Most of the sexual practices and attitudes of the ancient Greeks and Romans have parallels in modern life. There are differences, of course, but it is difficult to categorize them, mainly because what seems normal to one person may seem perverted to another. The U.S. Supreme Court, after all, leaves the definition of pornography to the local community. What follows here is a broad discussion arranged around eight major sexual themes—I leave it to the reader to identify the peculiar.

**SEX AND STATUS**

Both societies were slave-owning, which, coupled with the general attitude that women were second-class citizens, meant that men had sexual access to those who were lesser in status: unchaperoned proper women, as well as slave, foreign, resident-alien, and noncitizen women and men. The Augustan orator Haterius may have been exaggerating when he stated, "Debasement" [i.e.,
being raped] is a crime [stuprum] for the freeborn, a necessity for the slave, and a duty for the freedman.” (“Inpudicitia in ingenuo crimen est, in servo necessitas, in libero officium”; Sen. Controv. 4 pr 10.)

As with status, age difference was eroticized: it seemed natural for adult men to desire boys and youths as much as they did nubile women. Having sex with both was considered natural in both societies. There was, however, a long-running discussion about whether it was possible for men to love women (cf. Plut. Eroticusb); a man’s love for a youth was a given. A man could grow to respect his wife, but love between a man and a woman was unusual and rarely was the basis for marriage. Among Romans, however, heterosexual love was possible—though it occurred primarily within the lower classes.

It seemed natural for men to desire youths, their social and generational inferiors, though we hear of a few instances where a homoerotic relationship continued beyond the boy’s youth. A certain Pausanias of Athens and the playwright Agathon (floruit 430 B.C.) were such a couple (Pl. Symp. 177c, cf. Plut. Mor. 770c). It was thus noteworthy that the emperor Galba, who briefly ruled from October 68 to January 69 A.D., preferred not youths, but “men, adult and strong,” after his wife died (Suet. Galba 12, 22).

While love between men was not a problem, sex between citizen men was—both societies were concerned that there would be anal penetration, which would jeopardize the penetrated man’s citizenship. Penetration inverted a man’s proper gender role, turning him into a woman—that is, a noncitizen (the common Latin expression associated with this was muliebre patitur, or “he behaves sexually like a woman”). Many classical Greek societies had institutionalized paiderastia, in which adult citizen men indoctrinated proper youths (citizens in the making) into proper male society (see Daniel Ogden, Chapter 3): it was assumed this relationship would be eroticized. There was, therefore, concern that anal intercourse not take place; intercrural intercourse (two males stand, facing each other in embrace, the adult ejaculating between the youth’s thighs) was apparently an acceptable substitute.

The time it took for Roman men to become citizens (to assume the toga virilis, the plain, white toga worn on formal occasions) was far shorter than the twenty or so years it took an Athenian to become a full citizen, and because Roman citizenship did not require a long-term, adult-male sponsorship, there was no Roman equivalent of paiderastia. There was, however, paidomania—an adult man’s desire for a noncitizen youth (e.g., Catullus and Juvenius in Cat. 48 and 99).

Sexualizing inequalities (“otherness”) implies that foreigners, as “others,” are also characterized sexually (for instance, our “French kissing” or “Greek love”). Herodotus reports that the people of Libya and Scythia copulate promiscuously: if a man wants a woman, the Nasamone places a pole in front of
her house or the Massagetan hangs his quiver before her wagon; Machlyes and Auses men meet every three months to determine who fathered which child; and Gindane women wear leather anklets corresponding to the number of their lovers. Hippocrates attributes the female characteristics of Scythian men—their large, fleshy, feminine bodies—to Scythia’s wet and chilly climate (Aer. 15.17).

Black Africans were sexually exciting. Certain Athenian drinking mugs associate a negro male head with a white female head (ARV² 1529–52 passim),² and a Cnidian jug depicts a negro head with three heterosexual couples in frontal intercourse.³ The large erections of negro men appear in Roman mosaics.⁴ But negroses could also be problematic. A Pompeian woman writes a graffito that probably reproduces a popular song: “White women have taught me to hate black women; but I am able (and not unwillingly) to love them” (CIL 4.1520, cf. 1523, 1528, 1536; Ovid, Am. 3.11.35; Verg. Ecl. 2.56). Similarly, if a man wants to fall out of love with a dark woman, Ovid recommends that he imagine she is a negro (Rem. Am. 327).

**THE UBIXITY OF SEX**

We tend to think that sex is everywhere nowadays, but in antiquity it was even more pervasive. The sexual behavior of the gods forms the basis of many myths, and while modern retellings have the male gods “fall in love” with mortal women and boys, it is really rape that these stories recount. In addition to the major male gods, there are minor divinities whose main trait is their sexuality. The goat-god Pan is always randy. Bearded, erect satyrs follow Dionysus and accost women. Priapus, also bearded, protects Italian gardens by threatening thieves with rape, especially anal. The Roman Faunus protects fields and livestock and induces strong erotic desire—he turns himself into a snake and has intercourse with his daughter (Macr. Sat.1.12.24, cf. Lactant. 1.22.9 ff.; Servius 7.47 and 8.314). The sanctuary of Mutinus/Tutinus had a statue of a seated, erect Mutinus on which new brides sat to ensure fertility (Festus s.v. Mutini, Tutini, Sacellum; Lactant. 1.22.9 ff.).

In Greece, herms (short pillars with the head of Hermes on top and erect male genitalia halfway down the front side) stood at crossroads and in front of important buildings; a hall in the marketplace of Athens displayed a famous series of them. Their “mutilation” on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition (mid June 415 B.C.) was a scandal that contributed to the downfall of the expedition’s most famous general, Alcibiades. Romans also had herms with phalli, but theirs had a greater variety of heads that included portraits of real people.

In Athens, the festival Theogamia celebrated the sacred marriage (hieros gamos) of Zeus and Hera in mid February, and many real weddings took place
around this time. On the festival’s second day, the wife of the *archōn basileus* (the magistrate in charge of religion) had sex with the god Dionysus in the archon’s office (the Boukoleion). Presumably, “Dionysus” was the archon himself. In the late fourth century B.C., the daughter of the prostitute Neaera had passed herself off as a proper Athenian woman who had married a man selected to be the *archōn basileus*; she thus profaned the mystery of her “marriage” to Dionysus ([Dem.] 59).

One activity, temple prostitution, is often assumed. In Herodotus’s description of the cult of “Aphrodite” (Mylitta) at Babylon, he says, “[all] women were required at least once to have intercourse with a stranger within the temple precinct” (Ht. 1.199). He mentions “similar rituals in Cyprus,” where Aphrodite’s most famous temple was at Paleopaphos. There, the faithful consulted an oracle (Suet. *Titus* 5), bathed, visited the sanctuary of Adonis and Apollo, and practiced temple prostitution. The *Acts of Saint Barnabas* (first century A.D.) refers to the
religious procession and to “lewd” doings near the sanctuary. Justin (third or fourth century A.D.) quotes Pompeius Trogus (first century B.C.): “the Cypriots send their young women before marriage to the seashore to get money by prostitution” (Epit. Hist. 18.5, cf. Ennius, Euhemerus 134–8; Ovid, Met. 10.238–46). Strabo (around 64 B.C.—20 A.D.) also claims temple prostitution for the Paleopaphos sanctuary (his text closely mirrors Herodotus’s) and cites similar practices in Corinth, Locri Epizephyrii, and in Eryx, Sicily (6.26, cf. Diod. Sic. 4.83).

In Corinth, there were “more than a 1,000 sacred prostitutes, whom both men and women dedicated” to Aphrodite, the patron divinity (Strabo 8.6.20, cf. 12.3.36; Ath. 13.573f-574c). Presumably, these prostitutes practiced all over the city, and not just at the small temple at the top of Corinth’s acropolis. Hiking the 1,900 feet to its summit would not have added to the enjoyment of sex.

Several scholars have taken these ancient references at face value.6 But Herodotus is vague and may be attributing odd sexual practices to “other” peoples (Babylonians and Cypriots); the other references were written long after the period they claim for temple prostitution. As for temple prostitution in Corinth, Herodotus does not mention it, nor does Pausanias (mid-second century A.D.; 2.4.7). This last point seems telling, since Pausanias is greatly interested in peculiar religious practices.

Prostitutes, female and male, were, however, common everywhere (see Allison Glazebrook, Chapter 8): there were streetwalkers (pornai), who had small cells, prostitutes (meretrices) in brothels, and high-priced hetairai, who could own bordellos. “Flute-girls” (aulëtriai) performed at all-male Greek parties, mimes performed at Roman parties, and bath attendants gave more than baths in both Greece and Rome.

Prostitutes may have been thought dirty (Anacreon, PMG 346; Ar. Eq. 1397–1401; Men. Samia 390 ff.), but they were considered better than wives because they “must get and keep a man by being amenable.”7 They were deemed essential to military expeditions, accompanying Pericles to Samos and dedicating a famous statue to Aphrodite there (Ath. 13.572f). They also joined the Ten Thousand on their march through Persian Anatolia (Xen. An. 4.3, 19).

It has been estimated that there was one prostitute for every 50 men in Pompeii.8 In the early second century B.C., Rome was introduced to Greek symposia that included prostitutes as entertainers (Livy 39.6.7–9). In the city, prostitutes hung out at the walls, in the arches of the Colosseum, and especially in the Subura on the lower slopes of the Esquiline (Livy 3.13.2; Propertius 4.7.15; Mart. 2.17.1, 6.66.2, 11.61.2, 11.78.11; Pers. 5.32ff.; Priap. 40; Dio Chrys. 8.5). The city also had thousands of young male prostitutes who acted effeminate, wore the woman’s stola (long, pleated dress), and offered
themselves in the same regions the female prostitutes did. They also hung out at the latrines, for which they were known as sellarii—"stoolmen" (Cic. Phil. 2.44; Petr. Sat. 81.5).

There were so many male prostitutes in Rome, they were a nuisance. Caligula first wanted to ban them—even to drown them at sea—but he eventually saw their value and taxed them. His tax was rescinded only much later, in 498 A.D. (Suet. Cal. 16.40; Justin Martyr, 1 Apology 27) The emperor Alexander Severus (222–35 A.D.) had also contemplated banishing male prostitutes from Rome, and Philip the Arab (244–49) apparently actually did so (SHA, Alex. Sev. 24.4; Elagab. 32.6)—though not for long.

Caracalla's extension of citizenship to all freeborn men and freedmen in the Roman Empire (212 A.D.) had an unexpected consequence. Unless he was a slave, the man a citizen man penetrated was now also a citizen. Penetrating a freedman thus became a capital offense. An edict of Constantius and Constans (342 A.D.) declares that, "when a man marries (nubere) in the manner of a woman (muliebre), or a woman is about to renounce men," the appropriate laws are to take effect (cf. the later Theodosian Code, 438). Valentinian, Arcadius, and Theodosius (390 A.D.) ordered Orientius, the vicar of Rome, to publicly burn all male prostitutes; he instead gave them two months to leave the city. In Gaius's Institutes (published 533; restated in 544), the lex Julia de
adulterii coercendis makes any sex between men punishable by the death of both (4.18.4; Digest Novel 141). And, in 538 A.D., homosex becomes sacrilege: Justinian decreed that those who commit “crimes against nature” answer both to God and the law (Justinian, Novel. 77; Procop. An. 11.34–6).

A common ancient practice we moderns rarely indulge in is to use sexual innuendo against important people, especially one’s political rivals (Sen. Controv. 1.2.23). This, however, was so routine in antiquity, there must have been the assumption that powerful men were so powerful that they automatically trespassed all moral boundaries. Typical accusations included sexual profligacy, incest, fellatio, cunnilingus, prostitution, masturbation, effeminacy for men, and masculine behavior for women. Stock charges included “unspeakable” crimes (that is, fellatio and cunnilingus), using one’s “entire body” for sex, and performing cunnilingus on menstruating women.

The writings of the moral Cicero, for example, are rife with such charges: Publius Clodius used all parts of his body for sex, prostituted himself, and had incest with his sisters; Sextus Clodius performed cunnilingus on menstruating women; and Quintus Apronius, Gaius Verres’ henchman, had bad breath—a sure sign of a fellator or cunnilictor (Har. resp. 59; Dom. 25; Verr. 2. 3. 9, 23, respectively).

Even the famous Julius Caesar was not immune to reproach. At nineteen he was sent on a military mission to the court of Nicomedes IV Philopator of Bithynia (ruled from around 94 to 75 B.C.); it was rumored that the two became lovers (Plut. Caes. 1; Cass. Dio 43.20.2 ff.). Suetonius reports that he seduced many women—including queen Eunoë, the Moor wife of Bogudes—and quotes Curio that he was “every woman’s man and every man’s woman” (Iul. 50); Suetonius also castigates Caesar for being “overnice,” carefully trimmed, shaved, his superfluous hair plucked, bald spot combed over and covered by his laurel wreath. Suetonius charges Nero with similar crimes (Nero 29), and the Historia Augusta casts similar aspersions on Commodus (SHA, Comm. 5.11) and Elagabalus (SHA, Elagab. 26.3–5, 31.7–8).

THE BODY

Greeks and Romans shared a holistic concept of the body as a balance of “humors” (blood, phlegm, yellow and black biles) and of pairs of opposites (dry/wet, hot/cold). (See Helen King, Chapter 6.) The pairs of opposites connoted gender: men were dry and hot, women were wet and cool. Thus, it was natural for men to exercise in the nude (to be both hot and dry) and for women to stay indoors. Since women contained a lot of wetness, their bodies were thought spongy. To keep the liquids circulating inside women’s bodies, it was
necessary for women to be "opened up," sexually penetrated. It was also natu-
ral for men to expel their (wet) semen, since this was accomplished by hot air
coursing down the body ([Arist.] Probl. 30.1), and for women to take in the
semen, since they needed more wetness. As we have seen, men who lived in wet
and cool zones (e.g., Scythia) were thought to be feminine with soft, spongy
bodies. Similarly, women who lived in hot, dry areas conversely were mascul-
line (like the Amazons in Libya).

Because all Greek citizens were in the military from the ages of eighteen to
sixty, one of the purposes of exercising nude in the gymnasium would have
been for men to check out each other's bodies—and, by this, to put social pres-
sure on each other to keep physically fit. It was preferable, however, for a man
to avoid getting aroused there. Consequently, he might double his penis back
up onto itself and tie it in place using a leather thong (the "dog knot"); we see
this in some vase paintings of men at the gymnasium and in many sculptural
depictions of the (otherwise) always randy goat god Pan.

FIGURE 4.3: Hellenistic statue of Pan
with his penis tied with the "dog
knot"; Athens National Museum
(photo, author).
In the Roman period, there were other methods for preventing an erection. Closing the foreskin (infiltration) with a fibula (like a large modern safety pin), ring, or thread would prevent full erection (Oribasius, *Peri krikōseōs*). Male singers, entertainers, gladiators, and athletes were often infibulated to ensure the abstinence that benefited their performances. The fibula was also used to keep slaves chaste (Mart. 7.85, 9.27, 14.215; Galen 9.12 Kühn, cf. Arist. *Gen. An.* 7.1); Juvenal satirizes women who paid to have to have fibulae removed from the entertainers they desired (6.379 and schol.). Other Roman devices for preventing erections included the *theca* (a metal pouch) and the *aluta* (a leather bag), both of which enclosed the genitals (Mart. 7.35, 7.82). Of course, all these devices could also function as chastity belts for men; chastity belts for women are unknown in classical antiquity.

It might be thought that the scrutiny in the Greek gymnasium would extend to appreciating penis size. Kenneth Dover, analyzing Greek vase paintings and erotic poetry, came to the conclusion that desirable youths were depicted with small penises and tight, young bodies; their adult lovers, however, when erect, have larger penises.°° “I think this should mean, not that Greek men in general thought small penises more desirable, but rather that it is not the youth who should be doing the desiring (his true feelings to the contrary),” for example, we never see a depiction of intercrural sex where the youth is ejaculating between the thighs of the adult man. As with many modern S&M and intergenerational relationships, the sexual pleasure of the passive, younger partner is not the central issue.

The power of the phallus is made clear, however, by its large size: women in Greek vase paintings carry huge phalli in procession; perverted Roman emperors such as Commodus and Elagabalus desired *vassati*, or “hung men,” endowed like donkeys (*onobéli*) (SHA, *Comm.* 10.8–9; Elagab. 8.1). When erect, for example, the Greek god Pan and the Roman god Priapus have large penises, as do satyrs. In Greek comedy, especially the satyr plays, it was common to have the actors strap on long leather phalli and go up into the audience to accost and threaten the spectators, sometimes even hitting them.

One would think that exercising nude in the gymnasium would also lead to bodybuilding, but this is not directly known. Bronze cuirasses from the archaic through the Roman imperial periods are shaped to display taut pectoral muscles and a defined abdomen, regardless of the age or physical shape of the soldier—they were, in effect, a sham to arouse fear in the enemy.°°° Archaic sculptures of *kouroi* (youths) are often thickly built with powerful thighs, but they are not muscle-bound. There are, however, examples of known “strong men”: Bubon (sixth century B.C.) lifted a 315-pound stone with one hand and threw it over his head. The stone, now in the Olympia Museum, carries
an inscription commemorating this event (*IvO* 5.717, *SIG*³ 1071). Overblown Hellenistic sculpture in the baroque style (second century B.C.), such as the Laocoön and the Polyphemus group at Sperlonga, shows figures that certainly resemble bodybuilders.

Another consequence of Greek men exercising in the nude might have been the decorative trimming of pubic hair. Most male statues are nude or only partially clothed; several from the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. show the pubic hair trimmed, mostly in a pointed ogive arch (e.g., the Anavyssos kouros), but occasionally in rows of curls (e.g., the Striding God from Artemision and the Omphalos Apollo). The Romans had specialists, girl *picatrices*, who could arrange the pubic hair thus.¹⁴

After exercising, Greek men would pour oil on their bodies and scrape off the mixture of oil, dust, and sweat with a curved metal strigil; this “goo” (*komisalos*) had erotic, pharmaceutical, and magical qualities. Scrapings from famed athletes and gladiators were often sold at high prices (Ar. *Lys.* 918; Galen 12.283 Kühn).¹⁵

Body care was clearly an important part of a man’s grooming; some cities even conducted men’s beauty contests. Tanagra judged ephebes in honor of Hermes Kriophoros; the winner was declared “most beautiful in form” and carried a ram on his shoulders around the city walls (Paus. 9.22.1). Elis held a beauty contest in honor of Athena, and the winner, beribboned by his friends, received weapons as prizes (Ath. 13.609f–610a). In Athens, old men, chosen for their beauty, bore olive branches in the Panathenaic procession (Xen. *Symp.* 4.17; *Etym. Magn.* s.v. *thallophoroi*). There were women’s beauty contests, too—at Olympia, Tenedos, and possibly on Lesbos (Ath. 13.609e–610a; *Odyssey* 6.292 scholiasts A and D, cf. *Iliad* 9.129; Alcaeus fr. 130.32 LP).

The perfect body was defined by sculptors: the ‘Doryphoros’ by Polycleitus (mid-fifth century B.C.) for men, and the Aphrodite of Cnidus by Praxiteles (mid-fourth century B.C.) for women.¹⁶ Romans, especially, substituted these idealized bodies for their own in portrait statues. Men of high rank, such as Gaius Ofellius of Delos and Nero, and high-ranking women, such as those at the Flavian court, are examples. While the bodies would be in the style of the classical period, the heads would be realistic portraits, making for a jarring contrast.

In Athens, bathhouses and barbershops were popular places to hang out—as they are today—where attendants, barbers, and perfumers spruced up customers. These establishments could, of course, double as brothels or cruising areas (like those in the Ceramicus).
Too much grooming, however, could render a man effeminate. Julius Caesar, as we have seen, was deemed “overnice,” and Augustus was said to have singed his leg hair (Suet. Aug. 68). Oddly enough, too much hair also feminized a man. The hypermasculine, hirsute man was thought hypersexual and thus unrestrained in sexual activity—including, therefore, being penetrated (Juv. 2.41).

**BODY MODIFICATION**

With so much interest in the body, it is curious how little interest there was in body modification. Proper Greek and Roman citizens certainly did not go in for tattooing, body-piercing or circumcision. In the Greco-Roman world, such body modifications identified those who were not Greek or Roman, as well as slaves and criminals (the last could also have their ears or noses cut off).

![Image of a vase](image-url)

**FIGURE 4.4**: Athenian red-figure pelike, depicting circumcized Egyptian priests, by the Pan Painter (ca. 470 B.C.); Athens National Museum (photo, author).
Voluntary self-castration was practiced by the priests of Cybele (Pliny, *NH* 35.165, cf. Lucilius 306–7). Castration was performed on slave and noncitizen boys, and sometimes on men, to turn them into eunuchs, loyal servants, entertainers, sexual passives. Castration could also be a punishment: Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, who ruled from 627 to 585 B.C., shipped 300 sons of the Corcyraeans, who had revolted, to Lydia to be castrated (Hdt. 3.48). The Roman emperors Domitian and Nerva outlawed castration (Cass. Dio 67.2.3, 68.2.4).

Egypt had a long history of tattooing, branding, piercing, and male and female circumcision. Ptolemaic mummies of women provide evidence for clitoridectomy and infibulation of the vaginal opening. These procedures were done when the girl was fourteen, prior to marriage (Strabo 17.2.5; Philo, *Quest. Gen.* 3.47).

Male circumcision was common in the Near East, from as early as pharaonic Egypt. In Israel, it originated with God’s covenant with Abraham, requiring him to circumcise himself and his descendants and slaves (*Genesis* 17); Jews, Christians, and Muslims who abide by Abraham’s covenant circumcise their boys a week after birth. In classical antiquity, circumcision was practiced by Jews and Egyptians (by Roman times, only by priests; Josephus, *In Ap.* 2.141), as well as by Arabs, Ethiopians, Phoenicians, among others. Converts to Judaism were also circumcised (Tac. *Hist.* 5.5; Juv. 14), but the first Christians debated whether circumcision should be required of their new converts (*Acts* 10–11, 15; *Galatians* 2.3).

Since circumcision physically marked Jews out from most other members of the empire, it became a matter of imperial concern. On the basis of circumcision, Domitian could identify Jews for taxation (Suet. *Dom.* 7.1, 12). Hadrian forbade the practice (SHA Had. 14.2; *Digest* 48.8.3.5), while Antoninus Pius restored the right of circumcision to Jews but not to converts (*Digest* 48.8.11.1).

Men who had been circumcised and then wanted their foreskin restored went through one of two complex processes. The one known as epispasm (from the Greek for “stretched”) restored the foreskin by attaching a heavy weight on the skin of the penis, slowly lengthening it (Soranus 2.34, cf. Mart. 7.85, 9.27; Cels. 4.25.3). The other procedure, called recuditio (from the Latin for “re-cut”), cut the skin around the penis and pulled it forward to cover the glans as a new foreskin (Cels. 7.25.1–2). Jews who hellenized, participated in Greek-style nude events, or went to the Roman baths either covered their penises to hide their circumcision or underwent restoration (*1 Corinthians* 7.18; *1 Maccabees* 1.15; Joseph. A. 12.241; *Talmud, Sanhedrin* 44.1, *Shabbath* 19.2, *Yebamoth* 72.1).
Ear-piercing was practiced throughout antiquity by women (as surviving earrings attest), and sometimes by men, but there is little evidence for the piercing of other body parts.

Tattooing, temporary or permanent, may have been practiced from the earliest times\(^2\); one thinks of Ötzi, the Neolithic mummy found in the Alps, who has simple marks tattooed on his wrist and ankles.\(^3\) In the classical period, however, we have little evidence for tattooing; the Pistoiaenos Painter (around 460 B.C.) produced thirty-eight vases with tattooed Thracian women, twenty-seven of which portray the death of Orpheus.\(^4\)

Waist-compression constricts the waist to wasp-thinness using a laced corset or a tall belt. The effect on the body is startling: the organs are pushed up into the lower chest cavity, producing a pronounced chest and shelflike hips; walking is difficult, sitting in a chair is uncomfortable, and breathing is replaced by panting. The practice, for both women and men, began in Greece's Late Bronze Age. The tall belt can be seen in Late Geometric vase paintings (eighth century B.C.) and in Daedalic sculpture (seventh century B.C.), again for both genders. Waist-cinching apparently died out by the archaic period.\(^5\)

In both the Greek and Roman periods, a *strophium* (tight breastband) was used to bind or compress a woman's breasts and restrict her chest. Greek vase paintings show the female athlete Atalanta wearing the strophium when she wrestles Peleus (e.g., ARV\(^2\) 1039.9).\(^6\) Ovid implies that large-breasted women who wear the strophium are more attractive (Ovid, *Rem. am.* 337–8, cf. *Ars am.* 3.622). In Roman wall paintings, most women in sexually explicit scenes wear the strophium, perhaps to heighten feeling or call attention to the breasts.\(^7\) Another use of the strophium was to bind the orator's or actor's chest, perhaps to give him a stronger, more projecting voice.\(^8\)

A severe form of body modification was sometimes practiced on children. By confining them in small cages or jars during infancy, children could be made permanently dwarfed (Ps.-Longinus, *Subl.* 44.5; Sen. *Controv.* 10.40).\(^9\) The practice apparently continued into early modern Europe.\(^10\) Dwarves were thought sexually humorous and appropriate for oral sex (Mart. 9.7.1–10, 11.61.1–14; Suet. *Tib.* 44). Indeed, a man could develop a fetish for dwarf women (Pliny, *NH* 8; Suet. *Galba* 3; Hesych. s.v. *nannaristēs*).

**VIOLENCE AND PAIN**

As it is today, so it was in antiquity: violence was often associated with sexual pleasure. Because men wielded great power over their inferiors, hurting them
was thought to be natural, if opprobrious (Ovid, *Am.* 1.7). The common Greek verb for “to have intercourse” (*binein*), implies “violence” (*bia*), and the Latin *irrumatio* denotes a rape of the mouth. Aphrodite/Venus, the goddess of sex, is, after all, the lover of Ares/Mars, the god of war.

Rape was a common theme in both life and fiction. A Greek marriage (*gamos*; the word also means “intercourse”) assumed the bride’s acquiescence, not her assent. In Roman law, rape was only a crime against a freeborn citizen. In war, the victors conventionally raped and enslaved all female enemies—and killed their sons.

Rape is standard in myth; I give here only some notorious examples. Mars rapes the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia to produce Romulus and Remus. Jupiter gives Lara, her tongue ripped out, to Mercury to rape. Eros rapes Ganymede. Satyrs characteristically accost maenads; centaurs rape women and youths. Boreas rapes the nymph Oreithyia; Hades rapes Persephone. Hephaestus unsuccessfully tries to rape Athena; so, too, the giant Tityos tries to rape Leto. Peleus rapes Thetis. Theseus assaults the nereid Amphitrite, and he and Pirithoüs rape the twelve-year-old Helen. Achilles rapes Troilus to death, and Ajax rapes Cassandra at the altar of Athena at Troy, personalizing the rape of the city.32

A few females also rape. Eos, goddess of dawn, abducts the Trojan prince Tithonus, and bears him Memnon. Tithonus begs Zeus for immortality so he can live with Eos, but he forgets to ask for eternal youth; so he shrivels up like a cicada and she locks him in a room and throws away the key. Eos then abducts Cephalus, the son of Hermes, and bears him Phaethon, whom Aphrodite rapes. And Eos abducts Orion as he goes hunting—for his acquiescence, Artemis kills him.

Men interpreted women’s fear of rape as attractive—a common trope in Ovid: “fear itself became” Leucothoë and “chaste tears became” Lucretia (Ovid, *Met.* 4.230; *Fasti* 2.757).33

Both men and women could inflict pain on their partner during sex by slapping them with sandals, but only men caned, whipped, and burnt women with oil lamps. Since men beat only prostitutes, such violence also expressed differences in class and status, as well as the differences that existed between citizen men and all women. Theoretically, at least, the difference in status that was eroticized was also made violent.34

Slapping with sandals is commonly depicted in Greek art and referred to in Greek literature (*Anth. Pal.* 5.202, 503).35 In Roman depictions of sexual activity, removed sandals can be prominent.36

It is no surprise, then, that sandals became a sexual symbol, whether on or off the feet. Wearing them ensured that the feet stayed warm (male) and moist
FIGURE 4.5: Tondo of an Athenian red-figure kylix depicting a woman slapping a man with a sandal, while a boy above and a woman below masturbate, by the Thalia Painter (ca. 500 B.C.); Berlin and Florence (reconstructed drawing, author).

(female), conducive to the proper expenditure of sexual fluids. The Greek verb *bainein* (to walk) implied sexual intercourse, particularly between men.³⁷ Similarly, taking sandals off signaled a desire and readiness for sex ([Arist.] *Probl.* 4.5). One of the more famous late Hellenistic statue groups from Delos shows a flaccid Pan accosting Aphrodite, who raises her sandal as if threatening him; Eros tugs at one of Pan’s horns.³⁸

A fetishistic desire for feet was also known in antiquity. Antiphanes finds pleasure in a woman rubbing his feet. Vitellius used to carry around one of Messalina’s sandals ([Suet. Vit. 2]). The Severans Alciphron and Philostratus wrote letters that praise feet and footprints.³⁹

It is possible that the juxtapositions “barefoot: impulsive” and “shod: sexual” had further implications (compare the story of Oedipus, who wears only one sandal when he meets his father and kills him). Dio Chrysostom attributes Socrates’ condemnation to a connection between his bare feet and his corruption of minors ([Dio Chrys. 66.25, 26]), and several Greek vase paintings
show couples in erotic situations—the adult men shod, the prostitute women or youths without shoes.\textsuperscript{40}

Pain during sex could also involve caning or whipping. An Etruscan tomb painting depicts a man caning a woman while he has \textit{a tergo} (rear-entry) intercourse with her and she fellates another man.\textsuperscript{41} To the right of this scene, a nude youth and a nude man both wield whips while a woman cowers. An Athenian kylix (a cup used for drinking wine) by the Brygos Painter depicts an orgy: a man canes a kneeling woman; another man carries a woman while having frontal intercourse with her and while another man holds a burning oil lamp to her buttocks; and a man spanks a kneeling woman with a sandal (\textit{ARV}\textsuperscript{2} 372.31).\textsuperscript{42}

Inflicting pain was also thought appropriate for instigating conception. Unsuccessful Arcadian hunters flogged a statue of Pan to incite him to be more fertile (Theoc. 7.106–8). And during the Lupercalia, young men ran around the base of the Palatine, whipping women who wished to conceive. In one panel of
the Great Fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, a woman initiate (possibly to marriage) sneaks a peek into a *fascinum* (a draped, erect, apotropaic phallus; Pliny, *NH* 28.39), and in a subsequent panel she is caned.¹³

**HAVING SEX**

When having penetrative sex, it was not common for partners (of either sex) to look at each other—the missionary position was rare. Penetrative sex *in more canum* (rear-entry, *a tergo*) was usual. It has been suggested that the inequality of the sexes—including the skepticism about men being capable of loving women—might have resulted in men not wanting to regard their partner while penetrating them.¹⁴ Such avoidance might also result from the common attitude that penetration is a violent act, one better perpetrated impersonally.

The other common sex position, “equestrian,” had the penetrated partner sitting on the man’s lap (again, facing away being more common than facing towards him).
Both hetero- and homosexual encounters employed the *a tergo* and equestrian positions. Such positions for sex were featured in circulating sex manuals and in depictions in portable art, like Greek vase paintings and mould-made bowls, and Roman lamps, as well as in Roman wall paintings. Ovid briefly lists these sex positions, gives them names based on mythological figures, and attributes their preference, not to which gives more sexual pleasure, but to
which part of the woman’s body is thereby more pleasant to watch—her face is not mentioned (Ars am. 3.773–88).

Indoctrinating a youth into Greek male society could involve his introduction into the military by an adult male (see Daniel Ogden, Chapter 3). The custom of two men sharing a military cloak while on duty seems to have been common enough to inspire the sexual metaphor “to share the cloak,” which we read in Plato and see on many Greek vases (Pl. Symp. 219b; Ath. 5.219b, 13.603e-4d). We also see between two and five women sharing a cloak on Greek vases, and some of these scenes have obvious sexual implications.45

Natural penetration was of a woman’s vagina or a man’s anus (or of a youth’s thighs). Penetration of the woman’s anus would occur primarily for birth control, but not at the beginning of a marriage—it was assumed that a young, married woman would quickly become pregnant. When Agariste II (mid-sixth century B.C.) complains to her mother that her new husband, Peisistratus, is practicing “unnatural intercourse,” it is presumably because he wants to avoid fathering a child with the daughter of his political rival, Megacles (Hdt. 1.61, 6.131).

Masturbation was considered natural for boys ([Arist.] Probl. 30.1), men, and, apparently, women.46 There are several Greek and Roman depictions of boys and men masturbating, and one Greek depiction of a woman (Figure 4.5; Priap. 63.17).47 Masturbating in public was apparently not out of bounds for Diogenes the Cynic: caught doing so in the marketplace, he is said to have commented, “If only one could satisfy one’s hunger by rubbing one’s stomach” (Plut. Mor. 1044b). A graffito from Pompeii concurs: “When my worries oppress my body, with my left hand I release my pent up fluids” (CIL 4.2066).48 Similarly, masturbation can express deep emotions: Petronius describes how the viewer of a beautiful painting by Apelles can only masturbate to express his admiration. There was also the conceit that statues of beautiful women, like the Aphrodite of Cnidus, could cause men to ejaculate on their thigh (Lucian, Imag. 4; Am. 15–16; Val. Max. 8.11.4; Pliny, NH 7.127, 36.20–1; Tzetzes, Chil. 8.375).

We hear just one mention of men—those who were born under the conjunction of Venus, Mercury, and Saturn—masturbating between a woman’s breasts (Manetho 4.312). But surely more men were into this than the rare astral occurrence could explain: a terracotta of a woman’s chest depicts a phallus between the breasts.49

Oral sex in antiquity included all kinds—fellatio, autofellatio, cunnilingus, and anallyngus, though the last was apparently not as common as it seems to be today. The associated Greek and Latin verbs meant “to lick” (laikazein in Greek,
lambere in Latin; Mart. 11.58.12, 9.27.14). But there were common circumlocutions, such as lesbiazem (to do it Lesbos-style), and puns: since oral sex stops the performer from speaking, it could be said to shut a person up (arrhêtopoiein)—that is, to be something unspeakable. Latin had several more circumlocutions: “to defile every orifice of the body” (Suet. Nero 29), to have an “impure mouth,” to do something “shameless” (cf. Eur. Ba. 1062), “to offer the mouth” (os praebere), “to offer the head” (caput praebere, cf. capiti non par cere, Cic. Har. resp. 59), and “to devour a man’s middle” (Cat. 80.6). Catullus also refers to autofellatio: “to eat himself with his head lowered” (Cat. 88.8).

Cunnilingus had a special circumlocution: “to deny nothing,” conveying its extreme nature. For instance, “I deny nothing to you, Phyllis: deny nothing to me” (Mart. 11.50.12). A parallel remark is attributed to the wife of the tyrant Agathocles; as he was dying, she lamented, “What did I not do to you? What did you not do to me?” (Polyb. 12.15.104).

Just as today, fellatio was a common and quick sex act that could be performed anywhere. Thus, at Pompeii, both male and female prostitutes

FIGURE 4.10: Roman wall painting depicting a man having anal intercourse with a man being fellated by a woman, on whose vagina another woman performs cunnilingus (after Jacobelli 1995: pl. VIII); from the Suburban Baths, Pompeii (computer enhancement, author).
advertise fellatio cheaply—usually for two *asses*, occasionally for fewer (cf. Juv. 3.66, 6.365), but occasionally for more: Euplia offers fellatio for five *asses*. Cunnilingus is advertised by prostitutes at the same low price: Glyco (probably female) advertises cunnilingus for two *asses* (*cunnun lambet*, outside her cell; Pompeii III.1.27); Maritimus advertises it for four asses.

Latin had two words for fellatio: *fellatio* itself refers to the sucking action of the mouth, while *irrumatio* conveys the action of the penis—a rape of the mouth. To Martial, *irrumatio* is virile (compare the threat in Cat. 16), and a woman fellatrix has a “hot mouth” (Mart. 2.28.4, 2.82, 2.83, 4.17, 4.50, 7.55). In Pompeii, good fellators are congratulated: “Myrris, you suck well”; “Secundus is an excellent fellator” (*CIL* 4.2273 + p. 216, 4.9027).50

As today, fellation could substitute for vaginal intercourse, preserving virginity and acting as a contraceptive (cf. Mart. 4.84.1–4) and also, as today, it might not be considered “sex” at all.51 Martial plays on this conceit: “She’s chaste a thousand times. She doesn’t put out, but she doesn’t deny men anything, either.” Undoubtedly, the satirist would have appreciated the irony in Judge Webber Wright’s 1998 definition of sex that allowed President Clinton to deny he had sex with Monica Lewinsky (since he did not touch her genitals). Because she did touch his, however, she, by definition, had sex with him. Similarly, abstinence from intercourse was practiced by ancient singers (*Horo. Ars P.* 414, cf. Suet. *Dom.* 10), but they could still perform fellatio and cunnilingus (*Hor. Equ.* 1278 ff., and scholiast; Juv. 6.73; Mart. 7.82, 11.75, 14.215).

Fellatio and cunnilingus were both considered appropriate activities for the elderly: “even an old wife, Simylus, sucks” (*Anth. Pal.* 5.38 [37], cf. *Hor. Epod.* 8; Mart. 4.50.2); “he cannot get an erection; so now he licks” (Mart. 6.26.1–3, cf. 3.81, 11.25, 11.47).

The few depictions of fellatio—all heterosexual—appear in terracottas, metal tokens, and wall paintings.52 There were a couple of famous erotic paintings with this subject: Parrhasius’s *Atalanta fellating Meleager*, which Tiberius owned (Suet. *Tib.* 44), and Chrysippus’s *Hera fellating Zeus*, which was later sophisticatedly interpreted as an act of creation: “Hera stands for matter that receives seminal *logoi* (principles) from the deity” (Origen, *Cels.* 4.48; Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 3.3 and 8).

Two partners practicing oral sex on each other simultaneously is common today (sixty-nine), but in antiquity this was only rarely depicted or referred to—and it always involved a man and woman (cf. Ovid, *Ars Am.* 2.703–32).53

Analingus may also have been rare. I know of only three graffiti from Pompeii that refer to it—and those references are merely insults: “Populus canis
cunnunum linget Reno” (“Popilus licks Renus’s ‘cunt’ [i.e., anus] like a dog”).
“Priscus Extalio cunnun” (“Priscus [licks] Extalius’s ‘cunt’”). “Fortunata,
linge culu<m>” (“Fortunata, lick ass”) (CIL 4.4954, 8843, 8898).

Cunnilingus, however, was common. Since the associated words (leichein
in Greek, lambere in Latin) started with an l, they could easily be invoked with
just the letter (Auson. Epigr. 87.7; Varro, Sat. Men. 48 B, 70 Čebe). Thus, the
lambda on Spartan shields was a joke. To perform cunnilingus was to do it
“Phoenician-style” and to do it from the rear was to assume the “puppy” posi-
tion (cf. Figure 4.10; Hesychius s.v. skylax).

Even though common, both fellatio and cunnilingus were considered vile,
with fellatio more so for men than for women (Mart. 2.50, 9.63). The mouth
was “defiled” (os impure), the lips white (Cat. 80), the breath so bad that smelly
food could not disguise it (Ar. Ecc. 647; Mart. 3.77.5–10, 10.22, 12.55). Cicero
charges Marc Antony with an incesto ore (unchaste mouth) and Quintus Apro-
nius with bad breath (Cic. Phil. 11.5; Verr. 2.3.9, 23). Greeting a fellator with a
kiss was to be avoided (cf. Cat. 79.4; Mart. 6.55.5, 6.66.1–9, 12.85).

Because the vagina was thought to have a strong smell, like salted fish
(Auson. Epigr. 82.1–6), cunniliectors were also accused of having bad breath.
So Martial accuses Athenagoras (Mart. 9.95+95a, cf. Anth. Pal. 12.187.1–6).
Performing cunnilingus on menstruating women was considered especially vile
(Galen 12.249 Kühn). Seneca characterizes a certain Natalis for having “a
wicked as well as a stinking tongue” and “a mouth in which women purged
themselves” (Sen. Ep. 87.16, cf. Ben. 4.31.2–5). Similarly, cunnilingus on
pregnant women was the subject of jokes. When Nannius did it and heard
“the babies wailing within,” “a shocking sickness paralyzed” his tongue
(Mart. 11.61.1–14). Ausonius (Epigr. 86.1–2) says of the schoolteacher Eunus,
“when licking the strong-smelling cunt of your pregnant wife, you’re trying to
learn glossae [languages, tongues] to your not-yet-born children.”

There are few depictions of heterosexual cunnilingus, and only one that
shows two women performing it on each other.56

VIEWING SEX

Most Greek plays had some sexual content, but Greek comedies and satyr
plays were awash with it. In Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, for instance, women
refuse to have sex until the men stop fighting; consequently, both women
and men are randy, and the men all brandish erections. Satyr plays, origi-
nally one per tragic trilogy, featured sexually excited satyrs as the primary
actors and chorus. After satyr plays were produced by themselves (in the
mid-fourth century B.C.), they began to influence the development of other sexually comedic forms, especially in Italy.

Mime (short popular plays with dance and song) were put on by traveling troupes, both in public and in private residences. In the third century B.C., Theocritus and Herondas wrote mimes with sexual content, and some of these might have included autofellatio (Ath. 14.622a-d, quoting Semus, floruit 200 B.C., concerning erotic autocabdaloi; kubda means "bent-over"). Pantomimes were introduced to Rome from the east; they starred a single actor who silently danced all roles in a silk gown and a mask with closed lips. The stories, such as the rape of Leda or Procris (Juv. 6.63, 7.92), all had strong sexual content—because of this, the actors were often thought effeminate (Pliny, Pan. 54.1) and desirable (Pliny, Ep. 7.24); Maecenas, for example, was said to have been smitten with the mime Bathyllus (Tac. Ann. 1.54.3).

Magodiae included actors dressed like women and making indecent gestures while acting the parts of adulteresses and pimps (Ath. 14.621bd, cf. Herod. 36 and 40 Teubner). The southern Italian phlyax parodied myths, and featured men with long phalli either dangling or tied up in an exaggerated dog knot. The Italian fabulae relied on sexual jokes and sex acts: the palliata reworked Greek plays into Latin with standard jokes; the Atellana was a short piece with stock characters that depicted town life. During the Floralia festival, the fabulae Atellanae featured nude women (Lactantius 1.20.1), and one play, by the Roman Afranius (mid-first century A.D.), included a scene where prostitutes masturbated men (Ausonius, Epigr. 79).

The Greeks and Romans conducted orgies in somewhat formalized environments. In the Greek symposium, men drank together, reclining on couches, while young males and females played music, danced, and performed sexually. In Plato's Symposium the men send away the "flute-girls" so they can concentrate on their conversation—which, nonetheless, is about the nature of Eros. These drinking parties, however, could devolve into orgies, as depicted on Athenian vase paintings (e.g., the Brygos Painter's kylix) and Etruscan wall paintings (e.g., Tarquinia Tomb 4260). Another tomb at Tarquinia (Tomba delle Bighe) shows two pairs of youths engaged in anal intercourse under bleachers full of proper Etruscan men and women watching a boxing match.

Roman parties were similar to the Greek ones, but added a new element: voyeurism. In the sexually explicit paintings from Campania, a man and woman have sex almost always with someone present—usually, a room servant (cubicularius) stands nearby or in an open doorway. (This custom was depicted in the television series Rome.) Voyeurism obviously added excitement: "Always with doors wide open and unguarded, Lesbia, you receive
your lovers; you do not hide your vices. The beholder gives you more pleasure than the lover” (Mart. 1.34). Even watching oneself have sex was exciting: Horace decorated his bedroom with mirrors (Suet. Poet. 24.62–64), and Hostius Quadra was infamous for setting up a large mirror to watch himself be penetrated while performing cunnilingus (Sen. Q nat. 1.16).

Indeed, voyeurism seems an important part of Roman life in general. Many Campanian wall paintings of the Second to Fourth Styles include upper wall zones that depict small balconies containing anonymous small figures looking down and watching the real inhabitants of the room below.65 While Greek houses concealed the interior from visitors, Roman houses often had the main entrance directly opposite the master’s office (the tablinum), so passersby could see him at work in the distance, beyond the atrium. We—as well as the Greeks—might ask someone who stares at us, “What are you looking at?” A Roman would ask, “Do you like what you see?” Being viewed imparted importance.

We can call depictions of voyeurism in Roman sex “pornographic” in the modern sense (pornographos was first used to describe “the painters Aristeides, Pausias, and Nicophanes,” who painted prostitutes, or pornai; Ath. 13.567b).66 Modern definitions of pornography assume that its producers intend only to arouse an audience sexually. Can we know the intention of those who, in antiquity, produced sexually explicit scenes?67

We do know of the ancient sexual genres: sex manuals (such as those written by “Philainis”)68; sexually explicit plays, verses, and entertainments performed by actors who emphasized the sexual content; literature that explored
erotic feelings (such as Ovid’s poetry, the Menippean satire Satyricon, by Petronius, and episodes in Greek novels and in the Latin novel Golden Ass, by Apuleius); and portable art such as tabellae (paintings on small wooden diptychs), erotic lamps, cameos, mirrors, and mold-made bowls.

Pornography depends on at least three premises: the sex act needs to be perceived, the audience needs to feel it is being performed for them, and orgasm needs to be anticipated or perceived. For the first premise, many depictions strive to make the sex act perceptible: a mirror cover from Corinth positions the couple so we clearly see the man’s penis entering the woman’s vagina; in Roman wall paintings, the man tucks his near hand behind his back or places it on his hip, so as not to interfere with our viewing the actual moment of penetration—for the same purpose, such hand placements are common in modern pornography.

For the second premise, modern pornography places the sex act in a contrived setting (platforms, obvious sets, convenient paraphernalia, costumes), introduces a third party that stands for the audience (often not intimately participating), and provides formulaic exclamations that are repeated theatrically
in order to focus the audience’s attention on the activity. In Roman depictions of sexual activity, a stage setting often appears: a curtain is drawn behind the participants, isolating them, along with the audience, from the rest of the world. Roman art also introduces the third party: the cubicarius. Repetitive exclamations are inscribed over the sex scene: on vases (“hold still,” “let me!” and “stop!”), in paintings (“push it in slowly”), and on several mold-made bowls.

For the third premise, orgasm can be stated in literature, and it occasionally is in Pompeian graffiti. In static art, orgasm is difficult to convey, so Roman painting devised a convention: the man or woman stretches one hand out, as if conveying tension and release.

TRANSFERRED

Transvestism seems to have been a socially sanctioned aspect of some rites of passage: male transition to adulthood most commonly employed it.
The Dorian Ekdysia (undressing, or stripping) was a Cretan festival in honor of Leto that involved youths who were becoming citizens changing clothes. (The verb ekduō was used for taking the oath of citizenship in several Cretan cities; compare the Roman custom of assuming the toga virilis). At Lyttos, the festival took place in September and October (compare Athens’s Oschophoria) and had another name, the Periblêmaia (putting the woman’s cloak on). In Sparta, another Dorian city, youths spent a period in isolation that ended in a race, a beating, and a procession in women’s dress.

The Ekdysis has mythological transsexual explanations: Lamprus of Phaestus marries Galateia, and she becomes pregnant; he orders his wife to expose the child if it is a girl. During his absence, Galateia delivers a daughter but tells her husband it is a son, named Leucippus, and so keeps the child’s true sex a secret. When the girl matures, Galateia prays to Leto to change her daughter into a son, and Leto does so. (On the eve of their wedding, grooms slept next to the statue of Leucippus; Antoninus Liberalis 17.) Another version concerns the girl Iphis, who is in the same predicament. At thirteen, “he” is betrothed to, and falls in love, with another girl, lanthe, but as the wedding draws closer, Iphis begins to feel her love is unnatural (Ovid, Met. 9.666–797, incorporating a Lesbian version of the Leucippus story). She then calls out to the gods for help, and they transform her into a man so he can marry lanthe.

In Athens, graduation from the ephebeia (the first stage of military service) at age twenty may also have involved a change of dress since, in Aristophanes’ Wasp, Philocleon can see the ephebes’ genitals. The autumn Athenian festival, the Oschophoria, remembers a mythological transvestism: two youths dress up as women to imitate the companions of Theseus, who dressed as women to kill the Minotaur.76

Other myths mask coming-of-age rites. Achilles dresses as a girl to avoid induction into Agamemnon’s army, but Odysseus and Palamedes drop armor in front of him, which attracts his attention and reveals his true identity (Apol-lod. 3.13.8). Theseus enters Athens, wearing a chiton and long hair; this leads to his being mistaken for a maiden, which he corrects by throwing a bull into a sanctuary (Paus. 1.19.1).

Some marriage rites also called for transvestism. In Sparta and Cos, grooms don women’s clothes on their wedding night (Plut. Lyc. 15; Mor. 304cd). In Argos, brides wear a false beard (Plut. Mor. 245ef)77, and at another festival, the Hybristica, the Argives switch clothes to commemorate the female poet Telesilla, who led an army of women to defend Argos against Cleomenes of Sparta (ruled 520 to 489 B.C.; Plut. Mor. 245cf).
FIGURE 4.14: Statue from Motya, Sicily (late 5th c. b.c.), perhaps depicting an actor (with strophium) portraying Theseus (heroic hairstyle); Mozza Museum (photo, author).

Men could be humiliated when wearing women’s clothes. Surena, the victor of Carrhae, mocked Crassus by dressing a man as a woman, labeled with the latter’s name, in his triumphal procession (Plut. Crass. 32.4–6). And there is Heracles, dressed as a woman, doing women’s work for Omphale as punishment (Ovid, Her. 9.53–118; Fasti 2.318–24; Plut. Mor. 304cd).

Transvestism could be dangerous. Twice at Thebes, beardless men dressed as women—first to kill the Persian embassy (Hdt. 5.10), and later to kill the Spartan garrison (Xen. Hell. 5.4.4). In myth, Dionysus dresses Pentheus as a woman to infiltrate the Theban bacchantes; his mother dismembers him. Both Apollo and a certain Leucippus fall in love with Daphne, a companion of Artemis’s, but she shuns men. Leucippus thereupon dresses as a maiden so he can be in her party. Then one day, Daphne goes to bathe. Leucippus is reluctant to strip and join in, however, so her girl-comrades undress him, see that he is a man, and kill him (Paus. 8.20.2–4; Ovid, Met. 1.462–567).
Theater incorporates another aspect of socially accepted transvestism; until at least the late fourth century B.C., men played all roles—and several roles each within a play. Thus, Hippolytus could confront the sexuality of both father and stepmother if the same actor played Theseus and Phaedra in Euripides’ *Hippolytus.* Concert musicians also assumed long robes appropriate to women. Compare Phaedrus’s remark about Orpheus being effeminate, because he sang and played the kithara (Pl. *Symp.* 179d).

Transsexuality and hermaphroditism were, like transvestism, common topics in story—as well as an occasional reality. Lucius Mucianus claimed to have seen two transsexuals at Argos and Smyrna, Pliny reports four in 171 B.C., and he himself inspects one from Thysdrus (*NH* 7.23; Aulus Gellius, *NA* 9.4.12ff.). Phlegon of Tralles reports hermaphrodites in Greece (*Mirabilia* 2). In Rome, they were routinely killed from 207 to 92 B.C. (*Livy* 27.11.4, cf. Augustine, *Trinity* 6.8), but by Pliny’s time, hermaphrodites were thought to have only a physical abnormality.

In myth, Hermaphroditus was created when the water nymph Salmacis was united with Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite (Ovid, *Met.* 4.285–399). The conventional image of Hermaphroditus assumes a woman with female breasts and male genitals (contrast Priapus, who has a male body but often dresses like a woman). A famous Hellenistic statue plays with the viewer, who, based on their view from the rear, expects the likeness of a woman, but then discovers that, in front, “she” has male genitals. Similarly, Roman paintings depict satyrs accosting Hermaphroditus and recoiling in surprise.

A couple of well-known myths concern transsexuality. The Boeotian prophet Teiresias sees two copulating snakes and turns into a woman; when he sees them again, he turns back into a man (Hesiod fr. 275 M-W; Apollodorus 3.6.7).

FIGURE 4.15: Statue of a hermaphrodite, rear view; Athens National Museum (photo, author).
Since he knows what it is like to be both sexes, he is asked who enjoys sex more. He answers, "Women, by a third." In another myth, Poseidon falls in love with the Lapith maiden Caenis and promises to grant her anything. She asks to be a man, Caeneus, to whom Poseidon gives immortality as well. At Pirithoüs and Hippodamia's wedding, the guests include centaurs and Caeneus (among other heroes); when the centaurs become drunk, they attack other guests, including Caeneus, but since he is immortal they resort to hammering him into the ground to kill him (Ovid, *Met.* 12.189–209; Apollonius 1.57 scholiast; Homer, *Iliad* 1.264 and 2.746 scholiast; Hyginus 14.4; Pindar fr. 150 Bowra).

Male gods change sex to seduce a mortal woman. Helius, the sun god, enters Leucothoë's bedroom disguised as her mother, Eurynome, and rapes her (Ovid, *Met.* 4.217–35). Phoebus Apollo and Hermes both want the girl Chione (Ovid, *Met.* 11.301–7); Hermes causes her to fall asleep, then rapes her. Later that night, Apollo, disguised as an old woman, also rapes her. Callisto is an Arcadian nymph dedicated to Artemis; when Zeus, disguised as Artemis, rapes her, she delivers the boy Arcas and is turned into a bear (or shot) by the goddess (Ovid, *Met.* 2.409–40, 4.217–33, 11.310, 14.654–771; *Fasti* 2.155–92; Apollod. 3.101; [Eratosthenes] *Catasterismi* 1.1.1–11).

There is little real evidence for ancient bestiality. Non-mythological depictions are limited to a man having sex with a doe (*ABV* 469.71) and to women copulating with horses, mules, or donkeys—as Semiramis is said to
have done (Pliny, *NH* 8.64)—and crocodiles mounting negro pygmies. The last is, no doubt, meant to be a joke.

Instead, bestiality figures prominently in myth: Cronus, as a horse, rapes Phillyra, and she bears the centaur Chiron. As an eagle, Zeus has intercourse with Asterie and abducts Ganymede. As a swan, he rapes Leda, wife of Tyndareus, the king of Sparta; she produces Helen and Polydeuces (Pollux) from an egg, and, from an almost simultaneous union with Tyndareus, Castor and Clytemnestra. The egg was on view in Sparta (Paus. 3.16.1). Poseidon, as a horse, mates with Demeter in Arcadia, and she bears him the horse Arion or the local goddess Despoina of Lykosura (Paus. 8.25.4, 42.1).

In art, Pan attacks the shepherd Daphnis (*ARV*² 550.1), and has frontal intercourse with a nanny goat. Satyrs mostly rape maenads, but occasionally also a male donkey.

The two most famous myths with bestiality concern Europa (Ovid, *Met.* 2.844–75) and Pasiphaë. As a white bull, Zeus abducts Princess Europa of Tyre while she is playing on the shore. He takes her swimming across the sea

**FIGURE 4.17:** Roman discus lamp depicting a donkey having intercourse with a woman (first c. B.C.–first c. A.D); Olympia Museum (photo, author).
to Crete, where she bears him two sons, Minos and Rhadymanthus, and, in later accounts, Sarpedon. Minos marries Pasiphaë, who conceives a passion for a bull sent to Minos by Poseidon. The court artisan, Daedalus, constructs a hollow bronze cow for her to fit into so she can have intercourse with the bull; she bears the Minotaur, a bull-headed man. A couple of Campanian wall paintings depict Daedalus bringing Pasiphaë the cow, while Nero is said to have presented a live staging of Pasiphaë and the bull (Suet. Nero 12).

Copulating with a snake was said to produce great sons: Aristodama bore Aratus (Paus. 2.10.3), Olympias bore Alexander the Great, Avia bore Augustus. Scipio’s mother, too, was said to have mated with a snake.

We have only two instances of ancient necrophilia, one possibly mythological and one presumably real. In epic poems that deal with events later than those in the Iliad, Achilles kills Penthesileia, the queen of the Amazons. As she dies, he falls in love with her. The Byzantine scholar Eustathius of Thessalonica (II. 1696.52) goes one step further and has Achilles consummate his love with Penthesilea’s corpse.

Herodotus (5.92G1–4) records an odd story about Periander, tyrant of Corinth. When he consults the Oracle of the Dead on the river Acheron in Thesprotia, his dead wife, Melissa, appears and complains that she is cold because he has not burnt the clothing she wore when buried, and, she adds, because he had “put his loaves into a cold oven,” referring to his intercourse with her dead body. Periander then orders all the Corinthian women to come to the temple of Hera, wearing their most beautiful garments; he orders them to strip, and, praying to Melissa, has the clothes burnt.

A final note to this summary of Greek and Roman sexual practices and attitudes: almost every real sexual activity we moderns do (phone sex being unreal) seems to have its ancient analogue—except one, fisting (inserting the hand through the vaginal or anal opening). This is probably the only new, post-antique sexual activity, an invention of the late twentieth century.
86. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 90 and 229 n. 32. The general implications of Winkler’s review stand, although he did make some precarious guesses about the genders of some authors, accidentally double-counted one text, and missed others of relevance (and, of course, others again have come to light since he wrote).

Chapter 4


28. Compare fig. 4. 14; for example, J. Guillaud and M. Guillaud, Frescoes in the Time of Pompeii (Paris: Guillaud Editions, 1990), fig. 242.


34. Sutton, “Pornography and Persuasion,” 32.


42. Reinsberg, Ehe, Hetärentum und Knabenliebe, figs. 51; Johns, Sex or Symbol, b/w figs. 93, 108; Keuls, The Reign of the Phallus, figs. 167–70.

43. Johns, Sex or Symbol, 114.


47. Reinsberg, Ehe, Hetärentum und Knabenliebe, fig. 52; Johns, Sex or Symbol, b/w fig. 117.


49. G. Vorberg, Glossarium eroticum (Flanau am Main: Müller & Kiepenheuer, 1965), 485.

50. Varone, Erotica Pompeiana, 77, 140.


52. Reinsberg, Ehe, Hetärentum und Knabenliebe, fig. 83; Johns, Sex or Symbol, b/w figs. 115, 122; L. Jacobelli, Le piture erotiche delle Terme Suburbane di Pompei (Rome: ‘L’Erma’ di Bretschneider, 1995), figs. 33, 34, 55, pl. IV.
57. Richlin, “Reading Ovid’s Rapes,” 158–79; cf. Xenophon’s *Symposium*.
70. Johns, *Sex or Symbol*, figs. 95, 112; Clarke, *Roman Sex*, figs. 16, 17.
71. Marcadé, *Roma Amor*, pl. on p. 50; Clarke, *Roman Sex*, fig. 49.
72. For example, Johns, *Sex or Symbol*, b/w figs. 31, 65, color pls. 23, 37; Marcadé, *Roma Amor*, pls. on pp. 36, 59, 90, 107, 120, 123; Clarke, *Roman Sex*, figs. 33, 36, 37, 38, 40.
73. For example, Athenian kylikes, ARV² 444.241; Johns, *Sex or Symbol*, b/w fig. 111; Kilmer, *Greek Erotica*, R463; in a Pompeii wall painting, Clarke, *Roman Sex*,


81. Johns, Sex or Symbol, b/w fig. 85; see John Clarke, this volume, Chapter 9.

82. Johns, Sex or Symbol, color pl. 29.

83. Johns, Sex or Symbol, 110–11.

84. Keuls, The Reign of the Phallus, fig. 161.


86. Johns, Sex or Symbol, b/w fig. 91; Vorberg, Glossarium eroticum, 95 lower left, 601.

87. Keuls, The Reign of the Phallus, fig. 331.

88. Johns, Sex or Symbol, color pl. 1.


90. Johns, Sex or Symbol, color pl. 26.

91. Varone, Eroticism in Pompeii, pl. 1.

92. Apollod. Epitome 5.1; cf. the early fifth century kylix by the Penthesilea Painter, ARV² 879.1; and the slightly later scene painted on the barriers to the throne of Olympic Zeus, Paus. 5.11.6.