to water—the antithesis of fire. All of these differences reveal the small but significant changes that each author has made.

In the passages that follow Alexander's encounter with the eunuch at Susa, Diodorus and Rufus describe the same series of events but a number of details are changed. The details in Diodorus set up a series of parallels between Alexander and earlier Persian kings. The details in Rufus, on the other hand, cut out every one of these parallels. Indeed, his comparison of Xerxes' army to a flood reads like an active attempt to steer readers away from comparing the conflagration that that army famously caused and Alexander's burning of Persepolis. Rufus does include, however, Alexander's audience with Sisigambis in which he claims her as mother and promises to do his best to uphold Persian customs. Although they do so in very different ways, both Diodorus and Rufus show Alexander acting in a distinctly Persian way immediately after he encounters a eunuch.

Arrian and Plutarch's versions of Alexander at Susa do not include eunuchs, and both show Alexander acting in a markedly Greek way. Arrian describes Alexander finding many statues taken from Athens by Xerxes, including bronzes of Harmodius and Aristogeiton—the Athenian tyrant slayers—and sending them back to Athens (3.16.7). To support the truth of this statement, Arrian explains that the statues still stand in the Athenian Kerameikos, near the altar of the Eudanemoi whose location everyone initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries knows well (3.16.8).<sup>189</sup> After sending the statues back to

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<sup>189</sup> On this cult, Bosworth (1980a) 318: "The Eudanemi are extremely obscure. There was a *genos* so named in the fourth century, and their activities are connected with the Mysteries... The

Athens, Alexander “sacrificed according to hereditary custom” (θύσας τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ) and then put on a wrestling competition (ἀγῶνα γυμνικόν) (3.16.9).

In Plutarch, the eunuch by the throne at Susa is replaced by Demaratus of Corinth, who weeps and exclaims, “the Greeks who died before seeing Alexander sitting on the throne of Darius were deprived of a great pleasure” (37.4). Plutarch does mention the burning of the Athenian Acropolis, when he recounts the story of the burning of Persepolis (38). However, he phrases it in an entirely different way than Diodorus, who calls both fires impious (ἀσέβημα) (17.72.6). Plutarch describes the burning of Persepolis “as a punishment against Persia on behalf of Greece” (δίκην ἐπέθηκε Πέρσας ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλλάδος) (38.2). This continues a theme that Plutarch touches on earlier in his description of events at Susa. He says that Alexander sees a fallen statue of Xerxes, hesitates between leaving it on the ground as punishment for attacking Greece or raising it up because of Xerxes’ other positive qualities (38.1). He leaves the statue on the ground. For Plutarch, Alexander is punishing the Persians by burning Susa, whereas in Diodorus Alexander is copying the Persians.

Diodorus, Rufus, Arrian, and Plutarch all describe Alexander’s conquest of Susa in different ways. In Diodorus, Alexander meets a eunuch and immediately begins to transition into a Persian king. The eunuch appears again in Rufus; in this version, Alexander ignores the Greek concept of *xenia* when contemplating his manner of sitting in the throne. In the very next scene, his audience with Sisigambis, he adheres to Persian customs regarding sitting, proclaims his desire to uphold Persian customs, and quasi-adopts a Persian mother. Rufus’ Alexander does not continue to exhibit this Persian aspect

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Eudanemi seem associated with the cult of the winds but their precise activities are beyond

in the scenes that follow, but he does adopt distinctly Persian behavior here and explicitly expresses his wish to do so in the future. As we will see shortly, it is an encounter with another eunuch that prompts a more complete change in Alexander, later in Rufus. Arrian, by contrast, cuts the eunuch out of Susa, and his Alexander restores the Athenian statues (an act which leads to a mention of the Eleusinian mysteries), sacrifices in his hereditary way, and puts on a wrestling competition. The Hellenism of the passage is nearly hyperbolic. Finally, Plutarch substitutes a Corinthian for the eunuch, and his Alexander is explicitly described as acting “on behalf of Greece” (38.2). In the two versions that include a eunuch, Alexander begins to act Persian, and in the two versions that lack a eunuch, he acts Greek. The different versions of events at Susa demonstrate the role of the eunuch as a signal that ethnographic boundaries are being crossed.

#### **After Issus**

The eunuch by the throne at Susa is the only one explicitly mentioned by Diodorus, our earliest extant source on Alexander.<sup>190</sup> Rufus, our next source chronologically, contains a number of other eunuchs, several of whom appear in the aftermath of the battle at Issus.<sup>191</sup> A brief summary of events here will be useful for understanding the setting. Alexander and Darius wage a pitched battle from which the Persian king flees when it becomes clear that the Persians cannot win. The Persian army is scattered, and they abandon the many civilians who had followed the army train (3.4-12). Darius’ mother Sisigambis, wife Stateira, and infant son are among the captives (3.12). Of our four sources, only Rufus

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speculation.”

<sup>190</sup> In his section on Alexander.

<sup>191</sup> Although the battle of Issus predates the events at Susa discussed above, I present them in this order because the eunuch at Susa is the only one in Diodorus—the earliest of the authors whom I discuss. While each author’s work appears in my discussions of the others, I have, broadly,



includes eunuchs in the description of the battle's aftermath. Also unlike our other sources, Rufus' version involves both Alexander and his soldiers acting like Persians. Once again, the presence of eunuchs signals ethnographic transgressions.

In the aftermath of the battle of Issus, Rufus refers first to an individual eunuch who identifies Darius' abandoned cloak and then to a group of eunuchs in Sisigambis' tent. Alexander is in this tent with them when Rufus pauses his narrative to discuss Alexander's character. Before discussing the passages in which the eunuchs appear, however, one must consider two aspects of Rufus' narrative that occur before the battle: the death of Charidemus and the symbolism of Darius' cloak (3.2.10-19; 3.3.4-6 & 3.4.17).<sup>192</sup> The death of Charidemus includes an assessment of Darius' character that foreshadows the description of Alexander's character after the battle. Therefore, one must consider Charidemus' words about Darius in order to fully appreciate Rufus' about Alexander. The significance of Darius' cloak stems from its symbolic power. Rufus establishes that it is far more than a vestment, both during his description of the Persian army before battle and again during the course of the battle. Only after one recognizes the symbolic function of this cloak can one appreciate what it means for a eunuch to be the one to point it out in the Macedonian camp.

The death of Charidemus stems from an incident that occurs when Darius

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arranged the authors chronologically. Hence, I discuss the only eunuch in Diodorus, first, and I discuss eunuchs who only appear in Arrian, last.

<sup>192</sup> Heckel (1979) argues that in the lead up to Issus, Rufus employs a number of Herodotean parallels meant to emphasize the similarities between Darius and Xerxes. Among these parallels are the death of Charidemus (Hdt. 7.101-105), Darius' dream (Hdt. 7.12ff) and the description of the Persian army (Hdt. 7.59ff), all of which I discuss here. These parallels establish that these events are not idiosyncratic to this particular situation but are representative of Persia and Persian kings, more generally. Consequently, Rufus' comparison of Alexander and Darius should also be

assembles his troops and asks Charidemus—an Athenian exile fighting with the Persians—whether he thinks that his army is a match for Alexander’s (3.2.10). When Charidemus informs Darius that he has no chance of winning, Darius, enraged, orders his execution (3.2.17). Rufus explains that Darius executes his friend because his (i.e., Darius’) character had been “corrupted by Fortune” (3.2.17).<sup>193</sup> Before dying, Charidemus repeats Rufus’ sentiment about Darius’ corruption, saying “You, suddenly changed by regal power, will be proof to posterity that men, when they surrender themselves to Fortune, forget their nature” (3.2.18).<sup>194</sup> The similarities between Charidemus’ description of Darius (before the battle) and Rufus’ of Alexander (after the battle) are similar enough that large swathes of them could be switched without altering the meaning.

Along with the death of Charidemus, the references to Darius’ cloak in the lead-up to the battle also impact how the eunuchs after the battle should be understood. After the battle, a eunuch identifies Darius’ cloak in the Macedonian camp. This cloak is referred to several times earlier in the text, and a consideration of what the cloak signifies while it is still on Darius’ back is essential to understanding what it signifies when the eunuch finds it in the Macedonian camp. Before the battle, the cloak is established as the height of Persian luxury and a symbol of the Persian king. During the march to Issus, Darius has a dream in which he sees Alexander wearing his (Darius’) clothes, and some of his soothsayers interpret this as a sign that Alexander is going to conquer all of Asia (3.3.3-4). As the soothsayers perceive it, Darius’ cloak is intimately tied to his role as king.

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understood as a general comparison between Alexander and Persian kings (and not just between Alexander and Darius).

<sup>193</sup> *fortuna corrumpet*

<sup>194</sup> *quidem licentia regni tam subito mutatus documentum eris posteris, homines cum se permisere fortunae, etiam naturam dediscere.*

When the armies are arrayed for battle, Rufus describes the Persian army's decorative opulence, including the regal clothes of Darius: "Amidst all the luxury (*inter omnia luxuria*), the ornamentation of the king (*cultus regis*) stood out (*notabatur*). There was white embroidery on his purple tunic. His cloak was marked with gold, and golden hawks attacking each other adorned it" (3.3.17).<sup>195</sup> In the description of the Persian army's decadent trappings, the king's cloak occupies a unique level of luxury. Although it is one luxurious item in a sea of finery, it still stands out.

During the battle Darius' men are badly outmatched, and his horses are wounded. At this point, Darius jumps onto another horse to flee, leaving his cloak on the ground so that he can escape without being recognized (3.11.11). For Darius, the cloak is what marks him out as the Persian king. The cloak is the summit of Persian decadence and the identifying feature of the king's regalia. In the aftermath of the battle, one of Alexander's soldiers finds this cloak on the battlefield and brings it back to camp. Upon seeing it, a eunuch who had been taken prisoner bursts into tears, believing Darius to be dead (3.12.5). The cloak is so intimately associated with Darius in the eunuch's mind, that he reacts as though he has seen Darius' corpse. Symbolically, this cloak represents both Persian luxury and royalty.

Charidemus' words and the symbolism of Darius' cloak loom large over Rufus' description of the battle's aftermath. The eunuch who sees a Macedonian carrying Darius' cloak believes that Darius is dead and relays this information to the other captives (3.12.5). The maudlin weeping that this incites prompts Alexander and Hephaestion to investigate, and they end up at the tent where Darius' mother Sisigambis and wife Stateira

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<sup>195</sup> *cultus regis inter omnia luxuria notabatur. purpureae tunicae medium album intextum erat,*

are held. Alexander and Hephaestion enter the tent and inform them that Darius is actually alive, at which point Sisigambis performs proskynesis before Hephaestion. When a group of eunuchs who are also in the tent inform her of her error, Sisigambis apologizes.

Alexander replies that she made no mistake since “This man is Alexander, too”

(3.12.16).<sup>196</sup> The graciousness of Alexander’s answer prompts Rufus to digress on his general character:

If he had been able to retain this self-control to the end of his life, I believe that he would have been more successful than he seemed to be when he imitated the triumph of Dionysos, after he conquered all the peoples from the Hellespont to Ocean. Certainly, if he had overcome his pride and rage, his unconquered faults, then he would have abstained from the slaughter of his friends and soldiers at dinner, and he would have been respectful enough not to execute without trial men who conquered so many people alongside him. Fortune had not yet overcome his spirit. While it grew, he bore it moderately, but when it had peaked, he could not control it.

3.12.18-20

This passage is remarkable for its similarities to Charidemus’ last words to Darius: “You will be proof to posterity that men, when they surrender themselves to Fortune, forget their nature” (3.2.18). Furthermore, Charidemus’ death is prompted by Darius’ pride (in his army) and rage (at Charidemus’ appraisal of that army), the very qualities which Rufus says that Alexander could never fully control. Likewise, Darius’ decision to execute Charidemus—a member of his war council—finds an echo in the description of Alexander’s later summary executions of his friends and soldiers. Alexander’s failure to conquer the same personal qualities that Darius failed to conquer leads to the exact same results. Rufus also notes that these personal failings hamper Alexander’s attempts to emulate Dionysos’ mythical triumphal march through the east. The things that make

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*pallam auro distinctam. aurei accipitres, velut rostris inter se concurrerent, adornabant.*

<sup>196</sup> *nam et hic Alexander est.*

Alexander more like a Persian king also prevent him from successfully emulating a Greek tradition. And the transition is again signaled by a eunuch.

Rufus' description of Alexander's failings in this passage recalls similar ones in our other sources. At this point of their narratives, however, neither Arrian nor Plutarch nor Diodorus criticizes Alexander or alludes to his future character lapses.<sup>197</sup> Instead, their descriptions here are limited to praise, either for his compassion towards Sisigambis or for his character in general. Additionally, no one besides Rufus mentions any eunuchs in the tent with Sisigambis. Rufus, however, implicitly compares Alexander to Darius, refers to his future failure to imitate Dionysos, and does include eunuchs. Out of our four versions of events, only Rufus sets up this parallel between Alexander and Darius, and he is also the only one to include eunuchs. The presence of the eunuchs in Rufus' version corroborates my argument that eunuchs signal the warping of ethnographic identity.

The other eunuch who appears in Rufus' narrative of the aftermath of the battle of Issus is the one who identifies Darius' cloak, which Rufus depicts as a symbol of Persian luxury (3.3.17). Such opulent trappings were the hallmark of the Persians. For example, in the description of the Persian army that got him killed, Charidemus says, "The Persian army gleams with purple and gold; it is resplendent with an opulence so great that those who have not witnessed it simply cannot conceive of it. The Macedonian line is coarse and inelegant" (3.2.12-13). By abandoning his cloak in the dirt, Darius symbolically abandons the Persians' trademark opulence. Indeed in his flight across the desert, he strikes a rather coarse and inelegant figure. Once Alexander's army takes over the Persian camp they seize, as Rufus puts it, "a great weight of silver and gold, the apparatus of

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<sup>197</sup> Arrian 2.12; Plutarch 21-22; Diodorus 17.37.4-7.

luxury, not of war” (*non belli, sed luxuriae apparatus*) (3.11.20). By seizing “the apparatus of luxury, not of war,” they begin to take on the characteristics of the Persian army. Darius’ cloak symbolizes this luxury, and once it falls into Macedonian hands, they have reached the same heights of excess that defined the Persians shortly before. While that narrative is unclear about whether this cloak has been in the camp for hours or if the person who looted it has just arrived, its presence remains unannounced to the reader until the eunuch notices it. Consequently, the Macedonians’ complete appropriation of Persian luxury and the eunuch appear at precisely the same time.

In the passages before the battle at Issus, Rufus establishes that Darius is unable to resist Fortune, which causes him to be so arrogant and angry that he kills one of his allies. Rufus also establishes that the Persian army is defined by its opulence, the Macedonian one by its lack thereof. After the battle, Alexander encounters a group of eunuchs alongside Sisigambis, and Rufus digresses on the similarities between him and Darius. Likewise, Darius’ cloak—a symbol for Persian luxury *en masse* that the Macedonians have obtained—is identified by a eunuch. The eunuchs signal to the reader that characters are acting in a way that does not conform to the expectations of their ethnicity.

#### **Darius’ Prayers**

One could object that the above two examples are conveniences of coincidence. Eunuchs were common in fourth-century Persia, and it is well known that Alexander adopted some Persian customs during his years there.<sup>198</sup> It would not be remarkable for these two realities to manifest side-by-side in our sources. Alexander is not the only character,

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<sup>198</sup> Neither of these points is disputed, but for eunuchs: Llewellyn-Jones (2002) and for Persian customs Bosworth (1988) 135-137.

however, whose ethnographic deviations are accompanied by eunuchs. Rufus, Arrian, and Plutarch all include a meeting between Darius and a eunuch who escapes from Alexander's camp. In Rufus and Plutarch, the eunuch flees when Stateira, Darius' wife, dies in captivity (QCR 4.10.18-34; Plut. 30.1-7). In Arrian, the eunuch escapes while Stateira is still alive (4.20). According to Rufus, the eunuch's name was Tyriotes; according to Plutarch, Teireos; Arrian does not provide a name. To avoid confusion here, I refer to him as Teireos.

Upon reaching Darius, Teireos informs him that Stateira has died, according to Rufus and Plutarch. Darius' immediate reaction is to blame Alexander for her death, but Teireos maintains that Alexander treated her so well that the only element of pure bliss missing from her captivity was Darius himself. In Arrian, the scene is similar, but Darius' grief is inspired by his fears about what cruelties the captive Stateira is suffering. In all three versions, Darius' response to Teireos' description of Alexander's treatment of Stateira are the same. Darius prays that if the gods have decided to end his own sovereignty, then they have chosen to replace him with Alexander.<sup>199</sup> The nature of Darius' prayer becomes even more remarkable if one bears in mind that he has children, whom one might assume would be his preferred successors. Indeed, Teireos explicitly mentions that these children are alive and well, so Darius is not operating under the mistaken assumption that they have perished and therefore unable to eventually rule.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Rufus 4.10.34; Plutarch 30.7; Arrian 4.20.1.

<sup>200</sup> The children are attested in all three sources. In two cases, Plutarch 30.3 & Arrian 4.20.2, Teireos refers to Darius' children when detailing Alexander's munificence to Darius. For their existence in Rufus see, e.g. 3.12.26. Hammond (2003) 141 argues that Alexander himself might have planned to eventually install Darius' son Ochus as king of Persia. This corroborates my point that Darius' prayer for Alexander (a foreigner) to become king of Persia, ignores the eligibility of

In his study on Alexander and Persian kingship, N. Hammond notes that Alexander never adopted the traditional titulature of Persian kings and argues that Alexander never wanted to be king of Persia. Rather, as Hammond shows, Alexander had his eyes on a bigger prize: he wanted to be king of all of Asia.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, there are several instances where Alexander offers to let Darius continue to be the king of Persia, provided he recognize his subservience to Alexander, the king of Asia.<sup>202</sup> Hammond also notes the case of Porus, an Indian king whom Alexander left as such, after Porus acknowledged Alexander's ultimate authority.<sup>203</sup> Alexander's plans for the Persian throne seem to have been unchanged by Darius' death, as he ensured that Darius' son Ochus was treated as royalty and groomed in the art of kingship.<sup>204</sup> Although Alexander's premature death precludes absolute certainty, the evidence indicates that he planned to install Ochus as king of Persia, once he reached the appropriate age. Hammond posits that Alexander's motivation for leaving rulers on their thrones was that the various peoples whom he conquered would refuse to accept a foreigner as their king.<sup>205</sup> Darius' prayer, then, shows that he—the Persian king—more readily accepts a Greek king of Persia than Alexander thought that any of the Persians would accept this transformation. That Darius expresses his desire for a Greek to rule Persia only to Teireos the eunuch is a further demonstration of the association between eunuchs and violating the *mores* of one's own culture.

### **Darius in Chains**

Bessus' betrayal of Darius provides another example that does not focus on Alexander.

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his own (Persian) children, despite the potential for them to rule. There are other options that one might expect Darius to prefer, but he chooses Alexander.

<sup>201</sup> Hammond (2003) 137-144.

<sup>202</sup> Hammond (2003) 140; Diod. 17.54.6; Arrian 2.14.8.

<sup>203</sup> Hammond (2003) 141, citing Arrian 5.29.2.

<sup>204</sup> Hammond (2003) 141.



Rufus provides the fullest account of Bessus' plot, as he narrates events within the Persian camp. The other sources narrate events from Alexander's viewpoint, and therefore simply say that Alexander learned that Bessus had taken Darius hostage.<sup>206</sup>

Rufus begins his narrative of the conspiracy thus:

Inflamed with greed for kingship, Bessus [the satrap of Bactria] and Nabarzanes [Darius' *chiliarchos*] now decided to carry out the plan they had long been hatching. With Darius still alive, however, there could be no hope of gaining such power, [2] for among those peoples the king commands extraordinary respect: his name itself is enough to make them assemble, and the veneration he enjoys in prosperity remains with him in adversity.<sup>207</sup>  
5.10.1-2

In this passage, Rufus clearly establishes why Bessus and Nabarzanes cannot seize power with Darius alive: the Persians have too much respect for their king to betray him, regardless of any adversity. Bessus and Nabarzanes cannot simply kill Darius, however, because they fear that Alexander would condemn such treachery and, in turn, its perpetrators (5.10.6). The two begin to sow discord amongst the Persians, and Patron—the leader of a Greek mercenary group working for Darius—becomes suspicious (5.11.2).

Patron, approaches Darius to warn him, but Bessus is lurking nearby. Fearing an ambush, Patron simply stares at Darius, who eventually sends the eunuch Bubaces to ask Patron what he wants (5.11.3). Via Bubaces the eunuch, Patron requests a private audience, which Darius grants. In his speech, Patron describes himself almost exactly as Rufus just described the Persians.<sup>208</sup> Patron begins, “We [Greeks] were all with you in your more fortunate days, and in your present situation we remain as we were when you

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<sup>205</sup> Hammond (2003) 138-139.

<sup>206</sup> Diod. 17.73; Plut. 42.5; Arrian 3.21.

<sup>207</sup> For this section on the Bessus and Nabarzanes plot, quotes from Rufus are trans. by Yardley (2004) and checked against the Latin.

were prospering... We and you have been drawn together both by your prosperity and your adversity” (5.11.5). Bessus then asks for his Greek contingent to take over the duty of guarding Darius himself, although he concedes the unusual nature of his request: “As a foreigner born of another race I should not be asking for the responsibility of guarding your person if I thought anyone else could do it” (5.11.6). In the introduction to the conspiracy narrative, Rufus cites the Persians as the people whose loyalty to the king is unwavering. In his speech, however, the Greek Patron anticipates, rightly, that a coup is being cooked up within Darius’ own army, and therefore, he describes himself and the Greeks with him as the ones most faithful to Darius. In his speech, Patron acknowledges that his request transgresses ethnic boundaries, literally.

Rufus, rather than having Patron simply approach Darius, concocts an elaborate chain that ends with the eunuch Bubaces escorting Patron to the king. Some might object that a Persian king using eunuchs to summon people was common practice, and nothing more should be read into Bubaces. That point is valid, historically. It is not Rufus’ common practice, however, to bother mentioning these banal episodes featuring eunuchs. Rufus does, however, explicitly mention Bubaces in this instance of Darius summoning Patron—a Greek who says that he and his men “have left Greece behind” (5.11.6). This statement is true on a geographical level, of course, but coupled with Patron’s description of himself in a way that correlates so perfectly to Rufus’ description of Persians a paragraph earlier, it takes on a more figurative meaning as well. After being escorted by Bubaces, the Greek Patron describes himself as Rufus’ stock Persian.

Later that day, Darius is in his tent with only his eunuchs, including Bubaces. He

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<sup>208</sup> In the offset quotation in the previous paragraph.

has no doubts that Patron's concerns were valid but refuses to flee his own camp (5.12.10-11). Darius thanks the eunuchs for their steadfast service and tells them to save themselves. In response, "the eunuchs' mournful cries filled not only the tent but the entire camp," striking panic into the troops who "dared neither take up weapons for fear of meeting [the conspirators] nor remain inactive, in case they appeared guilty of impious desertion of their king" (5.12.13). Therefore, they raise a clamor but do nothing to help Darius. Since they know that they have not done anything yet, Bessus and Nabarzanes are puzzled by the uproar. They rush to Darius' tent and arrest him (5.12.15). Soon after the arrest, the Persians accept Bessus as their leader (5.12.19). Remarkably, given that Rufus earlier says that the conspirators did not think a coup was possible with Darius alive, Bessus does not kill Darius. Instead, he enslaves him, binding him with gold chains (5.12.20). The Persian troops' failure to assist Darius starkly contradicts what Rufus says in his description of their loyalty to their king. Specifically, the context for the Persians' failure to live up to Rufus' description of how Persians normally behave is provided by the wailing eunuchs.

Rufus introduces his description of the plot by explaining that the Persians' staunch loyalty to their king prevented Bessus and Nabarzanes from acting against Darius. What actually happens, however, is the exact opposite of this. The Persians hear the eunuchs' wails, and then they contribute to the commotion instead of checking on Darius. Then, this commotion at the camp causes Bessus and Nabarzanes to act. Instead of the situation that Rufus presents at the outset—the Persians' loyalty prevents the conspirators from acting—what actually happens is that the Persians' lack of loyalty causes the conspirators to act. In other words, the Persians behave exactly opposite to Rufus'

description of Persians. And this behavior, opposite to the norms of their culture, is sparked by the troops' collective reaction to hearing the eunuchs (5.12.12).<sup>209</sup>

### **The Capture of Gaza**

Another example of easterners not acting true to type occurs in Arrian's description of Alexander conquering Gaza. According to Arrian, Batis—the ruler of Gaza—is a eunuch, although Rufus does not include this detail.<sup>210</sup> A comparison of the two narratives provides insight into the significance of this difference. In order to understand how Arrian's Batis acts in a markedly un-Persian manner, one must appreciate that the physiognomic understanding of Persians extended beyond “luxurious and soft” to include, among other things, cowardice.<sup>211</sup> That said, modern scholarship on Greek views of Persia tend to focus more on luxury and physical weakness than cowardice, and so it is worth pointing out this pattern of cowardice as it appears in Arrian.<sup>212</sup> During his campaigns throughout Persia, Alexander's foes have a marked tendency to surrender without fighting or to give up mid-combat. For example, Sardis, Ephesus, Byblos, and Sidon surrender without fighting.<sup>213</sup> During the battles of Granicus and Issus, the Persians flee when things look bleak for them.<sup>214</sup> When Alexander besieges Miletus, the Persian contingent there flees (1.19). During Alexander's siege of Halicarnassus, the Persians

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<sup>209</sup> The language that Rufus employs to describe the eunuchs' cry in the camp is: *spado gemitu non tabernaculum modo, sed etiam castra conplevit*. Although here eunuch (*spado*) is singular, in 5.12.11, Darius addresses them in 2nd person plural: *Consulite vobis*. Regardless of number, it is clear that the cries of the eunuch(s) saturated the camp.

<sup>210</sup> For the historicity of Batis, his death, and whether he was a eunuch see Tarn (1948) v. 2, 265-276.

<sup>211</sup> Sassi (2001) 116.

<sup>212</sup> e.g. Hall (1989) 157.

<sup>213</sup> Arrian 1.17 for Sardis and Ephesus. 2.25 for Byblos and Sidon. All refs. in this paragraph are to Arrian.

<sup>214</sup> Arrian 1.16 for Granicus

there give up hope, but the Halicarnassians will not let them flee. Therefore, the Persians burn the wall down from the inside (1.23). Even during the monumental siege of Tyre, some of the Tyrian troops abandon their posts, and the Tyrian king Azemilcus and his magistrates stop fighting and take refuge in the temple of Heracles (2.23-24). In short, Alexander's Persian foes usually stop fighting while alive.

According to Arrian, this was not the case at Gaza. Led by the eunuch Batis, "Everyone there died while fighting exactly where they had been stationed" (2.27.7).<sup>215</sup> The unwillingness of the Gazans to surrender or flee from Alexander is a clear example of an entire city not acting in accordance with what one expects from easterners. Their behavior is so uncharacteristic that even the much later author Polybius mentions how anomalous it was (16.40). Arrian labels Batis the leader of Gaza as a eunuch, and the city's collective courage in the battle against Alexander was remarked upon for its failure to meet ethnic expectations, even in antiquity. Whereas most of the eunuchs in this chapter signal the transformation of a Greek to a Persian, Batis signals that the Gazans are acting Greek. Like his castrated brethren, Batis also signals a cultural shift. The difference in this case is that the shift is from Easterners (Gazans) to Greeks, instead of vice versa.

Rufus' description of the siege of Gaza also includes Batis, although he does not call him a eunuch. Another significant difference is that not all of the Gazans die in battle in his account (4.6.30). Batis himself is among the captives, and Alexander asks him how he would like to be tortured (4.6.27). Batis refuses to speak, and so Alexander ties him behind a chariot and drags him around the city, copying Achilles' treatment of Hector;

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<sup>215</sup> ἀπέθανον πάντες αὐτοῦ μαχόμενοι ὡς ἕκαστοι ἐτάχθησαν.

according to Rufus, Alexander explicitly claims to copy Achilles here (4.6.29). And although there are differences between Achilles' and Alexander's chariot mutilation scenes, Rufus' diction suggests that Alexander's claim to be following Achilles is accurate.<sup>216</sup> His description of Alexander binding Batis' feet—*per talos enim spirantis lora traiecta sunt*—"is a patent echo" of Vergil's description of Achilles binding Hector's feet in the *Aeneid*: *perque pedes traiectus lora tumentes*.<sup>217</sup> By echoing the Vergilian description of Achilles binding Hector's feet, Rufus indicates that Alexander does to Batis precisely what Achilles did to Hector. Through this allusion, Rufus gives merit to Alexander's claim to copy Achilles.

If Alexander takes on the role of Achilles, as Rufus agrees he does, then Batis is a stand-in for Hector. Hector, of course, infamously tries to flee from Achilles during their final stand off. By putting Batis in the role of Hector, Rufus strips him of the ethnically uncharacteristic bravery that Arrian attributed to him. In Rufus, Batis is not a eunuch, is implicitly compared to the fleeing Hector, and serves as a means for Alexander to emulate an epic Greek hero.

The contrast between Arrian's Batis—a eunuch who leads a city with courage uncharacteristic of easterners—and Rufus' Batis—an uncastrated man who plays the role of Hector and whom Alexander uses to emulate Achilles—could scarcely be greater. Arrian's Batis (the eunuch) demonstrates ethnic deviation, whereas in Rufus, Batis provides Alexander with a means of strongly affirming ethnic standards. Regardless of the historicity of Batis and his castration, his different roles in the two versions play out

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<sup>216</sup> Tarn (1948) vol. 2, 269 lists the differences.

<sup>217</sup> The canonical description of this is in *Iliad* XXII. Hamilton (1988) 446, citing Rufus 4.6.29 and *Aen.* 2.273.

exactly the way in which we have come to see eunuchs distort the “gravitational” field of cultural expectations.

### **Bagoas**

The two competing versions of Batis in Arrian and Rufus demonstrate that a character who is called a eunuch in one text can fill a particular role and then function differently in another source that does not designate that character as a eunuch. Bagoas—whom Rufus calls a eunuch but Plutarch does not—is another instance. Plutarch describes the interaction between Alexander and Bagoas as an example of Greek pederasty, without any indication that Alexander’s infatuation with Bagoas is a deviation from the norm. In Rufus, on the other hand, Bagoas is called a eunuch and inspires Alexander to abandon his cultural standards.

The reference to Bagoas in Plutarch occurs during a banquet at Gedrosia (67.4) that takes place immediately after a similar scene, at Carmania (67.1-3). According to Plutarch, the festival at Carmania was such that it seemed as though “the god [Bacchus] himself was present and taking part in the *komos*” (ὥς τοῦ θεοῦ παρόντος αὐτοῦ καὶ συμπαραπέμποντος τὸν κῶμον) (67.3). The festival at Carmania resembles a standard Greek *komos* to such a degree that it even seems as though Dionysos is present. There is nothing Persian or otherwise foreign about it. After this statement about the Bacchic nature of that festival, Plutarch continues, “Then when [Alexander] came to Gedrosia, he again put on a festival for the army” (67.3). Plutarch’s description of the festival at Gedrosia includes only the anecdote about Bagoas, whereas he provides a more general overview of the events at Carmania. This suggests that both festivals had the same general characteristics. There is no indication that the celebration at Gedrosia should be

read as markedly different from the one at Carmania. In Plutarch then, Bagoas appears during a distinctly Greek scene.

Let us consider what exactly Plutarch says about Bagoas, during the festival at Gedrosia:

It is said that when [Alexander] was watching dramatic contests (ἀγῶνας χορῶν) while drinking wine, his *eromenos* Bagoas won the prize for dancing, and as he was being honored, he went into the viewing area and sat by him. When they saw this, the Macedonians roared and shouted, urging Alexander to kiss him, until he embraced and kissed him.<sup>218</sup>  
67.4

Plutarch calls Bagoas Alexander's *eromenos*, a term that conforms to the well-documented Greek practice of pederasty.<sup>219</sup> An *eromenos* was the pubescent male lover of an older man, for a period of time that terminated when the *eromenos* grew a beard. One can describe the social milieu of an *eromenos* as "the world of Hellenistic youth... the erotic male world of homo-social athleticism."<sup>220</sup> And indeed, Bagoas the *eromenos* is in fact engaged in a competition. Admittedly, it is a dramatic competition and not an athletic one, but the difference between the two was far less marked in the ancient world than it is in modern times. Plutarch describes Bagoas as an *eromenos* engaged in a competition during a Bacchic *komos*. Furthermore, Plutarch never labels Bagoas as a eunuch. Bagoas is not a eunuch, his relationship with Alexander occurs during a Greek festival, and is described in distinctly Greek terms, in Plutarch's text.

Bagoas functions in a radically different way in Rufus. The Persian Nabarzanes gives Bagoas—who is explicitly labeled a eunuch (*spado*)—as a present to Alexander

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<sup>218</sup> λέγεται δὲ μεθύοντα αὐτὸν θεωρεῖν ἀγῶνας χορῶν, τὸν δὲ ἐρώμενον διὰ τοῦ θεάτρου παρελθόντα καθίσει παρ' αὐτόν. ἰδόντας δὲ τοὺς Μακεδόνας κροτεῖν καὶ βοᾶν φιλεῖν καλεῦντας, ἄχρι οὗ περιβαλὼν κατεφίλησεν.

<sup>219</sup> See, for example, Plato *Sym.* 208c-210b.



(6.5.23). At the beginning of the very next section, Rufus provides another description of Alexander's character. In this description, Rufus echoes many of the issues that he touched on in the description of Alexander during the eunuch scene in Sisigambis' tent.

This description runs:

It was at this point that Alexander relinquished control of his appetites. His self-restraint and continence, supreme qualities at the height of good fortune, degenerated into arrogance and dissipation. [2] The traditional ways of his people, the healthy, sober discipline and unassuming demeanour of the Macedonian kings he considered beneath his eminent position, and he began to ape the Persian royalty with its quasi-divine status. [3] Men who had conquered scores of nations he wished to lie prostrate on the ground to venerate him, and he sought gradually to inure them to servile duties and to bring them down to the level of captives. [4] Accordingly, he wore on his head a purple head-band interwoven with white, like the one Darius had once had, and he assumed Persian dress—without fearing the omen implicit in his moving from victor's insignia to the garb of the conquered... [7] He also forced Persian clothing on his friends and on the cavalry, the élite of the troops. They found it distasteful but did not dare refuse to wear it. [8] The royal quarters had a complement of three hundred sixty-five concubines, the number Darius had possessed, and along with them were hordes of eunuchs.<sup>221</sup>

6.6.1-8

Above, I discussed Rufus' description of Alexander's character in Sisigambis' tent, where he encounters eunuchs; that description begins, "If he had been able to retain this self-control to the end of his life" (3.12.18). Although Alexander is in control at that

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<sup>220</sup> Acosta-Hughes (2014) 6.

<sup>221</sup> Trans. Yardley (2004). *hic vero palam cupiditates suas solvit continentiamque et moderationem, in altissima quaque fortuna eminentia bona, in superbiam ac lasciviam vertit. [2] Patrios mores disciplinamque Macedonum regum salubriter temperatam et civilem habitum velut leviora magnitudine sua ducens Persicae regiae par deorum potentiae fastigium aemulabatur. [3] iacere humi venerabundos ipsum paulatimque servilibus ministeriis tot victores gentium inbuere at capiti vis pares facere expetebat. [4] Itaque purpureum diadema distinctum albo, quale Darius habuerat, capiti circumdedit vestemque Persiam sumpsit, no omen quidem veritus quod a victoris insignibus in devicti transiret habitum... [7] Amicos vero et equites unaque principes militum, aspernantes quidem, sed recusare non ausos, Persicis ornaverant vestibus. [8] Pelices CCC et LXV, totidem quot Darei fuerant, regiam inplebant, quas spadonum greges... sequebantur.*

point, Rufus (unlike our other sources) includes both eunuchs and a description of how Alexander will change when he loses that self-control. This later description in the section immediately following Alexander's acquisition of the eunuch Bagoas describes the culmination of that earlier one. The forecast of Alexander's adoption of Persian customs and the realization of that forecast both feature eunuchs. This passage even links to Darius' apparel and Alexander refusing to recognize that apparel as an omen—something we saw Darius himself do earlier. Alexander's adoption of Persian customs and mirroring of Darius are so explicit in this passage, that I forego enumerating them. Once again, a eunuch appears in the narrative just when a character experiences a radical transformation away from expected norms.

The difference between Plutarch's Bagoas and Rufus' Bagoas highlights the significance of referring to a character as a eunuch. In Plutarch, Bagoas is confined to a setting that is distinctly Greek, and Plutarch attributes a distinctly Greek label to him: *eromenos*. There is no hint there that Bagoas is a eunuch. In Rufus, on the other hand, Bagoas is a eunuch, and his appearance immediately precedes the culmination of Alexander's transformation into a Persian king—a process that Rufus alluded to the last time that Alexander met with eunuchs. In the debate about Bagoas that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the focus is whether Bagoas was real. By adopting Zambrini's suggested approach and focusing on authors' different interpretations of Bagoas, one can see that Rufus and Plutarch hardly seem to be talking about the same person when they use the name "Bagoas." Bagoas the eunuch signals to the reader that Alexander is adopting foreign behavior, whereas Bagoas the *eromenos* gives no such indication. On the contrary, a case could be made that his designation as *eromenos* affirms Alexander's

adherence to traditional behavior.

### **Rufus the Roman**

There is a significant difference between Rufus and the other writers discussed in this chapter that still needs to be addressed—Rufus wrote in Latin, whereas the others wrote in Greek. Rufus' prose style is based on Roman models including Livy, Vergil, and Horace and his deviations from other sources often reflect contemporary Roman concerns.<sup>222</sup> At the same time, however, Rufus relied mainly on Greek sources to compose his narrative.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, his text is truly Greco-Roman literature, but thus far I have only addressed the Greek side. The analyses above demonstrate that the eunuchs in Rufus' history conform to the pattern of eunuchs in Greek literature, functioning as indicators of ethnic metamorphoses, but his description of Bagoas includes themes commonly associated with eunuchs in Roman literature also. I fully discuss the difference between eunuchs in Greek and Roman literature in the next chapter but a complete appraisal of Rufus' Bagoas requires that a brief explanation of that difference be provided here.

One of the surprises in stories of eunuchs in Greek literature is their lack of concern for gender or sexuality. The closest that anyone comes to raising this issue is Herodotus' Hermotimos, who describes himself as someone who was once a man but is now nothing (οὐδέν).<sup>224</sup> Greek eunuchs signal that the physiognomic rules of ethnicity are being broken.<sup>225</sup> And while these rules are themselves based on fundamental

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<sup>222</sup> Steele (1915); Baynham (1998) 15-56; Yardley (2004).

<sup>223</sup> Bosworth (1988) 10; Yardley (2004) 6-9; Steele (1919); Baynham (1998) 15-56.

<sup>224</sup> See previous chapter.

<sup>225</sup> By "Greek eunuch" I simply mean a eunuch in Greek literature. Not a eunuch of Grecian origin. For more on the physiognomic laws encompassing gender and ethnicity, see my Introduction.

differences between the genders, the discourse concerning eunuchs is focused on that ethnographic level and not the level of gender. As I show in the next chapter, Roman literature's eunuchs are part of the dialogue about gender roles and sexuality, not ethnicity.

In some ways, Rufus' Bagoas functions precisely as we would expect a Greek eunuch to act. He enters the narrative, and suddenly Alexander abandons his self-control and adopts a plethora of Persian customs. There are, however, aspects of Rufus' Bagoas (which I have thus far carefully omitted) that also reflect the discourse on eunuchs that is common in Roman literature. Let us turn to them now. When Alexander receives Bagoas, Rufus describes the eunuch as one "to whom Darius had been accustomed, and Alexander soon was accustomed" (6.5.23). The verb that Rufus uses here for "accustomed" is *assuesco*, which can also mean "to be intimate with."<sup>226</sup> Although the passage cited for that meaning is this exact one, later events in Rufus support it. In book ten, a certain Orsines presents Alexander and his court with lavish gifts, but Orsines does not bring a gift for Bagoas. Alexander's friends warn Orsines that this omission is problematic for his health, since Bagoas has won great influence with Alexander by giving him his body (*obsequio corporis*) (10.1.25). Orsines responds that "he wished to honor the king's friends, not his whores, and it was Persian custom not to consider as men those who were shamefully disgraced" (10.1.26).<sup>227</sup> The verb used for "disgraced" here is *effeminarentur*, which conveys the dual meanings of being shamed and of being feminized. Bagoas proceeds to convince Alexander that Orsines is a thief, and Alexander

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<sup>226</sup> OLD s.v. *assuesco*, citing this passage for the intimate meaning.

<sup>227</sup> "*respondit, 'amicos regis, non scorta, se colere, nec moris esse Persis mares ducere qui stupro effeminarentur.'*"

orders Orsines' execution (10.1.27-38). Just before he dies, Orsines insults Bagoas one last time: "I had heard that women once ruled in Asia. But it is a strange thing for a eunuch to rule!" (10.1.37).<sup>228</sup>

Now, this story includes several examples of Alexander behaving like a Persian. First and most obviously, Alexander "grows accustomed to" the same eunuch to whom Darius once was accustomed. Additionally, Alexander kills Orsines without a trial, and the sentence after Orsines' death explains that at this point in time Alexander began to execute people without trial on a regular basis (10.1.39). In the descriptions of Alexander's character discussed above, we saw that Rufus cites summary executions as an example of Alexander becoming more like a Persian king. In short, the eunuch again signals transgressions of ethnic standards.

Orsines' comments about Bagoas' gender and sexuality, however, focus on issues that are foreign to Greek discussions of eunuchs but very much in line with Roman ones. First, Bagoas wins influence with Alexander by means of intercourse; second, Orsines calls Bagoas a whore (*scortum*); third, Orsines explains that since Bagoas has been shamefully disgraced and feminized, he has voided any claims to masculinity he may once have had; finally, Orsines' last words make clear that he does not consider Bagoas a woman. There seems to be a contradiction here. Orsines will not honor Bagoas because he does not consider him a male, but then with his dying words implies that he also does not consider Bagoas female.

This contradiction stems from a basic tenet of Roman masculinity. According to Roman gender roles, a man played the penetrative role in intercourse or at least put on a

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<sup>228</sup> *audieram, inquit, in Asia olim regnasse feminas, hoc vero novum est regnare castratum.*

public façade of doing so.<sup>229</sup> Most of the time, someone who was born as a biological male would have been able to fulfill this role, or at least create the pretense of doing so.<sup>230</sup> Eunuchs, however, were (usually) unable to play this role or to keep up a public façade of doing so. At the same time, eunuchs neither menstruate nor bear children and therefore are not women. In Roman literature, eunuchs signal that someone is failing to uphold their proper gender role.

Rufus' presentation of the interaction between Bagoas and Orsines raises these issues of gender and sexuality, but there is no indication that anyone has failed to correctly adhere to his gender role. As noted above, however, this scene does portray Alexander furthering his transformation into a Persian king. Rufus' narrative presents the issues of gender and sexuality, which one would expect when a eunuch appears in Roman literature, but these issues are working alongside the ethnic transgressions more common in Greek literature. Rufus' Bagoas is much like Rufus' text itself, in that Bagoas too straddles the line between Greece and Rome.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter and the previous one have argued that eunuchs in Greek literature signal to the reader that the physiognomic laws of normative cultural behavior are being violated. In the earlier Greek literature surveyed in the previous chapter, eunuchs were associated with a pattern of themes that demonstrated that they were neither wholly Greek nor wholly Persian. They were not obedient to kings and tended to be involved in regicide, unlike the stereotypical, slavish Persian. At the same time, they consistently violated fundamental aspects of Greek civic life, such as the laws of supplication, of oath-keeping,

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<sup>229</sup> Williams (1999).

and of hospitality. They existed in a void between ethnicities.

In this chapter on later Greek literature, we observed two significant changes, although once again ethnicity was the major focus. First, the eunuchs themselves were rarely the ones behaving contrary to ancient biology. Instead, eunuchs signal that *another* character is behaving or is about to behave in a foreign way. Although this was sometimes the case in the previous chapter, it is universal in this later body of literature. Second, the characters who violate expected practices did not exist in a void, as was the case in the last chapter. Alexander does not just abandon Macedonian ways, but also he adopts Persian ones. Batis and the Gazans do not simply fight with not-Persian courage, but with Greek courage.

Despite these differences, it is fair to say that both the earlier and later Greek literature is concerned with the rules of ethnicity and the expected behavior of peoples. Given that eunuchs are defined by their lack of testicles or penises and not their ethnicity, the focus of the Greek discourse on eunuchs might be surprising, at first. When one takes into consideration, however, that the Greeks' system of ethnography was based on the different sets of traits held by men and women, it makes sense that what might seem to us like an issue of gender was, for them, mainly an issue of ethnic standards. As we see in the next chapter, the same was not true for the Romans.

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<sup>230</sup> Williams (1999).

#### **Chapter 4: Eunuchs in the Roman Republic**

In this chapter, I argue that eunuchs in literature from the Roman Republic are part of the Roman discourse on masculinity, not ethnicity and culture. In this way, they are different from the eunuchs in Greek literature that I discussed in the previous two chapters. A second difference is that eunuchs in Roman literature both signal a character's deviation from the standards of masculinity and scrutinize those very standards. In addition to these differences, there is a significant similarity in how both Greek and Roman eunuchs function within their respective texts. In the previous chapters, we saw that eunuchs in Greek literature were not necessarily the ones dissociated from their ethnicity and culture. For example when Alexander encounters the eunuchs in Sisigambis' tent, he begins to take on Persian traits, whereas the ethnic and cultural aspects of the eunuchs themselves go unmentioned. The same holds true for eunuchs in literature of the Roman Republic, only the dissociation impacts gender identity instead of ethnicity. In Terence's *Eunuchus*, for instance, the failure to correctly perform Roman masculinity belongs not to the eunuch Dorus but to the uncastrated Chaerea (disguised as Dorus), as well as several other men.

In both Greek and Roman literature, eunuchs signal a hoisting of anchors of identity, although the eunuchs themselves are not necessarily the ships that go adrift. In Roman literature, the relevant anchor is masculinity. Furthermore, Roman authors proceed to ask whether the anchor of masculinity is ideally forged or needs reshaping.



Since Roman masculinity is the ideological framework within which the eunuchs in this chapter must be understood, the following section reviews the conventions and standards of this framework. After the discussion of Roman masculinity, I discuss two texts that show both the association between eunuchs and deviations from the conventions of Roman masculinity, as well as the subversive effects that eunuchs have on those conventions—Terence’s *Eunuchus* and Catullus 63.

### **Roman Masculinity**

The quintessential element of Roman masculinity was to be *perceived* as fulfilling the insertive role in sexual activities, regardless of whether one’s partner was male or female.<sup>231</sup> I emphasize “perceived” in the sentence above because the significance of the reality of one’s sexual proclivities in establishing manhood cannot be known, today. Our understanding of Roman masculinity is limited by the public representations and performances of that masculinity, and no ancient source discusses the self-perceived gender identity of one who played the penetrated role in intercourse, while retaining the public persona of a penetrator. The following example elucidates the gender jargon. Suetonius tells us that Julius Caesar’s opponents insulted his masculinity by saying that he played the passive role during a youthful affair with king Nicomedes of Bithynia.<sup>232</sup> This anecdote, however, only reveals that publicly accusing a man of playing the passive role in intercourse was to attack that man’s masculinity. It does not tell us whether Caesar would have questioned his own masculinity if he did in fact play the passive role with

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<sup>231</sup> Williams (1999) 18 “First and foremost, a self-respecting Roman man must always give the appearance of playing the penetrative acts, and not the receptive role.” Richlin (1992), Gleason (1995), Brown (2008).

<sup>232</sup> Suet. *Julius Caesar* 49; Williams (1999) 9-11 on representation versus reality also uses this example.

Nicomedes, but no one else knew of the affair.

The second major protocol of Roman masculinity governs the status of sexual partners. Excepting one's spouse, "freeborn Romans both male and female were officially off-limits."<sup>233</sup> Slaves of both genders, on the other hand, were potential lovers, provided that the freeborn person involved in intercourse played the penetrative role. Roman men could visit prostitutes—who were typically slaves—of either gender without fear of stigmatization, provided that they were perceived as penetrating and not being penetrated.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, public perception is just as important for understanding this rule as it is for understanding the primary rule of penetration. There is, of course, a high probability that at some point a freeborn Roman man had an extra-marital affair with another freeborn Roman, but the degree to which this violation of one of the central protocols of Roman masculinity impacted his self-perception cannot be known. We can only discern the rules of performing masculinity in the public sphere—the outward representations of Roman masculinity—but the degree to which these conventions were actually followed privately is unknowable.<sup>235</sup>

The essential term for understanding Roman masculinity is the Latin word *virtus*.<sup>236</sup> *Virtus* is formed from the noun *vir* (man) and the suffix *tut*, which "designates

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<sup>233</sup> Williams (1999) 19.

<sup>234</sup> Williams (1999) 85.

<sup>235</sup> On this point, I disagree with Williams (1999) who argues that we can understand cracks in a public facade of masculinity as glimpses of an underlying, private reality that deviates from the public representation. There is no way to discern, however, whether such seeming lapses in the public performance of masculinity were purposeful or not.

<sup>236</sup> Kuefler (2001) 20 calls it the "foundation of masculinity;" Williams (1999) 139 defines it: "the ideal of masculine behavior that all men ought to embody." McDonnell (2006) 12 on the other hand argues that until Cicero's time the word's definition was limited to "courage." He repeatedly undermines himself, however. For example, on *virtus* in Plautus he adds "the willingness and ability to withstand pain" (24); "To be sure, *virtus* displays a variety of meanings other than

the activity and quality associated with the noun from which it is derived.”<sup>237</sup> On a most basic level then, *virtus* simply means “manliness.” In practice, *virtus* comes to encompass everything distinct to a man, as opposed to feminine traits which were categorized under the label *mollitia* (softness). Now, a man who displayed *mollitia* lacked perfect *virtus*; on the other hand, a perfect lack of *mollitia* was perfect *virtus*.<sup>238</sup> In other words, being “manly” was not characterized by doing manly things as much as by not doing feminine things. The relationship between *virtus* and *mollitia* was hierarchical, in that the Romans considered *virtus* as better in every sense than *mollitia*. As Craig Williams puts it in

*Roman Homosexuality:*

One could never praise a man by saying that he lacks all masculine vices—indeed, the very concept is oxymoronic. In short, *virtus* is an eminently praiseworthy quality, whether in a male (who should naturally have it) or a female (who may, exceptionally, attain to it); *mollitia*, while desirable in women and boys, is antithetical to full manliness.<sup>239</sup>

*Virtus*, then, signifies not only “manliness,” but also something akin to its English descendant: virtue. A man with perfect *virtus* stood as a pinnacle of logical, moral, civic, and personal excellence. Feminine *mollitia* was innately worse and was a stain upon

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martial and courageous in the Plautine corpus" (31). Later, McDonnell concedes that Cato also uses the word in ways not related to courage. McDonnell does show that courage was part of *virtus*, but his argument that it was the only sense of the word until Cicero is untenable.

<sup>237</sup> McDonnell (2006) 2.

<sup>238</sup> Manwell (2007); Sassi (2001) 27 explains this definition by contrast to others: "Insofar as it is regarded as the norm, the positive term in a cultural model lacks marked definition within the asymmetrical system of relations holding between itself and the other terms." According to her terminology, Roman men are the "positive term" in the Roman cultural model, and so their definition stems from opposition to the other terms (women and children).

<sup>239</sup> Williams (1999) 133. Kuefler (2001) 19 concurs about the meaning of *virtus*: "Virtue was so intimately linked to maleness in the Roman universe that it is impossible to separate Roman definitions of masculinity from more general notions of ideal human behavior." But *idem* 30-31 disagrees that women should always strive for *virtus*. Kuefler notes that "Women were frequently described as manly if they showed some virtue greater than that expected of them: courage, equanimity, or sexual modesty," but on the other hand Roman authors "consistently discounted such virtue as 'unnatural.'" He mentions the Amazons as an example of the masculinized image of

one's *virtus*.

Let us now consider some of the ways in which Roman men strove to avoid accusations of *mollitia* and prove their *virtus*. On a basic level, *mollitia* (softness) could be used to characterize the female body. For example, women are naturally less hairy than men, and consequently a man who removed his body hair ran the risk of being branded as *mollis* (soft).<sup>240</sup> A man with too much body hair, however, could be accused of over-emphasizing his masculinity in an attempt to hide his true lack thereof.<sup>241</sup> This requisite balance between too feminine and too masculine extends from touch to include the other senses as well. A Roman man was expected to be moderately attractive, smell moderately decent, and speak with a moderately deep voice.<sup>242</sup> The achievement of bodily masculinity was an absence of feminine traits, but one could not appear to be going to too great of lengths to ensure their absence without facing accusations of fake *virtus*. This anxiety that a hyper-masculine man could actually be adopting histrionic affectations reveals that Romans were aware of the highly performative nature of Roman masculinity, a fact with especial relevance for the discussion of Terence below.

In addition to being perceived as playing the active role in intercourse and maintaining a golden mean in personal hygiene and deportment, a Roman man was expected to demonstrate restraint and control over others.<sup>243</sup> This aspect of Roman masculinity stems again from an understanding of *virtus* as “not *mollitia*.” It was not just the female body that Romans conceived of as *mollis*, but also “the languor of their minds,

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women with *virtus*. The question of whether women should aspire to *virtus* is not important here, but the lack of a consensus on the point is worth noting.

<sup>240</sup> Manwell (2007) 111-115. Williams (1999) 128.

<sup>241</sup> Manwell (2007) 111-115. Williams (1999) 130; Gleason (1995) 70-77.

<sup>242</sup> Manwell (2007) 111-115. Williams (1999) 129-135; Gleason (1995).

the ease with which they gave themselves to their emotions, and their dissolute morals.”<sup>244</sup> Therefore, it was the manifest destiny of the steadfast masculine *virtus* to restrain and control feminine *mollitia*. There is also a relationship between *virtus* and martial conquest. As war is a distinctly un-feminine arena, those who win a war must have more *virtus* than those who lose, and therefore would benefit from Roman rule and its attendant *virtus*.<sup>245</sup> Once again, however, Roman men had to walk a fine line. Philosophers perceived as too dedicated to reason and soldiers as too fierce in battle could be accused of donning a hyper-masculine facade to disguise their underlying femininity.<sup>246</sup>

In addition to control over women and foreigners, a Roman man was also supposed to control his own emotions and actions.<sup>247</sup> The underlying ideology here is the same as that for exerting control over others. Irrationality, emotional outbursts, and slack morals were all examples of *mollitia*, and as such needed to be restrained by *virtus*. An illogical, melodramatic adulterer clearly lacked the *virtus* needed to restrain himself, and therefore was not a fully developed *vir*. This need for self-control also explains what seems at first to be a paradox—a Roman man who was reputed to overindulge his sex-drive might find his virility called into question. For example in his sixteenth poem, Catullus targets men who base their attacks on his masculinity on his affair with a woman: “Because you read about my many thousands (*multa milia*) of kisses, you

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<sup>243</sup> Williams (1999) 132; Brown (2008) 12-13.

<sup>244</sup> Kuefler (2001) 21.

<sup>245</sup> Williams (1999) 135.

<sup>246</sup> On philosophers, Gleason (1995) 133. On soldiers, Kuefler (2001) 29-31.

<sup>247</sup> Manwell (2007) 111-115.

question my virility” (16.12-13).<sup>248</sup> The kisses in question are a clear reference to the *milia multa* kisses that Catullus exchanges with Lesbia in poem 5. There is no question about whether Catullus played the role of penetrator or penetrated in his relationship with Lesbia, but the multitude of kisses draws into doubt his self-control over his libido.<sup>249</sup> Although abundant intercourse might at first glance seem like a thorough fulfillment of the prime directive of Roman masculinity—to penetrate—in fact, it undermines one’s claim to self-control and by extension to *virtus*.

A complete analysis of Roman masculinity requires several volumes unto itself, but this discussion has hopefully laid out its major tenets. To perform Roman masculinity was to penetrate the proper partners, have masculine bodily features, employ reason, control others, and control oneself. Additionally, one had to convince others that such things came naturally, since appearing to expend too much effort upon them indicated a hidden lack of *virtus*. Eunuchs in literature of the Roman republic signal that a character is failing to live up to the standards of an ideal Roman *vir*. In the remainder of this chapter, I compare the significance of this failure to live up to Roman masculine ideals in Terence’s *Eunuchus* and Catullus 63. These are the only extant works from the Roman republic that focus on eunuchs, and their diametrically opposed positions concerning the importance of performing Roman masculinity suggest that Catullus’ poem is, in part, a response to Terence’s work.

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<sup>248</sup> *quod multa milia basiorum / legistis male me marem putastis*

<sup>249</sup> The (in)famous first (and last) line of Catullus 16—*pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*—exemplifies hyper-masculinity (16.1, 16.14). Catullus responds to accusations of effeminacy by over-emphasizing his masculine *bona fides*. Wray (2001), which I discuss at length in a later section of this chapter, explains how Catullus relies on hyper-masculine verses—such as the opening and closing of poem sixteen—to counterbalance verses that open him up to charges of effeminacy.

In both Terence and Catullus, eunuchs symbolize a failure to perform Roman masculinity, but the two authors differ in their analysis of this failure's significance. Terence, in the *Eunuchus*, suggests that a willing abdication of one's masculine identity can provide access to previously unreachable goals and need not be permanent. The play presents an argument in favor of occasionally opting out of the competition of Roman masculinity. In Catullus 63, on the other hand, the character Attis castrates himself, then longs to reclaim his masculinity, in vain. Catullus' Attis shows that lost masculinity cannot be recovered, even if it is ceded voluntarily. Since Terence and Catullus' representations of eunuchs' impact on Roman masculinity correspond, eunuchs serve as a medium through which one can better understand the authors' opposed views of the value of performing Roman masculinity.

### **Terence's *Eunuchus***

Before dealing with Terence's *Eunuchus*, it is necessary to review some details about his life and corpus and address the two major branches of scholarship on the *Eunuchus*. The discussion of Terence's bibliography is relevant because he was a Carthaginian by birth, then a slave at Rome, and lastly a freedman poet. Additionally, his works are all based on Greek plays. Consequently, one might not expect them to be representative of Roman culture, despite their being performed there. I also include a discussion of the two major branches of scholarship on the *Eunuchus* because they help situate my own discussion of the play's treatment of Roman masculinity.

Our biographical record of Terence comes largely from Suetonius' *Life of Terence*, which is subject to the pitfalls of all ancient biographies but is accepted today as mostly factual. Terence, whose full name was Publius Terentius Afer, was born in

Carthage near the beginning of the second century BC. He came to Rome as a slave of the senator Terentius Lucanus who, appreciating Terence's beauty and wit, freed him at an unknown date.<sup>250</sup> After he was freed, Terence went on to author six comedies from the years 166-160 BCE, all of which survive. During this time, the Roman dramatic tradition was about a century old, and its popularity and social acceptability were rising.

Dramatists had been the subject of aristocratic derision at Rome until late in the third century BC, but this attitude eroded during the decades preceding Terence's career.<sup>251</sup>

This rising tide did not leave Terence behind. In the opening to his *Adelphoe* Terence refers to accusations that certain *homines nobiles* actually authored his plays. These accusations reveal that Terence was palatable enough to aristocratic (*nobiles*) Roman sensibilities to be included in elite social circles.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, these accusations give us some insight into how Terence's plays sounded to an audience—like something an *homo Romanus nobilis* might write. Even if Terence is concocting these accusations for literary purposes, that he deemed them plausible enough to stage suggests that they are not wholly untenable. That Terence faced accusations that his plays sound *too* Roman suggests that his works conformed to Roman expectations quite well. In other words, they addressed issues pertinent to Rome and are not the idiosyncratic musings of a

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<sup>250</sup> Suet. *Vita Terenti* 1.

<sup>251</sup> Goldberg (1986) 6-12. One cause of this change in the perception of dramatists was the increased interaction between Rome and Greece during the second century, coupled with increasing appreciation of each others' cultures. Greece of course had a dramatic tradition centuries old, and as it became more popular in Rome, Roman dramatists mined it for their own works. For his part, Terence based four plays on works of Menander and two on works of Apollodorus of Carystus. The increased popularity of Greek culture led to a domestic phenomenon that furthered the elevation of Roman comedy. Namely, every politician known to fund a play from 217-186 BC went on to a higher position.



foreigner.

Furthermore, the primary expectation of Terence's initial audiences was that his plays would be funny. In order for Terence to meet this expectation, he had to present material that his audience could relate to.<sup>253</sup> That his plays were publicly staged suggests that he did in fact succeed at this. The price of staging a Roman comedy was covered by magistrates, using public funds, and the plays were performed at public festivals, such as the Megalesian or Roman games.<sup>254</sup> We know this in part because in the prologue to *Eunuchus*, Terence refers to a magistrate reading the play before it was performed (20-24). By the time these plays were seen publicly, then, Roman public officials had already reviewed and chosen to fund them.<sup>255</sup> Were Terence's plays impossible for a Roman to relate to, it is doubtful that a magistrate would have chosen them for public consumption. Therefore although Terence was African and his plays are based on Greek originals, the Terentian plays are thoroughly Roman.<sup>256</sup>

*Eunuchus*, to which we now turn, was performed twice in one day at the Megalesian Games of 161, earning Terence a record profit in the process.<sup>257</sup> During the

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<sup>252</sup> Goldberg (1986) 6-12 rightly argues against assuming that these *homines nobiles* were Scipio and a philhellenic circle of friends. Astin (1978) demolishes the old consensus that Cato and Scipio were locked into a cultural debate over Hellenism. *Adelphoe* 15.

<sup>253</sup> Tom Hawkins, *per ep.*

<sup>254</sup> Lebek (1996) 33.

<sup>255</sup> James (2013) 176.

<sup>256</sup> The debate on what percentage of Terence's plays is simply a translation of Menander is endless. For more on this debate as it relates to *Eunuchus* see Lowe (1983), Konstan (1986), Saylor (1975), and Victor (2012).

<sup>257</sup> Christenson (2013) 262, citing Suetonius *Vita Terenti* 2. Contra Lebek (1996) 32 who argues that Terence almost performed the play a first time earlier, only for a magistrate to end the performance by charging Terence with plagiarism. This argument is based on *Eun.* 20-24: *postquam aediles emerunt / perfecit sibi ut inspiciundi esset copia. / magistratus quom ibi adesset, occepast agi. exclamat furem non poetam fabulam dedisse, et nil dedisse verborum tamen.* Terence's words here suggest rather that the interruption occurred privately (*perfecit sibi*)

prologue of the *Eunuchus*, Terence explains that he has drawn from two plays of Menander—*Eunouchos* and *Kolax*—to create his own (30-31). He cites the soldier Thraso and his parasite Gnatho as coming from *Kolax* but this explicit explanation has not stopped scholars from combing through the entire play in an attempt to discern what comes from Menander's *Eunouchos*; what comes from Menander's *Kolax*; and what are Terence's own contributions.<sup>258</sup> This attempt to categorize various parts of the play into three discrete units constitutes one of the two major fields of scholarship on *Eunuchus*. The play's ending, in which two characters agree to share a *meretrix*, draws especial attention from scholars concerned with such categorization. Tellingly, most scholars find this arrangement unpalatable and therefore consider it one of Terence's attributions.<sup>259</sup> Attributing the "good" parts of the play to Menander and the "bad" parts to Terence is the usual *modus operandi* of this branch of scholarship. As in the previous chapter on Alexander biographies, I am not concerned with which parts of *Eunuchus* come from each of Menander's two plays or what parts are Terentian inventions. Instead, I shall treat Terence's play as a whole and deliberate construction worthy of examination in its current form.

A more recent line of scholarship argues that Terence purposely subverts the conventions of Roman comedy in the *Eunuchus*. Drawing on a slightly later section of the prologue than those concerned with categorization, these scholars focus on a passage

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and Suetonius' statement on the matter is unambiguous: *Eunuchus quidem bis die acta est (Vita 2)*.

<sup>258</sup> e.g. Lowe (1983), who also has a good review of scholarship in a similar vein.

<sup>259</sup> Pasquali (1936) quoted (& transl.) by Goldberg (1986) 117: "Perhaps this final scene, so unworthy of this refined creature [Thais], would not have offended the greater part of the spectators, but it would surely have offended Terence's more cultured readers: to us moderns, it is intolerable."

in which Terence addresses accusations that he has stolen his material.<sup>260</sup> Terence asks:

If he [the author] is denied the right to use the same characters as other writers, wouldn't he also be prohibited from scripting in the role of a running slave, or from bringing virtuous wives, nasty prostitutes, a hungry parasite, and a braggart soldier on stage, or having a baby passed off as someone's, an old man tricked by a slave?<sup>261</sup>

quod si personis isdem huic uti non licet  
qui mage licet currentem servom scribere  
bonas matronas facere, meretrices malas,  
parasitum edacem, gloriosum militem,  
puerum supponi, falli per servom senem  
35-39

As scholars rightly note, however, none of these stock character stereotypes materialize in the *Eunuchus*. For example, although Terence refers to *bonas matronas* and *meretrices malas*, Thais—the *meretrix* of the *Eunuchus*—is generally beneficent, to the extent that David Konstan characterizes her as “a *meretrix* with a *matrona*’s face.”<sup>262</sup> In response to the accusation of plagiarism, Terence first describes stock characters and then goes to great lengths to deviate from these descriptions, thereby creating a unique and indisputably original play that cannot plausibly be accused of plagiarism. The play’s “bad” ending, according to this line of scholarship, is another means for Terence to deviate from comedic conventions.

The focus of this branch of scholarship is on the relationship between this play and the conventions of Roman comedy, but some scholars working along these lines do nod to the *Eunuchus*’ treatment of Roman masculinity, in an ancillary fashion. In one of his articles, for example, David Christenson discusses several aspects of Chaerea’s rape

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<sup>260</sup> Manuwald (2006), Goldberg (1986) 105-122.

<sup>261</sup> Trans. David Christenson (2012).

<sup>262</sup> Konstan (1986) 379, 392-393 on Thais’ positive traits; Dessen (1995) quote on 129, and more concerning Thais on 136-137.

of Pamphila, including its incorporation of allusions to a traditional Roman wedding ceremony; potential audience reactions to the scene (which is the only comedic rape that takes place during the action of a play); and how this rape subverts the conventions of rape in Roman comedy.<sup>263</sup> In his conclusion to this section, Christenson states: Chaerea's eunuch disguise "functions as an open signifier into which a viewer can read what (s)he wants regarding sexual insecurities, ambiguities, and gender roles."<sup>264</sup> Similarly, in the conclusion of his article, Christenson reiterates: "In the figure of the eunuch... Terence found fertile ground to reevaluate norms of sexuality and gender."<sup>265</sup> Although I wholeheartedly agree with Christenson's conclusions, these statements lack any connection to the rest of his article, which is focused on the play's subversion of the conventions of Roman comedy, not Roman masculinity.<sup>266</sup> There is a disconnect between Christenson's discussion, which is focused on Roman comedy, and his conclusions, which are about Roman masculinity. I note this disconnect not to pick a fight with Konstan but because it is this exact gap in his article that I attempt to fill in my discussion of the *Eunuchus*.

In keeping with both of the major lines of scholarship on the *Eunuchus*, I too begin with the prologue. The final two lines of the prologue pose a challenge to the audience that directly pertains to the role of the eunuch and ultimately Roman masculinity, although translations do not tend to capture this. Let us look at a few different translations of these lines, compare similar syntactical constructions from

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<sup>263</sup> Christenson (2013).

<sup>264</sup> Christenson (2013) 269.

<sup>265</sup> Christenson (2013) 279.

<sup>266</sup> Dessan (1995) has the same issue, although there is at least some evidence directly focused on issues of gender and sexuality, especially in her section on Thraso (131-132).

elsewhere in Latin literature, and then examine the relationship between these lines, the eunuch, and Roman masculinity. The relevant lines read:

*date operam, cum silentio animum attendite,  
ut pernoscatís quid sibi Eunuchus velit.*  
44-45

John Barsby renders this into English as:

Pay attention and listen carefully in silence,  
so that you may understand what the *Eunuch* has to say.<sup>267</sup>

Barsby's translation of *quid sibi velit* as "what the *Eunuch* has to say" is repeated verbatim by Manuwald and Christenson's later renditions.<sup>268</sup> In his posthumously published translation, Frederick Clayton seems to take *sibi* as referring back to the audience members, although it is not entirely clear: "In peace now hear our piece. Weigh word and action, / see if our *Eunuch* gives some satisfaction."<sup>269</sup> Clayton seems to read the line as "What (*quid*) our *Eunuch* (Eunuchus) wants (*velit*) for the audience (*sibi*)."<sup>270</sup> The homonyms and rhyming, of course, indicate Clayton's attempt to add some English poetics to the lines, so perhaps trying to strictly tie his translation to the Latin is futile. For his part, A.J. Brothers renders the lines: "Pay attention, and listen carefully in silence, so you will realize what the *Eunuch* is all about."<sup>271</sup> These three English translations are markedly different, which begs the question of what exactly Terence is asking his audience to *pernoscatís*.

The phrase *sibi velit* without an associated infinitive is rather rare, but its use

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<sup>267</sup> trans. Barsby.

<sup>268</sup> Christenson (2012). Manuwald (2006) 437.

<sup>269</sup> Clayton (2006).

<sup>270</sup> Although one might expect *tibi* instead of *sibi*, if such a meaning were Terence's goal.

<sup>271</sup> Brothers (2000).

elsewhere is more related to function and purpose than desire to speak. In *De Senectute*, Cicero's Cato asks: *avaritia vero senilis quid sibi velit, non intellego*. [66] *Potest enim quicquam esse absurdius quam quo viae minus restet, eo plus viatici quaerere?* (*De Sen.* 65-66). The *quid sibi velit* here must be expressing a question of function, so that a translation would run: "But the greed of an old man, I do not understand its function. [66] For what could be more absurd than to seek more provisions for a journey as the road gets shorter?" In *Controversiae* Seven, Seneca the Elder uses the phrase in a similar way. A son is upset with his father for praising a slave for no gain, instead of a ruler who might in turn bestow favours. The son says: *Nescio quid sibi velit quod servi meritum laudat; tyrannum enim laudare debebat* (*Contr.* 7.7). Since praising the slave has failed to yield anything of value, the son is clearly wondering why the father did so: "I do not know for what purpose he was praising the merit of the slave. He should have praised the tyrant." Seneca the Younger uses the phrase similarly in the *Apocolocyntosis*. When Mercury sees Claudius' funeral procession, he asks: *quid sibi velit ille concursus hominum* (*Apo.* 12). Mercury is not asking "What does that flock of men want to say for itself?" but "What is that flock of men doing?"

Returning to the end of Terence's prologue with this syntactical context, it seems that a better translation of

*date operam, cum silentio animum attendite,  
ut pernoscatis quid sibi Eunuchus velit.*  
44-45

is

Pay attention and listen carefully in silence  
so that you may understand the function of the Eunuch.

Now on paper, it is clear that *Eunuchus* in line forty-five refers to the title of the play.

One does not hear capital letters or italicization, however, and in a performative context there is no difference between *quid sibi Eunuchus velit* and *quid sibi eunuchus velit*. The end of the prologue, then, is telling the audience to pay attention so that they can learn the function of both the *Eunuch* and the eunuch. One should not make the assumption, however, that the *Eunuch* and the eunuch necessarily function in the same way. This dual meaning, I believe, is the source of the disconnect in articles like that of Christenson. Christenson's discussion is about the workings of the *Eunuch*, but his conclusions are more in keeping with the workings of the eunuch. One of the purposes of the *Eunuch* as a play does seem to be, as Christenson notes, to subvert the conventions of Roman comedy, but the eunuch subverts a different framework: Roman masculinity.

Given the title of Terence's play, one might expect a eunuch to play a major role. Dorus the eunuch, however, only speaks about eighty words constituting slightly more than seventeen lines of the play. Furthermore, Dorus is not a major driver of the play's action, and scarcely a minor one. One could rather easily stage the *Eunuchus*, in fact, without even including Dorus. Dorus' limited time on stage and lack of role in the plot is perhaps why he himself has been one of the least discussed aspects of his eponymous play in modern scholarship.<sup>272</sup> On the other hand, the contrast between the expectation that a eunuch will play a major role in the play's action and the reality that this is not the case has distressed scholars for centuries. Pseudo-Servius, a ninth century commentator, suggests one way to interpret this phenomenon:

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<sup>272</sup> Dessan (1995) 123.

The play is called *Eunuchus* because of a fake eunuch (*falso eunucho*)—Chaerea—who rapes a virgin Attic citizen after he is led into the house of Thais the courtesan. This so-called eunuch who rapes that virgin is the primary building block in the comedy. If other characters are brought on, they serve the eunuch, and every part of the play pertains in some way to the eunuch.<sup>273</sup>

With the major caveat that it is Dorus, the *verus eunuchus*, and not Chaerea, the *falsus eunuchus*, who looms over the entire play, I wholeheartedly concur with Pseudo-Servius' assessment. All the characters are reliant on the dissociative effects that the real eunuch has on gender identity, and therefore the entire play does in fact pertain to him, and not Chaerea.<sup>274</sup> Chaerea, to whom Pseudo-Servius attributes such great importance, does play a major role in the critique of Roman masculinity that Terence's play presents, but he is just one of the multiple examples of this dissociative effect that eunuchs have on masculinity in Roman literature. Returning to the final lines of the prologue, Chaerea is one datum showing *quid sibi eunuchus velit*, but he is not the only one. The final lines of the prologue ask the audience to pay attention so that they can learn how the eunuch works, indicating that the actual eunuch is in fact the backbone and connective tissue of the play. As Dorus is objectively not, however, a major character in terms of action, one must search for his importance elsewhere. Dorus the eunuch's function is a symbolic one,

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<sup>273</sup> *Eunuchus dicta est fabula a quodam falso eunucho dicto Chaerea qui ductus in domum Thaidis meretricis pro eunucho vitiauit quandam virginem Atticam civem; istel talis eunuchus qui vitiauit illam virginem est principalis materia in hac comeoedia; si aliae personae inducantur eunucho suserviuntur, et omnes partes fabulae aliquo modo ad eunuchum tendunt.* The passage is cited in full in Germany (2008) 130. Germany *ibid.* explains, "Unfortunately there is no recent edition of Pseudo-Servius. His commentary was often printed in the sixteenth century... The passage I [Germany] have quoted is from 53R in the 1511 Venetian edition of *Terentius cum quinque commentis*." Dessan (1995) 123 rather misleadingly supplies the word "eunuch" and then picks up the Ps.-Serv. passage at "est principalis," and then explains that Ps.-Serv. perceived Dorus—the actual eunuch—as the *principalis materia*. This, of course, is not what Ps.-Serv. says, although I agree with Dessan's broader point about the supremacy of Dorus and not Chaerea.

<sup>274</sup> Dessan (1995) concurs that the actual eunuch is the thematic engine of the play, despite his absence from the stage.



as the play's three major male freeborn characters all become dissociated from their Roman masculinity.

Terence's play is driven by the dissociative effect that eunuchs have on masculine identities in Roman literature. In the following discussions, I show how the play's three major freeborn male characters—Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea—are all dissociated from their masculine identity, in a distinct way. One might object that since Phaedria, Chaerea, and Thraso are not actually eunuchs, they should not be the focus of discussion here. In the previous two chapters, however, we have seen repeatedly the dissociative effects that eunuchs have on characters around them. Two of the characters I discuss, Phaedria and Chaerea, are tied especially closely to Dorus. Phaedria purchases Dorus as a gift for the courtesan Thais, thereby bringing him into the realm of the play (162-171). For his part, Chaerea disguises himself as Dorus, in order to infiltrate Thais' house (358-390). Thraso does not actually meet Dorus, but he thinks he does, as he encounters Chaerea disguised as a eunuch (474-506). That Thraso is taken in by a facade is particularly fitting for his masculine failings, as I discuss further below. Additionally, Terence says in the prologue that he has added the character of Thraso from another play, suggesting his overall importance to Terence's purposes (20-25). The juxtaposition of these three characters' masculinity reveals the pervasive impact of Dorus the eunuch throughout *Eunuchus*.

*Eunuchus* also shows the inter-connectedness of the various aspects of Roman masculinity. As the following discussion reveals, each of the freeborn male characters in *Eunuchus* first fails to perform Roman masculinity in one particular way and

consequently becomes entirely dissociated from his masculine identity.<sup>275</sup> As we have moved quite far from Roman masculinity over the last few pages, I here repeat its basic aspects, which I discussed more fully above. To perform Roman masculinity was to penetrate the proper partners, have masculine bodily features, employ reason, control others, and control oneself. Furthermore, one had to convince others that such things came naturally, since appearing to expend too much effort upon them indicated a hidden lack of *virtus*. The following analyses focus on the play's three freeborn males and major characters—Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea. Phaedria's initial failing is that he does not think logically. He allows his emotions to control him and suffers a total collapse of masculinity. Thraso—Phaedria's rival and Terence's only *miles gloriosus*—represents hyper-masculinity. He tries too hard to prove his masculinity, and like Phaedria, ends up completely unmanned. Chaerea—Phaedria's younger brother—differs from the other two, in that after he loses his masculinity, he manages to redeem it. In the following analyses, I show how each of these three characters is dissociated from his masculine identity, as well as how Chaerea reclaims this identity. I then discuss how Terence uses this difference between Chaerea and the other two to challenge the strict rules governing Roman masculinity.

The action of the play opens with a discussion between Phaedria and his slave Parmeno, standing near the house of Thais the courtesan. Thais had sent Phaedria away the day before the play's action begins but now has summoned him back, for reasons

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<sup>275</sup> Williams (1999) 142 on the interconnectedness of the facets of Roman masculinity: "The house of cards might collapse with the removal of just one card... If a man loses control in just one aspect of his life—if he displays any one of the effeminate traits or any combination of them—he is susceptible to being called effeminate, and can be suspected of any other effeminate traits." In *Eunuchus*, this is exactly what happens, and these suspicions prove true.

unknownst to Phaedria, Parmeno, or the audience. Phaedria's initial masculine failing is his inability to employ reason. Instead, he allows his emotions to govern his thinking, and this one slip leads to a total loss of masculinity.<sup>276</sup> Phaedria, a freeborn male, should employ reason, control himself, and control others. In his opening ten lines, he reveals that he fails at all three and that the cause of these failures is his inability to control his love for the courtesan Thais. Since his emotions control his thoughts, he loses control of himself, and since his emotions are for Thais, he subsequently cannot control her either. His opening speech runs:

What should I do? Should I not go even now when I am summoned to her? Should I instead control myself so as not to suffer the insults of a prostitute? She shuts me out, then she calls me back. Shall I return? Not if she begs me. If only you were able, there would be nothing better or braver. But if you begin and cannot bravely carry on, then when you are unable to endure it and no one is calling you, when your pact has been broken, you will go to her of your own accord, showing that you love her and cannot bear it. Then it is over, and done, and I am finished. She will toy with you, when she knows that you are defeated.

quid igitur faciam? non eam ne nunc quidem  
cum accersor ultro? an potius ita me comparem  
non perpeti meretricum contumelias?  
exlusit, revocat. redeam? non si me obsecret.  
siquidem hercle possis, nil prius neque fortius. 50  
verum si incipies neque pertendes gnaviter  
atque ubi pati non poteris, cum nemo expetet,  
infecta pace ultro ad eam venies, indicans  
te amare et ferre non posse, actumst, ilicet,  
peristi. eludet ubi te victum senserit. 55  
46-55

This opening speech demonstrates how far Phaedria's mind is from the Roman ideal of the logical male mind. His inability to think rationally appears in the play's first clause,

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<sup>276</sup> James (2013) 183 also lists these as Phaedria's masculine failings. Williams (1999) 144: "men who had become enslaved to their passions... could even be thought to have lost their *virtus* by falling in love."

as he professes ignorance about what he should do (*quid igitur faciam?*). Closely following this admission of perplexity is the word *accersor*—a first-person, singular, passive verb. First Phaedria cannot think of what he should do, and now in the next line he describes himself in the passive voice, showing a lack of personal efficacy. He does not act but is acted upon by others. As Phaedria continues his speech, it becomes apparent that Thais—the courtesan who is the source of Phaedria’s current consternation—has complete control over him.

This speech makes clear the intersection between Phaedria’s inability to employ reason and subsequent loss of control over himself and others, in several ways. When Phaedria debates what he is going to do, he relies on the second person to reach a decision. In other words, the attempt to make a decision for himself is syntactically divorced from his person. For example when he considers his own limitations, he says *siquidem hercle possis* rather than assert any sense of personal control (e.g., *siquidem ego possum*). He takes on the voice of someone else telling him how to behave. Furthermore, these lines in the second person contain the only semblance of logical progression in the speech, as they discuss a basic chain of cause and effect. On the other hand, the first person is used to ask questions (46-49) and for the interjection *peristi* (55). Only when he “thinks outside himself” does Phaedria demonstrate any logical thinking. This syntactic pattern shows that one who is unable to think in a manly, logical fashion requires an outside voice giving directions.

The speech is also peppered with words pertaining to courage and military conflict all of which depict Phaedria as conquered and cowardly, emphasizing his

submissive condition. As I discussed above, cowardice and defeat are demonstrative of feminine *mollitia* and a lack of *virtus*. One who has been defeated ought to be controlled by the victor, who by definition is more masculine. Therefore, the preponderance of these words in this speech further demonstrate Phaedria's failure to perform Roman masculinity. Phaedria describes the act of leaving Thais as a *fortius* course of action, but he cannot make himself follow it. Later, he reiterates that to attempt to stay away from Thais would be *gnaviter*, but again he fails to make such an attempt. The prospect of returning to Thais at a later date is described as happening when Phaedria cannot uphold a truce (*infecta pace*), which is not an indictment on his masculinity *per se*, but contributes to the martial tone of the passage, thereby strengthening the other military words' impact. Finally in the last line of the speech, he says that Thais will *eludet* him, when she sees that he is conquered (*victum*). While *victum* is an obvious example, *eludet* is also a battle term, as the verb signifies "parry" in addition to "mock."<sup>277</sup> Combined, *victum* and *eludet* paint a picture of Thais deflecting the final desperate strikes of an already conquered Phaedria. He lacks the *virtus* to win, and consequently Thais has total power over his life. In Parmeno's response to his master's lamentations, he continues this martial theme by asking, "What can you do? Nothing but ransom back your captured self (*te redimas captum*)" (74). Another example appears when Parmeno explains that if Phaedria were to try to get control of himself back from Thais, she would need only "minimal force" (*vix vi*) to overcome his attempt. If someone who is conquered lacks sufficient *virtus*, then someone who can be conquered by a woman using only *vix vi* is sorely lacking indeed. Phaedria's inability to think like a logical, Roman man is

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<sup>277</sup> Dessan (1995) 128.

intertwined with images of military failure and submission, both of which are indicative of failed masculinity, in the Roman mind.

In addition to his personal sovereignty, Phaedria's failure to control his emotions costs him the control over others that was expected of a Roman man. Indeed, the very people to whom he has ceded control of himself are those whom he should control. First, his opening speech reveals that he is at the beck and call of Thais, although her social status and gender should dictate the opposite. Second, his interactions with Parmeno reveal that the slave actually controls the master, not the other way around. Phaedria often asks Parmeno for directions, instead of delivering orders. Oftentimes, these requests for directions include Phaedria asking Parmeno to think for him. For example, Phaedria asks Parmeno, "Do you think that I can (*censen posse me*) hold fast and endure not coming back for awhile?" (217-218). At one point Phaedria seems to tell Parmeno what to do, but further examination reveals that Parmeno is still controlling Phaedria.

The point at which Phaedria seems to exert control over Parmeno occurs as Phaedria is about to leave the stage. Before he goes, Parmeno calls him back and reminds him to give him orders (213). Therefore, even if Phaedria were to proceed to exert a strong sense of authority over his slave here (which he does not), he would still in fact just be responding to his slave's request. Phaedria gives Parmeno some directions, and Parmeno responds: "I would have remembered, even if no one reminded me."<sup>278</sup> Parmeno's response reveals Phaedria's lack of control over his slave in two ways. First and most obviously, this line suggests that even when Phaedria appears to give orders, he is simply listing things that Parmeno would have done regardless. If Parmeno would have

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<sup>278</sup> 216 *memini, tam etsi nullus moneas*.

done these things without Phaedria's prompting, then Phaedria is hardly exerting any authority over him. Another reading of the line is to interpret the implied object of "remembered" not as "to do the things that Phaedria asks," but as "to give orders" in the first place. According to this understanding of the line, Parmeno is subtly reminding the audience that he had to intercede and remind Phaedria to give orders in the first place. Whether Parmeno is dismissing Phaedria's orders as redundant or calling attention to Phaedria's failure to give orders without a slave prompting him, the line undermines any sense of authority that Phaedria might seem to assert by "ordering" his slave. That Parmeno introduces his line with the word "remembered" (*meminisse*) again demonstrates that Phaedria's failures stem from his inability to think clearly. Parmeno, then, redirects our attention to Phaedria's failure to employ reason just as he undermines any sense that Phaedria controls his slave. It is especially ironic that Phaedria is even dependent on his slave for issuing orders to that slave. In both his relationships with Thais and Parmeno, Phaedria's failure to think causes his inability to control people of lower social status, another way in which he fails Roman masculinity.

In response to one of Phaedria's requests for directions, Parmeno mimics Phaedria's internal debate. This mimicry captures both Phaedria's inability to employ reason and directly addresses the type of man that Phaedria is. It runs, "I her, she him, she me, she, no! No more, I prefer to die! She will know what kind of man I am" (*mori me malim sentiet qui vir siem*, 65-66). Parmeno's description of Phaedria's thoughts consist at first of nothing more than a string of pronouns, indicating Phaedria's failure to think logically. The second half of this quote touches on one potential way for Phaedria to re-assert control over himself and prove his manliness: suicide. Parmeno proceeds to

explain why this avenue is closed to Phaedria. In the lines that follow, Parmeno explains that Phaedria cannot escape Thais' control, as long as he allows himself to be governed by his emotions. Parmeno's explanation of why Phaedria should not rely on the threat of committing suicide in a debate with Thais reads: "By Hercules! She will extinguish such talk with one false little tear that she pitifully extracts from her eyes by rubbing most gently. She will turn the accusation back on you [Phaedria], and you will pay the penalty willingly" (67-70). By hypothesizing that Thais could talk Phaedria out of suicide with a (fake) emotional appeal, Parmeno reiterates the point that Phaedria makes decisions not with masculine logic but feminine emotion. As long as Phaedria allows emotions to dictate his behavior like a woman, he will continue to cede control of himself to Thais.<sup>279</sup> Any attempt to retake control, such as committing suicide, is doomed to fail, until Phaedria manfully conquers his emotions.

Since he is governed by his emotions, Phaedria is under Thais' sway and lacks self-control. Nevertheless, he has been summoned to a prostitute's house, and so one might expect that he is about to play the penetrative role in intercourse, thereby fulfilling the primary protocol of Roman masculinity. When Thais comes onto the stage, however, such illusions are shattered. She has summoned Phaedria to request that he stay away for three days, in order that she may carry out an elaborate plot to rescue Pamphila—a freeborn woman and longtime friend of Thais who has been wrongly forced into servitude and is currently owned by the soldier Thraso. Thais, however, has summoned Phaedria in order to ask him to stay away from her for the next three days. And since his

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<sup>279</sup> Statements such as "Phaedria allows emotions to dictate his behavior like a woman" and "manfully conquers his emotions" should be understood as pertaining only to how Romans perceived the sexes and not as either my own opinion or facts.



emotional attachment to her prevents him from seeking others' company, that request effectively precludes him from playing the penetrative role in intercourse. Phaedria's love for Thais already cost him his reason, self-control, and control over others, and now it stops him from playing the active role in intercourse.

Although his lack of self-control leaves Phaedria no choice but to consent to Thais' wishes, his first reaction to hearing the details of her elaborate ruse is to snap bitterly at her, to which Parmeno applauds: "Well done, master, good for you! At last she's provoked (*perdoluit*) you. You're a man! (*vir es*)" (154).<sup>280</sup> The word *perdoluit* that Parmeno uses to describe Phaedria's reaction is a combination of the prefix *per-*, which indicates "thoroughness or completion" and the verb *doleo*, which not only indicates general pain but also is the specific verb regularly used to describe the pangs of giving birth and the grief of mourners.<sup>281</sup> When Thais informs Phaedria that she summoned him not to have sex but to explain why they cannot have sex for some time, Phaedria loses the potential to perform the fundamental tenet of Roman masculinity—penetration—and at this exact moment Parmeno calls our attention back to Phaedria's emotions by classifying his reaction as thoroughly and completely feminine and excessive.

In the ensuing dialogue between Phaedria and Thais, Phaedria shows not only that emotions govern his own mind, but also that he is unable to perceive others' minds as driven by anything but emotions. Parmeno hinted at this when he described the effects of Thais' "one false little tear" on Phaedria, but now Phaedria himself confirms that he really is only able to process information through an emotional lens. He accuses Thais of

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<sup>280</sup> trans. Barsby

concocting the entire story of Pamphila in order to drive Phaedria away, since she secretly loves the soldier Thraso more than him: “I am shut out (*excludor*) and he is invited in. What am I to think except that you love (*amas*) him more than me and you fear (*times*) lest that woman who has been brought to him [Pamphila] steal him from you” (158-161). Phaedria is unable to process Thais’ detailed and rational explanation of her plan. Instead, he interprets everything through emotions, in this case love and fear. Thais is baffled by Phaedria’s understanding of the story she just told him and asks confusedly: “I am afraid of that?” (*ego id timeo*, 162). Notably, again in this passage Phaedria puts himself in the passive voice when discussing his interactions with Phaedria—“I am shut out (*excludor*)”—reiterating her control over him. Once again, Phaedria’s emotions cause him to think of himself in the passive voice. The failure to think like a logical, Roman man erodes all other aspects of Phaedria’s masculinity.

After some back and forth with Thais, Phaedria consents to leave town for two days and states, “I will go to the countryside. There I *macerabo* for two days” (187). The verb *macerare* can signify “waste away” or “fret,” but its fundamental meaning is “make soft.” When Phaedria relents to Thais’ plan, which entails him abstaining from sex, he expresses his willingness to go along with Thais’ plan by saying that he “will go to the country and be soft for two days.” While the sexual subtext needs no elaboration, another aspect of this line is worth noting. *Macerare* often refers to physical objects, including the human body. Phaedria’s words symbolically indicate a decline in his *durus* masculine body, during his trip to the countryside. Phaedria’s inability to control his emotions had already stripped him of self-control, control over Parmeno and Thais, and the potential to

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<sup>281</sup> OLD v. *doleo* e.g. Catullus 34.14 *Lucina dolentibus Iuno dicta puerperis*.

penetrate. Now it is costing him his masculine bodily features. The initial failure to think logically has stripped Phaedria of every aspect of his masculinity.

At this point Thais goes off stage, and Phaedria demonstrates an awareness of his complete inability to uphold the standards of Roman masculinity, as he proceeds to lament: “By Hercules! I must banish this softness of mind (*mollities animi*). I surrender myself too easily” (222).<sup>282</sup> Phaedria’s use of *mollities* to describe his mind is striking, as *mollities* is as quintessentially feminine as the term *virtus* is masculine. In *Roman Homosexuality*, Craig Williams provides a list of words that one could employ to question a man’s masculinity. He concludes this list by saying, “But above all, to call a man *mollis* (soft) or to associate him with *mollitia* (softness) was a handy way of making the point that he was not fully masculine.”<sup>283</sup> Furthermore, Phaedria does not use the term to describe himself in a general sense, but he locates this *mollities* specifically in his *animus*—the rational part of his soul. He then proceeds to blame this *mollities animi* for his tendency to surrender himself too easily. In a moment of unusual clarity, Phaedria himself recognizes that his “soft thinking” is the cause of his loss of control. After Phaedria laments his softness, Parmeno reiterates his master’s point, by comparing Phaedria now to Phaedria before he fell in love with Thais: “No one was less silly, no one more austere, no one more self-controlled” than Phaedria, before he fell in love (226-227).<sup>284</sup> Parmeno’s description of the effects of love on Phaedria’s masculinity correspond to the most common signs of mental *mollitia*—irrationality and a tendency for

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<sup>282</sup> *eicienda hercle haec est mollities animi. nimis me indulgeo.*

<sup>283</sup> Williams (1999) 128.

<sup>284</sup> *hoc nemo fuit / minus ineptus, magis severus quisquam nec magis continens*

melodrama.<sup>285</sup>

Phaedria allows his emotions to override his reason, and consequently fails in every other aspect of Roman masculinity. One might object that this is a familiar trope of the Roman elegaic tradition, and therefore not indicative of the symbolic effects of the eunuch in the *Eunuchus*. The Roman elegaic tradition, however, had not developed at this time, and in fact, Sander Goldberg argues that the major themes of Roman elegy stem from Terence himself.<sup>286</sup> Goldberg explains that Terence “repudiates the standards of conduct that made Plautine comedy so funny” and that this repudiation of Plautus’ comic style imbues Terence’s plays with a certain seriousness.<sup>287</sup> Consequently, Terence’s heirs were not comics but later Roman poets such as the elegaists. Another potential objection is that Phaedria’s failure to perform Roman masculinity is unrelated to the eunuch Dorus. We saw above, however, that the end of the prologue explains that the entire *Eunuchus* is a demonstration of how eunuchs work. Furthermore, one early commentator argues that all of the characters are affected by the presence of one character—a *false* eunuch. I am simply adjusting the importance that Pseudo-Servius attributes to the false eunuch to the real one. Finally, Phaedria is the one responsible for introducing Dorus to the play. He explains that he bought Dorus the day before the events of the play, as a gift for Thais (162-171). If, as I maintain, simply interacting with a eunuch leads to a dissociation from one’s masculine identity, then it is precisely Phaedria who should demonstrate this at the play’s opening, since his association with Dorus is part of the play’s *Vorgeschichte*.

Phaedria fails to perform Roman masculinity because he is too love-struck to

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<sup>285</sup> see pg. 5 above and Kuefler (2001) 21.

<sup>286</sup> Goldberg (1986) Ch. 8 “The Death of Comedy.”

<sup>287</sup> Goldberg (1986) 214.

think; consequently, he fails every major tenet of Roman masculinity. While every scene in which Phaedria appears could be marshaled as evidence of his failure to live up to Roman masculinity, I believe the above should suffice. Phaedria is but one part of a triangle, whose other two points are the soldier Thraso and Chaerea (Phaedria's brother), and it is Thraso to whom I now turn. Thraso fails Roman masculinity in a manner opposite to Phaedria. Phaedria consistently fails to display any aspect of Roman masculinity, whereas Thraso is overly obsessed with doing so. To everyone except Thraso, however, his *mollities* is evident. He represents the failures of hypermasculinity, a term used for Roman men who strive too hard to show their *virtus* and thereby reveal its true absence.<sup>288</sup> His constant attempts to prove his masculinity lead to Thraso's dissociation from it, and thus he demonstrates a second example of how one can become dissociated from one's masculine identity.

Thraso is Terence's lone *miles gloriosus*, and it is not a coincidence that a stock character whose "predominant trait is boastfulness, usually of his military exploits but sometimes of his ability to charm the opposite sex" appears in a play whose major focus is Roman masculinity, as the *miles gloriosus* is perfectly designed for the demonstration of hypermasculinity.<sup>289</sup> Thraso does not conform precisely to the stock character's usual behavior, however, and the differences emphasize his failure to perform Roman masculinity.<sup>290</sup>

In his first scene, Thraso tries to prove that he is a *bona fide* military man who

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<sup>288</sup> Gleason (1995) 74-81.

<sup>289</sup> Duckworth (1952) 264.

<sup>290</sup> That Thraso is an imperfect *miles gloriosus* is widely recognized. In his apt summation of Thraso, Duckworth (1952) writes, "Thraso lacks the vigour and forcefulness of the usual *miles*" (265).

once led an entire army. This attempt goes astray, however, and instead there are several oblique references to his being penetrated by a king. Thraso comes on stage accompanied by his parasite Gnatho, and during their dialogue Thraso boasts that during his tenure working for an unnamed king, the king entrusted him with the entire army (*credere omnem exercitum*, 402). His attempt to flaunt his military accomplishments quickly detours, however, as he soon begins talking about his relationship with the king, rather than the army's accomplishments. This detour begins when Thraso is talking about the king, and Gnatho makes a joke hinting at the sexual nature of their relationship. The joke runs:

Thraso: *habes*.  
 Gnatho: *rex te ergo in oculis—*  
 Thraso: *scilicet*  
 Gnatho: *gestare*

Cynthia Dessan's translation is not literal but conveys a similar effect in English rather well, although it does not include Thraso's initial *habes*:

Gnatho: Then the king held you—?  
 Thraso: Of course.  
 Gnatho: —very dear?  
 401-402

Thraso's interruption (*scilicet*) allows Gnatho's first five words to linger without a verb, and *ergo* suggests that no verb is forthcoming but should be supplied by the previous line. In this case, with *habere*. Now *Habere in oculis* was a regular means of expressing desire for a person, whereas *gestare in oculis* simply meant to hold one in high regard. By interrupting with an affirmative, Thraso effectively brags that he and the king had a sexual relationship.<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, since *rex* is nominative and *te* accusative, the line

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<sup>291</sup> Dessan (1995) 131; Barsby (2001) 359.

hints that Thraso was not the one penetrating in the relationship.

Thraso continues to discuss his relationship with the king, and another such joke occurs, this one building on Thraso's tendency to use historical infinitives.

Thraso: *tum sicubi eum satietas  
hominum aut negoti si quando odium ceperat,  
requiescere ubi volebat quasi—nostin?*  
403-405

Gnatho acknowledges that he does in fact know, and Thraso continues:

Thraso: *tum me convivam solum abducebat.*  
407

If one were to treat *requiescere* as a historical infinitive, then it would be followed by a full stop. According to this reading, Thraso's initial lines would read: "Then whenever he was tired of people or whenever ill-will seized him, he rested. When he wanted something else, a kind of—you know?" and the punch-line: "that's when he took me off alone as his private guest." Heightening the ambience is that in addition to "lead away," *abduco* can also mean "seduce." Whereas Phaedria is precluded from making any attempt to show his masculinity because his emotions dictate his actions, Thraso opens immediately with references to his military stature. As he tries to establish his *virtus*, however, the play strongly hints that his actual job for the king was not directly related to war.

Slightly later in this dialogue with his parasite Gnatho, Thraso provides two examples of his intelligence. The first is an insult directed at the man in charge of the army's elephant contingent:

Are you so fierce because you have power over beasts?  
*eon es ferox quia habes imperium in beluas?*  
415

The second is directed to a Rhodian man at a dinner party who flirts with Thraso's date:

Being a hare yourself, do you hunt game?

*lepus tute's: pulpamentum quaeris.*

425

In these insults, Thraso attempts to demonstrate his intelligence, another trait of Roman masculinity. In both instances, however, what he actually says undermines his claim.

Above, I discussed the expectation that Roman men exercise authority over others, but omitted the technical Roman term used to indicate such control: *imperium*.<sup>292</sup> This is the exact term that Thraso now employs to "insult" the elephant master for possessing. If the elephant master were accused of lacking *imperium* over beasts, then his *virtus* would be at question. Thraso's attempt to use the possession of *imperium* as an insult, however, reveals his own fundamental misunderstanding of Roman masculinity. The attempt to demonstrate his masculinity by proving how smart he is backfires on Thraso.

The second insult, directed at the Rhodian man picks up the questions concerning Thraso's sexuality that arose during his talk about the king. Thraso calls the Rhodian a hare (*lepus*) to show that Thraso thinks of the Rhodian as game in the same way that the Rhodian thinks of Thraso's date. In other words, Thraso reveals that he considers the Rhodian a potential sexual partner. Given the tone of the joke, it is unlikely that Thraso would play the passive role in this encounter, but it gets to another tenet of Roman masculinity—penetrating *the proper partners*. There is no indication that the Rhodian is a slave, and the facts that he is a guest at a dinner party who flirts with Thraso's date suggest that he is not. Furthermore, Gnatho adds some asides that make sure the audience knows that Thraso's hare joke is an old cliché, despite Thraso's claims of originality

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<sup>292</sup> Williams (1999) 128-130.



(426-429). Just like when he tried to establish his military credentials and did nothing more than show he played the passive role with the king, so too do Thraso's attempts to establish his intellectual prowess undermine his claims to Roman masculinity. All he manages to display with these witty insults is his own stupidity and failure to seek the right partners for intercourse.

Thraso's attempts at proving his manliness thus far have done nothing but reveal failures to live up to the standards of Roman masculinity. An investigation into the character of Gnatho reveals that any semblance of *imperium* that Thraso might seem to exercise of Gnatho is also an illusion. Before Thraso comes on stage, Gnatho delivers a monologue in which he claims to be the inventor of a new type of parasitism. He describes his philosophy as:

There is a type of men who want to be the best at everything  
but are not. I follow them; I do not try to make them laugh at me,  
but instead I laugh at them while praising their intellect.  
I praise whatever they say. If they take back that praise, so do I.  
They deny something, so do I. They say it, then I say it. In short, I  
order myself to agree to everything. Nowadays, this is by far the  
most profit.  
248-253

In light of Gnatho's extended monologue, one must reconsider his constant acquiescence to Thraso. Gnatho has "ordered himself to agree to everything" (*imperavi egomet mihi omnia assentari*). Now Gnatho is not the only comedic parasite whose dependence on another character is a sham, which raises the question of why Terence describes Gnatho's style in such great detail.<sup>293</sup> The answer to this question becomes quite clear when one considers that the fundamental issue at the heart of *Eunuchus* is Roman masculinity and that exercising *imperium* over others is an essential part of this. Gnatho makes it clear for

the audience that any authority that Thraso might seem to have over him does not actually exist. Consequently whenever Thraso orders Gnatho to do something, which is a way of asserting his masculinity by demonstrating control over others, the audience knows full well that Gnatho is actually the one controlling Thraso. Whenever Thraso attempts to demonstrate his masculinity, he does nothing more than further erode any claims he might have to it.

This pattern climaxes late in the play when Thraso besieges Thais' house with a motley assortment that he refers to as his army. Thais has taken Pamphila—the freeborn woman who had been forced into servitude—from Thraso and returned home, prompting Thraso's "attack." The date of the play (161 BC) is relevant here, as Rome had not yet entered the phase of its history when armies crossed the *pomerium* on a rather regular basis. In other words, Thraso here is not a comedic form of Caesar or other sort of political commentary. War was a distinctly male arena, and Thraso here is boldly thrusting his masculinity into a domestic setting in order to assert his control of both Thais and Pamphila. This scene is his most audacious attempt to flaunt his masculinity. Instead of proving his masculinity, however, Thais talks Thraso out of his attempt, leaving him at a loss. No longer able to think for himself, he turns to Gnatho and asks, "What do we do now?" (811).<sup>294</sup> From this point, Thraso progressively cedes control of himself to others. For example, he "hands himself over to Thais so that he can do whatever she asks" (1026). Even at this stage, though, he still tries to paint his actions in the manliest way possible, as he compares his willing subjugation to Thais to Hercules'

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<sup>293</sup> Duckworth (1952) 267.

<sup>294</sup> *quid nunc eamus?*

subjugation to Omphale (1027).<sup>295</sup>

Over the course of the play, Phaedria and Thraso fail to meet every major standard of Roman masculinity. In both cases, these failures stem from one major flaw: for Phaedria, the failure to think and for Thraso, hypermasculinity. Let us now consider the play's ending, at which both are present. Chaerea—Phaedria's brother—has won Thais' goodwill towards their entire family. Consequently, Phaedria's prospects with Thais are significantly better than Thraso's. That is until Gnatho intercedes on Thraso's behalf, with a proposition. Gnatho explains that Phaedria will not hold onto Thais' favor for long, as he cannot afford the necessary luxuries, while Thraso, on the other hand, can. Gnatho proposes that Phaedria allows Thraso to share Thais with him (1073-1081). As a brokerage fee, Gnatho will get whatever he wants from everyone, forever. As usual, Phaedria does not know what to do and turns to his brother for advice: "What do we do?" (1081). Chaerea says that Gnatho's plan actually makes a fair amount of sense, and therefore Phaedria agrees to it. In this final scene, we see the result of Phaedria and Thraso's failed masculinities. Thais' two competing lovers at the play's beginning remain so at its completion.

Phaedria and Thraso's agreement to share Thais troubles many scholars.<sup>296</sup> One of the ending's (ostensible) problems is that it disagrees with characters' development, up to this point in the play.<sup>297</sup> As Sharon James explains, comic *adulescens*, such as Phaedria, typically develop their masculinity during the course of a play, progressing from

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<sup>295</sup> *ut Thaidi me dedam et faciam quod iubeat... qui minus quam Hercules servivit Omphalae.*

<sup>296</sup> Goldberg (1986) 116 "Everyone seems uncomfortable with it." Manuwald (2006) 424: "Scholars have described the ending as unsatisfactory, surprising, and in disagreement with the plot and the portrayal of the characters up to this point."

<sup>297</sup> Manuwald (2006).

“spineless and passive, to sexually impulsive but not fully integrated into adult[hood]... to fully assured of his sexual rights” and masculinity.<sup>298</sup> Since Phaedria is an *adulescens*, there is an assumption that his masculinity will evolve over the course of the play. Similarly, it is atypical for a *miles gloriosus*, such as Thraso, to willingly cede his claim to sexual supremacy.<sup>299</sup> The very existence of these patterns is significant, as it establishes that Roman comedy incorporated issues of masculinity regularly.<sup>300</sup> Indeed, the genre dealt with this theme so often and in such a uniform manner that even modern audiences have expectations about what characters should be like at a play’s conclusion. What is unique about *Eunuchus*, however, is that it deviates from these usual patterns—characters’ masculinity devolves, instead of develops—thereby upsetting expectations and causing discomfort. Significantly though, this does not in any way disagree with the rest of the play’s characterization of Phaedria and Thraso. As I have shown above, both characters’ masculinity steadily collapses over the course of the play, and the ending is simply the culmination of that process. It is no coincidence that this deviation from the established pattern of masculine development occurs in a play titled *Eunuchus*.

Let us turn now to Chaerea—Phaedria’s brother—who at first fails to perform Roman masculinity as badly as Phaedria and Thraso but makes a stunning reversal after he performs the primary protocol of Roman masculinity—penetration. Chaerea runs onto the stage and bumps into Parmeno, who asks why he is in such a hurry. Chaerea explains that he is pursuing a beautiful woman but has lost track of her. Parmeno realizes that the woman whom Chaerea was pursuing is none other than Pamphila, who is now at Thais’

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<sup>298</sup> James (2013) 183.

<sup>299</sup> Manuwald (2006) 429.

<sup>300</sup> James (2013).

house. Parmeno himself is currently escorting Dorus the eunuch to Thais' house, as a gift from Phaedria. Parmeno jokingly says that if Chaerea and Dorus were to switch clothes, then he could give Chaerea—disguised as a eunuch—to Thais, instead of Dorus.

Parmeno explains to Chaerea that this plan could work since “you could easily pass as a eunuch, on account of your beauty and age” (*praeterea et aetas ipsast facile ut pro eunucho probes*, 375). Chaerea's natural features, in other words, are more similar to those of a eunuch than an uncastrated man. This is not the only reference to Chaerea's lack of masculine bodily characteristics, and it is this initial failure of Roman masculine standards that leads to Chaerea's subsequent failures, as it enables him to pretend to be a eunuch slave. Significantly, unlike Phaedria and Thraso, Chaerea makes an active decision to dissociate himself from his masculine identity. Whereas those two characters' initial failures inevitably led to more, Chaerea chooses to use his beauty to his own advantage. Parmeno's initial reference to Chaerea's soft features in this scene is the first of several. For example, when Parmeno presents Chaerea—now wearing Dorus' clothes—to Thais, he once again praises Chaerea's beauty (472-473). Thais concurs, as does Thraso who exclaims, *ego illum eunuchum, si opus sit, vel sobrius* (479). Furthermore, when Chaerea orders Parmeno to give him Dorus' clothes as a disguise, he says, *orna me!* (377). As Chaerea is demanding the items necessary for his ruse, *orna* here most basically means something akin to “provide [me] with the necessary equipment.”<sup>301</sup> At the same time, the verb can also signify “ornament,” “decorate,” or “embellish,” allowing the another reading of the line closer to “Make me pretty!” Before he fails the other tenets of Roman masculinity, Chaerea embellishes his already excessive

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<sup>301</sup> *OLD* v. *orno*

beauty.

In this plotting scene with Parmeno, Chaerea is in control of himself and Parmeno. Although the disguise idea was initially Parmeno's, the slave explains that he was only joking and tries to talk Chaerea out of it. After unsuccessfully trying to convince Parmeno that the idea is in fact a good one, Chaerea resorts to simply ordering him to help with the ruse.<sup>302</sup> After Chaerea disguises himself as a eunuch slave, however, he loses control over both himself and others. He describes being presented to Thais as *traditus sum mulieri... laeta vero ad se abducit domum* (576). The word *traditus* picks up the military imagery that we saw with Phaedria, as it signifies not only "to hand over" but also "to surrender." *Abducit* is also relevant, as its usual direct object in this play is slaves.<sup>303</sup> Inside Thais' house, Chaerea displays a subservient attitude. Thais orders him twice in one line (*edicit... imperat*, 579), and he accepts these orders while "modestly looking at the ground" (580). Later, Thais' female servants order Chaerea about (594-596). Chaerea's effeminate beauty allows him to disguise himself as a eunuch slave, and he subsequently loses control over himself and others. Although he should have *imperium* over Thais the courtesan and her slaves, the situation is reversed. Chaerea's initial masculine failing has now led to two others.

Chaerea also demonstrates hypermasculinity, fails to employ reason, and penetrates an unacceptable partner, while he is disguised as a eunuch slave. Before elaborating on how so, let us turn back to his initial motivation for donning the eunuch costume. When Chaerea learns that the eunuch Dorus is intended as a gift for Thais and therefore will live in the same house as Pamphila, he exclaims "What a lucky eunuch"

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<sup>302</sup> *cogo atque impero*, 389.

and lists all of the things that Dorus will get to do with Pamphila: “He will see her, talk with her, be in the same house as she, eat with her, and sleep near her” (367-368).<sup>304</sup>

Once Chaerea is in Thais’ house, however, what he actually does is rape Pamphila. This idea comes to him when he sees a painting depicting the myth of Jupiter visiting Danae as a shower of gold. Chaerea describes the painting and his reaction to it:

This painting was there which depicted Jupiter as golden rain in Danae’s lap. And because that god had once played a similar trick, my mind began to rejoice even more. A god had turned himself into a man and secretly come into another’s house through the skylight to trick a woman. And what a god he is who shakes the mightiest temples of the sky with thunder! Should not I, a little man, do the same? Well I did just what he did, and happily.

...ibi inerat pictura haec Iovem  
quo pacto Danae misisse aiunt quondam in gremium imbrem  
aureum.  
egomet quoque id spectare coepi: et quia consimilem luserat  
iam olim ille ludum, impendio magis animus gaudebat mihi.  
deum sese in hominem convortisse atque in alienas tegulas  
venisse clanculum per impulvium fucum factum mulieri.  
at quem deum, qui templa caeli summa sonitu concutit!  
ego homuncio hoc non facerem? ego illud vero ita feci ac lubens.  
584-591

Chaerea’s rape of Pamphila is the only rape that occurs during a Roman comedy.

Although rapes impact other plays’ plots, those occur before the plays’ action begins.

Although the rape is an instance of Chaerea performing the primary masculine protocol of penetration, that this is the only such rape suggests that Chaerea’s assertion of his masculinity is inappropriate or excessive, for this venue.<sup>305</sup> Additionally, Chaerea’s description of events reveal that he is uncertain of his masculinity. During this speech, he

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<sup>303</sup> c.f. 145, 157, 172, 350, 395 (*deducam*), 407, 581.

<sup>304</sup> "sleep near her" is *propter dormiet* (368). The use of *propter* here precludes any sexual aspect that *dormiet* might otherwise convey.

<sup>305</sup> For more on how Chaerea's rape differs from others v. James (1998) 37-41.

abstains from assigning himself the label of *vir*, opting instead for *homuncio*, meaning “little man” or “manikin.” And in a slightly later line, Chaerea explains that he had to rape Pamphila or else “I would have actually been what I was pretending to be (i.e., a eunuch)” (606). We saw, however, that Chaerea lists several things that he wants to do with Pamphila in his initial plan, but he does not include sex on his list. Chaerea is unsure of his own masculinity and enters Thais’s house with no plans to penetrate Pamphila, but when he sees the painting, he is reminded of what men are supposed to do.<sup>306</sup> He deviates from his natural inclinations and chooses instead to act as a man should, in an attempt to prove his masculinity. Taken together, the evidence—the uniqueness of this particular rape; the doubts that Chaerea expresses about his own masculinity; and his implicit acknowledgment that he rapes Pamphila because the painting reminds him of masculine standards of behavior—reveals that Chaerea is not that different from Thraso. He overly asserts his masculinity (even going so far as to put it on stage!) while simultaneously revealing underlying insecurities about it.

Chaerea’s speech about the painting also demonstrates his inability to think logically. On a basic level, he forgets that gods and men are not subject to the same rules. For example, Danae was a princess, and therefore not the kind of woman with whom a mortal man could have unmarried sex, without facing serious consequences.<sup>307</sup> Similarly, after he describes Jupiter’s ruse, Chaerea spends an entire line talking about the god’s omnipotence and then emphasizes his own lowly status as an *homuncio*, in the very next line. This juxtaposition demonstrates precisely why Chaerea should not feel entitled to do what Jupiter does. Nevertheless, he fails to make this logical connection. Chaerea’s

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<sup>306</sup> *contra* James (2013) 187 who describes the rape as “premeditated,” but does not elaborate.



inability to think in this scene is also supported by the fact that his description of the myth contradicts itself. He first says that the painting shows Jupiter as a shower of gold (*imbrem aureum*), but then later says that Jupiter changed himself into a person (*deum sese in hominem convortisse*). In his magisterial commentary, Wilhelm Wagner says that this contradiction has troubled Terentian scholars as far back as Donatus and only tentatively offers his own position.<sup>308</sup> As I see it, one should not try to reconcile the two lines in search of meaning but understand them as a purposeful indication of Chaerea's failure to think straight.

Although he is ignorant of the facts, Chaerea also penetrates an unacceptable partner, when he rapes Pamphila. Were she actually a slave, he would have some defense, but even then he would be on shaky ground since she is not his slave.<sup>309</sup> As it turns out, however, Pamphila is a freeborn citizen, and Thais has summoned her brother Chremes to identify her as such. Thais' goal in all of this is to win the favor of Pamphila and Chremes' family, thereby increasing her own social standing. Upon learning that "Dorus" raped Pamphila, Thais fears that Chremes will assume that Thais forced her into prostitution, and her plan will backfire. Upon discovering that it was Chaerea who raped Pamphila, Thais confronts him. Now, this is where things take a remarkable turn. Since donning the eunuch costume, Chaerea has failed to uphold every tenet of Roman masculinity, but one. He further decorated his already unmanly body, penetrated an unacceptable partner, lost control of himself, failed to control others, failed to employ reason, and displayed hypermasculinity. The one thing he did do, however, was rape

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<sup>307</sup> Apollodorus 2.4.1, Hyginus 63.1.1.

<sup>308</sup> Wagner (1883) 330-331. Brothers (2000) 187: "In the myth, Jupiter took the form of the shower of gold, but did not come himself in human shape."

Pamphila, that is to say he penetrated. By performing the one fundamental masculine protocol, Chaerea suddenly regains the rest of his masculinity.

When Thais confronts Chaerea about the rape, her slave Pythias accompanies her. Pythias suggests that since Chaerea claimed to be Thais' slave, they can do him physical harm without fear of repercussions (861-863). Thais, however, quiets Pythias and explains to Chaerea that he has interrupted her plans (864-871). Her speech to Chaerea contains no orders or commands, but rather details the impact that his rape has had on her. Chaerea responds, "Well I hope there will be an eternal sense of gratitude between us, Thais. Often a great friendship grows out of something like this, despite a bad beginning" (873-874). Thais concurs that they should form a friendship. Now throughout the play, Thais has consistently ordered around the men she encounters, specifically Phaedria and Thraso, but she makes no attempt here to order Chaerea and accepts his suggestion that they not dwell on his raping her best friend, despite expressing significant outrage when she first hears what has happened to Pamphila (817-821). Chaerea proceeds to explain that Thais should convince Chremes and Pamphila that the best course of action is for Chaerea and Pamphila to get married (878-897). Chaerea suggests that the three of them—Chaerea, Thais, and Pythias—retire to Thais' house, while they wait for Chremes. Although Pythias has strong reservations given what happened last time Chaerea was in the house, Thais ignores her and consents to Chaerea's plan (897-909). These interactions between the three show that since the rape, Chaerea has reclaimed his control over himself and his control over others. Furthermore, all parties involved agree that he should marry Pamphila, showing that his reasoning skills are recovered enough to

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<sup>309</sup> Williams (1999) Ch. 2.

seem sensible to others and that he will soon be able to penetrate the proper kind of partner—a wife. Although he had been dissociated from his masculine identity, he is able to reclaim it.

At the end of his prologue, Terence asks his audience to pay attention so that they can learn “how the eunuch works.” Then Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea—the *Eunuchus*’ three major freeborn male characters—are all progressively dissociated from their masculine identity. Phaedria and Chaerea are the two characters most connected to Dorus the eunuch, as Phaedria brings him into the realm of the play and Chaerea impersonates him. Thraso never meets Dorus himself but encounters Chaerea disguised as Dorus, which is fitting since the idea of “disguise” is especially relevant to Thraso’s masculine failings. The eunuch Dorus hardly occupies the stage, but his influence pervades the play. As a eunuch slave, he is biologically unable to penetrate and socially in a subservient position—a natural and inevitable failure in the game of Roman masculinity. Likewise, Phaedria and Thraso’s masculine failings prevent them from penetrating Thais or anyone else and render them subservient. Their total failure to perform Roman masculinity leaves them in the same state as the eunuch. During his scenes disguised as a eunuch, Chaerea is an extreme embodiment of this symbolic transformation to “eunuch-hood.” Returning now to Pseudo-Servius’ claim that all of the characters are somehow related to Chaerea, we can see that this is clearly not so. Chaerea is simply a manifestation of the overarching importance of Dorus, the *verus eunuchus*. Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea all become *falsi eunuchi* and demonstrate the dissociative effects that eunuchs have on characters’ masculinity in Roman literature, and the full significance of Chaerea’s transformation can only be appreciated when it is juxtaposed to those of Phaedria and

Thraso.

Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea's each lose their masculinity in a different way: Phaedria loses his mind; Thraso over-asserts his masculinity; and Chaerea voluntarily dons the role of eunuch. A comparison of these three modes of masculine failure and their results shows how Terence's play challenges the traditional view that Roman men must always adhere to the standards of Roman masculinity. On the contrary, the play suggests that willingly ceding one's masculinity for a short time is, ironically, sometimes the best way to ensure that one does not lose it unwillingly and permanently. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the highly performative nature of Roman masculinity and the importance of perception. In order to avoid any blemishes on his *virtus*, a Roman man had to exercise constant control over every aspect of his body. Scratching one's head with the inappropriate number of fingers or sneezing in the wrong way was grounds for accusations of *mollities*.<sup>310</sup> Appearing to try too hard to meet these standards, however, could also lead to such accusations. Walking this tight rope was undoubtedly exhausting and tedious, at times. Furthermore, the game of Roman masculinity was always sudden death. As Craig Williams puts it, "If a man breaks just one rule, he loses the game; in the balancing act of masculinity, one stumble can ruin the entire performance."<sup>311</sup> This is precisely what happens to Phaedria and Thraso. They play the game of Roman masculinity, make one initial involuntary slip, and never recover. Once they are dissociated from their masculinity, they cannot reclaim it. Chaerea, on the other hand, shows that there is another option. Unlike Phaedria and Thraso who unwillingly lose their masculinity, Chaerea actively chooses to cede his. He takes

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<sup>310</sup> Gleason (1995) 74-78.

advantage of his lack of masculine body features to temporarily become Chaerea *eunuchus*. He is willing to symbolically castrate himself in order to get what he wants, and he succeeds. This poses the question of whether it is better to attempt masculinity and fail or ignore the game altogether and win. All three characters are reduced to the same level as Dorus, but only Chaerea—who consciously *chooses* to ignore the rules of Roman masculinity—is reduced to this status temporarily, achieves his goal, and reclaims his *virtus*.

The driving theme of the *Eunuchus* is Phaedria, Thraso, and Chaerea's failures to correctly perform Roman masculinity. This focus on masculine failures by the major male characters in a play entitled *Eunuchus* indicates the dissociative effects that eunuchs have on characters' gender, in Roman literature. Although Roman comedy often focused on masculinity, the *Eunuchus*' treatment of this theme runs counter to expectations. Through the juxtaposition of Chaerea, Phaedria, and Thraso, Terence suggests that it is better to dissociate oneself from one's gender than to be dissociated by external forces. Both options render a man no better off than a eunuch, but the former option leaves open the potential to recover one's *virtus*. This understanding of the play also helps us understand its unprecedented popularity, as it effectively tells the audience that there is no lasting harm in ignoring the rigid conventions of Roman masculinity now and then. On the contrary, doing so might even be beneficial, as it is for Chaerea.

### **Catullus 63**

Catullus 63 also demonstrates that eunuchs in Roman literature have a dissociative effect on masculine identity. In this instance, unlike in Terence's *Eunuchus*, this dissociation

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<sup>311</sup> Williams (1999) 142.

affects the eunuch himself and not the characters around him. Remarkably Attis—the poem’s main character—loses his masculinity twice: first, willingly and later, unwillingly. This double loss shows that Catullus’ Attis is in dialogue with Terence’s Chaerea. In the *Eunuchus*, Terence’s depiction of Chaerea suggests that one can regain virility voluntarily ceded and that doing so might prove beneficial. In his Attis poem, Catullus strikes back against that idea, by showing Attis first ceding his masculinity and then having Cybele interfere when he tries to regain any semblance of it.

Catullus’ poem begins with a certain Attis landing in Phrygia—home of the goddess Cybele—and castrating himself (1-7). In these opening lines, Catullus describes Attis with phrases such as “driven on by raging madness” (*stimulatus furenti rabie*) and “unsettled of mind” (*vagus animi*), thereby demonstrating Attis’ inability to think rationally (4-5). In this irrational condition, Attis “himself cut off his ‘weights’ with a sharp rock and *her* remaining parts sense themselves lacking manhood” (*devolsit ipse acuto sibi pondera silice / itaque ut relictas sensit sibi membra sine viro*, 6-7). Once Attis is castrated and therefore severed from the potential to penetrate—the quintessential tenet of masculinity in the Roman mind—Catullus switches from masculine to feminine endings, when describing Attis. There are indications, however, that Attis’ masculinity was already in question, before the castration. His raging madness and unsettled mind in the previous lines indicate his pre-existing inability to think logically (as a *vir Romanus* should), and the very verb used to describe the castration—*devolsit*—is also regularly used to describe the unmasculine habit of depilation. Additionally, Catullus reveals Attis’ lack of self-control when he describes the self-castration as prompted by madness (4). Shortly later the reader gets more background information that corroborates the notion

that Attis' masculinity was on the wane long before his castration.

Although Attis alone is mentioned in the poem's opening sequence, we soon discover that he is part of a group of eunuchs, as he begins to address his companions (*comitibus*, 11). During his speech, Attis explains that both he and these companions castrated themselves because of their "strong hatred of Venus" (*Veneris nimio odio*, 17), a phrase that suggests a refusal to play the active role in intercourse.<sup>312</sup> Chronologically, this initial refusal to perform the primary masculine protocol occurs before the events of the poem itself. The narrative jumps from Attis' initial *Veneris nimio odio* to Attis castrating himself while *stimulatus furenti rabie*. Thus, the failure to either think logically or control himself appear as natural progressions of Attis' initial refusal to penetrate.<sup>313</sup>

After Attis addresses his companions, they march deep into Cybele's woods and Attis falls asleep (25-37). Upon awakening, Attis has regained some aspects of his masculine identity that he lacked the night before, such as the ability to think logically. He has a clear mind (*liquidaque mente*), realizes where he is (*ubique*), and what has happened (*foret*) (45-47). He returns to the seaside with a "burning mind" (*animo aestuante*), and the participle here is of especial importance since, biologically, men were

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<sup>312</sup> *Contra* Janan (1994) 107 who concludes: "C. 63, because it operates in the realm of mythology, can combine the Lesbia of 11 with the Lesbia of 51 in one figure at one time—in Cybele. Cybele is all the terrifying things... characteristic of c. 11's Lesbia; *she is also a goddess whose maddening attractions sweeps away every familiar landmark of a young man's identity*. Cybele is jouissance féminine personified" (my emph.). Attis seeks Cybele out because she controls a realm devoid of the social expectations of attraction, and he himself lacks any sense of attraction. Harder (2005) 73 notes that Attis' behavior early in the poem is motivated by his lack of any sense of sexual attraction: "An interesting point of difference [between Attis and emotional men in Hellenistic poetry] is that in these [latter] examples the emotions are of an erotic nature, whereas Attis' suffering is in fact caused by hatred of Venus."

<sup>313</sup> There is no indication that Cybele is responsible for this initial bout of madness, *contra* Janan (1994) 31: "Attis, driven mad by Cybele, emasculates himself." As Nauta notes (2005) 95: "The reason that Catullus' Attis and his *comites* have unmanned themselves is given by Attis himself: *Veneris nimio odio*."

“hotter” than women.<sup>314</sup> Slightly later, he describes his mind as “lacking wild madness” (*rabie fera carens*, 57). Attis’ mania is gone and his mind is functioning in a more manly way than it had been the night before. Upon seeing that the sea is empty, Attis begins to cry, suggesting that he returned from the woods to the beach in hopes of re-boarding his now missing ship and sailing home (47). Later, Cybele herself corroborates that Attis is trying to re-assert self-control, during this speech (80-81).<sup>315</sup> Although his castration precludes him from penetration, Attis has regained several key parts of his masculine identity.

When Attis realizes that he has no means of leaving Phrygia (because the boat is gone), he provides a detailed description of his previous life. In her article on the poem, Carolina Kroon attributes great significance to this description and explains that it establishes the poem’s over-arching thematic dichotomy:

The poem is about the struggle between frenzy and fury on the one hand and mental sanity on the other, the former state of mind being constantly associated with swift movement and feverish haste. These two opposed states of mind are related to, and associated with, two opposed modes of existence and two corresponding types of domicile. On the one hand, there is the wild, ecstatic life in the dark, cold, and animalistic wilderness of Phrygia, a life which means enslavement to Cybele. This mode of existence contrasts with the civilized city life that Attis, as a free man of influence, led in Greece.<sup>316</sup>

Although Kroon does not make this connection, her description of the poem’s divide between two types of societies corresponds quite nicely to the paradigms of masculine and feminine, in the Roman world. Attis transitions from a “masculine” world of mental

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<sup>314</sup> Sassi (2001) 2-5, 118-121.

<sup>315</sup> *fac uti facinoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat / mea libere nimis quae fugere in imperia cupit* (80-81).

<sup>316</sup> Kroon (2005) 135. Likewise Nauta (2005) 89: “irrational abandonment and rational control is certainly an important theme”



sanity in which he is “a man of influence” in control of himself to a “feminine” and irrational world in which he is a slave. During his description of the life he has left behind, Attis also raises a series of points about his own identity and its current ambiguity that suggest the potential to return to his previous world, albeit in a diminished capacity:

Now will I be a ministress of the gods and slave of Cybele?  
Will I be a Maenad, a remnant of myself, a sterile man?  
Will I cultivate the green parts of Ida, cloaked in snow?  
Will I live life under the tall peaks of Phrygia,  
where the forest dwelling deer and wood wander boar are?

*ego nunc deum ministra et Cybeles famula ferar? ego Maenas? ego mei pars?  
ego vir sterilis ero? ego viridis algida Idae nive amicta loca colam? ego vitam  
agam sub altis Phrygiae columinibus, ubi cervix silvicultrix, ubi aper  
nemorivagus?*  
68-72

These lines show Attis poised between the two worlds that Kroon describes. One option is to live as a servant (*ministra, famula*) of Cybele, in the woods, alongside animals whose association to the wild are emphasized by the adjectives that accompany them. The other option is to accept that although he cannot be a *vir perfectus*, he could carry on as a *vir sterilis*, a *pars* of his former self, and try to introduce some aspects of his previous, more civilized world to the wild woods through agriculture (*algida... loca colam*). In other words, he can give up on his masculinity entirely and live as a wild slave or cling to the shards of masculinity he still has and try to domesticate (or masculinize) the wilderness in which he finds himself.

After opening the poem with a thoroughly effeminized Attis (1-38), Catullus changes course and attributes some masculine characteristics to him (39-74). At this point, however, Catullus again changes the trajectory of Attis’ masculinity. Cybele learns of Attis’ debate with himself, and makes sure that he stays in her effeminate domain. She

orders one of her pet lions: “Go, fierce one, make sure that madness strikes that one (Attis), make sure that, goaded by madness, she returns into my woods, into my domain which she too freely desires to leave” (78-80).<sup>317</sup> The lion charges at Attis who “without thinking (*demens*) fled into the savage woods (*in nemora fera*), where she was always, for her entire life, a slave (*famula*)” (89-90).<sup>318</sup> When Attis teeters on the precipice between the masculine world and the feminine one, Cybele asserts herself. She strips him of his briefly regained lucidity and personal sovereignty and makes him her lifelong slave, thereby ensuring Attis’ complete and perpetual dissociation from his masculine identity.

When Catullus wrote his Attis poem, Terence’s *Eunuchus* was, as far as we know, the only other example of Roman literature to prominently feature a eunuch. Therefore it is not unreasonable to consider how Catullus engages with Terence. Notably, both authors feature a character who is dissociated from their masculinity and becomes a eunuch, only to then try to reverse course: Chaerea and Attis. In Terence, Chaerea’s reversion to *vir* is successful, whereas Catullus’ Attis is not so lucky. For Chaerea the role of “eunuch” was only a temporary disguise, but for Attis the castration is real—he has, in fact, become an actual eunuch and there is no going back. Catullus shows Attis’s total lack of masculinity at the poem’s outset and then resituates that masculine identity in a liminal position during the poem’s middle, thereby raising questions about Attis’ potential to reverse course, even if the most he can hope for is life as a *vir sterilis*. By having Cybele intercede, completely re-strip Attis of his masculinity, and make him a

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<sup>317</sup> 78-80: *agedum, inquit, age ferox, i fac ut hanc furor agitet / fac uto furoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat / mea libere nimis quae fugere imperia cupit.*

<sup>318</sup> 89-90 *illa demens fugit in nemora fera; ibi semper omne vitae spatium famula fuit.*

servant (*famula*), Catullus indicates that once masculinity is willingly abandoned, there is no going back. This, of course, is a direct rebuttal of Terence's representation of Roman masculinity. In the section on Terence above, I showed that all three of the major freeborn male characters are symbolically reduced to eunuchs, and Chaerea—the only one who ceded his masculinity willingly—is able to recover his virility, whereas Phaedria and Thraso cannot. In the character of Chaerea, Terence suggests to his audience that they should not fear abandoning the severe standards of Roman masculinity, at least temporarily. In poem 63, Catullus likewise has a character willingly give up his masculinity, but once Attis takes that first step, there is no going back.

My argument that Catullus 63 demonstrates an insistence on strict adherence to the conventions of Roman masculinity is in line with David Wray's argument that "the object of Catullan poetics—his 'politics of rhythm'—consists in the performance of manly excellence."<sup>319</sup> Although some scholars argue that Catullus purposely demasculates himself at times, Wray explains how carefully Catullus goes about his masculine poetics.<sup>320</sup> On the one hand, there are Catullus' invectives bragging about penetrating whoever impugns his *virtus*, and there is little debate about the Roman masculinity of this aspect of Catullus' poetics. On the other hand, Catullus at times seems to adopt a less aggressive tone and even abandon standards of Roman masculinity. For example, the kiss poems (5 & 7), seem to show a completely smitten man in thrall to a woman, "in love and in open defiance of societal norms, including norms of masculine

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<sup>319</sup> Wray (2001) 67.

<sup>320</sup> e.g., Janan (1994) 2: "Catullus is regularly regarded as unstable in basic categories of the self—such as gender." Also, Skinner (1997).

behavior.”<sup>321</sup> Rather than read such poems as Catullus failing to perform Roman masculinity, Wray reminds us of the balancing act inherent in that performance. A constant string of aggressive invectives and threats of rape is the sort of *libellus* that one might expect from Terence’s Thraso, were he to write poetry. By juxtaposing the hypermasculine poems alongside poems of “provocatively effeminate delicacy,” Catullus balances his masculine poetics between two poles: one of Archilochean invective and aggressiveness and one of Callimachean delicacy and refinement.<sup>322</sup> The instances in which some perceive Catullus as breaking the rules of Roman masculinity are not “less” Catullan, but likewise they are neither “more” Catullan nor indicative of Catullus abandoning the standards of Roman masculinity. Catullus is the speaker of every poem in the collection and his masculinity is neither more nor less displayed in each particular poem. Rather, his claim to perform Roman masculinity arises from the balance between the two poles that is established by the entirety of the corpus.<sup>323</sup>

If, as Wray argues, Catullus establishes his masculine identity by maintaining the balance between the Archilochean and Callimachean poles *throughout his entire corpus simultaneously*, then the poems in which Catullus seems to abandon masculine ideals are simply a counter-balance to those in which he over-exerts his masculinity (e.g., poem 9). By characterizing Attis in a fashion that rebukes the Terentian position that lost masculinity can be reacquired, Catullus affirms Wray’s comprehensive view of Catullus’ masculine poetics. If masculinity once lost cannot be regained, then Catullus’ more feminine poems would preclude him from reclaiming masculinity, unless of course such

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<sup>321</sup> Wray (2001) 147.

<sup>322</sup> Wray (2001) 209.

<sup>323</sup> Wray (2001) Ch. 5. Manwell (2007) concurs with Wray’s assessment.

poems are understood as the balance to the hyper-masculine poems, and Catullus establishes his masculinity through both types of poems, simultaneously (as Wray argues).

While my argument concurs with Wray's position, it contradicts a common reading of Catullus 63 that understands the poem as symbolically autobiographic.<sup>324</sup> According to this reading, Attis is a veiled representation of Catullus, and Attis losing his masculinity and his ultimate subservience to Cybele is an allegory for Catullus' relationship with Lesbia. One of the benefits of this reading is that it conforms to the popular argument that Latin neoteric poetics were an attempt to reject the socially perceived value of traditional categories, such as masculinity.<sup>325</sup> After all, if Catullus is Attis, then the poem is a veiled allusion to the poet's rejection of his own masculinity. There are several major issues with this reading, however. First, Catullus himself is our primary source and means of defining the category of Latin neoteric poetry.<sup>326</sup> Arguing for a particular reading of Catullus based on its adherence to the parameters of Latin neoteric poetry is no more than arguing for a reading of Catullus based on its adherence to another reading of Catullus. The process is circular. Second, none of the arguments for an autobiographical reading of the poem successfully explain away the fact that Attis and

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<sup>324</sup> For an autobiographical reading see Skinner (1997) 139-146 or Janan (1994) 106, who says: "Attis' situation coincides with Catullus' own, as he constructs it in the Lesbia cycle. The figure of Attis extravagantly expands upon the icons of Catullus' suffering that dot the Lesbia cycle, but particularly upon his tortures in c. 11." Wray (2001) argues against the autobiographical approach, as does Nauta (2005) 89, who explains some of the problems: "It has often been felt that Attis is in a sense an allegory for Catullus, and Cybele for Lesbia: like Attis, Catullus was brought out of his mind by a dominant female, like him he tried to free himself from her sway, and like him without success... [but] reading poem 63 as autobiographical allegory is problematic."

<sup>325</sup> Johnson (2007) 175-190.

<sup>326</sup> Johnson (2007) 175-190.

Catullus are driven by completely opposite forces.<sup>327</sup> Attis' rejection and hatred of love drive him to unman himself and become Cybele's servant, whereas Catullus' excessive love of Lesbia gives her power over him. If one is meant to read them as parallels, then one must somehow account for their antipodal motivations. Third, the final three lines of Catullus 63 stand apart from the Attis narrative, and Catullus speaks them in his own authorial voice. They read: "Great goddess, mother Cybele, great mistress of Didyma, mistress, may your madness (*furor*) always be far from my home. Drive on others in frantic haste (*incitatos*), drive others to madness (*rabidos*)" (91-93).<sup>328</sup> The clear implication of these lines is that Catullus is not suffering from the type of madness that Attis suffers, as they express his hope that he will not suffer Attis' fate and become a raving servant to a dominant woman. If Attis were a stand-in for Catullus, as the autobiographical reading argues, then these lines should be an exhortation for this madness to depart from Catullus, not pray that he never suffer from it, in the first place.

Unlike the biographical reading of Catullus 63, Wray's approach does not need to account for Attis and Catullus' opposite motivations and has the benefit of offering a clear explanation for the poem's final lines. Namely, one can interpret them as pertaining

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<sup>327</sup> Skinner (1997) 137-139 at least recognizes this contradiction and attempts an argument against it, unlike Janan. Skinner argues that Attis castrates himself because he wants to continue playing the passive sexual role of an *eromenos* but has reached an age that precludes him from doing so. She makes this argument based on the poem's statement that Attis castrates himself due to excessive hatred of Venus (*Veneris nimio odio*, 17). Skinner interprets "Venus" (*Veneris*) as a reference to exclusively the adult, male role of penetrator. From this dubious interpretation, she is able to argue that when Attis says that he has castrated himself because of his hatred of love, he must mean his hatred of playing the penetrative role in sexual intercourse and not his hatred of the love that he received as an *eromenos*. Therefore just as Catullus is driven by his love of Lesbia, Attis is driven by his love of playing the passive role in sex, as an *eromenos*. The actual poem, however, does not narrow down the type of "Venus" that Attis loathes, in the way that Skinner's argument forces her to. Without this distinction—which is ingenious but lacks textual substantiation—her entire argument crumbles.

to Catullus' entire collection. According to Wray, Catullus asserts his masculine poetics by displaying Archilochean and Callimachean types of masculinity, in turn. If, however, the poet were struck with *furor* and ran *incitatus* and *ravidus* in either direction, then his poetics of masculinity would become either a poetics of hypermasculinity (too much Archilochus) or of femininity (too much Callimachus). Catullus' masculine identity is contingent on steadily charting a middle course and therefore requires careful treading. By showing that lost masculinity cannot be regained in his Attis poem, Catullus shows the paramount importance of never letting this balance stray too far in either direction.

My reading of Catullus 63 as a rebuke to the Terentian notion that lost masculinity can be regained corroborates Wray's position that the entire Catullan corpus works simultaneously to establish the poet's masculinity, with the more effeminate poems functioning as a balance to the hyper-masculine ones. It does so because it supports Wray's point that, even in his more effeminate poems, Catullus does not abandon his masculine identity. Were he to do so—according to the Catullan view of masculinity that I argue for in his Attis poem—then he would be unable to reclaim it. Yet Catullus regularly switches from a hyper-masculine to a sub-masculine persona throughout his corpus. His ability to readopt the former persona proves that Catullus never cedes his masculine identity, even when he might seem to. By showing that lost masculinity cannot be reacquired in his poem about Attis the eunuch, Catullus both argues against the view of Roman masculinity that Terence offers in the *Eunuchus* and guards himself against accusations of effeminacy. So long as he can revert to a masculine poetic voice, Catullus' masculinity is never lost.

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<sup>328</sup> 91-93: *dea magna, dea Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi / procul a mea tuus sit furor omnis, era,*

This reading conforms to the consensus that Latin neoteric poets challenged traditional boundaries of basic Roman categories, such as masculinity, albeit in a less extreme way than that argued for by proponents of an autobiographical interpretation of Catullus 63. Those scholars maintain that Attis—an allegory for Catullus—symbolizes Catullus’ abdication of his Roman masculinity, thereby showing his rejection of the relevance of that category. According to my argument, Catullus rejects not the validity of the category of masculinity but rather the means of achieving it. Whereas Roman masculine ideals had traditionally been achieved by navigating a golden mean between hyper-masculine and feminine, Catullus constantly switches between these two extremes. Instead of achieving masculinity by adhering to a middle path, Catullus switches between extremes, which balance each other out. He develops his own way to achieve masculinity, but implicit in his doing so is his acceptance of the category’s traditional parameters.

### Conclusions

Terence and Catullus’ works both show the dissociative impact that eunuchs have on Roman masculinity. Terence’s prologue explains that his *Eunuchus* is an extended meditation on how the eunuch works, and the play’s three major freeborn male characters all fail to live up to the standards of Roman masculinity. Chaerea, who does so by choice, ultimately redeems his claims to *virtus*, thereby suggesting that it is better to loosen one’s grip on masculinity willingly than unwillingly. In his Attis poem, Catullus likewise has a character opt out of the game of Roman masculinity voluntarily, but with vastly different results. Like Chaerea, Attis dissociates himself from his masculinity, but the effects are



permanent and he is forever emasculated. Attis' inability to return from *eunuchus* to *vir* once he has failed corroborates the scholarly view that Catullus' presentation of his own masculinity should be read as concurrently existing in all of his poems. If any single failure would lead to a complete and perpetual loss of Catullus' masculine identity, then poems in which such failures seem to occur must instead be understood as simultaneously coexisting with and balancing against his more hypermasculine invectives. Although one might object to the notion that Terence's *Eunuchus* and Catullus 63 are engaged in a dialogue about Roman masculinity, given their different genres and the chronological divide of nearly a century, the two works stand as the only extant Roman literature from the Republican era that contain more than a passing reference to eunuchs. Furthermore, Chaerea and Attis begin on similar paths—the willing adoption of the title eunuch—and both begin to recover their masculinity. Chaerea completes this recovery, but Attis cannot and suffers a total dissociation from his masculine identity. This near parallel strongly suggests that Catullus' depiction of Attis is evoking and arguing against the position that Terence stakes out with Chaerea. Despite the characters' different outcomes, for both Terence and Catullus the eunuch was clearly a useful symbol for exploring the nature of and challenges inherent in performing Roman masculinity.

## **Chapter 5: Eunuchs in Lucian and Favorinus**

Lucian and Favorinus each draws upon both the Greek and Roman traditions of how eunuchs work, and each does so in his own unique way. In his dialogue the *Eunuch* and in his ethnographic text *On the Syrian Goddess*, Lucian shows how the different Greek and Roman paradigms for how eunuchs work interact with each other. Although he varies these paradigms from their earlier forms, his mining of earlier eunuch literature is clear. My discussion of Favorinus is unique in this thesis, as I am concerned with him as a historical person and not literary depictions of him. Relying on others' descriptions of Favorinus, I argue that he consciously modeled himself on eunuchs in earlier Greek and Roman literature. Although Favorinus was not a eunuch, he suffered from Reifenstein syndrome and therefore lacked the physical features of an adult male. During his philosophical and speaking career, he relied on how eunuchs work in Greek and Roman literature to situate himself in the competitive intellectual milieu of his time.<sup>329</sup>

### **Lucian's *Eunuch***

In his dialogue the *Eunuch*, Lucian combines the Greek and Roman paradigms for how eunuchs work that we have seen in the previous chapters.<sup>330</sup> In chapter two, we saw that eunuchs' constant association with civic violence, the destruction of family lines,

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<sup>329</sup> Since Favorinus' used the title of eunuch as a means of personal self-definition, whereas all of the other examples that I've discussed are confined to literature, I discuss Favorinus after Lucian, despite the fact that Favorinus predates Lucian.

<sup>330</sup> I discuss Lucian's background at some length, below. Since his background is tightly intertwined with my conclusions about the *Eunuch*, I present them alongside each other, thereby avoiding a multitude of cross-references to myself.

revenge, and political upheaval destabilized their ethnicity, leading to Persian eunuchs, for example, behaving in distinctly non-Persian ways. In the previous chapter, on the other hand, we saw that eunuchs in literature of the Roman Republic indicate a destabilization of masculinity. In the following analyses, I show how Lucian weaves together the themes that clustered around eunuchs in classical Greek literature and the gender destabilization prevalent in Roman literature. Following that, I explain the impact of this weaving on the ethnicity of the character Bagoas.

The *Eunuch* is a dialogue with two speakers, Pamphilus and Lycinus. The majority of the dialogue, however, consists of Lycinus telling Pamphilus about a trial from which he has just departed. At this trial, the eunuch Bagoas and a certain Diocles—two Peripatetic philosophers—each argued that he should fill a vacant, endowed philosophical chair, the primary duty of which is teaching. Before Lycinus begins narrating the events of the trial, he informs Pamphilus about the trial’s general characteristics. He peppers this description with martial and Homeric imagery, evoking the classical Greek association between eunuchs and violence intruding into a domestic setting. Lycinus says that the victor of the trial would receive the duty of teaching and “not a shield of hide or a victim,’ as the poet [Homer] says it” (*Eun.* 3).<sup>331</sup> He continues: “That, Pamphilus, is the Helen for which they were fighting each other” (*Eun.* 3). Slightly later, he refers to the trial as a war (πόλεμος, *Eun.* 4) and says that Bagoas and Diocles fought as if their homeland were in danger (πατρίδος κινδυνευούσης, *Eun.* 3). By alluding to Homer and describing the trial as a war, Lucian incorporates one of the themes that constantly appears alongside eunuchs in classical Greek literature: violence

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<sup>331</sup> *Il.* 22.159

infringing upon civic life.

Later, Diocles continues this theme by arguing that Bagoas and other eunuchs are a constant potential threat to a city's well-being. Lycinus summarizes one of Diocles' tirades against Bagoas:

Diocles said that... [eunuchs] should be excluded not only from [philosophy] but also from temples, sacred springs, and all places of public assembly and that it is an ill-fated, bad omen if anyone setting out from his house in the morning should see such a person (i.e., a eunuch). He also said a lot about a eunuch being neither man nor woman but some sort of mixed, hybrid portent, beyond human nature.

ὁ Διοκλῆς ἔφη... τοὺς τοιοῦτους οὐχ ὅπως τούτων ἀποκεκλειῖσθαι ἡξίου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἱερῶν αὐτῶν καὶ περιρραντηρίων καὶ τῶν κοινῶν ἀπάντων συλλόγων, δυσοιώνιστόν τι ἀποφαίνων καὶ δυσάντητον θέαμα, εἴ τις ἔωθεν ἐξιών ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ἴδοι τοιοῦτόν τινα. καὶ πολὺς ἦν ὁ περὶ τούτου λόγος, οὔτε ἄνδρα οὔτε γυναῖκα εἶναι τὸν εὐνοῦχον λέγοντος, ἀλλὰ τι σύνθετον καὶ μικτὸν καὶ τερατῶδες, ἔξω τῆς ἀνθρωπείας φύσεως.

*Eun.* 6

Diocles follows his statement that eunuchs should be excluded from civic life by reminding his audience that eunuchs often foreshadow a deleterious occurrence (δυσοιώνιστον, δυσάντητον θέαμα, τερατῶδες). Rather, then, than precisely state what the negative events are that eunuchs portend, Diocles juxtaposes his statement that eunuchs should be excluded from civic life with a reminder that they have symbolic resonance. He relies on his audience's knowledge of the earlier Greek trope to fill in the blanks. His argument that eunuchs should be excluded for many aspects of civic life hinges on the Greek literary association between eunuchs and violence occurring in sacrosanct places.

Significantly, Diocles ties eunuchs' association with civic violence to their destabilized gender. They should be excluded from civic life because they are an omen of

violence, and they are an omen of violence because of their “hybrid” gender. Lycinus’ use of war imagery at the dialogue’s opening raises the spectre of violence intruding upon a trial. Later, Diocles alludes to eunuchs’ deleterious impact on a city’s safety by listing the public venues from which they should be excluded. Together, these sections evoke the association between eunuchs and violence infringing into domestic life. Diocles, then, connects this aspect of the Greek tradition to the Roman tradition in which eunuchs indicate gender-destabilization.

While Lucian does incorporate this martial imagery, the spectacle of the wrangling philosophers is comic, not destructive. At the dialogue’s opening, Pamphilus asks Lycinus why he is laughing so hard and Lycinus promises that Pamphilus will also be laughing, once he’s heard what Lycinus just witnessed (*Eun.* 1). Towards the end of the dialogue, Lycinus says that everyone watching the trial had stomach pains from laughing so hard (*Eun.* 12), and over half of Pamphilus’ interlocutions are about how funny the trial is (*Eun.* 1, 2, 6). This focus on just how comedic the whole situation is transforms the “violence” of the trial into a Punch and Judy show—no one is actually hurt and everyone gets a laugh out of it. After the early hints at war and violence, the public trial ends with laughter, not violence.

A second major theme associated with eunuchs in classical Greek literature was the destruction of family lineages. No children are in mortal peril in Lucian’s *Eunuch*, but I will argue that this theme does exist in the text. After that, I show how the text presents Bagoas’ destabilized gender as the reason that he threatens a lineage. Just as Diocles argues that Bagoas’ gender foreshadows impending civic violence, likewise the eunuch’s destabilized gender is described as the reason why he threatens the destruction of a

lineage.

The crux of Bagoas and Diocles' fight is their disagreement over which of them is better suited to instruct children in Peripatetic principles. Proper instruction of pupils is necessary for the continuation of that philosophical sect, a symbolic lineage. Near the text's beginning, Lycinus says that Bagoas and Diocles fought as if "on behalf of their endangered fatherland, their ancestral temples, and their ancestors' graves" (ὕπὲρ πατρίδος κινδυνευούσης καὶ ἱερῶν πατρῶων καὶ τάφων προγονικῶν, *Eun.* 3). Of course, the two are actually fighting about the future of their philosophical sect, and each thinks the other unfit to ensure its continuation. By using "fatherland" to refer to their sect and describing Bagoas and Diocles as sharing ancestors, Lucian indicates that Bagoas and Diocles' lineage is based on their philosophical sect and not blood relations.<sup>332</sup> Lucian's substitution of the two men's actual families with their philosophical school and his statement that they fought as though their homeland was in danger shows that the men's lineage is at stake. It is an intellectual, rather than a familial one, but a lineage nonetheless.

Two other passages corroborate my point that Lucian gestures toward the association between eunuchs and the destruction of lineages that is prevalent in classical Greek literature. At one point, the judges wonder whether it is proper to entrust the προστασίαν of young men to a eunuch (*Eun.* 8). Προστασία can indicate "authority over," and therefore aptly describes the relationship between a mentor and mentee. It can also, however, indicate a "bodyguard." Given the context, the former meaning is the

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<sup>332</sup> In Plato's *Sym.* (206c-208e), Diotima describes the production of philosophy as a form of creation that is nearly identical to siring children. Philosophy creates an intellectual legacy in the

obvious choice here, but by using this particular word (as opposed to e.g. διδασκαλίαν, μυσταγωγία, or κηδεμονία), Lucian subtly alludes to the idea of protecting the pupil's bodily safety, in addition to overseeing his intellectual progression. Although the prospective pupils are never really in harm's way, the use of προστασία raises questions about their safety. Elsewhere, Bagoas says that his inability to have sex would preclude him from having a pederastic relationship with his pupils, again shifting the focus from the pupils' intellectual development to their bodily integrity (*Eun.* 9). Although the pupils' philosophical development is clearly the dialogue's focus, the text subtly alludes to the potential for them to suffer physical harm. By describing the Peripatetic school as Bagoas and Diocles' "family" and suggesting that students might suffer bodily harm should the wrong man become their teacher, Lucian shows that the discussion in the *Eunuch* about whether Bagoas should be allowed to teach is a continuation of the Greek theme that associates eunuchs with the destruction of a lineage and with family integrity.

The debate over whether Bagoas has the potential to fully and properly educate pupils focuses on the effects that his destabilized gender has on his pedagogical authority. Lycinus indicates the exact moment when the judges' focus shifts to the question of whether Bagoas is fit to be an instructor: "This was the main focus of their consideration at this point: if a eunuch teaching philosophy was fit to be entrusted with authority over young men."<sup>333</sup> This statement indicates that the ensuing section's concern is whether Bagoas is qualified to ensure the continuation of the Peripatetic line. One of the judges argues that Bagoas should not be put in charge of the pupils because of his appearance:

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same way that procreation does a biological one. For more on this, see my discussion of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in Ch. 2.

“It is necessary for a philosopher to have a dignified appearance, bodily excellence, and most importantly a long beard that inspires trust in those who approach him in order to learn” (τοῦ μὲν καὶ σχῆμα καὶ σώματος εὐμοιρίαν προσεῖναι φιλοσόφῳ δεῖν λέγοντος, καὶ τὸ μέγιστον, πώγωνα βαθὺν ἔχειν αὐτὸν καὶ τοῖς προσιοῦσι καὶ μανθάνειν βουλομένοις ἀξιόπιστον, *Eun.* 8). As a eunuch, Bagoas lacked a masculine physique and could not grow a beard. According to this judge, those physical imperfections preclude him from gaining the confidence of his students, and therefore he cannot teach them philosophy. If the judge is correct, then entrusting the students to Bagoas would imperil the Peripatetic line.

In his answer, Bagoas argues that being a eunuch actually *increases* his pedagogical authority, despite what the judge may claim. Bagoas retorts that since he is a eunuch, no one can accuse him of any wrongdoing with his students, a benefit that even Socrates—who was charged with leading the young astray—lacked (*Eun.* 9). The only wrongdoing that Bagoas’ eunuchism precludes him from being charged with is pederasty, which is not the accusation that Socrates faced. By pointing out his immunity to this charge, Bagoas shows that being a eunuch provides at least one benefit that uncastrated philosophers lack, whereas the judge only saw detrimental effects. Meanwhile, the reference to Socrates undermines the judge’s position that bodily excellence augments a philosopher’s pedagogical authority. Socrates was famously hideous and lacked both a dignified appearance and bodily excellence. By citing him here, Bagoas disproves the judge’s contention that outward appearance is a valid criterion for judging philosophers. Bagoas proceeds to follow the judge’s train of thought *ad absurdum* and exclaims, “If it

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<sup>333</sup>*Eun.* 8: καὶ τὸ κεφάλαιον ἤδη τοῦ σκέμματος τοῦτο ἐτύγγανεν, εἰ δοκιμαστέος εὐνοῦχος ἐπὶ



should be necessary to judge philosophers by the length of their beard, then a goat would be rightly judged the best of them all” (*Eun.* 9). Contrary to the judge’s assertion that looking like a eunuch harms Bagoas’ ability to teach philosophy, Bagoas shows that appearances do not matter and that being a eunuch actually gives him at least one benefit that uncastrated men lack.

Bagoas’ argument makes a compelling case for eunuchs’ ability to serve as philosophical instructors. Unfortunately for Bagoas, at this point in the dialogue a bystander yells out that Bagoas is not actually a eunuch. Rather, he explains, Bagoas was caught in the act of adultery and declared himself a eunuch to escape the charges (*Eun.* 11). The accusation of adultery undermines Bagoas’ argument that eunuchs are immune to charges of inappropriate sexual relations. In response to the bystander’s accusation, Bagoas silently considers whether being a eunuch or an adulterer is more beneficial for him, while everyone watching the trial bursts into laughter (*Eun.* 11). Above we saw that Lucian incorporates the association between eunuchs and civic violence into the *Eunuch* and presents this association as a direct result of eunuchs’ destabilized gender, but he strips this violence of its threatening force by making it distinctly humorous. The same is true of his treatment of the Greek literary tradition of eunuchs destroying lineages. The judge and Bagoas are in the midst of arguing about whether Bagoas’ lack of masculinity is a threat to the continuation of the Peripatetic line, when the bystander accuses Bagoas of adultery, causing everyone present except Bagoas to burst into laughter. The threat is raised and discussed, but then laughter subsumes it before any conclusion is reached.

After describing the crowds’ laughter, the narrative switches back to the judges,

who are discussing several ways of getting to the truth about Bagoas' nature. It is here that the Greek theme associating eunuchs with political upheaval appears. Significantly, Lycinus describes these judges as "the noblest (ἄριστοι), oldest (πρεσβύτατοι), and wisest (σοφώτατοι) men in the city," earlier in the dialogue (*Eun.* 2). This description and their role as judges shows that these men are the wielders of authority, locally. To determine whether Bagoas is a eunuch, some of these luminaries think that "they ought to strip him, as is done with slaves, and determine by inspection whether he had the testicular parts (τά πρὸς τῶν ὀρχέων) to practice philosophy," while others suggest that the oldest and wisest of them should watch Bagoas have intercourse with a prostitute (*Eun.* 12). To come to terms with Bagoas' destabilized gender, the judges must become either slave-dealers or voyeuristic pimps. Upon hearing these options, the crowd begins to laugh uproariously at them. Rather than pursue either of their options, the superlative judges cede their juridical authority, deciding instead to send the case to the emperor (*Eun.* 12). This scene shows the collapse of civic authorities' public standing, as the eminent judges become the objects of derision.

Although the judges—the local authorities—are rendered powerless when confronted by Bagoas' ambiguous gender, the result is laughter and not any sort of violent political upheaval. By stating the judges decided to send the case to the emperor, Lucian reminds the reader that, despite their local standing, these judges' authority was always subsidiary to imperial power. Therefore even when they lose control of a situation, the real source of power—the emperor—is unaffected. Although the judges' public standing is undermined by this trial, the source of their civic authority remains staunchly enthroned, thus preventing any significant political change. Instead, there is

only laughter.

In the *Eunuch*, Lucian incorporates three of the major themes surrounding eunuchs in classical Greek literature: civic violence, the destruction of family lines, and political upheaval. In Greek literature, these themes appeared alongside actual violence, but in the *Eunuch* they lead to laughter. In order to grasp the significance of this change, it is necessary to understand Lucian's historical context. Lucian lived and wrote during a period of significant cultural fluidity. Places that had once been "the East" had been ruled for centuries by Greek kings, and these Greek kingdoms had in turn been conquered and incorporated into Rome, along with the Greek poleis themselves. Of course, this process had been completed much earlier, but Lucian's period seems to mark the beginning of a widespread and collective intellectual milieu usually referred to as the Second Sophistic.<sup>334</sup> This milieu was constructed, to a significant degree, from classical Greek texts. Despite one's origins, one could, through education or *paideia*, partake in this phenomenon. Thorough mastery of Greek *paideia* was the primary signifier of Greekness, during this time.<sup>335</sup> In *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, Glen Bowersock refers to the diverse places whence "Greeks" of this period came: "The men of whom Philostratus wrote were Greeks, in the broad sense—from Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt... [but] they bore no grudge for belonging to the Roman empire; they did not object to the word Ῥωμαῖοι, a collective and non-prejudicial term."<sup>336</sup> In a world where Syrians are also Romans and can lay claim to Greekness through their intellectual pursuits, the

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<sup>334</sup> Jones (2004); Whitmarsh (2001) Introduction; Bowersock (1969) 15-16.

<sup>335</sup> Whitmarsh (2001).

<sup>336</sup> Bowersock (1969) 15.

older ethnic divisions are blurred.<sup>337</sup> Lucian—who was in fact a Syrian Roman involved in the Hellenic-oriented intellectual milieu of his time—was perfectly situated to recognize the disintegration of such ethnic distinctions.

The themes that surround eunuchs in classical Greek literature, and in Lucian's *Eunuch*, do not simply function individually but work together to destabilize ethnicity. For Lucian, however, the category of ethnicity lacked the clear boundaries that it had once had. The character Bagoas shares his name with several earlier, famous Persian eunuchs, and therefore, although Lucian omits any direct mention of Bagoas' origins, he implies that Bagoas should be interpreted as a Persian.<sup>338</sup> Yet he is a master of Aristotle's teachings—the basis for Peripatetic philosophy—and cites numerous Greeks from the classical period, such as Socrates, Diotima, and Aspasia (*Eun.* 4, 7, 9). These references show that Bagoas is thoroughly educated in classical Greek literature. Through his *paideia*, Bagoas can lay claim to being Greek. And since the dialogue is concerned with Bagoas' claims to fill a philosophical chair endowed by the Roman emperor and details his appearance in a Roman court, Bagoas also seems to be a Roman. Just as Lucian himself is a Hellenized Syrian-Roman, so Bagoas is a Hellenized Persian-Roman. Since Bagoas lacks any firm ethnic alignment, it is impossible for him to distinctly transition from one ethnicity to another.

By incorporating the themes tied to eunuchs in classical Greek literature into the *Eunuch*, Lucian evokes the earlier literary tradition in which these themes led to ethnic destabilization. Lucian does not carry any of these themes to their conclusion, however. Rather, he brings them up, allows his characters to comment on them, and then

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<sup>337</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 207.

substitutes the expected violence for laughter. Likewise, Lucian does not fulfill the expectation that a eunuch accompanied by this cluster of themes will experience ethnic destabilization. The familiar series of functions that eunuchs signal to a reader kicks into gear, starts to progress, and then collapses in a fit of giggles. Through his characterization of Bagoas, Lucian offers insight into why this is the case. Bagoas' polyvalent ethnicity precludes him from shifting radically in any direction. Significantly, Lucian imposes a cause and effect framework upon the disparate Greek and Roman traditions by presenting Bagoas' ambiguous gender as the cause of each of the themes associated with eunuchs in Greek literature. This demonstration of the interaction of the Greek and Roman literary traditions concerning eunuchs reflects concerns prevalent in Lucian's own world, in that it shows how aspects of different cultures interact. Likewise, Bagoas' consistently ambiguous ethnicity echoes the erosion of ethnic boundaries in Lucian's time. Significantly, Lucian makes these points by manipulating the literary paradigms for Greek and Roman eunuchs that I argue for in previous chapters, thereby corroborating my arguments in earlier chapters.

### **Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess***

Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* is a description of the temple of the goddess Atargatis at Hieropolis (modern Manbij, northern Syria), written in a style similar to Herodotus or Pausanias. In this text, Lucian employs eunuchs in a manner similar to his *Eunuch*, as he once again puts the earlier Greek and Roman patterns of how they work alongside each

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<sup>338</sup> I discuss several in Chapter Two, above.

other.<sup>339</sup> As in the *Eunuch*, Lucian incorporates the earlier Greek and Roman patterns of ethnic and gender destabilization largely intact—thus reinforcing the pattern proposed for previous authors—but he varies those patterns in a new way. It is a goddess and her temple, rather than humans, whose ethnicity becomes destabilized. Furthermore, given that the goddess whose ethnicity is destabilized is mainly defined by her ethnicity (she is the “Syrian goddess”), this destabilization is simultaneously an erosion of her core identity from the text’s point of view. Furthermore, as is the case in the *Eunuch*, Lucian again depicts gender destabilization as the cause of the ethnic destabilization.

### 1. Attes and Dionysus

*On the Syrian Goddess* discusses the physical structure of the temple at Hierapolis, its decorations and rituals, and provides foundation myths for most of these. Several of the foundation myths explicitly credit eunuchs with establishing the temple. The first of these says that the eunuch Attes founded the temple. According to this version, after Rhea castrated him, Attes of Lydia “stopped living as a man” (βίου μὲν ἀνδρηίου ἀπεπαύσατο), “assumed female form” (μορφὴν δὲ θηλέην ἡμείψατο), donned women’s clothes, and traveled the world, teaching Rhea’s rites. When Attes was journeying through Syria, the people living on the eastern side of the Euphrates forbade him from entering their territory, and so he put an end to his itinerant lifestyle and established a temple at Hierapolis, just west of the Euphrates (15).

Although this passage is short, it incorporates both Attes’ gender transition and Atargatis’ ethnic destabilization. The text explicitly says that Attes stopped living as a

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<sup>339</sup> Lightfoot (2003) and Anderson (1976a) 68-72 for Lucian's authorship of *On the Syrian Goddess*. See Dirven (1997) for an argument against it. The similarities between how the *Eunuch* and *On the Syrian Goddess* use eunuchs further corroborate Lightfoot and Anderson's position.

man. And although he assumed feminine shape and raiment, he did not simply become a woman, “γυνή ἐγένετο.” He is not a man, but he has only the outward trappings of a woman, as opposed to fully becoming one. In other words, his gender status is in the same liminal state as that of Bagoas in the *Eunuch*, as Diocles described it. Additionally, the eunuch Attes is responsible for a facet of Atargatis’ ethnic destabilization, as the narrative describes him as imposing a Phrygian deity’s identity onto the Syrian goddess.

The text says that during his wanderings Attes spread the rites of “Rhea,” which is the standard *interpretatio Graeca* for Cybele—a Phrygian goddess. Yet, the temple which Attes built at Hierapolis was for Atargatis, not Cybele. Attes’ close ties to Cybele, the text says, are the reason that Atargatis is “comparable to Rhea, in many respects. She is borne by lions, holds a drum, and wears a tower on her head, just as the Lydians depict Rhea” (15).<sup>340</sup> In addition to these attributes, both Atargatis and Cybele’s priests were eunuchs, and the narrator explains that Atargatis’ eunuchs castrate themselves in honor of Cybele’s Attes.

Now Atargatis and Cybele do seem to have shared many of these attributes, but their interactions were not as unidirectional as this text suggests.<sup>341</sup> Atargatis’ association with lions, for example, predates that of Cybele by centuries. Early Phrygian iconography of Cybele depicts her as a veiled figure, usually standing and accompanied by a bird.<sup>342</sup> In fact, none of Cybele’s listed attributes are indigenous to the early Phrygian tradition, rather they all developed after her cult spread into Greece. During the third century BC, the attributes that Cybele developed in Greece were transmitted back to Phrygia, where

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<sup>340</sup> Translation Lightfoot (2003).

<sup>341</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 11ff.

<sup>342</sup> Summers (1996) 351-352.

they became prominent.<sup>343</sup> The treatise's titular Syrian goddess borrowed her attributes from a Phrygian goddess whose own features were a pastiche of indigenous traits and Greek understandings of what constituted an Oriental deity. Of course, one cannot assume that Lucian knew this cultic history, and several of these attributes, such as lions and turreted crowns, were prevalent in ancient religion.<sup>344</sup> Their identification in *On the Syrian Goddess* as especial attributes of Cybele that Attes imposed on Atargatis suggests an attempt to present Syrian Atargatis as a direct derivative of the Phrygian goddess. According to this version of the temple's foundation, Atargatis may be Syrian in origin, but all of her characteristics stem from a Lydian representation of a Phrygian goddess. Additionally, that Lucian cites specifically Cybele, a Phrygian goddess whose identity had been largely shaped by Greeks, further warps Atargatis' distinctly "Syrian" identity, although whether Lucian was aware of this or not is impossible to know.

After telling the story of Attes, the narrator says that he believes the true founder to be Dionysus (16). Although this passage does not contain any eunuchs, its juxtaposition with the Attes story and its reliance on genitals as evidence suggests the two foundation stories should be read as a pair. Dionysus was a hyper-phallic deity, and his appearance innately draws a contrast to the eunuch Attes.<sup>345</sup> Apart from his extra-textual associations, Lucian strongly emphasizes the importance of phalli for attributing the construction of the temple to Dionysus. The narrator believes the story about Dionysus is accurate, in large part because of the two extremely large phalli standing in the temple's porchway, one of which bears the inscription: "I, Dionysus, dedicated these phalli to

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<sup>343</sup> Lightfoot (2003); Lightfoot (2002); Bremmer (2005).

<sup>344</sup> Lightfoot (2003).



Hera, my step-mother” (16). Additionally, there is a bronze statue with a large phallus in the temple, similar to those which the Greeks erect for Dionysus. Since there are Indian stones and horns of ivory within the temple, the narrator posits that Dionysus son of Semele must have stopped at Hierapolis and built the temple on his way back from Aethiopia (16).

While it was possible for Greek authors to use the names of Greek gods to refer to foreign ones, that does not seem to be the case here. First, Dionysus is not a standard *interpretatio Graeca* of any Syrian deity.<sup>346</sup> Furthermore, the text does not simply use Dionysus’ name as a fill-in for another deity’s name, but instead relies on the Greek myths concerning Dionysus. The narrator connects Dionysus’ foundation of the temple to a particular event in the life of the Greek Dionysus, namely his travel to Aethiopia. Likewise, the inclusion of the matronymic and the reference to Hera specifically as step-mother (μητρυνή) also require knowledge of the Greek Dionysus. In other words, this is not an instance in which Dionysus’ name is used to describe a foreign god, but an instance in which the distinctively Greek god Dionysus and his concomitant mythological narrative is required for understanding the story of the Syrian goddess.

A useful contrast comes from Herodotus, when he gives an aetiology for an Egyptian ritual at Papremis that involves a faux-battle waged with wooden clubs: “According to the Egyptians, the reasons for the customs of this festival is that the mother of the god Ares used to live in this sanctuary; and when Ares, who grew up apart from his mother, reached adulthood, he went to mingle with her” (2.63.4). Herodotus substitutes

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<sup>345</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 365: “No Greek god is more strongly associated with phallic cult than Dionysus.”

<sup>346</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 363.

the Greek name Ares for the name of an Egyptian god, but the plot he describes stems from no Greek tale concerning Ares. Although Herodotus refers to Ares' mother, there is no direct explanation of who this is, whereas in Lucian both Semele and Hera's connections with Dionysus are stated. Unlike the Herodotean instance, Lucian's text requires further knowledge of the Greek Dionysus. In Herodotus on the other hand, the name Ares could be substituted with that of any other Greek god, and the story would still be about an Egyptian one. By incorporating not only Dionysus' name but also Greek stories about him, *On the Syrian Goddess* puts the establishment of Atargatis' temple inside the framework of Greek myth. The temple of the Syrian goddess is actually of Greek origin, according to the narrator.

Proponents of both the Attes and Dionysus foundation stories cite genitals as conclusive evidence. According to the Attes foundation story, the fact that Atargatis' priests are eunuchs is definitive evidence that Attes the eunuch founded the temple and based its rites on a Phrygian goddess (15). According to the narrator, on the other hand, the preponderance of decorative phalli prove that Dionysus the Greek god founded the temple for his step-mother Hera (16). In the previous section on the *Eunuch*, we saw how Lucian represents Bagoas' ambiguous gender as the catalyst for the erosion of ethnicity. A similar phenomenon is at work here. There is an underlying concern about the relationship between the temple's founder and penises, just as there is a concern in the *Eunuch* about the relationship between philosophy and Bagoas' penis. Regardless of which of these phallic-based conclusions about the founder one accepts, the effect is the same. The Syrian goddess' temple is not Syrian. The gender ambiguities are the causes of ethnic ones.

## 2. Combabos

The initial temple at Hierapolis that either Attes or Dionysus built was, according to *On the Syrian Goddess*, demolished at an unspecified point in time, and the temple that exists in the narrator's time was unambiguously constructed by the eunuch Combabos in Hellenistic times. The story of this second temple's construction cannot be briefly summarized, but I choose to provide a comprehensive summary at the outset to avoid sporadic and disruptive summation throughout. Combabos' construction of the temple was not at first of his own initiative but that of Stratonice, wife of an unnamed Assyrian king (17). Before describing Stratonice's involvement with the construction of the temple, Lucian narrates another event in her life that takes place after the temple-building. The king's son falls in love with Stratonice—his step-mother—and suffers from fevers and trembling as a result.<sup>347</sup> He refuses to admit the cause of his illness, but the king's doctor is able to discern that the son is suffering from lovesickness. Therefore, he measures the boy's pulse as he calls the denizens of the palace into his sickroom one by one. After discerning that Stratonice is the object of the boy's affections, the doctor deceptively informs the king that the boy is in love with his own (i.e., the doctor's) wife. The king orders the doctor to give his wife to the boy, since it is easier to replace a wife than a son. At which point, the doctor explains his ruse, and the king, ceding to his own logic, gives both Stratonice and his throne to his son (17-18).

The text then shifts to an earlier point in Stratonice's life, when she is still married to the king. Hera orders her to (re)build a temple in Hierapolis, Stratonice ignores this command. She then falls quite ill, at which point she acquiesces to the goddess' wish and

recovers. The king appoints a certain Combabos as Stratonice's escort, and Combabos tries to turn down the position, fearing lest the king grow jealously suspicious of Combabos and Stratonice's relationship during their temple-building excursion. The king insists that Combabos accompany Stratonice, and Combabos reluctantly agrees to do so. He does, however, request a week's delay in setting out for Hierapolis. During this week, Combabos castrates himself, seals his genitals in a casket, and entrusts the casket to the king (19-20).

When Stratonice and Combabos are in their third year of building the temple at Hierapolis, Stratonice falls in love with Combabos. This love is a second punishment of Stratonice by Hera, for her initial refusal to build the temple. When sober, Stratonice is careful not to reveal her affections, but one night she drunkenly propositions him. He rejects her, and so she threatens to slander him to the king. To prevent this, Combabos informs her that he is a eunuch (21-22). Stratonice cannot overcome her affection for Combabos but makes no further attempts to consummate it. Due to her affection, however, she constantly associates with Combabos, and informers report this to the king, who summons Combabos back to the palace. The king sentences Combabos to death, at which point Combabos accuses the king of killing him not for any crime but in order to keep the contents of the sealed casket. The king calls for the casket to prove that he has not meddled with its contents, but when he finds Combabos' genitals inside, he knows him to be innocent (23-25). In recompense, the king executes the informers and gives Combabos heaps of gold and silver. Combabos also asks for permission to return to Hierapolis and finish building the temple. The king agrees, and Combabos returns to

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<sup>347</sup> This story is based on the case of Antiochus, son of king Seleucus Nicator. I discuss the

Hierapolis and completes the temple (26). Several of Combabos' friends accompany him, and they too castrate themselves. Later during a festival, a woman sees Combabos, falls in love with him, and then kills herself upon discovering that he is a eunuch. To prevent any such occurrences in the future, Combabos and the other eunuchs begin dressing as women, a practice maintained by the eunuch priests of the narrator's time (27).

In her commentary, Lightfoot notes that the story of Stratonice and her step-son and that of Stratonice and Combabos are "mirror images of the same topoi: illicit love, failure to overmaster it, [and] the vocabulary of disaster," but ultimately she professes *aporia* concerning the question: "What is the meaning and value of the [step-son] story followed by Combabos?"<sup>348</sup> It is unclear, however, why Lightfoot thinks that this section of the text must be divided into two distinct stories. Rather than consider the step-son tale and the Combabos tale as distinct, I argue that they are actually elements of one story that combines everything we have seen in the previous three chapters. Although the Herodotean nature of *On the Syrian Goddess* is widely accepted, it has not been used to explain the juxtaposition of the passages about the step-son's love for Stratonice and Stratonice's love for Combabos. Reading both passages as one continuous story, however, reveals that all of the themes that clustered around eunuchs in Herodotus are present and that, like in his *Histories*, the characters' ethnicities are destabilized. Likewise, the temple that Combabos builds and whose description takes up the majority of the treatise also clearly demonstrates an ethnic destabilization. Finally, Combabos' gender becomes progressively more feminine, throughout the story. In this passage, Lucian ties together all of the earlier literary traditions concerning eunuchs.

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relevance of this, below.

As in classical Greek literature featuring eunuchs, the stories of Stratonice and Combabos show the destruction of a family line, political transition, the intrusion of violence into ideally inviolable spaces, and revenge. Additionally, the royal family's true ethnicity is wholly obscured. It is possible to speak of the royal family's "true" ethnicity because the story of Stratonice and her step-son is based on the well-known historical case of Antiochus, son of the Macedonian general (and king) Seleucus Nicator.<sup>349</sup> Seleucus was born in Macedonia and served as one of Alexander's generals. After Alexander's death and several wars, he established the Seleucid empire which extended from the east coast of the Mediterranean to the western border of India. He and his first wife had several children, including Antiochus (later known as Soter). Upon his first wife's death, he married Stratonice, both of whose parents were Macedonians. Later, Seleucus gave Stratonice to Antiochus, and father and son each ruled half of the kingdom. Although Lucian draws on historical events, his account is clearly a literary and not a historical construction.<sup>350</sup> One facet of the literary nature of this account is the depiction of Seleucus and Stratonice. Despite their historical counterparts' Greek origins, Lucian's characters are indistinguishable from generic eastern kings in Greek literature.

Lucian achieves this, in part, by withholding the names of the parties involved, except for Stratonice. Instead, he refers to them by titles that emphasize their association with the east, such as "the king of the Assyrians" (τοῦ Ἀσσυρίων βασιλέως, 17).<sup>351</sup> Later, Lucian compares what the Greeks say about Phaedra to what the Assyrians say about

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<sup>348</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 400-401.

<sup>349</sup> Grainger (1990) is a thorough biography of Seleucus Nicator.

<sup>350</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 376: "Among all the surviving versions [of the Stratonice and Antiochus story], Lucian's is most artfully presented as a sort of confected folktale."

<sup>351</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 380: "a story-telling motif, not a real royal title."

Stratonice, suggesting that Phaedra and the Greeks belong on one side of a division and Stratonice and the Assyrians belong on the other (Ἀσσύριοι ἐς Στρατονίκην μυθολογέουσιν, 20). When the king discovers that Combabos is innocent, he gives him “Assyrian robes and royal horses,” reiterating the king’s Assyrian (and therefore generally Eastern) nature (ἐσθῆτες Ἀσσύριαι καὶ ἵπποι βασιλῆιοι, 25).<sup>352</sup> The inclusion of all of these references to Assyria, coupled with the absences of any reference to the characters’ Greek origins and of all their names (except Stratonice) makes them appear markedly eastern.

Furthermore, describing the characters as “Assyrian” (Ἀσσύριος), instead of just “Syrian” (Σύριος), is significant in and of itself. During this period, “Syrian” was the general Greco-Roman means of referring to Syrians, Assyrians, Arameans, and other Near Easterners, collectively. “Assyrian,” on the other hand, was generally used by representatives of these groups to emphasize their ties to a legacy that extended back in time far earlier than Alexander’s conquests and the subsequent Hellenization of these regions.<sup>353</sup> As Nathanael Andrade explains, “The narrator labels Stratonice and her husband simply as... ‘Assyrians’ (*Assyrioi*)’ despite their Seleucid Greek origins. He thereby places them in continuity with the putatively ancient Assyrian or Babylonian monarchs.”<sup>354</sup> By calling Seleucus and Stratonice “Assyrians” instead of “Syrians,” Lucian rejects the Greco-Roman term for collective classification of Near Easterners, thereby situating them in the legacy of actual Assyrian kings and further suppressing their actual Greek identities.

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<sup>352</sup> “Royal horses” were an ancient Persian tradition, cf. Hdt. and Xen. *Cyrop.*

<sup>353</sup> Andrade (2014).

<sup>354</sup> Andrade (2014) 310.

At the end of the story, of course, the king's esteem for Combabos the eunuch also contributes to his generally eastern characterization, as eunuchs were a stock feature of Persian courts.<sup>355</sup> One must also consider why Stratonice's name is present. By giving only one character's name, Lucian informs the reader of the relevant historical instance. One name must be revealed to show that we are in fact reading a veiled story about a Macedonian king and not an actual Assyrian.<sup>356</sup> Since Stratonice's part is significantly larger than the other two's, giving her name also makes sense from a narrative standpoint. By including her name, Lucian shows that the text is about Greeks whose ethnicity has largely become "Assyrian".

The story also contains the destruction of a family lineage. The lovesickness of Seleucus' son Antiochus for his step-mother Stratonice threatens his life, but the doctor's intervention wards off death. This intervention requires Seleucus to give Stratonice to Antiochus, however, thereby destroying the potential for offspring from the union of Seleucus and Stratonice. Now Seleucus' first wife and Antiochus' mother was Apama of Sogdiana. Their marriage was one of the many performed at Susa and conducted according to Persian wedding rituals (Arrian 7.4-5). Alexander forced these unions upon his troops, but after his death, the troops considered these marriages as lacking validity.<sup>357</sup>

Therefore the legal status of Antiochus, the result of one of these marriages, was not

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<sup>355</sup> See Chapters One, Two, and Three, above.

<sup>356</sup> Were her name absent, a reader might still recall the case of Stratonice, but the existence of other, similar stories would preclude certainty over whether the story is, in fact, about her. In addition to the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife also demonstrates many parallels (Abusch 2002). Later, Galen writes of an almost identical situation, in which he himself plays the role of doctor (Lightfoot [2003] 376). Indeed, Lightfoot notes that the primary reason many doubt the historical accuracy of the story of Stratonice and Antiochus is because it so closely resembles countless stories about other individuals (*eadem* 374).

<sup>357</sup> Worthington (2003) 198.



firmly established. In light of this, Lucian's reference to Phaedra during the Stratonice story has special significance. In Euripides' play *Hippolytus*,—the origin of the character Phaedra—there are several references to the fact that Hippolytus is a bastard, and that Phaedra's future offspring will eventually rule in succession to Theseus.<sup>358</sup> Like Hippolytus, Antiochus was at risk of his father and step-mother producing more legitimate heirs. By gaining Stratonice for himself, however, Antiochus cuts off this potential new lineage. Furthermore, Seleucus not only hands over Stratonice but also his throne. Whereas in reality Seleucus divided his kingdom with Antiochus, Lucian presents this as a full scale transfer of power. By deviating from history in this fashion, Lucian incorporates the theme of political upheaval prevalent in classical Greek stories containing eunuchs.

Later in the text but earlier within the text's chronology, the themes of revenge and violence in a sacrosanct place occur. Upon learning that Combabos is a eunuch and cannot have slept with Stratonice, Seleucus says to Combabos: "First of all, the death of the informers will be your revenge" (πρῶτα μὲν σοι τίσις ἐξ ἡμέων ἔσσεται αὐτόθεν συκοφαντέων ὁ θάνατος, 25). Then, after Combabos returns to Hierapolis, a woman kills herself during a festival at the temple (27). The meaning and value of the Antiochus story followed by the Combabos one is that they are two halves of a typical Herodotean eunuch story. The royal family's ethnicity is destabilized, the pattern of themes familiar to us from chapter two appears, and of course Combabos the eunuch is at the heart of things.

One potential objection to this argument is that Combabos does not appear in the text until after the bit about Antiochus' love for Stratonice. This arrangement, however,

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<sup>358</sup> e.g. ll. 300-310.

does not invalidate that story from being part of the broader eunuch-tale. Rather, it is another instance of Lucian simultaneously displaying and varying the earlier patterns of how eunuchs work. There is strong evidence in the text that the story of Antiochus' lovesickness should be read as a part of the Combabos story. Immediately before narrating Antiochus' love for his step-mother, the narrator says, “Now I will speak about the founding of the temple, how it came to be, and who built it” (ἤδη δὲ ἐρέω καὶ τοῦ νηοῦ περὶ θεσίος τε ὅπως ἐγένετο καὶ ὅστις μιν ἐποιήσατο, 17). Then he narrates the Antiochus and Stratonice story (17-18). A reader, therefore, has good reason to believe that Antiochus' love for Stratonice has direct bearing on the foundation of the temple. It is only after the conclusion of this romantic drama that more context appears: “Back when this same Stratonice was married to her first husband... Hera ordered her to build a temple” (19). Only at this point does the reader learn that Antiochus' lovesickness has nothing to do with the temple. On the contrary, it occurs after those events, chronologically, and has no bearing on them.

Since the story of Antiochus and Stratonice actually does not pertain to the temple of the Syrian goddess, one must ask why it appears in *On the Syrian Goddess*. Even were one to suppose that Lucian simply had a burning desire to tell this tale, its particular placement is peculiar. Lucian could have, for instance, situated it after finishing the story of Combabos—its proper chronological position. Significantly though, he sandwiches it between the sentence introducing the story of the temple's reconstruction and the culmination of that construction. This placement means that one should read the story of Antiochus' lovesickness as part of the broader temple construction story—a story in which the eunuch Combabos plays a major role. And since Antiochus' love for Stratonice

has no bearing on the temple's construction, there would be no indication that one should treat it as part of the temple construction story, if it did not appear until after Combabos rebuilds the temple. Lucian, then, went out of his way to integrate the story of Antiochus and Stratonice into the broader Combabos story, although the reasons for this have thus far remained unclear.<sup>359</sup>

Lucian subsumes all of the themes that eunuchs signal in classical Greek literature into one story, by integrating the Antiochus story into the Combabos one. Through his anachronistic organization of these events, Lucian again demonstrates his skill at using earlier literary traditions in new ways. He delivers a eunuch-tale that conforms to the classical Greek literary tradition but with a new twist—he begins the story *in media res*.

Throughout this part of *On the Syrian Goddess*, Lucian also draws upon how eunuchs work in Roman literature, as there is a steady decline in Combabos' masculinity. He starts out fully masculine but castrates himself to ward off all potential charges of impropriety towards Stratonice (20). Despite being a eunuch, his appearance and behavior still resemble a man to such a degree that Stratonice is totally unaware of his castration until he shows her proof (22). Later, another woman falls in love with him and commits suicide upon learning that he is a eunuch, and so Combabos begins to actually dress as a woman (27). Elsewhere, however, the text suggests that Combabos' outward appearance was markedly feminine, even before he began wearing women's clothes. There is a statue of Combabos in the temple depicting him: "He has the form of a woman but wears men's clothes" (μορφὴν μὲν ὁκοίη γυνή, ἐσθῆτα δ' ἔτι ἀνδρικήν ἔχει, 26). Clearly, this statue depicts Combabos before he began wearing women's clothes, but if

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<sup>359</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 400-401.

he already has the form of a woman, then his later adoption of women's clothes is unnecessary, as the text explains it as a means of clarifying his unmasculine status. On the other hand, if his lack of masculinity were obvious to an observer, then there would have been no need for him to change his manner of dress. As we saw in the *Eunuch*, Lucian is not content to show eunuchs' lack of masculinity, but he also destabilizes the meaning of the word eunuch. These two mutually exclusive descriptions of Combabos ask the reader whether a eunuch is more like a man in women's clothes or a woman in men's clothes.

In the discussion of Terence's *Eunuchus* in the previous chapter, we saw the contagious effects that eunuchs could have on others' masculinity. This was a common trope for how eunuchs function in Greek literature too, only the effects impacted others' ethnicity and not their gender. Like the eunuch in Terence's play, Combabos' lack of masculinity quickly spreads. When Combabos reveals himself as a eunuch to the king, his friends' empathy inspires them to castrate themselves as well (26). The text explicitly links their decision to Combabos' lost masculine status: "Since Hera loved Combabos, she spread the thought of castration into many minds, so that he would not mourn his masculinity by himself" (ἡ Ἥρα φιλέουσα Κομβάβον πολλοῖσι τὴν τομὴν ἐπὶ νόον ἔβαλλεν, ὅπως μὴ μοῦνος ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναδρηγῇ λυπέοιτο, 26). Likewise, when Combabos began dressing as a woman, these friends did the same (27). Not only did Combabos affect his contemporaries but also he is the inspiration for the temple's current eunuch priests (27). The narrator explains the process by which such eunuch priests are created. They hurl off their garments, run into the middle of town, and castrate themselves with a giant sword (51). This sword, reserved for this purpose, has lain in the middle of town for

many years. Oftentimes, the young men who do this did not come to Hierapolis to castrate themselves: “Even many who came as spectators act do this, when the madness comes upon them” (ἡ μανίη ἀπικνέεται, 51). Combabos began a tradition of eunuchs in Hierapolis that lingers in the air and any young man in the city is susceptible of catching. Lucian expands the idea that a eunuch’s mere presence has deleterious effects on others’ masculinity—an idea implicit in earlier authors—by describing the irresistible urge to self-castrate as an eternal pathogen that permeates Hierapolis.

In addition to writing his own Herodotean eunuch-story and both incorporating and expanding the Roman tradition of eunuchs’ impact on gender, Lucian also destabilizes the ethnicity of the temple’s cultic practices. He does not do this by assigning different origins to different ritual behaviors but by jumbling up aspects of Greek and Near Eastern rituals and myths. The subsequent interactions cause the Greek elements of these stories to take on Near Eastern characteristics and the Near Eastern parts to take on Greek characteristics. The gap between the cultures is narrowed, and the ethnic divisions are blurred. Since nearly a quarter of the text explains how Combabos the eunuch came to build this temple, it is not unreasonable to interpret this jumbling through the destabilizing influence of the eunuch-founder.

One of the text’s first examples of this phenomenon is the explanation for a semiannual ritual in which people from all over Asia bring buckets of sea water into the temple and then pour them out (13). The water disappears into an unquenchable cavern beneath the temple. This ritual, explains the narrator, commemorates Deucalion. Long ago, Zeus flooded the earth, and an especially pious Scythian man named Deucalion, his wife, his sons, his sons’ wives, and two of every animal on earth lived on Deucalion’s

ark, until the chasm opened up at Hierapolis and the waters drained into it (12). The narrator concludes his Deucalion story by affirming that this story conforms to what the Greeks say about him. This insistence that this is what the Greeks say about Deucalion informs the reader that this passage is not to be read as an *interpretatio Graeca* of a local, Hierapolitan myth about a different flood survivor, and there is no indication that this was really a localized version of the flood story.<sup>360</sup>

Contrary to its repeated claims, this story is decidedly *not* what the Greeks say about Deucalion. In no (extant) Greek story do Deucalion's sons, their wives, and two of every animal accompany him. Furthermore, nowhere else is Deucalion described as Scythian. In fact, this story is much closer to that of Noah (Gen. 6-8).<sup>361</sup> Since pagan adaptations of the Greek Hebrew Bible were exceedingly rare, many other sources for this story have been suggested, including a Zoroastrian flood story; a flood story in Berossus' *History of Babylonia*; the flood in the Babylonian *Atrahasis*; and the earlier (original) Sumerian flood myth.<sup>362</sup> Significantly, *On the Syrian Goddess's* flood story perfectly corresponds neither to any of these Near Eastern flood stories nor to any Greek ones. The generally Near Eastern provenance of these potential sources suggests what is going on here. The narrator tries to incorporate a Syrian ritual into a Greek mythological framework—the story of Deucalion—but he must tweak several aspects of that story in order to do so. The process of trying to make the Syrian ritual conform to Greek myths ironically causes the Greek myth to become more like a Near Eastern flood story. Once some parts of the Deucalion myth have been changed, the narrator is able to make an

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<sup>360</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 335.

<sup>361</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 335.

<sup>362</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 336-342.

argument that the Syrian water-pouring ritual is based on something that Deucalion, a Greek, did. But in order to make the ritual fit this Greek mythological framework, that framework itself has to be altered. The result is that the Syrian ritual's origins have been Hellenized, but the Hellenic mythological framework has been "Syrianized" in the process. At this Syrian temple that Combabos the eunuch built, there is a ritual whose aetiology can be found in Greek myths but only if those Greek myths become more Syrian. The interaction between the Syrian ritual and the Greek myth leads to each of them becoming more like the other.

The description of the *phallobatai* ritual continues this theme of Greco-Syrian mixing. The narrator describes one ritual in which a man climbs one of the massive phalli in the temple's courtyard. One possible purpose of this ascent is to ask the gods to bless Syria, but another is to honor Dionysus, whom the narrator says built these phalli (28). The narrator supports the position that Dionysus is the honoree, again basing his conclusions on the presence of the phalli. But he also says that while the climber is atop the phallus, people put money in a basket at its base, and the climber asks the gods to bless them (29). Although the narrator sees the two possible purposes of the rite as mutually exclusive, his description of the rite supports both sides. There are massive phalli—his evidence for the role of Dionysus—and the climber does ask for blessings. Additionally, the method of climbing is that which the Arabians and Egyptians employ to climb date-palm trees (29). This ritual is made up of Greek, Syrian, and Arabian or Egyptian components. Like the 'Deucalion' story, the phallus-climbing ritual is an example of the ethnic blending that occurred at the temple the eunuch Combabos built.

The temple's architecture and statuary also conforms to this pattern. The narrator

says it is built in the Ionic style, but it stands on a Roman style podium (30).<sup>363</sup> In addition to having a pronaos and naos, it also has what Lucian calls a θάλαμος, but this does not seem to correspond to the traditional Greek adyton. This θάλαμος sits atop a low podium, and, since it has no doors, it is visible by the public (31). Although it is unclear what exactly Lucian is describing, it seems to be an adyton-édicule—a “free-standing structure like a baldachino, roofed over and standing on a podium at one end of the” temple.<sup>364</sup> Material evidence for such adyton-édicule appears only in Lebanon.<sup>365</sup> Despite initially describing the temple’s style as Ionic, the narrator’s subsequent description reveals a combination of Greek, Roman, and eastern styles.

The statues displayed in the temple depict, among others, Zeus, Hera, Achilles, Helen, Combabos, Stratonice, and the ancient Assyrian Queen Semiramis. Between the statues of Zeus and Hera stands a statue which “does not have its own shape but bears the likenesses of other gods” (τὸ δὲ μορφήν μὲν ἰδίην οὐκ ἔχει, φορέει δὲ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν εἶδεα, 33). The text says that some Assyrians associate it with Dionysus, others with Deucalion, and others with Semiramis (33). We have seen Dionysus’ role in the temple’s ethnic destabilization several times above, and Deucalion’s flood story also contributes to that theme. It is also worth recalling here that *On the Syrian Goddess*, uniquely, makes Deucalion a Scythian. Elsewhere in the text, the narrator says that Semiramis transformed into a dove and her mother transformed into a fish (14). This statue, then, is an amalgamation of two traditionally Greek figures—one of whom has played a key role in undermining the Syrian identity of the temple and one of whom has become Scythian

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<sup>363</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 428.

<sup>364</sup> Lightfoot (2003) 429.

<sup>365</sup> *ibid.*



without explanation—and an Assyrian queen with strong ties to the idea of metamorphosis, in this text. On a basic level, this statue’s ambiguity undermines the gender and ethnicity of the Greek man, the (Greco-)Scythian man, and the Assyrian woman.

The particular word used to indicate this statue is σημήιον. Now one possible meaning of σημήιον is simply “a sign,” “a monument,” or, as Lightfoot translates it, “the standard.” But it also has persuasive tones and can signify “an argument in proof of a conclusion.” Of course, one way to understand its use here is in a religious context, as proof of the gods’ existence or power. The roles elsewhere in the text of the three figures whom Lucian chose to cite as possible candidates for the σημήιον suggest that it is also an argument for the importance of ethnic destabilization in this work. Dionysus and Deucalion play major roles in that theme, and now they themselves are mixed with an Assyrian woman. Lest this go unnoticed, Lucian even tells us that this statue is essential evidence for his argument.

*On the Syrian Goddess*, therefore, weaves together everything we have seen eunuchs do in earlier chapters. The story of Stratonice, Antiochus, and Combabos contains all of the elements of a typical Herodotean eunuch-tale. The competing foundation myths of the original temple built by either Attes or Dionysus destabilize the temple’s Syrian nature, as they provide Lydian and Greek origins, respectively. The second temple that Combabos built is characterized by a constant blend of Greek and foreign. Both Attes and Combabos are not only castrated, but also become even more feminine later by donning female clothing. In Combabos’ case, there are competing versions of how masculine he looked post-castration, and his gender ambiguity becomes

almost like an air-born pathogen. Of course, Lucian was not content to just include these earlier literary themes; he also altered them. Rather than a person's ethnicity becoming destabilized, it is a temple's. Furthermore, its ethnic destabilization occurs because of a eunuch, be it Attes or Combabos.

### **Favorinus of Arles**

Favorinus of Arles (ca. 85-165) was an Academic philosopher whose wondrous eloquence caused Philostratus to include him in his catalogue of sophists.<sup>366</sup> One of the similarities between philosophers and sophists during this period was the need to constantly demonstrate one's superior philosophical or rhetorical skill. Those involved were striving not only to establish their authority over their peers but also to attract students. As a philosopher who also delivered rhetorical performances, Favorinus had to prove his superiority over both rival philosophers and sophists. In this section, I argue that Favorinus' decision to describe himself as a eunuch was motivated by the earlier literary traditions about eunuchs and that Favorinus relied on these traditions to establish his philosophical and pedagogical authority for himself.

#### **1. Favorinus in the *Lives of the Sophists***

According to Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, Favorinus was born "double-natured, a man-woman" (διφυῆς δὲ ἐτέχθη καὶ ἀνδρόθηλυσ), a description that modern scholars concur denotes Reifenstein's syndrome.<sup>367</sup> Reifenstein's syndrome is caused by a man's inability to process male hormones. Affected infants often suffer from cryptorchidism and genitals so ambiguous that even modern doctors often struggle to assign such a child

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<sup>366</sup> Holford-Strevens (1997) 189 for the dates of Favorinus' life. Phil. VS 489-492 is on Fav.

<sup>367</sup> Mason (1979); Swain (1989); Gleason (1995); Holford-Stevens (1997); Holford-Stevens (2003).

a gender. Post-pubescent Reifenstein patients suffer from sexual impotence, decreased body and facial hair, micropenis, and often develop fat deposits in places—such as the breasts—where women, not men, usually have them. The inability to process androgen hormones also limits the development of a masculine (i.e., deep) voice.<sup>368</sup> In short, a person with Reifenstein’s syndrome has the same physical characteristics as a eunuch, despite not having been castrated.<sup>369</sup> Favorinus was not unique in the ancient world. The paradoxographer Phlegon of Tralles, for example, documents several other cases of children of ambiguous gender.<sup>370</sup> What was, however, unique about Favorinus was his public presentation of his condition. Although the standard Greek word to describe infants of ambiguous gender was ἀνδρόγυνος (androgynous) and *cinaedus* was the standard Latin one, Favorinus chose to describe himself as a eunuch (εὐνοῦχος).<sup>371</sup>

Let us consider why he did so. Both the Greek and Roman literary traditions concerning eunuchs were based on paradoxes. On the Greek side, eunuchs signal that a Persian, for example, is acting in a distinctly un-Persian way. On the Roman side, they signal that a man is acting in a distinctly unmanly one. More broadly speaking, eunuchs alert the reader that someone is behaving in a manner paradoxical to either his ethnicity or his gender. Significantly, among the first things that Philostratus says about Favorinus is that he relied on three paradoxes to define himself:

Although he was a Gaul, he Hellenized; although he was a eunuch, he was charged with adultery; he quarreled with a king and lived.

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<sup>368</sup> National Institute of Health, Library of Medicine:  
<<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001169.htm>>.

<sup>369</sup> For the physical characteristics of eunuchs, see Chapter 1 (Introduction) above.

<sup>370</sup> Gleason (1995) 39-40; Hansen (1996) 40-43.

<sup>371</sup> Gleason (1995) 62-65. Notably, ἀνδρόγυνος and *cinaedus* are slanted synonyms. More on this in a bit.

Γαλάτης ὃν ἐλληνίζειν, εὐνοῦχος ὃν μοιχείας κρίνεσθαι, βασιλεῖ  
διαφέρεσθαι καὶ ζῆν.  
*Lives of the Sophists*, 489

The first of these paradoxes correspond to the Greek and Roman paradigms for how eunuchs work in literature. The city of Arles—Favorinus’ birthplace—was in the province of Gallia Narbonensis. It had once been a Gallic city, which the Romans conquered in the second century BC. There is also evidence that before the Roman conquest a Greek polis had founded a colony there, the residents of which seem to have coexisted alongside the native Gauls.<sup>372</sup> As a consequence of this history, the population of Arles during Favorinus’ time was a mixture of Gauls, Greeks, and Romans, and it is likely that most inhabitants of the town spoke at least two languages.<sup>373</sup> Favorinus himself, for instance, demonstrably knew both Greek and Latin. Additionally, Favorinus’ family was part of the local aristocracy, and he was, from birth, a Roman citizen.<sup>374</sup> Rather than identify himself as such, however, Favorinus describes himself as the most “other” of the three options available to him—a Gaul. And he does not stop there but goes on to explain that he is a Gaul who has become a Greek. He claims two heritages, thereby embracing the ethnographic destabilization that eunuchs in earlier Greek literature signify. The significance of this decision becomes clear, when considered alongside the second paradox.

The second of his paradoxes evokes the Roman literary tradition of gender destabilization. As noted above, the normal Greek word for one such as Favorinus was ἀνδρόγυνος and the Latin one was *cinaedus*. Although they operated as synonyms during

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<sup>372</sup> Gleason (1995) 1.

<sup>373</sup> Holford-Strevens (1997) 191.

<sup>374</sup> Gleason (1995) 1-5; Holford-Strevens (1997) 189.

Favorinus' time, these words' original meanings were quite different to each other.<sup>375</sup> The Greek ἀνδρόγυνος once referred to what we today would call a hermaphrodite, i.e., someone—such as Favorinus—born biologically ambiguous with respect to gender. On the other hand, *cinaedus* was the Roman term for biological men with effeminate features and habits, and such men were considered prone to sexual deviance and excess, as well as deceit.<sup>376</sup> Were Favorinus to accept the label of ἀνδρόγυνος, then he would also be accepting the negative connotations of *cinaedus*. Unlike one of truly ambiguous gender (an ἀνδρόγυνος in the original sense), a *cinaedus* was a clearly biological man who failed to live up to masculine ideals because of his inability to restrain his feminine tendencies. A *cinaedus* was judged by standards of Roman masculinity and found wanting. A εὐνοῦχος, on the other hand, operated beyond those standards. Since they were biologically incapable of sexual penetration, there was no expectation that they do it. In the competitive game of Roman masculinity, a *cinaedus* was a loser, but a εὐνοῦχος was a spectator.

In the first half of his second paradox then, Favorinus establishes himself as something other than a failed, degenerate man (*cinaedus*) by declaring himself a eunuch. In the second half of this paradox, he subverts the meaning of eunuch by blurring the line between it and masculinity. He immediately follows his claim to be a eunuch with the statement that he performed the manliest of acts in the Roman mind—sexual penetration. One interpretation of this statement is that Favorinus is trying to show that he actually does belong in the category of man. Yet this would contradict the first half of the paradox, in which he claims the title of eunuch in order to escape a more effeminate

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<sup>375</sup> Gleason (1995) 63-64.

category. Furthermore, Favorinus famously emphasized how effeminate his voice was and wore a great deal of makeup, thereby making it clear that he had no interest in the title of “man.”<sup>377</sup>

To see what Favorinus is doing here, one must consider the impact of his statement on the category of masculinity. When one who does not even claim to be a man can perform the quintessential masculine act, in a way moreover that transgressed aggressively against another man’s masculine rights, that act’s ability to define masculinity is drawn into question. By creating ambiguity about the means of defining masculinity, Favorinus also creates ambiguity about the significance of the category itself. Now as we saw in the previous chapter, manliness (*virtus*) in the Roman world was the pinnacle of a hierarchical system governing not only gender but also social values. Something with more *virtus* was not just more masculine but also better.<sup>378</sup> When Favorinus gives up any claims to the label *vir* in the first half of this paradox, he also ostensibly admits to being innately “worse” than all men. Rather than accept this, Favorinus raises the question of what a man is.

The standard Latin term used to describe a person born with Favorinus’ condition—*cinaedus*—categorized him alongside biologically normal men who acted like women. Since *cinaedi* were men, they had more (potential) *virtus* than all non-men, but their effeminacy placed them at the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinity. Rather than accept this position below all non-*cinaedi* men (but above everyone else), Favorinus

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<sup>376</sup> Gleason (1995) 64-65; Williams (1999).

<sup>377</sup> Phil. *VS* 489; Fronto, *Laud. Negl.* A 229.

<sup>378</sup> For more on this, see the previous chapter. Williams (1999) 133 has an excellent summation of the point: “One could never praise a man by saying that he lacks all masculine vices—indeed, the

described himself as a eunuch. Since men innately had more *virtus* than non-men, Favorinus' self-identification as a eunuch seems to be a downward move, in the hierarchy of gender. But by alluding to his adultery charge, he destabilizes the meaning of the terms "eunuch" and "man." Once the meanings of "eunuch" and "man" are unclear, it is also impossible to discern their hierarchical relationship to each other. If one cannot define what a man or a eunuch is, then one cannot conclude that a man is better than a eunuch. Due to this destabilization, Favorinus can occupy the category of eunuch and compete for authority against men, without immediately losing to them on the ground that he is either an effeminate—and therefore worse—man (*cinaedus*) or because he is something innately worse than a man—a eunuch. He uses the association between eunuchs and gender destabilization to change the rules of the game.

This also explains what is going on in the first paradox. Although Favorinus was a Roman citizen by birth, those born in the city of Rome or places that had been thoroughly Romanized had a firmer claim to Roman identity than he did. Rather than argue that he too should be considered wholly Roman, Favorinus labeled himself a Hellenized Gaul. As discussed above, to be Hellenized during this period meant being *pepaideumenos*—educated in classical Greek literature. Just as Roman masculinity was a contest waged in the public eye, so too was one's status as *pepaideumenos*. Rather than compete against others to prove his status as a *pepaideumenos* Roman, Favorinus chose to create a new category for himself—*pepaideumenos* Gaul. In this instance, the category in which he situated himself was not one with a previous meaning whose relationship to pre-existing Roman values needed to be challenged, as was the case for a eunuch.

The effect of these two paradoxes is that Favorinus changes his social status from that of an effeminate, provincial Roman man to something new and undefined—a Hellenized, Gallic eunuch. By defining himself in this paradoxical way, Favorinus was able to establish his pedagogical and philosophical authority on his own terms. Had he conformed to the pre-existing hierarchy, his birthplace and biological condition would have undermined him. By defining himself in other terms, however, Favorinus created a new category whose status and social limits had yet to be defined. Favorinus recognized that his standing within each of the (ostensibly) more socially empowering aspects of his identity—male and Roman—were limited. By instead calling himself a Gallic eunuch, he stripped himself of such limits.

A final point about Favorinus' second paradox that one must address is its similarity to the adultery charge leveled against Bagoas in Lucian's *Eunuch*. This similarity has led some to think that Bagoas is a veiled allusion to Favorinus.<sup>379</sup> Bagoas, however, appeals to Favorinus' standing as an eminent philosopher to argue that he (Bagoas) should not be excluded from philosophy (*Eun.* 10). If Bagoas were meant to be a stand-in for Favorinus, it would be odd to have him refer to Favorinus as somebody else. On the other hand, that both are accused of adultery does seem like an unlikely coincidence, so long as the texts are not read with the Roman literary tradition of eunuchs in mind. Both texts feature someone identified as a eunuch from the outset and do not discuss that person's life before castration. That is to say, the scope of Lucian's text precludes us from reading about Bagoas losing his masculinity after castration, and likewise biology (and self-definition) prevents any such discussion of Favorinus.

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male (who should naturally have it) or a female (who may, exceptionally, attain to it)."



Eunuchs, however, signify the destabilization of gender. Since readers see both Bagoas and Favorinus only as eunuchs, it is the category of “eunuch” that is destabilized. The accusations against Bagoas and Favorinus draw the meaning of “eunuch” into question, as such accusations claim that a eunuch performed an act in the special purview of men. Although both texts focus on the eunuchs’ failure to behave as such, the blurring of the distinction between eunuchs and men also destabilizes the definition of masculinity. And since penetration was the quintessential component of masculine gender identity in ancient Rome, suggesting that a eunuch was able to do so was the most potent means of destabilizing both genders at the same time. When Lucian’s *Eunuch* and Favorinus’ paradox are interpreted within the broader Roman literary paradigm for how eunuchs work, what initially seems like an incredible coincidence—two different eunuchs being accused of adultery—is unmasked as an efficacious means for a eunuch to destabilize definitions of gender.

Favorinus’ third paradox—that he quarreled with a king and lived—demonstrates the effectiveness of the first two. Since Favorinus has built a unique social category for himself, the inherent dangers incurred by other ones did not impact him. This paradox’s difference in function is indicated syntactically. The first two incorporate a noun and participle referring to Favorinus, followed by an infinitive whose subject is Favorinus. The third begins with a noun not referring to Favorinus (*βασιλεῖ*), followed by two infinitives whose subject is Favorinus. There is a transition from describing what Favorinus is and does to how he interacts with another person. Significantly, the other person in this instance is emperor Hadrian, with whom Favorinus quarrels and lives.

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<sup>379</sup> Holford-Strevens (1997), (2003); Amato (2005).

Indeed, Favorinus does not just survive his quarrel with Hadrian but is unscathed by it (οὐδὲν ἔπαθεν, VS 489). According to Cassius Dio, Hadrian considered himself the ultimate intellectual authority and executed no small number of prominent intellectuals whom he perceived as challengers to that authority (69.3). Yet in its catalog of the leading intellectuals during Hadrian's tenure, the *Historia Augusta* cites Favorinus as the greatest of them, raising the question of how Favorinus not only survived Hadrian's reign but openly quarreled with him and survived (16.10).

Favorinus paradoxically challenged Hadrian's authority and went unharmed, and his self-identification as a Gallic eunuch was (perhaps) essential to his survival. The roles of intelligence and *imperium* in defining Roman masculinity are key to answering both the questions of why Favorinus adopted the title of "eunuch" and how he escaped from Hadrian. We saw in the last chapter that one of the major tenets of Roman masculinity was the ability to think rationally and intellectually, as opposed to emotionally. Logical thinking was a sign of self-control, and self-control was necessary for the exercise of control over others (*imperium*). Significantly, the ideal Roman man exercised his *imperium* over everyone with less masculinity than himself. Therefore, to be a legitimate ruler, one also had to be the most masculine, as that status legitimated one's claim to the highest degree of *imperium*.<sup>380</sup> One of the outcomes of this nexus of intelligence, masculinity, and power is that challengers of Hadrian's status as the smartest were also challengers to his status as the manliest and, consequently, the legitimacy of his claim to supreme *imperium*.

Unlike the intellectuals whom Hadrian executed, Favorinus had removed himself

from the entire game of Roman masculinity by defining himself as a eunuch. Since he openly professed to lack masculinity, Favorinus posed no (or a lesser) threat to Hadrian. By adopting the title of eunuch, Favorinus gained the power to safely disagree with an emperor by not challenging his imperium. Rather than try to downplay his Reifenstein's and partake in the public competition of Roman masculinity, Favorinus went in the other direction and emphasized his lack of masculinity. Furthermore, he ceded his claim to the *imperium* innately found in all Romans, by describing his ethnicity as a hybrid of two conquered peoples. This association with the conquered—Gaul and Greece—as opposed to the conqueror—Rome—indicates a further cession of any claim to *imperium*, thereby reiterating Favorinus' abstention from masculine competition. In his first two paradoxes, Favorinus builds himself a new and ambiguous identity. In the third, he shows the unique power that this identity bestows upon him. By defining himself through aspects of his identity traditionally held in less esteem, Favorinus paradoxically gains power that others lack. His authority stems from his ostensible rejection of any claims to it.

## 2. Favorinus in the *Noctes Atticae*

In the *Noctes Atticae* of Aelius Gellius—one of Favorinus' students—there are indications that Favorinus' public persona of a “foreign” eunuch disinterested in being Roman or proving his masculinity was no more than a well-maintained facade. This facade had to remain largely in place, as it is the basis of Favorinus' philosophical authority, but by using a variety of techniques, he was able to keep his mask on while asserting his status as a Roman man. This approach allows Favorinus to stake his claim to Roman masculinity, and it also protects him from competitors' attacks.

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<sup>380</sup> See Vout (2007) Ch. 1 for the emperor as the pinnacle of masculinity and the relationship

In one anecdote from *Noctes Atticae*, Favorinus questions the veracity of a line of Sallust according to which avarice causes both a body and soul to become effeminate (*NA* 3.1). An interlocutor suggests that “body and soul” is a poetic circumlocution for “man,” but Favorinus counters that Sallust did not use poetic paraphrases (3.1.5). A second interlocutor suggests that greedy men are so devoted to the acquisition of wealth that they neglect their bodies and minds, which consequently lapse into effeminacy (3.1.7-9). Favorinus notes that this answer fails to explain the existence of men who are greedy but also have masculine physiques (3.1.12). A third interlocutor modifies the position of the second one and suggests that only men who are concerned exclusively with getting rich become effeminate in body and mind (3.1.12-13). To this, Favorinus says, “Either what you say is credible or Sallust blamed greed far more than is warranted, because he hated it” (3.1.14). By questioning the validity of Sallust’s description of how men become effeminate, Favorinus suggests that he has a better understanding of masculinity than Sallust did. Furthermore, his response to the first interlocutor demonstrates Favorinus’ mastery of Roman literature. This anecdote, then, shows Favorinus speaking as an authority on issues pertaining to Roman masculinity and Roman culture, thereby contradicting his notorious self-identification as a Hellenized-Gallic eunuch. At the end, though, Favorinus reassumes his Gallic eunuch mask by saying that the third interlocutor might be correct. He does not wholly discredit his scepticism of Sallust’s description, as he leaves open the possibility that Sallust and all three interlocutors are wrong, while he is correct.

Favorinus here makes an implicit claim to have a better understanding of

masculinity than Sallust, and he flaunts his knowledge of Roman literature. Should a rival philosopher, however, attack Favorinus' understanding of the issue or censure his speaking on topics beyond the purview of a Gallic eunuch, Favorinus can counter that he only asked a question and left open the potential for Sallust to be correct. Favorinus limits his own declarative statements to indisputable facts—Sallust does not use poetic circumlocution and there are greedy men with masculine physiques—whereas his more philosophical ideas are conveyed through questions and either-or (*aut... aut*) sentences that leave open the possibility that he is wrong. Thus, Favorinus is able to assert his mastery of Roman masculinity and Roman literature, without subjecting himself to attacks based on his lack of masculinity or provincial origins.

Another anecdote from *Noctes Atticae* takes place in the entrance hall of the Palatine, where Favorinus and others wait to pay their respects to Caesar (4.1). A certain grammarian among them displays his erudition by discussing the importance of the grammatical gender of words: “Even *penus* (“provisions”),’ he said, ‘is described in different genders and with various declensions. For the ancients said *hoc penus* and *haec penus* and *huius peni* and *penoris*” (4.1.2-3). Favorinus responds by saying that it makes no difference what gender one treats *penus* as, and inquires whether the grammarian even knows what it means (4.1.5-7). The grammarian rattles off various types of food that fit the category of *penus*, but Favorinus clarifies that he wants to know the word's meaning, not hear examples of things that fit into the category (4.1.8-9). When the grammarian is confused about what Favorinus is asking for, Favorinus explains:

If I were to ask you to tell me, that is to define in words, what a man is, I do not think that you would respond that you and I are men. For that would be to show who is a man, not to explain what a man is. But if I

should ask you to define what thing a man is, you would certainly say to me that a man is a mortal creature possessing reason and knowledge, or you would say something else that separates man from everything else.

‘Si,’ inquit, ‘ego te nunc rogem ut mihi dicas et quasi circumscribas verbis cuiusmodi ‘homo’ sit, non, opinor, respondeas hominem esse te atque me. Hoc enim quis homo sit ostendere est, non quid homo sit dicere. Sed si, inquam, peterem ut ipsum illud quod homo est desinires, tu profecto mihi diceres hominem esse animal mortale, rationis et scientiae capiens, vel quo alio modo diceres, ut eum a ceteris omnibus seperares.

4.1.12

Favorinus here lays claim to Roman masculinity and status as an expert of Roman culture, but immediately walks this back. First off, Favorinus questions the grammarian’s understanding of the word *penus*, which is close enough to the Latin *penis* that a phallic pun cannot be ruled out.<sup>381</sup> According to that interpretation, Favorinus is explaining to the grammarian that he (the grammarian) can give examples of phalli, but does not know what a phallus is actually for. In other words, the possession of masculine genitals does not inherently increase one’s (understanding of) masculinity, as some who possess them do not even know what they are. Besides this possible word play, there is the indisputable fact that Favorinus offers his own definition of man (*homo*).

Although one might object that *homo* can designate “person,” as opposed to particularly “man,” Gellius regularly uses *mortalis* for “person” and even dedicates an entire section of *Noctes Atticae* to explaining that *mortalis* includes people of both genders and all ages, whereas *homo* means strictly adult males (13.29). When he does use a form of *homo* to indicate people of both genders, Gellius usually clarifies what he means, for instance by saying *homines utriusque sexus* (14.1.27).

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<sup>381</sup> Kevlen (2009) 128-129 argues that this is a purposeful play on words and I would prefer nothing more than to accept his position. But the *e* in *penus* is short, and the *e* in *penis* is long, so

Favorinus, then, puts forward his own definition of “man,” and this definition hinges not on genitals or penetration but on intellectual ability (*rationis et scientiae capiens*). He only does so, however, in the form of a hypothetical answer that the grammarian might give to a hypothetical question that Favorinus does not ask him. Favorinus alters the definition of man so that it better fits himself, but he creates great distance between himself and this definition by presenting it in the assumed voice of the grammarian. Favorinus, speaking as the grammarian, even describes himself as a man (*non, opinor, respondeas hominem esse te atque me. Hoc enim quis homo sit ostendere est*). He borrows the grammarian’s voice to bestow masculine status upon himself, thereby claiming the title of man, but without using his own voice. Although his technique in this anecdote varies from the Sallustian one, in both cases Favorinus subtly carves out a masculine identity for himself, while trying to maintain the facade that that is not what he is doing.

When Favorinus abandons the grammarian’s voice and speaks as himself again, he demonstrates his thorough mastery of Roman literature, by citing numerous ancient Roman authors who misused *penus* in their works (4.1.17-18). He explains that he investigated this matter because he was unsure of the meaning and “for Roman citizens speaking Latin, it is no less shameful to refer to an object by the wrong word than to call a man (*homo*) by the wrong name” (4.1.18). Although he does not explicitly refer to himself as a Roman citizen here, Favorinus does say that his investigation of *penus*’ meaning is the type of behavior in which a Roman citizen should engage. By citing ancient Roman authors who did not know the meaning of *penus*, he establishes himself as

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the words' similarity is less than it might appear, at first. Although it is impossible to know, either

a greater authority on the Latin language and on how to be a Roman citizen than they were and the grammarian is. Again, though, Favorinus restrains himself from explicitly declaring this to be the case.

In this anecdote, Favorinus asserts his status as a male Roman citizen, but he once again does so from behind the safety of his Gallic eunuch-mask. Were anyone to attack him for making such a claim, he could simply point out that he never called himself a man. Indeed, he says that the grammarian would *not* call him a man (*non, opinor, respondeas hominem esse te atque me*). Of course, the next sentence suggests that the reason the grammarian would not call Favorinus a man is because this would not answer the question, “for [answering that you and I are men] is indicating who is a man” (not what a man is).<sup>382</sup> Favorinus competes for his status as a man and Roman from behind the protection of his carefully constructed facade, thereby allowing himself to take part in the competition for Roman masculine standing, without fear of being challenged.<sup>383</sup>

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way, it does seem to be within punning range.

<sup>382</sup> *hoc enim [respondere hominem esse te atque me] quis homo sit ostendere est*. Although I've added the text in square brackets here, *hominem esse te atque me* is indubitably the antecedent of this *hoc*. The full quotation is on the previous page.

<sup>383</sup> Kevlen (2009) recognizes and discusses the tendency for *Noctes Atticae* to feature Favorinus in situations concerning masculinity and Roman identity and culture. He argues, however, that by alluding to Favorinus' lack of masculinity and basing Favorinus' philosophical and pedagogical authority on his mastery of Roman culture and history, Gellius undermines Favorinus and asserts his own authority. This is so, according to Kevlen, because, Favorinus was a Gaul who Hellenized, whereas Gellius was actually Roman. Therefore by discussing Roman issues, Favorinus admits that they are of greater importance than Gallic ones. Since Gellius was a Roman, Kevlen continues, and Favorinus was not, the implication is that Gellius' Roman learning is more useful and valuable than Favorinus' Gallic and Hellenic learning. *Contra* Kevlen, however, Gellius came from an African province (Holford-Strevens [2003] 13-15), not Rome itself or even Italy. Gellius and Favorinus, therefore, had equal claims to being Roman. Kevlen seems to have bought into Favorinus' self-identification as a Hellenized Gaul so thoroughly that Favorinus' latent claim to being Roman slipped his mind. Given their similar origins, Gellius actually increases his own authorial authority on Roman matters by depicting Favorinus—a fellow provincial—as a master of Roman culture, as this demonstrates the ability of a non-Roman (i.e. one from neither the city itself nor the immediately adjacent region) to prevail over those



Favorinus' final appearance in Aulus Gellius serves as a shield against anyone who has grown suspicious of the sincerity of his Gallic eunuch-identity during the course of *Noctes Atticae*. After multiple anecdotes similar to the two described above, Favorinus once again questions a Roman about Roman culture. This time, he asks the jurist Sextus Caecilius about the Romans' adherence (and lack thereof) to the laws of the twelve tables, as well as whether some of those laws are too cruel and others too lax (20.1). Caecilius rebuts each of Favorinus' pointed questions by explaining how the meanings of certain words in the laws have changed over time and by detailing the historical context that made each of the laws necessary. In other words, the final image of Favorinus in *Noctes Atticae* is him trying to show that he is an expert on Roman culture, only for a Roman to deftly counter his attempts.

That this is the last time we see Favorinus in the text retroactively tilts the scales against him in each of the previous instances in which he left open the possibility that he was wrong, as in the Sallustian example above. One must bear in mind, however, that Aulus Gellius was a student and friend of Favorinus. He had a vested interest in helping Favorinus maintain his facade as a eunuch disavowing Roman masculine or cultural authority. By making Favorinus' loss to Caecilius the final impression that a reader has of him, Gellius transitions Favorinus away from the expert on *Romanitas* that he is in the rest of *Noctes Atticae* and back towards the image of the Gallic eunuch. As such, Gellius'

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from closer to the city in disputes about Roman culture. I concur with Kevlen that by referring to Favorinus in discussions on masculinity and Roman culture, Gellius reminds the readers that Favorinus was neither a man nor a Roman. As I've shown above, however, Favorinus purposely presented himself as neither male nor Roman in order to create an original basis for his authority. By discussing Favorinus in conjunction with these topics, Gellius does indeed draw the reader's mind towards Favorinus' professed lack of both, but *contra* Kevlen this is a reminder of Favorinus' authority, and not a subversion of it.

depiction of Favorinus in *Noctes Atticae* is a macrocosm of Favorinus' own self-representation in the various anecdotes of Gellius' texts. Clearly, then, Favorinus' instruction of Gellius was most successful.

In addition to the two examples above, several other references to Favorinus from *Noctes Atticae* warrant mention here, although they do not deal with masculinity or Roman identity. The first is a discourse by Favorinus about the importance of a mother nursing her infant. He argues that a child's nature is largely dictated by the nature of the woman who nurses that child, not the nature of the parents (12.1). He compares nursing to watering a plant. The quality of water used to water a sapling determines the sapling's nature far more than the quality of the tree from which the seed (i.e., the one that grew into the sapling) came (12.1.16-17). The same, Favorinus argues, is true for people. We saw above how Favorinus blurs the distinction between men and eunuchs in his second paradox in an attempt to challenge the traditional Roman gender hierarchy of male supremacy, but whether one clever sentence could significantly challenge the long-held Roman view of innate masculine supremacy is doubtful. In this passage, however, Favorinus continues that challenge. At one point, he explains that an infant's character develops (*moribus inolescendis*) in accordance with the nature of the mother's milk (*natura lactis*) and relegates the father's seed to a secondary role (12.1.20). Later, he says that children entrusted to a wet nurse instead of to their mother lack any real concern for their families (12.1.23).

Favorinus thus challenges the significance of the *paterfamilias* for the family's continued existence, as it is mothers' nursing that ensures real familial ties. He reiterates the primacy of mothers in maintaining family lines by saying that a child entrusted to a

wet nurse is “not much less forgotten than one that has died” (*quam morte amissi, obliuio*) (12.1.22). In this passage, Favorinus continues his challenge of masculine supremacy in the Roman hierarchy of gender. The father’s supreme authority over the family unit is superseded by the mother, and, significantly, the mother gains this authority by performing a gender specific task—nursing. Not only does this raise questions about whether masculinity is inherently better than femininity, but it also bears on Favorinus’ status. If the real authority within the family unit lies with the mother, then there is a possibility that non-men are also the true wielders of authority in other arenas.

By attributing such significance to nursing, Favorinus also challenges the science of physiognomy. According to physiognomy, one’s ethnicity and gender are the major controlling factors of one’s nature, and one’s physical appearance is indicative of one’s nature.<sup>384</sup> If, however, the nature of the milk that one consumes as a child is the supreme arbiter of character, then the significance of ethnicity and gender are undermined and appearance is no longer a perfect indicator of character. For example, in his discussion of nursing, Favorinus cites a passage in the *Aeneid* where Dido says that Aeneas is too cruel to be related to Venus, unless Hyrcanian tigers nursed him (12.1.20).<sup>385</sup> The implication is that if Hyrcanian tigers nurse someone, then, regardless of parentage and appearance, that person will be cruel. Elsewhere in *Noctes Atticae*, Favorinus also delivers a lengthy tirade against astrologers, who claim that the position of the stars and planets at the moment of one’s birth dictates one’s future (14.1). He points out that its practitioners claim that it is one of the most ancient sciences. If it were a valid means of predicting the future, he explains, then those earlier readings would have already predicted everything.

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<sup>384</sup> See my Intro.

Clearly though, he notes, that is not the case, and therefore astrologers are not to be trusted.

### 3. Favorinus and Physiognomy

As Maria Sassi explains, astrology had by this time been subsumed by the ever-growing science of physiognomy.<sup>386</sup> Celestial bodies were classified as either male or female based on their perceived heat and the mythical role of their eponymous deities, semi-deities, and heroes. Sassi explains the implications of this conflation of astrology and physiognomy: “The individual’s whole being reflects characteristics belonging to each of the heavenly bodies dominating his day of birth... These affect physical appearance, character, the propensity to suffer certain illnesses, and even the manner of death.”<sup>387</sup> Although astrological physiognomy was based on celestial positioning and not bodily appearance, it was still a form of physiognomy and one that Favorinus could easily assault. His distaste for physiognomy is understandable, since it was a science that claimed to be able to judge a person’s intellectual and moral worth based on their external attributes. Favorinus had fashioned a unique ethno-gender identity for himself in order to escape the restraints of social categories. Physiognomy, however, did not care whether he was a *cinaedus* or a eunuch, a Roman or a Gaul. It relied solely on his physical features (which were markedly feminine) to define him. In other words, physiognomy was a means of categorizing a man who had sculpted his identity so as to escape pre-existing categories.

Favorinus, therefore, needed to discredit physiognomy. In addition to the

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<sup>385</sup> *Aen.* 4.366

<sup>386</sup> Sassi (2001) Ch. 5.

<sup>387</sup> Sassi (2001) 168.

instances in the *Noctes Atticae* where he attacks it, there are indications that this challenge was also a major component of his philosophical works. Although none of his philosophical works survive, references to them hint at how he tried to do this. Aulus Gellius says that Favorinus wrote ten books on the principles of Pyrrhonian scepticism (*NA* 11.5.5). According to this philosophy, appearances are based not on the object being perceived but on the nature of the perceiver (11.5.6). In his treatise *On the Best Manner of Teaching*, Galen corroborates that Favorinus held this position, as he attacks Favorinus for the contradiction of claiming to perceive nothing but still being able to teach something.<sup>388</sup> Favorinus' argument that it is impossible to view an object as it really is threatened the underpinnings of physiognomy—a science that drew conclusions about people based on their appearance. This philosophical position explains Favorinus' long standing feud with the physiognomist Polemo.<sup>389</sup> Although Philostratus describes Polemo as a sophist, his rhetorical performances seem to have consisted largely of him demonstrating his physiognomic prowess by expounding on people's character, based on their appearance.<sup>390</sup> In one of his works, Polemo performs a physiognomical interpretation of Favorinus. Since Favorinus styles his outward appearance in the manner of a foreign, effeminate eunuch, Polemo describes him as a deceitful sexual deviant who has relied on sorcery to convince people that he is eloquent and intelligent, despite not actually possessing either quality.<sup>391</sup> Since physiognomy relied so heavily on appearance, Favorinus' cultivated distinction between *cinaedus* and eunuch had no bearing on his status, according to that system. Although he could use the label of eunuch and its

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<sup>388</sup> Galen Περὶ Ἀριστῆς Διδασκαλίας *passim*.

<sup>389</sup> Gleason (1995) contains a detailed account of their mutual animosity.

<sup>390</sup> Gleason (1995).

traditional ties to ethnic and gender destabilization as a disguise that enabled him to elude competitors who focused on asserting their own status as Roman men, there was no escaping the physiognomic gaze. Favorinus' philosophical arguments about perception, however, reveal that he once again tried to avoid being subjected to others' categories.

The first two paradoxes with which Favorinus defined himself show that he was aware of the Greek and Roman literary traditions concerning eunuchs. Rather than live as an effeminate Roman *cinaedus*, he donned the mantle of eunuch, along with its concomitant destabilization of ethnicity and gender. By abstaining from any claim to traditional indicators of social status, Favorinus paradoxically gained authority beyond the grasp of less ambiguously defined men living in imperial Rome. His disavowal of any claim to Roman masculinity, supplemented by his self-description as a hybrid foreigner and not a Roman, excused him from the normal rules governing Roman men and made him appear safer to the intellectually covetous Hadrian. Although this was Favorinus' dominant public persona, there are hints in Aelius Gellius that Favorinus was in fact taking part in the competition of Roman masculinity, but on his own terms. In *Noctes Atticae*, we see him exercise his claims to both masculinity and Roman-ness, but he does so from a distance and never strays too far from his Gallic eunuch mask. This mask protected him from most of his philosophical rivals, since attacks based on his effeminacy and ethnicity lost their bite. Unfortunately for Favorinus, physiognomy drew conclusions about his internal characteristics based on his crafted public persona. Although he could craft a public persona that side-stepped the term *cinaedus* by adopting the title of eunuch, physiognomy ignored such distinctions. Both a *cinaedus* and a eunuch

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<sup>391</sup> Gleason (1995), Swain (2007).

had similar physical features, and therefore the same moral and intellectual failings. It is ironic that it was physiognomy that prevented Favorinus from fully escaping social categories, as his attempt to define himself as something new and ambiguous relied on the guise of eunuch—a guise whose ethnic and gender ambiguity were rooted in physiognomy.

### Conclusions

Lucian and Favorinus draw upon both the Greek and Roman literary traditions concerning eunuchs, but manipulate them to their own particular ends. In Lucian's case, there is a marked concern for sorting out how the two different systems interact with each other. In both the *Eunuch* and *On the Syrian Goddess*, Lucian depicts the gender destabilization that corresponds to how eunuchs work in Roman literature as the cause of the ethnic destabilization from the Greek tradition. This melding of the two literary traditions parallels Lucian's historical reality, as he lived in a period when previously disparate cultures on all sides of the Mediterranean were especially engaged with each other. This engagement led to not only mixing but also compromise and change. One reflection of this is found in the *Eunuch*, as there is no mention of ethnicity, but people's civic identities are destabilized instead. Indeed, one of the historical realities of the period is that ethnicity was becoming less essential for self-definition and one's civic standing within local communities was becoming more so.

Although he was as prolific as Plutarch, no extant written work can be conclusively identified as a product of Favorinus.<sup>392</sup> From references to him in

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<sup>392</sup> Two speeches by Dio Chrysostom (37 & 64) are now regularly described as the works of Favorinus, as is a speech concerning exile discovered on a papyrus in 1931. Niebuhr (1811) was the first to attribute Dio 37 to Favorinus, and the immediate reception of this argument was

Philostratus, Aulus Gellius, and Galen, we are able to glean a rather detailed portrait of him. Born an ἀνδρόγυνος-*cinaedus*, he instead defined himself as a eunuch. Although he had Roman citizenship, his homeland was still an eclectic mixture of Gauls, Greeks, and Romans, and any claim to Roman status was subject to attack by rivals. Rather than openly fight for recognition of his status as a Roman man, Favorinus relied on the ethnic and gender ambiguity that the term eunuch had developed in centuries of literature to situate himself beyond the boundaries of traditional social hierarchies—the pinnacles of which were occupied by the manliest men and Romans born in the city of Rome. He

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divided, as Marres' complete rejection of it in his own 1853 edition of Favorinus shows (Amato [2005] 53). von Arnim's edition of Dio's speeches (1893-1896), represents a middle-ground, as he accepts that the speech is not the work of Dio, but labels it "Anonymi Corinthiaca" (Amato [2005] 53). Others, however, did accept Niebuhr's attribution. Their growing numbers led to a self-perpetuating cycle, as one could simply cite some or all of them as evidence of Favorinus' authorship, without needing to re-address the question. There is nothing wrong with this technique, in and of itself, as it is beneficial for scholarship to grow upon itself, in such a fashion. In this particular instance, however, the doubts that Niebuhr's nineteenth century peers expressed seem to have been largely ignored, and his argument was taken as fact throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In his recent edition of Favorinus (2004), for example, Amato provides a seemingly exhaustive list of those who have and have not accepted Niebuhr's argument, notes that those who accept it greatly outnumber those who do not, and concludes that the text is that of Favorinus. Although his list shows that those closest to Niebuhr, temporally, were least likely to accept this position, Amato considers the matter closed (Amato [2004] 53). Thus, one can now add Amato's edition to the list of scholars who consider the speech that of Favorinus, despite his not actually addressing the question. Dio 64 was then attributed to Favorinus because of its similarity to Dio 37, as was the exile speech. Ironically, the similarity of the exile speech to the two Dio speeches actually undermines the position that *any* of them should be attributed to Favorinus since, as Bowersock (1969) 36 notes, Philostratus tells us that Favorinus quarreled with an emperor but "did not suffer for it, in any way" (οὐδὲν ἔπαθεν *VS* 489). And as Gleason notes, there was not even a hint in the evidence about Favorinus that he was exiled, until this speech was discovered and attributed to him (Gleason [1995] 145-147). This attribution was based on the similarities between the exile speech and Dio 37 and 64. Since this exile speech both resembles Dio 37 and 64 strongly enough to suggest the same author and contradicts all the other evidence about Favorinus, one would think that it would prompt a re-examination of the question of whether Dio 37 and 64 were written by Favorinus. Instead, the historicity of this contra-evidentiary exile was widely accepted. This all strikes me as extremely dubious, and therefore, I do not include these texts in my discussion of Favorinus. To be clear, I am not arguing that they are *not* the works of Favorinus. Rather, I am uncomfortable with this long chain of scholarship that refers only to earlier scholarship, as opposed to the primary sources, especially since this



emphasized the ambiguity of the terms with which he defined himself by coupling his self-description as a eunuch with the fact that he was charged with adultery and his self-description as a Gaul with the fact that he was Hellenized. In other words, he did not just emphasize his status as “the other,” but also he cultivated ambiguity about what type of other he was. This allowed him to compete for philosophical and pedagogical authority on his own terms.

That both Lucian and Favorinus incorporate ethnic and gender destabilization into *their* uses of the term eunuch demonstrates the validity of our readings of how the eunuch works in the earlier literary traditions, in previous chapters. In turn, Favorinus’ use of this destabilization as a foundation for his own authority is a forerunner of the Christian image of the eunuch, which I briefly discuss in the general conclusions that follow.

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chain incorporated the exile speech—which contradicts all other evidence about Favorinus’ life—without re-considering the underlying assumption about Dio 37.

## **Chapter 6: Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven**

For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who were castrated by men, and there are eunuchs who castrate themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever is able to do this, may he do so.

εἰσὶν γὰρ εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς ἐγεννήθησαν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνουχίσθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰσὶν εὐνοῦχοι οἵτινες εὐνούχισαν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω.

Matt. 19:12

At the beginning of this work, I posited that a fuller appreciation of how eunuchs work in earlier literary traditions would reveal that Jesus' apparently radical exhortation to self-castration is actually not at all surprising. The fourth century Christian theologians Ambrose and Jerome provide some of the earliest extant exegesis on this passage, and their argument was widely accepted by early Christian leaders. They argue that Jesus' words here are demanding "spiritual castration," which involved no bodily mutilation and was simply the renunciation of sexual activity.<sup>393</sup> Whether Jesus meant a bodily or spiritual castration is impossible to discern, but parallels between nascent Christian ideology and how eunuchs work in earlier literary traditions suggest that his words here pertain to far more than sexual renunciation. Like eunuchs, Christianity destabilized the value of ethnicity and gender; it challenged the definition of "Roman masculinity;" and converting to it signaled that one was going to forego the mode of behavior that one's

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<sup>393</sup> Kuefler (2001) 253-273.

ethnicity dictated. Early Christian ideology, then, encompassed all of the things that we have seen eunuchs do in the previous chapters. Paul's writings regularly attack traditional differences between ethnicities and genders.<sup>394</sup> In his letter to the Galatians, for instance, he writes: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor master, man nor woman, for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).<sup>395</sup> Again in I Corinthians, "All the limbs of the body, despite being numerous, are one body. And thus it is in Christ, for we are all in one body with one spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or master" (I Cor. 12.12-13).<sup>396</sup> By arguing that people of different ethnicities (Jew or Greek) and genders (man and woman) are the same, Paul destabilizes the very facets of identity that eunuchs do.

Not only did Christianity attack these divisions, but also it challenged the parameters of the category of Roman masculinity. The Christian ideology of masculinity claimed that real manliness was having the endurance to suffer at the hands of others. In other words, to passively cede personal sovereignty and experience pain, without retaliation.<sup>397</sup> For fourth century Christians, *firmitas* and *patientia* played for Christian men what *virtus* and *imperium* had played for Romans of the republic.<sup>398</sup> A more famous way that Christianity rejected traditional Roman masculine values was its emphasis on chastity. Significantly, Christians not only strove for masculinity in a new way but they also claimed that their paradigm of masculinity was manlier than that which had preceded it. As Matthew Kuefler explains, "Christian ideology of masculinity depended on the

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<sup>394</sup> Scheid (2004) 234.

<sup>395</sup> οὐκ ἔστι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας, οὐκ ἔστι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔστι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ, πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

<sup>396</sup> πάντα δὲ τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος πολλὰ ὄντα ἐν ἑστίν σῶμα. οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστός, καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι.

<sup>397</sup> Kuefler (2001).

<sup>398</sup> Kuefler (2001) 110.

paradox that Christian men were manliest when they abandoned the pursuits that ancient Roman tradition had long considered manly.”<sup>399</sup> By rejecting the standards of traditional Roman masculinity, Christians were able to carve out a unique masculine authority for themselves, just as Favorinus did when he forewent any claim to traditional Roman masculinity and adopted the title of “eunuch.”

The Christian concept of “conversion” recalls how eunuchs work in authors writing about Alexander. Unlike earlier Mediterranean religions, Christianity engaged in proselytization and those who decided to join the religion converted. Previously, proselytization was not a practice of Mediterranean cults, and one’s religion was almost wholly the direct result of one’s place of birth and class. Since each state sanctioned particular cults and mandated participation in them, cultic activity was also civic activity.<sup>400</sup> The worship of particular deities could spread, of course, but its origins were not forgotten. Many Romans, for instance, worshipped Hercules and Apollo, but these were referred to as “Greek cults” (*Graeca sacra*).<sup>401</sup> And a Roman who partook in *Graeca sacra* still engaged in *Romana sacra*. Worshipping Hercules was an addition to Roman religion, and not a conversion. Christianity, however, prohibited its adherents from engaging in non-Christian worship. The intertwined nature of state and religion meant that converting to Christianity was not just a turn towards a particular cult but also a commitment to cease acting like a Roman.

Christianity as a religion, then, challenged the same parts of society that eunuchs had a long history of challenging in earlier literature. Early Christians and their ideology

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<sup>399</sup> Kuefler (2001) 206.

<sup>400</sup> Scheid (2004) 113.

<sup>401</sup> Scheid (2004) 118.

worked in the same way as eunuchs. This correspondence suggests that Jesus' words here are not a call for sexual renunciation, as Jerome and Ambrose argued, but a reflection of Christian ideology more broadly. They signal the sort of issues with which Christians and Christian ideology are concerned. This is corroborated by an Ethiopian eunuch who appears in Acts of the Apostles. An angel instructs a disciple named Philip to proselytize in Jerusalem and Gaza. In Jerusalem, Philip sees an Ethiopian eunuch praying and reading the Book of Isaiah from the Hebrew Bible (Acts 8:27-28). He is, it seems, both an Ethiopian and a Jew. The text adds that this eunuch is the treasurer of the Ethiopian queen Candace (Acts 8:27). Ethiopia—this eunuch's homeland—is a place where women rule, marking a contradiction of Greco-Roman gender roles. The passage from Isaiah that the eunuch is reading describes a sheep being slaughtered, without protestation (Acts 8:33-34). This, of course, is an allegory to Jesus' death, but it also reflects the later Christian ideology of masculinity, with its focus on *firmitas* and *patientia*. The Ethiopian eunuch is the first gentile convert to Christianity.

Not only, then, is early Christian ideology enwrapped in the same issues that Greek and Roman authors used eunuchs to think about, but also the spread of Christianity begins with a eunuch—one who appears in a scene that also alludes to ethnicity, gender roles, and the definition of masculinity. When Jesus urges his followers to castrate themselves in the Gospel of Matthew, he is looking in two directions: to the past and how eunuchs work in pre-Christian literature; and to the future, as he anticipates that those who adopt his teachings will be forced to grapple with many of the ideas that those eunuchs present. Jesus, it seems, recognized that eunuchs are good to think with when creating a religion.

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