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### Publication Date

2020

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

“You Are Correctly Called a Man, Because You Act Manfully”: A Transgender Studies  
Approach to Gender-Crossing Saints in Late Antiquity

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

Kathryn Leigh Phillips

September 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Melissa Wilcox, Co-Chairperson

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Dr. Paul Chang

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The Dissertation of Kathryn Leigh Phillips is approved:

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University of California, Riverside

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my family. Thank you to my husband and children who endured all the time I spent researching and writing this dissertation. Without their constant love and support this would not have been possible. Lizzy and Lily, you have been so patient with the many days that I have not been able to have as much fun with you as we would like. Thank you for being so understanding and for giving me snuggles. Your love keeps me motivated. Scott, thank you for being by far my most reliable source of support. You have done so much to maintain our family during these years and it would be impossible to fully express my gratitude. Thank you to my parents and siblings for your support and encouragement throughout the long process of my education goals. I am grateful that you always found my goals important and worthwhile.

Thank you to all of my friends that have been there for me over these years including Pricila Chavez, Florence Capinding, and Christine Vriesma. Raquel Martinez, thank you for always finding my work interesting. You have no idea how amazing and motivating that is to me. To my fellow disserteers, Dani Dempsey and Jess Rehman, thank you for going through this process with me. It was so much easier knowing that we went through this together. Thank you for all your insights and support. Our friendship is incredibly important to me. Dani, a special thank you for inspiring this dissertation with your own amazing scholarship.

Thank you to those who served as both official and unofficial mentors to me. Thank you to my high school teachers William Valenzuela and John Bradshaw. You both first inspired my passion for history. Thank you to my first unofficial mentor in graduate

school, Justin Rose. You helped me when we were missing a Christianity professor and our conversations led to this dissertation. Thank you for getting me in touch with Beth, who was indispensable to this project. Thank you to my fellow scholars in the Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion research group. A special thank you to Tammy Ho, Wesley Leonard, Sherine Hafez, and Andy Smith. Your work is inspiring and I appreciate the feedback you have given me regarding my own. Thank you to the other fellows of the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship and to my Holstein mentor, Kristi Upson-Saia. Kristi, your mentorship was invaluable to me and I always came from our meetings feeling confident in what I was doing and motivated to work. Thank you to the rest of the faculty in UCR's Religious Studies department. Taking classes with all of you me to become the scholar I am today.

Of course, this project would not be possible without the amazing mentorship of my dissertation committee. Paul Chang, thank you for all that you have taught me. When you came to UCR, you immediately began to mentor me and I am so grateful for your continued guidance. Thank you for taking on the role of being the bad guy and imposing deadlines when I asked you to. The time spent discussing my exams reading lists got me through exams process and I always leave our conversations with some new insight into my research. Beth DePalma Digeser, thank you so much for taking a UCR student under your wing. Sometimes your guidance was scary and I resisted it, but in the end, it has made me such a better scholar. All the while, you were so kind and supportive of me and my research. I always looked forward to our skype sessions. Melissa Wilcox, thank you so much for coming to UCR; you have made our lives so much better. You are one of the

kindest, most generous persons I know. Thank you for teaching me all that I know about Queer and Transgender Studies and for constantly reminding me how much I know. I am so lucky to have you all of you as mentors. It should also be mentioned that this project was completed during a pandemic and required all the more labor from all of you as a result. Without the guidance and support of you three, this dissertation would not have been possible.

For my kids – I can only hope this makes a small dent in creating a better world for you.



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“You Are Correctly Called a Man, Because You Act Manfully”: A Transgender Studies Approach to Gender-Crossing Saints in Late Antiquity

by

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University of California, Riverside, September 2020

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In late antiquity, several hagiographies of assigned female saints who presented themselves as men were popular among Christian audiences. Within these hagiographies, the subjects changed their gender presentation and lived as men, often in monasteries intended for those assigned male. However, current historiography explains away these acts of gender variance from the historical record. Historians often view these saints’ presentation as a means to negotiate patriarchy, such as safety while traveling or to attain authority reserved for men. There seems to be a compulsion among scholars to impose cisnormativity onto these figures through viewing their gender presentation as solely a pragmatic choice. This dissertation analyzes these examples of gender variance in late antique Christianity through a transgender studies lens. This approach views these saints’ genders as performative constructions within their cultural context. By using a transgender studies approach, this dissertation disrupts the cisnormative view that causes the erasure of gender variance from the historical record.

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## **Introduction**

The courtesan Pelagia rode into Antioch with all the trappings of wealth. She was described as covered in gold and pearls and accompanied by servants also bedecked in ornaments and luxuries. Her hair was uncovered and her dress was mentioned to demonstrate her impudence in that it was not different from a man's, with the exception of her makeup. She passed in front of a deacon named Jacob, the narrator of her story, and several bishops, including Nonnos who was known for his piety. The bishops turned away from the sight of her except for Nonnos. Although she was not a Christian, Pelagia decided to go to church and she heard a homily given by Nonnos. The homily moved her and she began to sob at the thought of her sins. Pelagia went before the bishops and begged to be baptized. Nonnos and a deaconess, Romana, baptized Pelagia. She then gave away all of her wealth and began a life of penitence. On the eighth day after her baptism when it was time to remove her baptismal robes, instead of putting on her own clothes she asked Nonnos for some of his. She told him her plan to dress as a man and leave in the night. Nonnos agreed and gave her some of his clothing and she left without telling anyone else.

Three years later, the deacon Jacob went to Jerusalem and sought out a great monk named Pelagios that he had heard performed glorious acts. He went to his cell at the Mount of Olives and knocked on a window. Pelagia was wearing the clothes of a holy man and Jacob did not recognize the person as someone he once knew. Jacob describes Pelagia as having lost all her beauty due to fasting and keeping vigils; her body was

emaciated and dark. Those in Jerusalem referred to Pelagia as “the eunuch” and did not suspect that she was female bodied. Jacob even recorded that she spoke to him like a man and he had no realization that this was Pelagia. After speaking to her, he felt moved by the way of life of such, in Jacob’s words, a “man of God.” Jacob went to other monasteries and heard more stories about the miracles of Pelagios. Jacob heard news that Pelagios had died and that all of the monks, as well as other people of Jerusalem, were going to see his burial. At the burial, as the body was being prepared with anointment, the holy men realized that this was a female body. They shouted out their astonishment that such holy acts were performed by a woman.<sup>1</sup>

Within early Christianity, a particular genre of hagiography reached the height of its popularity among Christian audiences. Often referred to as “cross-dressing” or “transvestite” saints, these hagiographies all feature saints that were assigned female but lived as men, either temporarily or for the remainder of their lives. These hagiographies often include a climactic moment in which their female bodies were revealed and everyone glorified God that a woman was able to commit such acts of holiness. In some cases, their status as assigned female is revealed during their life, but many others are revealed after their death. Pelagia of Antioch, also known as Pelagia the Harlot or Pelagia the Repentant, is one example of this reveal taking place after her death. The story of Pelagia includes many of the major elements included in these hagiographic stories and serves as a helpful introduction to the genre.

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<sup>11</sup> *Life of St. Pelagia*, (Syriac) trans. Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 40-62.

*The Life of Saint Pelagia the Harlot* is a fairly well-known story among historians of ancient Christianity. The fifth-century hagiography has a penitent sinner, an escape in the night, and a twist ending to keep the ancient or current reader in suspense. Of the many female bodied saints that took on masculine presentation, Pelagia is perhaps more known as indicated by her appearance in various scholarship. Like many of the other saints in this genre, her “real” identity as a female bodied person was revealed at the time of her death. Many current readers, including scholars, would think of it in much the same way: she was a woman who disguised herself as a man and it was revealed after her death that she had really been a woman the whole time. Indeed, her *Vita* records that after the revelation of her body, the crowd buried her as a revered woman. Although her miracles were considered to be the work of a holy man, she is then instead remembered as a holy woman.

The other so-called transvestite saints have very similar treatment. Many are discovered after their death, like Mary known as Marinos. In some cases, they revealed themselves to be women in order to avoid trouble, particularly accusations of rape, like Eugenia, although others maintained their masculine presentation even after such an accusation, like Mary and Theodora of Alexandria. Others were discovered in life, like Matrona of Perge,<sup>2</sup> who was revealed to the abbot through a dream. Some stories ended with their change to masculine presentation without knowledge of what happened after, such as the case of Thecla. In some cases, characters internal to the story were aware of the saint’s female body, but continued to accept their masculine presentation. Matrona,

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<sup>2</sup> Matrona is also referred to as Matrona of Constantinople.

for example was permitted to wear men's habits in her convent. Likewise, Eugenia was told by the abbot Helenus, "You are correctly called a man, because, except that you are a female, you act manfully."<sup>3</sup> Regardless of how much time these saints spent in masculine presentation, they were still remembered as holy women.

Moreover, there is limited historical scholarship on these figures and their gender presentation, and the scholarship that exists often explains away their masculine presentation. Thecla, for example, was nearly raped and many scholars posit that her change in gender presentation was a way to avoid further treatment while living as an itinerant preacher. The saints who entered monasteries, such as Mary, Theodora, Matrona, Eugenia, and several others, are usually said to have changed their gender presentation in order to enter male monasteries. It is often posited that a family member might have found them if they had gone to a convent and changes in gender presentation allowed them live as ascetics without familial intervention. Scholars seem to feel a need to defend why such holy figures would change their gender presentation to a masculine one in order to recuperate these saints as women.

This dissertation interrogates the historical implications of treating gender variant figures in such ways. When scholars explain away gender variance, they erase it from the historical record while simultaneously affecting current transgender issues. Although many of the gender-crossing saints are analyzed throughout this project, the focus is on three of these figures: Matrona of Perge, Mary known as Marinos, and Thecla. These

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from the Latin provided by Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 20.

three figures exemplify the explanations often attributed to the various gender-crossing saints and, therefore, provide a focus to disrupt these cisnormative explanations.<sup>4</sup> By treating these figures as women and searching for explanations for their masculine presentation, scholars affect current ideas about gender as well as how we view the ancient past. Therefore, this project is a historiographic intervention that preserves gender variance in late antique Christian texts. In order to accomplish this, I use current theories on gender, particularly on gender performativity. In this way, I use a transgender studies approach in order to avoid gendered assumptions about the subjects and to disrupt the common historical practice of imposing cisnormativity onto historical figures and narratives.

### **Cultural Sexual Differentiation and Gender Norms**

In order to disrupt cisnormative narratives that naturalize the gender binary of western modernity, it is important to consider the cultural context and gender norms of the ancient Mediterranean. It should be noted that this context is not referring to a monolithic culture. The Roman Empire was vast and included many different geographical locations, languages, and cultures. Therefore, while there are some commonalities that can be pointed to in order to create a cultural context, these views are not the same everywhere and in every time period. For example, there are extensive

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<sup>4</sup> Cisnormative refers to the assumption that one's gender aligns with the sex one was assigned at birth.

descriptions of multiple genders within Rabbinic Jewish texts.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, early Christianity was far from monolithic. There were many variations throughout the time period this project deals with and orthodoxy was only just beginning in its formation. Despite some treatises from ancient authors trying to set boundaries for orthodoxy in their time, it is important to remember that their words were neither heard nor followed throughout all Christian communities.

That said, sexed bodies in the ancient Mediterranean were thought of quite differently than in modern times. Although a much more detailed account of these cultural differences can be found in chapter one, I want to provide a brief description here in order to contextualize the Christian literature discussed in this introduction. Sex, as well as its cultural gender implications, was seen much more in terms of a spectrum rather than a strict binary. Genitals were viewed as one expression of this spectrum, rather than the root of difference. Historian Kristi Upson-Saia argues, “Although individuals’ natural gender was not measured primarily through genitalia, it was nonetheless exhibited and interpreted through the body.”<sup>6</sup> This spectrum of difference, therefore was largely seen in embodied performances of culturally gendered traits. Furthermore, this spectrum upheld a gender hierarchy in which to be considered a masculine male person was the top position within the hierarchy. Culturally held virtues, therefore, were associated with masculinity, whereas vices were associated with

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<sup>5</sup> Max Strassfeld’s article is one such example of scholarship on the topic of Rabbinic gender variance, with particular attention to the *androgynos*. “Translating the Human: The Androgynos in Tosefta Bikurim,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no 3-4 (2016): 587–604.

<sup>6</sup> Kristi Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue, and Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 10.



femininity. Men were particularly expected to exhibit reason and restraint, while women were viewed to be largely incapable of such virtues, particularly in their lack of sexual restraint.

However, because these notions of masculine and feminine characteristics existed on a spectrum, individuals were able to display feminine or masculine gendered performances regardless of their sex: those assigned female were able to perform masculinity and those assigned male could perform femininity. According to Elizabeth Castelli, because categories like masculine and feminine were placed in a hierarchy, men and women were not viewed as “opposites.” Instead, “qualities of masculinity may inhere in the persons of biological females (‘women’) or characteristics of femininity in the persons of ‘men’.”<sup>7</sup> Because sex was also hierarchical, females were viewed as less likely to achieve culturally deemed superior masculine traits. On the other hand, males were expected to safeguard themselves from accusations of femininity through public masculine performances. Women were, therefore, encouraged to act in masculine ways, even if this was largely considered out of their capabilities, and men were largely shamed if they exhibited inferior feminine features.

As the cultural context in which Christianity formed, Christian views towards gender and embodiment often included these aforementioned cultural gender norms. Ancient sources often speak of women as less reasonable and hyper-sexual. This is also apparent in texts that praise an exemplary woman. Often, exemplary Christian women are

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation in Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. J. Epstein and K. Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31.

compared to widely held gender norms that women were expected to exhibit the opposites of masculine virtues such as reason and restraint. Although these exemplary women were viewed as successfully exhibiting superior masculine qualities within the gender spectrum, this is written within the misogynistic gender hierarchy prevalent throughout the ancient Mediterranean.

### **Asceticism and Gender**

The subjects of this dissertation span from the first to the sixth century CE. During this period, the tradition which we now call Christianity was varied and largely continuing to create the foundations that would become more solidified in medieval Christianity. Ascetic practices were particularly under change throughout this period. In the first century, when Thecla is supposed to have lived, Christianity was still a very small group, largely situated in the neighboring areas of Judea. As the apostolic Acts attests, the followers of Jesus did not have orthodoxy or orthopraxy set. The letters of Paul also demonstrate the divisions present, particularly over practices such as circumcision and Jewish dietary restrictions. Likewise, Christian ascetic practices were not yet set.

The itinerant preacher, in the style of first Jesus and then Paul, was one model for early ascetic Christians to follow. The apostles sought to bring new members into their discipleship; while some apostles focused more on fellow Jewish people, Paul expanded into the Gentile world. Paul was certainly not the only early Jesus follower to expand the scope of potential converts: the apostle Thomas supposedly reached India and some

Christian communities claim Apostolic origins through him.<sup>8</sup> Within Paul's epistles, there is a network of preachers on the move that Paul references which include women. For example, Aquila and Pricilla (or Prisca) were a married couple that Paul acknowledges for their work in traveling and ministering.<sup>9</sup> Paul also brings attention to another woman without the accompaniment of a man: Phoebe. Also referenced in Romans 16, Phoebe is referred to as a *diakonos*. Although this is often translated in English as "servant," Elizabeth McCabe has argued that its use is the same for Phoebe as male figures in Pauline epistles, which are more commonly translated as "deacons" and given clerical authority in interpretations.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Pauline epistles demonstrate early ascetic and authoritative practices were not reserved only for those assigned male.

Likewise, one of the subjects of this project further demonstrate the lack of sexual division in early ascetic practices: Thecla. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* begin with Paul preaching to Gentile communities. In this second-century writing, Thecla joins Paul in his itinerant preaching, but eventually sets out on her own. She first goes back to her home city to preach to its residents and then sets off again on her own.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing in these *Acts* that speaks to an irregularity of itinerant preaching by those

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<sup>8</sup> David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2000), 343.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 16:3-4. All Biblical references throughout this project are NRSV.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth A. McCabe, "A Reevaluation of Phoebe in Romans 16: 1-2 as a *Diakonos* and *Prostatis*: Exposing the Inaccuracies of English Translation," edited by Elizabeth A. McCabe, *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2009), 99-116.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 10.

assigned female. Therefore, ascetic practices within the earliest stages of Christianity, did not seem to be segregated by assigned sex.

Eremitic asceticism was largely popular in the first few centuries, but a shift towards communal ascetic lifestyles occurred around the fourth century. Although segregating ascetic communities by assigned sex soon became the norm, some early communal living was not sex segregated. For example, some ascetics lived together in a pseudo-marriage, which was later forbidden in the council of Nicaea in 325.<sup>12</sup> These male and female ascetics would live together mirroring heteronormative marriage without the sexual relationship. According to Susanna Elm, the benefits to both parties were similar to that of a typical heterosexual marriage: a woman could be supported economically if she did not come from a family that could support her in her vow of virginity, and a man could enjoy the “earthly comforts” of having a wife “without forfeiting their bid for salvation.”<sup>13</sup>

Although some earlier communities, such as those created by Macrina and her brother Basil of Caesarea, were largely segregated by sex, some early communities did not segregate, choosing instead a model of living as brothers and sisters. For example, Basil of Ancyra, the bishop of Ancyra between 336 and 358, argued for spiritual castrations that would enable men and women to live together as if “born from the same womb.”<sup>14</sup> Basil of Ancyra argued that men and women who lived in extreme asceticism

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudo in the sense that they did not legally get married, but lived together.

<sup>13</sup> Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

could reach angelic states. According to Elm's analysis of Basil's *De virginitate*, "Once a [female] virgin has achieved this state of mind, once she adopts the appearance of a man, has given her voice a masculine firmness, and comports herself like a man, then she may live with the brothers in Christ as if in a family."

Similarly, monastic followers of another bishop, Eustathius, practiced angelic communal living with women that changed to more masculine appearance. According to Sozomen, Eustathius founded monastic communities in Armenia, Paphlogonia, and Pontus with his own "monastic philosophy."<sup>15</sup> Although nothing remains of this philosophy, the practices of his monasteries were condemned, and therefore somewhat preserved, in the Council of Gangra in 340-1. Canon 13 of the council of Gangra states that if a woman dresses in men's clothing, she should be anathematized and canon 17 states that if a woman cuts off her hair, a sign of her subordination, under pretense of asceticism, she should be anathematized.<sup>16</sup> Elm argues,

If then a woman shaves her head, she not only denies this subordination, but she assumes a position as man's equal, and may further express this by wearing a man's dress. If she has thus become – at least externally – a man, she ought to be, like a man, God's image and glory. It appears that the women who followed Eustathius did not simply cast aside their female clothes and exchange them for male attire, but assumed an entirely new role.<sup>17</sup>

Although the followers of Eustathius were condemned for their lack of sex segregated appearance and roles, Eustathius still became bishop of Sebaste sometime before 356.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.14.

<sup>16</sup> Elm, *Virgins of God*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

Elm notes it is particularly of interest that the council of Gangra anathematizes these actions when done under “the pretense of asceticism.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it was not the specific actions that were condemned, but rather when they are justified under false asceticism; however, there was no further discussion of how to recognize this “pretense,” which allowed it to be applied to any monastic group which defied the developing sex segregated rules.

As norms around ascetic communal living began to become more set and sex specific during this period, institutional clerical authority also became more sex specific. Some scholars have argued that initially men and women both had access to institutional power.<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald demonstrate this access to authority through an analysis of house churches. Osiek and MacDonald argue that because women were viewed to belong in the private sphere and were expected to run the home, women likely would have been integral members of house churches as well.<sup>21</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen similarly argues that because women were thought to belong to the private sphere, this often gave them domain over the household. Roman women took care of the finances; ordered their servants and slaves and disciplined them; and stored and distributed household supplies.<sup>22</sup> Torjeson notes “The male and female householders who served as

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in the Earliest Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*.

<sup>22</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priest*

patrons of the early churches may not have always been the titular leaders of those churches. Nevertheless, the similarities between the duty of householder and those of early bishops and presbyters are striking.”<sup>23</sup> Torjesen argues that when churches left the home and became more institutionalized in the third century, clerical authoritative positions became accessible only to those assigned male. She further notes that during the third and fourth century, the church became much more involved in the imperial court and the office of bishop “became increasingly monarchical,” likely influencing how these positions became viewed as sex specific.<sup>24</sup>

### **Metaphorical Expressions of Gender Crossing in Early Christian Literature**

The council of Gangra’s condemnation of Eustathius’ monastic followers demonstrates the existence of gender variant Christian ascetics outside of the hagiographies examined in this project. Although some of the hagiographical figures are believed to be historical people, many are considered fictional characters. Regardless of whether the figures examined in this book were “real,” hagiographies reflected reality and an idealization of that reality. The council of Gangra gives further evidence that gender crossing did happen in ancient Christian ascetic practices. Documents from these communities, such as Basil of Ancyra’s, further demonstrate a theology that supported these practices. Furthermore, this theology was supported by prior Christian literature

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 157.

that used gender crossing. For example, Elm argues that the council of Gangra condemned Eustathius and his followers for taking scripture too literally: scripture that encouraged giving up all possessions (Matthew 19:21), to leave their families and avoid marriage (Matthew 19:29 and Mark 12:25), and most importantly for this context that there is “neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).<sup>25</sup> Elm notes that “Eustathius taught nothing that does not have a firm basis in the New Testament,” yet the council “felt obliged” to condemn his literal interpretations due to social repercussions.<sup>26</sup>

However, these are not the only examples of earlier Christian literature that could be used to support such a theology. Several examples exist that would further support communities and individuals that participated in gender crossing as part of their ascetic practices. Many of these examples are more metaphorical, but could be used to justify gender-crossing performances and presentations. Although some are less direct, such as Paul describing himself as a nursing mother (1 Thessalonians 2:7), others make a much clearer erasure of assigned gender categories, such as Galatians 3:28 referred to above.

This literature goes beyond the New Testament as well. For example, in the *Gospel of Thomas* saying 114, the apostles ask Jesus to send Mary away because she is a woman and therefore unworthy. Jesus replied that he would “make Mary male.”<sup>27</sup> According to Elizabeth Castelli, “The notion that maleness is linked to salvation (and the underside of that notion, that femaleness has a special relationship to sin) is not an

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<sup>25</sup> Elm, *Virgins of God*, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Castelli, “I Will Make Mary,” 30.



innovation on the part of the tradition; what is new is the idea that women can gain access to holiness and salvation by ‘becoming male.’<sup>28</sup> The *Gospel of Thomas*, then, sets the theological foundations for the notion that women who practice extreme piety are spiritually made male, which is commonly found in many other texts. Castelli notes that because masculinity was viewed as superior, it is only boundary crossing towards masculinity that is seen in Christian literature with the exception of polemics against homosexuality. In so doing, Castelli argues ancient Christian writers both support the cultural understandings of gender, while further undermining common understanding of the inherent nature of gendered characteristics:

“Becoming male” marks for these thinkers the transcendence of gendered differences, but it does so only by rescribing the traditional gender hierarchies of male over female, masculine over feminine; the possibility that women can ‘become male,’ paradoxically however, also reveals the tenuousness and malleability of the naturalized categories of male and female. That feminine gender identity can be set aside in the process of spiritual advancement both reiterates the dominant understandings of gender differences (in the insistence that movement from female to male is a sign of development and progress, a movement from the lesser to the greater) and undercuts the dominant understanding of gender differences (in the recognition that they are not fixed).<sup>29</sup>

Castelli argues that the *Gospel of Thomas* and other texts using its example demonstrate the stretching of conventional gender boundaries.<sup>30</sup> Within this notion of becoming male, early Christians demonstrate a gender fluidity as well as a hierarchy in which maleness represents spiritual advancement.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Castelli, “I Will Make Mary,” 33.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

This metaphorical stretching of gender boundaries is continued in texts through the fourth century. Castelli notes, “The paradigmatic lives of holy women produced during the third and fourth centuries provide yet another example of texts in which gender ambiguity becomes a sign of the women’s special status.”<sup>31</sup> For example, Palladius reports that John Chrysostom said of the abbess Olympias, “Don’t say ‘what kind of woman’ but ‘what kind of man:’ because this is a man, other than her body.”<sup>32</sup> Macrina is similarly described in the *Life of St Macrina* by her brother Gregory of Nyssa. For example, Gregory described his sister in masculine terms. He states that after a death she did not express “womanish” emotions and that he was not even sure if he should call her a woman because she transcended the limitations of her sex.<sup>33</sup> Because Macrina was assigned female, her display of manly virtues is all the more exceptional and exemplary. Virginia Burrus argues that Gregory was using Platonic views of the transcendent Man that was the goal for every Christian. She notes that “transcendentalized subjectivity” privileges men as “receptive lovers of Christ” in what she refers to as the “homoeroticism of his soteriology.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, because men were viewed as closer to the transcendental Manhood in Platonic thinking, they were closer to and more receptive to Christ. According to Burrus, this homoerotic soteriology influenced Gregory’s description of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Palladius, *Dialogus de vita S. Ioannis Chrysostomi*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*.

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Burrus, “*Begotten, Not Made*”: *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 83.

Macrina in which he “productively destabilize[s]” without fully “eras[ing] the androcentrism of his thought”: “If it is because she is a woman that Macrina makes such a good man, it is also because she has been made male that she can become such a good lover of Christ.”<sup>35</sup> This language, which stretches conventional gender boundaries while simultaneously reinforcing gender hierarchy, were common throughout writings regarding holy women.

Although it was very common for men to refer to holy women as “manly” throughout the fourth century, there is also an example of a woman describing herself becoming a man. Perpetua’s account of her imprisonment leading up to her martyrdom at the beginning of the third century is one of the few texts extant with a known female author. In the *Passion of St. Perpetua*, Perpetua recounts several visions in her prison diary. Perpetua and her fellow arrested Christians were sentenced to execution in the arena, where they would be killed by beasts and gladiators. In the last vision of her account waiting for martyrdom, she was led to the amphitheater where she was meant to fight an Egyptian gladiator.<sup>36</sup> Young men approached both the Egyptian and Perpetua to get them ready for battle. When Perpetua’s helpers stripped her naked, she recounted that she “became a man.”<sup>37</sup> As a man, she defeats the gladiator and woke understanding that she would be victorious in the arena in reality as well by being killed and becoming a martyr. Castelli argues that the closer Perpetua moves towards her martyrdom, the more

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>36</sup> *Passions of SS Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

“she strips off the cultural attributions of the female body,” first through cessation of lactation and giving up all obligations of motherhood and then through her physical transformation in her vision.<sup>38</sup> Castelli argues that in becoming male, Perpetua’s transformation “signif[ies] her increasingly holy status.”<sup>39</sup> Although this becomes a trope in the fourth-century texts above, this early third-century diary is written by the woman who experienced this metaphorical gender transformation.<sup>40</sup>

Although many examples of metaphorical or rhetorical gender crossing existed from the beginning of Christian traditions, this project examines those who underwent an embodied gender crossing. Though it has been suggested in some scholarship that the “transvestite saint,” as they are often called, is following this same “manly woman” trope observed here, some hagiographies existed prior to the establishing of such a trope, for example Thecla. Thecla is often suggested as the source of the trope while ignoring the lived reality of the potentially historical Thecla. Furthermore, using these tropes as the only explanation for the entire genre, ignores that fact that some of these figures were real people that did cross gender boundaries in their presentation and performance. Rather than trying to search for one cause for the entire genre, or even for a single figure, this project seeks to open our understanding of ancient Christian gender crossing through an introduction of contemporary studies in gender.

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<sup>38</sup> Castelli, “I will Make Mary,” 35.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Perpetua’s diary is claimed to be her work, although it is not clear how much it may have been edited by a likely male editor, possibly Tertullian.

### Previous Scholarship on Gender-Crossing Saints

Although scholarship on gender-crossing saints began in the nineteenth century, current scholarship on them in ancient Christianity has been few and far between. The subjects are commonly brought into scholarship on women in ancient Christianity, but usually briefly and without significant analysis to their gender variance. There is a large amount of current research on one of the foci of this dissertation: Thecla. However, this largely overlooks her gender crossing or excuses it as a means of safer travel. Mary and Matrona, on the other hand, have very little scholarship focused on them. What does exist is primarily translations, critical editions and commentaries on their hagiographical texts.

Although Thecla is frequently the subject of scholarship, it rarely focuses on her gender presentation. For example, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson analyzes the *Life and Miracles of Thekla*, a later version of Thecla's life that continues past the conclusion of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, created by an unknown author in the fifth century.<sup>41</sup> This study is both a work of literary analysis and a history of literature from the time. There is very little attention given to Thecla's masculine appearance. In *The Cult of St Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Stephen Davis constructs a meticulously detailed study of the cult of Thecla in the first several centuries of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> He attempts to reconstruct as much as possible the religious acts of women in this time period through an analysis of Thecla, the second most popular female figure in ancient

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<sup>41</sup> Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Christianity behind Mary the mother of Jesus. Davis does give some attention to Thecla's masculine appearance. He draws attention to other women who changed their appearance as well, some specifically in emulation of Thecla. In these examples, however, he explains them as means of escape or to achieve a position not open to women.

Little scholarship focuses on Mary and Matrona. Khalifa Bennasser does include an analysis of the genre of transvestite saints with his translated the tenth-century version of the *Life of St Matrona* for his dissertation.<sup>43</sup> Like many other studies of these saints, Bennasser's dissertation explains their gender presentation as a means to an ascetic life that was unavailable to them for various reasons otherwise. Bennasser also discusses the cultural discourses around gender that positioned maleness closer to divinity. Bennasser argues that this may have influenced the trope of women disguising themselves as men. Although he largely discusses the historicity of the genre, his is one of the only works that focuses on Matrona. With the exception of critical editions and translations, I have found no scholarship that focuses solely on Mary/Marinos.

Many pieces of scholarship briefly address the topic of the gender-crossing saint, but they largely view such gender crossing instrumentally, as a means to an end. For example, Virginia Burrus notes that gender boundaries, the association of the public and private sphere with men and women respectively, put Thecla in danger when in public,

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<sup>43</sup> Khalifa Bennasser, "Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit" (Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers University, 1984).

possibly implying this as another explanation for the change in appearance.<sup>44</sup> In *Sacred Fiction: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, Linda Coon makes a similar assertion, specifically referring to Thecla, that “transvestitism” was to enable freedom of movement.<sup>45</sup>

Other scholarship argues that the genre of gender crossing exists because of theologies that favors maleness and therefore refers to pious women as “manly.” For example, in “Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story,” Susan Ashbrook Harvey looks at hagiographies from the 4<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> centuries and analyzes the tension between the holy women in these hagiographies and the cultural stereotypes of women.<sup>46</sup> The hagiographers often attempt to reinforce cultural views that women are weak, frail, and a gateway for sin while at the same time they portray the female focus as the opposite of these stereotypes.

Ashbrook Harvey argues that this fulfills a theological purpose to demonstrate redemption: it shows the reversal of the weak into the strong in Christian redemption theology. Because women are the cultural symbols of sin, they better demonstrate the power of Christian salvation. Ashbrook Harvey discusses the motif of the reformed harlot

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<sup>44</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston: Mellon Press, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> Linda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story,” *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. Linda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990) 36-59.

and connects it with the motif of the transvestite saint. She argues that these women became men because they “could not serve God adequately as women.”<sup>47</sup> She further argues that the hagiographical motif allowed male writers to honor women in a masculine framework while still maintaining the saint’s identity as a woman. In continuance with her ideas on paradox and redemption, she states that these saints are not only redeemed as human beings, but more specifically as women. While theologically astute, Ashbrook Harvey’s analysis still ignores the lived experience of actual people or represented as actual people presenting themselves as men.

The earliest scholarship focusing specifically on the phenomenon of “transvestite” saints, as they are often called, was largely concerned with finding pre-Christian references for the stories. These are attempts to view these Christian stories as borrowing from classical mythology or literature rather than creating a new genre. For example, in *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia*, Hermann Usener argues that the women in these hagiographies have similar names to epithets of Aphrodite, specifically the bearded Aproditos.<sup>48</sup> He posits that these hagiographies are a remnant of the cult of Aphrodite of Cyprus, whose festivals included cross-dressing by devotees. L. Radermacher in *Hippolytos und Thekla: Studien zur Geschichte von Legende und Kultus* argues that Thecla’s “disguise” is modeled after a Greek novel by Xenophon, in which a woman shaves her head and dresses as a man to escape an unwanted marriage to be reunited with

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>48</sup> H. Usener, *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1879).



her actual love interest.<sup>49</sup> In *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike*, Rosa Soder argues that all of the hagiographies of so-called cross dressing saints are reminiscent of Greek romances and she uses a structuralist analysis of the common features of both genres to make her point.<sup>50</sup> Not only do these approaches assume antecedents for the switch in gender presentation in the classical culture before Christianity rather than focusing on the importance they held for the newly forming religion, but they also explain away gender variance as a disguise with a practical purpose.

Some earlier scholars have tried to explain the masculine saints from within Christian tradition. For example, (Father) H. Delahaye argues that they are all variations of Pelagia.<sup>51</sup> According to him, there are two stories of Pelagia, one a martyred virgin and the other a courtesan that presented herself as a male hermit after her conversion. Evelyn Patlagean takes a somewhat similar tactic through a structuralist approach akin to Levi-Strauss.<sup>52</sup> Patlagean argues that these figures' gender transgression is a negotiation of social obstacles for women and the trope of female transvestism represents a moment of female freedom in a male dominated society.

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<sup>49</sup> L. Radermacher, *Hippolytos und Thekla: Studien zur Geschichte von Legende und Kultus* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1916).

<sup>50</sup> Rosa Söder, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike* (Stuttgart: S. Kohlhammer, 1932; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969).

<sup>51</sup> H. Delehay, *Les legends hagiographiques* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1927).

<sup>52</sup> Evelyn Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme deguisee en monie et l'evolution de la saintete feminine a Byzance," *Studi Medievali* 3, no. 17 (1976): 597-623.

More recently, Stephen Davis has also attempted to find earlier antecedents within Christianity and Judaism through a post-structural approach.<sup>53</sup> He views Thecla as one such antecedent for the others, as well as Biblical figures. Davis uses an approach, which he categorizes as post-structuralist intertextuality, to analyze the hagiographies of ancient female saints who “disguised” themselves as men. He explains that intertextuality is the idea that authors refer to works prior to their own within “larger cultural discourses that give it meaning.” Davis argues that instead of viewing these hagiographies through a structuralist approach, the structural aspects should be viewed as allusions to earlier legends. In doing so, he argues that these texts are woven references to earlier works as well as Christian discourses on female bodies rather than a story with universal aspects. Again, all of these discourses ignore one of the most straightforward readings—whatever the larger cultural structures or discourses that gave rise to these hagiographies, they are ultimately hagiographies that depict those assigned female living and acting as men, even becoming men.

Other scholars have tried to understand the genre through psychological approaches. Marie Delcourt in the appendix “Female Saints in Masculine Clothes” of her book, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classic Antiquity*, argues for a psychoanalytical approach. Rather than a classic mythology as its antecedent, she argues these hagiographies are referring to earlier Christian asceticism. Therefore, the change to a masculine persona takes on certain symbols, such as ruptures from the

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no1 (2002): 1-36.

family, from forms of prior existence, and from a sexual life. Delcourt argues that it is through these inner psychological symbols that we can better understand the change of outward appearance.<sup>54</sup>

John Anson in “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism” also takes a more psychological approach; however, he is searching for the psychology behind the writers of these hagiographies.<sup>55</sup> Anson argues that these other approaches look in the wrong place to understand the trope. He suggests instead of trying to find the prior Greek reference or trying to understand these figures as historical women, we should instead examine their hagiographies as discussing the tensions of the monastics who wrote them. It is through these stories that these male monastics neutralized the temptation of a female presence. He argues that Thecla should be viewed as the origin of these hagiographies and remarks on how her *Acts* do not offer explanation for her masculine appearance although the *Acts* do seem to connect it to her baptism. He argues that the change in appearance is related to a ritual of “putting on Christ,” in whom neither female nor male existed. However, men and women both participate in the ritual of baptism in which there is neither male nor female. Yet, he never addresses that there aren’t examples of male-bodied people changing their appearance after the ritual, because of the cultural notions of feminine inferiority, which seems to undermine this argument. In some later cases of

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<sup>54</sup> Marie Delcourt, “Female Saints in Masculine Clothes,” in *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity* (London: Studio Books, 1961), 84–102.

<sup>55</sup> John Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,” *Viator* 5 (1974): 1-32.

transvestite saints, he argues that the disguise is a means of escape from their previous lives.

Kristi Upson-Saia devoted an article, “Gender and Narrative Performance in Early Christian Cross-Dressing Saints’ *Lives*,” and a chapter of her book, *Early Christian Dress*, to the topic of cross-dressing saints. In both pieces of scholarship, she focuses on the authors of the hagiographies, and their intentions for the way they narrate the stories of these holy figures. Upson-Saia argues that the (probably male) hagiographers emphasized the femininity of cross-dressing saints. She argues that these authors did not intend for gender subversion to be a model to be emulated. Rather, “They absorbed the transgressive dress performance into their narratives not to uphold it as a model for readers to follow but rather to control, domesticate, and harness the dress practice, as well as claims of radical gender transformation, that were troubling them.”<sup>56</sup> Upson-Saia argues that this allows the hagiographers to control transgressive narratives in order to redirect them into preferred modes of piety. Despite this, they still retain a representation of women living and dressing as men and were circulated as such.

One of the most recent works on the genre, as well as one of the only monographs on the subject, is Crystal Lynn Lubinsky’s *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood*. Lubinsky’s book is incredibly researched. She provides summaries for the hagiographies of the cross-dressing saints and thorough descriptions of the previous scholarship on the genre. Like Davis, Lubinsky uses an intertextual approach to the origins of cross-dressing saints. However, Lubinsky sets her work apart by arguing for a

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<sup>56</sup> Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress*, 85.

strictly female identity of the subjects of these hagiographies. Like Upson-Saia, Lubinsky argues that the authors of these hagiographies emphasize the subjects' female categorization with the intention for readers to view them as women.

Lubinsky argues that all levels of masculinity are superficial, and their "transvestism" is strictly instrumental in order to maintain a "holy womanhood." In her introduction, Lubinsky specifically states that these figures should not be considered transgender, because they are not "male, but female bodied."<sup>57</sup> Instead, she argues these figures exhibit a superficial masculine disguise in order to sustain ascetic practices. She further argues that these figures did not "become male in any real sense," without explaining what male in a "real sense" would be.<sup>58</sup> Although much of her argument is based on what she supposes is the hagiographer's intentions, she further posits a feminine interiority to these figures. By arguing the subjects' own intentions, Lubinsky argues an interiority, and, therefore, an identity, she could not possibly know. In fact, Lubinsky's points about the subject's femininity can be turned exactly on their head. No matter how feminine these women once were, how much culture and society assigned them feminine qualities, they decided to live as men, and this exact transition was captured by stories and hagiographies that were popularly circulated. We cannot know the interiority of the subjects of these stories, nor can we know the interior states of the people who recounted, copied down, and passed on these stories, but the simple fact is that each of these stories,

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<sup>57</sup> Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

which, viewed in the aggregate, were enormously popular over the course of centuries, transmitted a narrative of a culturally feminine person becoming a masculine person.

This dissertation owes much to the research that has come before it. Although there is not an exhaustive amount of scholarship on the genre of gender-crossing saints, research has continued to provide new ways to understand these figures. However, all of these ways continue the assumption that these figures are cisgender. This dissertation, on the other hand, says “yes, and,” to the research before it. Yes, this genre fits into the trope of masculinizing exemplary women. Yes, hagiographers seemed to emphasize their subjects’ femininity and domesticate their gender transgression. Yes, male attire may have allowed for easier travel and the acquisition of authority. Yes, masculine dress may have been used instrumentally to avoid familial ties. But we must also consider the possibility that these figures were not cisgender and that their masculine dress and performances were part of the embodiment of a masculine identity.

### **Transgender Studies and Trans\* Histories**

Transgender studies provide a perspective on gender that is not defined by or fixed to an assigned sex. As a term invented in the twentieth century, it may be anachronistic to say someone from before that time was transgender; however, transgender studies does utilize a framework that can be used to understand historical gender variance through performance and embodiment. In the *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker defines the work of Transgender studies in the introduction:

Most broadly conceived, the field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood.<sup>59</sup>

I use this framework of denaturalizing sex differentiation with the culturally associated gender standards in order to analyze gender-crossing subjects. This includes a recognition that these subjects make gender choices that both “sustain” and “thwart” gendered expectations while embodying a gendered self. These hagiographic stories at face value denaturalize sex and gender by illustrating that sex does not determine every kind of gendered behavior. Therefore, according to this definition, these stories are also transgender stories, with no need of anachronistic importation of modern baggage.

Transgender studies is particularly focused on gendered identities; however, this understanding of identity encompasses a great deal of variety. Transgender is commonly viewed as a blanket term for someone who identifies as gender non-conforming or their gender not aligning with their assigned sex regardless of medical or surgical interventions that person may or may not have. As an identity, a person can be transgender without changes to one’s physical appearance or performance, without medical or surgical interventions, with the

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<sup>59</sup> Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

notion that they are transitioning into what they identify as their gendered personhood without that transition having a fixed beginning or end. In defining this broader transgender identity, Stephen Whittle places an emphasis in gendered experiences: he notes that a trans identity

can cover a variety of experiences. It can encompass discomfort with role-expectations, being queer, occasional or more frequent cross-dressing, permanent cross-dressing and cross-gender living, through to accessing major health interventions such as hormonal therapy and surgical reassignment procedures.<sup>60</sup>

Although popular understanding of transgender identity may at times be much more limited than this, within transgender studies, trans identity is viewed with a much broader understanding.

Although transgender studies is concerned with gender identity as developed through these various gendered experiences, Jack Halberstam also advises against being too involved in identitarianism. Halberstam explains that classifications and “having a name for oneself can be just as damaging as lacking one.”<sup>61</sup> Halberstam explains that the fixation on naming has its origins in “colonial exploration,” that was then used to classify “normal” and “abnormal” human behavior in the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, while acknowledging that the ability to name oneself is powerful, Halberstam advocates for the use of a

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen Whittle, Foreword to *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Wittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), xi.

<sup>61</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.



broader term that is less likely to fall into traps of exclusivity or fixity: namely

“trans\*.” Halberstam explains that the additions of the asterisk:

holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, perhaps most importantly, it makes trans\* people the authors of their own categorizations...trans\* can be a name for expansive forms of difference, haptic relations to knowing, uncertain modes of being, and the disaggregation of identity politics predicated upon the separating out of many kinds of experience that actually blend together, intersect, and mix. This terminology, trans\*, stands at odds with the history of gender variance, which has been collapsed into concise definitions, sure medical pronouncements, and fierce exclusions.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, rather than a fixed identity that may fall within problematic regulated taxonomies, Halberstam argues for a broader view of gender identity. This approach to trans\* personhoods seems similar to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s deconstruction of sexual taxonomies in *Epistemologies of the Closet*. Like Sedgwick, Halberstam seeks to deconstruct the flattening of identities into neat categories. Trans\*, then, leaves room for a wider variety of gender variance which can be applied to multiple cultural understandings and historical periods.

These broader definitions of transgender subjectivity allow for a more inclusive application of transgender studies. Trans historians, however, are still cautious of the application of the term “transgender” to historical figures. It would be anachronistic to apply a largely identity-driven term to someone existing prior to both the invention of the term transgender and the current notions of identity. In their introduction to *TSQ*’s special edition on Transhistoricalities, Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici explain that trans history in many ways reflects the trajectory of LGB historical studies which have largely cautioned

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

against applying identity-driven terminology to subjects before the terminology was invented: “If we extend this logic, as some scholars have suggested, one cannot write a parallel history of ‘transgender’ or ‘transsexual’ before the advent of the very vocabulary that generated its subject; to do so would risk divesting past gender practice of what made it meaningful in its own time and place.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the historical context in order to avoid anachronisms.

However, this is not to say that there is no place for trans history. In a similar vein, Afsaneh Najmabadi writes about debates over the existence of lesbians or “lesbian-like women” in medieval Europe and points to the discomfort that many historians face in naming similar behaviors in historical women with current terminology.<sup>65</sup> Amy Richlin further explains why this may be a problem for those who exhibited same-sex sexual acts in the ancient Mediterranean with terms like *cinaedi*, because this terminology was used to attack these behaviors: “as in the case of *cinaedi*, [they] cannot be assumed to have defined themselves as they were defined by their attackers, or even to have self-identified as a group, especially when, like *cinaedi*, they have left no first-person statements about themselves as such.”<sup>66</sup> Richlin points out that it is difficult not only to determine the terminology to be used in these situations, but also the difficulty in knowing whether any

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<sup>64</sup> Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, “Trans, Time, and History,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no 4 (2018): 520.

<sup>65</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Historical Analysis,” *Journal of Women’s History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 11-21.

<sup>66</sup> Amy Richlin, *Arguments in Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014) 13.

group identity existed given the lack of historical documents by the group in question. However, this debate over the existence of lesbian- or gay-like people is not the main concern of either historian.

Both Najmabadi and Richlin use this debate over the use of current categories to problematize the use of “women” as a universal category. Najmabadi argues that there is not a similar debate over the existence of women in medieval Europe, because there is “the presumption of the naturalness of woman; that there have always been women.”<sup>67</sup> Richlin similarly notes that even within the ancient Mediterranean, the category of “woman” was varied: “We have multiple cultures in the ancient Mediterranean, where the sex/gender systems varied quite a bit from east to west: differing practices in veiling, divorce, public presence, property rights - all coexisted side by side.” Both Najmabadi and Richlin question the acceptance of one universal category when historians seem uncomfortable with others.

Trans historians have made similar arguments about the use of universal gender categories when referring to men and women while historians exclude categories such as transgender and gender queer. Although DeVun and Tortorici described the caution of some scholars against using current terminology, they argue, “Indeed, we do not abbreviate all histories of gender simply because past categories accord imprecisely with present ones; we write about women in the distant past even as we acknowledge that premodern subjects dovetail imperfectly with the modern term woman.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>67</sup> Najmabadi, “Beyond the Americas,” 18.

<sup>68</sup> DeVun and Tortorici, “Trans, Time, and History,” 523.

DeVun and Tortorici argue that as scholars, we can still search for gender variance in the past while also recognizing that the context and categories may not fully hold the same meanings, just as we do for categories like women and men.

Trans history was largely shaped by frustration of historians who were themselves transgender or gender non-conforming. These frustrations were largely a result of a lack of representation of gender variance within historical narratives. A volume of *Perspectives on History*, the American Historical Association's newsmagazine, had an article about the emerging fields of trans history in which several prominent trans historians were interviewed about the field. Many of these scholars spoke of their frustrations with the lack of historical sources and representation. For example, Leslie Feinberg said, "I couldn't find myself in history...no one like me seemed to have ever existed." Emily Skidmore notes, "any sort of marginalized population has had a hard time finding their sources present in traditional archives."<sup>69</sup> Jesse Bayker adds that those sources that exist are "produced by people looking from the outside in."<sup>70</sup>

These frustrations have been integral to the development of a trans historical methodology that looks for those who crossed gender boundaries. Skidmore further explains, "Even though the term transgender is modern, people have moved from one gender to another for a very long time. And transgender history looks at that movement."<sup>71</sup> Susan Stryker further explains that trans scholarship asks, "what the world

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<sup>69</sup> Kritika Agarwal, "What is Trans History?: From Activist and Academic Roots, a Field Takes Shape," *Perspectives on History* 56, no. 5 (2018): 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

looks like when it pays attention to the kinds of knowledges produced by being gender non-normative, gender incongruent, gender changing, gender minoritized.”<sup>72</sup> The methodology trans scholars like Stryker and Skidmore describe allows trans historians not only to find gender variant subjects and recognize them as proto-trans figures while concurrently destabilizing and disrupting gender categories.

As mentioned by Skidmore above, trans history combats historical erasure of gender variance. Erasure is common for marginalized groups and has been written about by feminist of color and postcolonial historical critiques. For example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that erasure is always involved in the construction of history. Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* uses postcolonial history to analyze power dynamics that are so intricately involved in the construction of history.<sup>73</sup> This silencing, or erasure as I call it, begins with which sources are deemed important and archived. Trouillot further argues that historians selectively “silence” the past when they create history using those sources. The power dynamics involved lead to the construction of what is considered history, which then shapes the past for those who consume it. In this way, those in power remain in power and those without remain without.

This post-colonial analysis of the power dynamics of historical production also applies to trans history. For example, Horacio Ramirez addresses living archives within

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

trans community memory.<sup>74</sup> Because his subject, Teresita la Campesina, is a transgender Hispanic woman, she would not be found in traditional archives. Ramirez argues that queer studies often focuses on white cis men and Hispanic studies ignores LGBTQ subjects. He demonstrates an intersectional erasure of his historical subject that also brings up issues of his work as a “legitimate” historical project. Ramirez example, then, demonstrates several of the issues working within the field of trans history.

Furthermore, when primary sources describing gender variant lives exist, cisnormativity is often imposed on them. A clear assumption that everyone was cisgender is demonstrated in the works surrounding gender-crossing saints as well as other pre-modern histories. In “Towards a Transgender Archaeology: A Queer Rampage Through Prehistory,” Mary Weismantel makes an argument for the need of transgender studies in archeology. She gives the example of the “Princess of Vix,” a female skeleton from the Iron Age that was surrounded by items usually associated with males. Weismantel argues the scholarship around this discovery largely ignores the possibility of gender variance which she says indicates the need for transgender scholars in the field. She explains,

To enter the archaeological record from a transgender perspective is not just a romp through a queer fairyland. In fact, it can turn into a queer *rampage* driven by an angry determination to overturn systemic repression of knowledge, which constitutes a form of structural violence perpetrated against people, past *and* present, who do not conform to contemporary norms of gender.<sup>75</sup> [original emphasis]

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<sup>74</sup> Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, “A Living Archive of Desire: Teresita la Campesina and the Embodiment of Queer Latino Community Histories,” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 111-135.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Weismantel, “Towards a Transgender Archaeology: A Queer Rampage through Prehistory,” in *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader Vol. 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013) 320.

Weismantel articulates the frustration that many trans scholars feel at the erasure of gender variance that is part of an overall epistemological violence against gender non-conforming people, “past and present,” as she points out. Although Weismantel acknowledges that the “Princess” is too old to be called “transgender,” “this find, and others around the globe, demonstrate that many of the behaviors associated with transgender today...were also part of ancient life.”<sup>76</sup> Seeming to foresee the opposition to trans perspectives in archaeology, or likely already experiencing it, Weismantel argues, “Interpreting evidence like this from a transgender perspective doesn’t mean artificially forcing ancient phenomena into a new and ill-fitting category. If anything, the opposite seems true.”<sup>77</sup> Weismantel notes here that the ill-fitting and artificially forced categories here is cisnormative bias towards the modern gender binary.

The same is true for the treatment of antique gender variance. Fillippo Carla-Uhink, likewise argues for the use of transgender studies in antiquity:

in Classical Antiquity, it is possible to identify forms of behaviour and action which might fall into our modern category of transgender. Starting from a constructivist view of gender as performance, all those behaviours implying a performative assumption of characteristics, which, in the culture of reference, are not generally ascribed to the birth sex of the actor, can be defined as transgender.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid, 321.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Fillippo Carla-Uhink, “‘Between the Human and the Divine’: Cross-dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Graeco-Roman World,” in *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, ed. Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carla-Uhink, and Margherita Facella, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 3.

Carla-Uhink argues that the category can in fact be used in antiquity when it is used with the understanding of behavior. Perhaps the interiority of these subjects is out of our reach, but trans behavior can be understood as actions that transgress cultural expectations for one's assigned sex. This is part of an embrace of constructivist views of gender that are rarely used to understand gender variance within late antiquity, despite its use within feminist history.

*TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, applies this method and demonstrates how trans behavior in antiquity is overlooked in historical scholarship. In the preface of *TransAntiquity*, Domatilla Campanile, Fillippo Carla-Uhink, and Margherita Facella trace the trajectory of reception of the third-century emperor Elagabalus. As someone who frequently dressed in women's clothing, referred to themselves in feminine names, and desired to become a woman, Elagabalus would certainly fit what Weismantel and Carla-Uhink describes as exhibiting behaviors associated with transgender today.<sup>79</sup> However, as Campanile et al. note, scholars up until the mid-nineteenth century referred to Elagabalus as a "tyrant" with "unbridled depravity." When the option to rationalize Elagabalus' gender variance and give some other reason for it was not available, scholars vilified the emperor instead. Elagabalus was eventually picked up by the gay liberation movement, which Campanile et al says indicates that, "most episodes of transgender performance were perceived as

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<sup>79</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 80.



indicators of the performer's sexual orientation."<sup>80</sup> Therefore, as Elagabalus was embraced by the queer community, it was still with cisnormative bias.

This dissertation uses the theoretical approaches described here to construct another layer of analysis to add to the work already in existence about gender-crossing saints. The intention here is not, then, to fully deny the various interpretations of this phenomenon, but to further push our understandings by including the possibilities of what would now be associated with the term transgender. This dissertation is particularly interested in demonstrating through an analysis of antique Christian gender crossing that “‘gender,’ as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, this project seeks to disrupt and denaturalize gender categories while intervening in the epistemological violence that is the erasure of gender non-conforming people and the imposition of cisnormativity on historical figures.

### **What to Expect**

As mentioned above, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that silencing is part of any historical project. There is some scholarship about gender-crossing saints so these figures have not been totally silenced; however, a significant aspect of their life, the construction

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<sup>80</sup> Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carla-Uhink, and Margherita Facella, Preface to *TransAntiquity*, xi-xii.

<sup>81</sup> Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges,”3.

of a masculine embodiment and possibly a masculine personhood and identity, has been silenced by current historical scholarship. Although this project is deeply involved in bringing voices of gender variance into the historical record, I must acknowledge that I too take part in silencing through my choices of whose voices to highlight. I devote a chapter each to Matrona, Mary, and Thecla; however, I do use comparisons to other gender crossing saints in my analysis, which I hope brings more gender variant voices into the discussion.

Although there is many other gender-crossing saints, my selection of these three were based on themes I thought they particularly highlighted as well as availability and languages of sources. A thorough description of the manuscripts available for each of these figures, as well as what source I am specifically using, is detailed at the beginning of each chapter. Generally, I attempted to use primary sources for the three figures that dated the furthest back while balancing the completeness of extant manuscripts that were used to create the critical editions. All translations are my own throughout, unless specifically mentioned in the footnote. For example, I compare the Greek text of Mary I used to a later Syriac, but had to rely on Agnes Smith Lewis' translation of the Syriac.

Most of the gender-crossing saints are referred to in feminine pronouns throughout their hagiography unless they are being referred to by another person from within the text. The only exception to this is Mary's hagiography, in which the narrator switches to masculine pronouns and the name Marinos during the majority of the text. As such, I have decided to use feminine pronouns throughout in order to maintain consistency with the primary sources. I decided to refer to Mary in feminine pronouns as

well in order to keep consistency with the other subjects and to avoid confusion by switching back and forth when referring to her. I felt the use of masculine pronouns would imply a knowledge of the subjects' identities and preferences that are both unavailable as well as possibly anachronistic. I also avoided alternatives such as the use of third person "they" and gender-neutral pronouns such as "ze" for the same reason.

It is only slightly an exaggeration to say that I agonized over this decision. Because "she" reinforces the idea that these are women and that womanhood is tied to their assigned sex, I struggled with this choice and continue to be unsure if it was the right one given the undertaking of this project. However, I have since come to another way of thinking about this. At a fellowship retreat in which the room was asked to share their pronouns with the group, the traditionally masculine presenting leader of the meeting said that she was open to all pronouns but particularly liked the use of she because of the genderfuck of it.<sup>82</sup> I have since come to realize that I can view these subjects in a similar way. I like the idea that it is a total genderfuck to insist on the masculinity of these subjects throughout while maintaining pronouns associated with femininity.

The majority of scholarship on these figures refer to them as either "transvestite" or "cross-dressing" saint. I have avoided these terms because I am concerned that they both focus too much on clothing. Although these saints do change into traditionally male clothing, this is not the only aspect that they change. The saints in these stories change

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<sup>82</sup> Genderfuck refers to a form of gender presentation that mixes traditionally masculine and feminine appearances together in order to subvert the gender binary.

their physical appearance in order to live as men, including clothing and hair, but they also change all other outward gendered aspects. They change their name and are often given gendered titles such as eunuch. They also change their performances and are recognized as men by internal audiences. For these reasons, “cross-dressing” or “transvestite” do not connote the fullness of their gender expression. Instead, I refer to these saints as either “gender-crossing” or “gender variant.” These terms more accurately convey the level their gendering alters within cultural norms of their time and reflect the full embodiment of constructing a gendered personhood.

Along with transgender studies, my historical approach has been influenced by postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies have long pointed out that history is written through an epistemological bias. For example, in *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty says that the discipline of history is Eurocentric and attempts to “translate” other lifeworlds into European means of understanding. By doing so, history delegitimizes other worldviews. He argues that this methodology of history is tied “to a certain understanding of rationality.”<sup>83</sup> If something does not fit into that understanding, read European, then it is discarded. Chakrabarty uses an example from subaltern studies, Ranajit Guha’s “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” to illustrate his point. In this essay, Guha talks to the Santal, who express their rebellion occurred because they received instructions from their god Thakur to do so. The Santal did not express their insurgency in terms of their own agency, but rather the agency of a supernatural figure.

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<sup>83</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 99.

Chakrabarty's primary complaint with Guha's essay is that he does not give the supernatural agency as the Santal did. Chakrabarty argues "Thus the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself. Making visible this disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do."<sup>84</sup> He refers to this plurality of times existing together as History 1 and History 2. History 1 belongs to the Hegelian "rational" view of history and History 2 belongs to outside worldviews, or different forms of rationality. Chakrabarty explains:

First, we can situate ourselves as a modern subject for whom the Santal's life-world is an object of historical study and explanation. But we can also look on the Santal as someone *illuminating possibilities for our own life-worlds*. If my argument is right, then the second relationship is prior to the first one. It makes the first relationship possible.<sup>85</sup> [my emphasis]

Chakrabarty argues that in order to perform History 2, the historian first must allow that alternative worldview to affect their own. Therefore, alternative rationalities should not be discredited in order to truly allow more inclusive historical representations of marginalized communities. By allowing these alternative rationalities to affect one's own life-world, one can more accurately create a representation of inclusion.

I try to incorporate Chakrabarty's History 2 in terms of the "realness" of the saints I analyze. I have, in general, avoided a positivist views of historical figures. Therefore, the question of whether my historical subjects were real seemed irrelevant. Although there is some historical evidence that Matrona was a historical person, all of the gender-

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 112.

crossing saints held a degree of realness for their early Christian audiences. Although there should be some acknowledgement that the hagiographers had certain agendas in their narratives, we can still understand that these figures and their actions held a realness for the communities that revered them. Furthermore, while it is impossible to know for many of these saints which if any actually lived, it is likely that they represented real actions and beliefs within diverse Christian communities across the Roman Empire. For example, if we accept the condemnation by the council of Gangra as a condemnation of a real community, then we must accept that this type of gender variance did occur. Gender-crossing saints could have reflected these real actions through fictional characters. The stories of gender-crossing saints, furthermore, holds a realness for the ancient past regardless of whether they lived or not. They reflect the lifeworlds of which they were a part, a lifeworld in which real Christians believed in and possibly imitated.

I have devoted a chapter each to Matrona, Mary, and Thecla as case studies. This style in part mimics Natalie Zemon Davis *Women in the Margins* approach to her three female subjects from different contexts within the seventeenth century linked by Zemon Davis for their marginalization.<sup>86</sup> By doing this, I hoped to more closely analyze the choices made by each subject towards a masculine embodiment rather than the aggregate decisions within the genre. However, these actions are also compared to other gender crossing saints for deeper analysis and understanding of these individual choices. The first chapter on Matrona discusses more thoroughly the ancient Mediterranean views on

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<sup>86</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

sex and gender. Particular attention is given to the malleability of these categories as well as liminal gender categories. Attention is also given to Matrona's authority and how that does and does not transgress gender boundaries. The second chapter on Mary focuses on how parenthood is viewed within late antiquity and especially how these views are dependent on gendered expectations. This chapter also looks at the "reveal moment" of this genre in which the subject's female body is exposed for the first time since taking masculine presentation. The last chapter on Thecla focuses on the emphasis of femininity of gender-crossing saints found in both current scholarship and historic sources. It further demonstrates that a transgender perspective of gender performance can still apply to such an early figure where we have only a limited description of her gender-crossing behavior. In each chapter I discuss how that figure defies the cisnormative assumptions that their gender crossing is only a pragmatic choice. Although each chapter highlights different aspects of the gender-crossing genre, overall, there is an emphasis on how their gender presentation and performance creates a masculine embodiment and self for each subject.

## Chapter 1 “Frail by Nature”: Matrona of Perge and The Malleability of Ancient Sex and Gender

This chapter examines the life of Saint Matrona, a gender-crossing saint from the fifth century. Matrona illustrates some of the common rationalizations for gender crossing: that she used masculine presentation to escape family and as a way to gain authority. Scholars commonly explain Matrona’s shift in gender presentation as a way to escape her abusive husband, because he would be able to easily find her in a convent. Because scholars have focused so heavily on gender crossing as pragmatic and not as indicative of a gendered self, Matrona and the other saints of this genre are referred to as “disguised.”<sup>87</sup> Their gender presentations and performances, within this framework, are a deception and not reflective of any “real” gender identity.

This is indicative of the cisnormative narratives that are imposed on gender-crossing saints. This narrative reinforces notions that gender is natural and fixed to one’s sex. This view of sex and gender has not only been challenged within current scholarship, but does not reflect Matrona’s cultural context. Matrona self-identifies as a eunuch when she enters a male monastery. Eunuchs were commonly viewed as having changed their sex and occupy a liminal state of sex/gender. Eunuchs as a category illuminate the ways that gender and sex were not viewed as a fixed binary within ancient Mediterranean texts. Therefore, Matrona offers a good starting point for examining malleable and liminal gender categories and how they play a role within gender-crossing stories. From that

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<sup>87</sup> Khalifa Bennasser, “Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism;” Stephen Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex;” and Crystal Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers* specifically use the word disguise when referring to gender-crossing saints.



analysis, we can further understand Matrona as embodying masculine presentation and performances with full recognition of the existence of gender variance within late antiquity.

### **The Life of Matrona**

The *Life of Saint Matrona* is about a fifth century saint known as Matrona of Perge or Matrona of Constantinople who eventually became the head of her own monastery. In this hagiography, Matrona was a deeply devoted Christian. Her husband, however, banned her from all-night vigils at the church out of fear of infidelity and physically abused Matrona when she attended church services. Matrona decided to leave her husband to pursue a life of asceticism but was unsure how she would escape him. She had a dream, that she interpreted to be from God, in which a group of male monks hid her. Matrona then cut her hair and presented herself as a eunuch named Babylas at the monastery of Bassianos in Constantinople. The monks took her in as a fellow ascetic brother until Bassianos had a dream revealing Babylas to be Matrona. He confronted Matrona and decided that she should continue an ascetic life, but not at the monastery. Matrona then traveled to multiple locations, avoiding her husband at many of them, performed multiple miracles and brought many women into ascetism. Finally, possibly after the death of her husband, Matrona returned to Constantinople and, with Bassianos' blessing, began her own monastery. While there are some variations in the *Life of St Matrona*, the *vita prima*, the oldest version and therefore most likely to be the most accurate reporting of her life, ends with an account of Matrona as the *hegumen*, or leader,

of a monastery in which she and the other ascetic women dressed in traditionally male monastic habits.<sup>88</sup>

The *Vita prima* survives in several manuscripts, including a complete copy from an eleventh-century Greek codex Paris, Bib. Nat. 1519, Vaticano gr. 807 from the tenth century, and Vaticano Palatino 80 from the twelve century.<sup>89</sup> Father Hippolyte Delahaye edited these manuscripts to create the *Acta Sanctorum*, which notes variations in the text within each manuscript. This version of Matrona's life was likely written shortly after her death, which Cyril Mango suggests occurred around 510-515 CE;<sup>90</sup> although, Delahaye argues it would not have been written earlier than the middle of the sixth century based on the romantic elements of Matrona's wanderings, the prevalence of traditional "pagan" religion in Beirut, and the prominence of Deacon Markellos.<sup>91</sup> Mango points out a reference to the Church of St. Mary the New at Jerusalem, which was dedicated in 543, supports Delahaye's claim that it would not have been written before the mid sixth century; however, Mango argues some of the specifics, such as likely forgotten names if written much later, still suggest that the original was written soon after the events of her life took place.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Life of St Matrona Vita Prima*, 51.

<sup>89</sup> *AAS S. Matrona Vita Prima* (Nov. 3.790-813) and Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 22.

<sup>90</sup> Cyril Mango, "Introduction to the Life of St. Matrona of Perge," ed. Alice- Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 16.

<sup>91</sup> *AAS*, Nov. 3.789.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

The *Vita prima* does not list an author, but it was likely penned by a monastic close to Matrona. Delahaye, in his commentary on Matrona's multiple *vitae*, argued that this was likely a monk at Bassianos' monastery probably using notes from a nun, Eulogia, at Matrona's convent. However, Eva Topping has argued that the most likely author of this version was a woman, specifically a nun from Matrona's convent. Topping supports this argument by noting the prominence of women throughout the hagiography, many of whom subvert patriarchal expectations of their society, yet still meet "happy endings."<sup>93</sup> She argues that the *Vita prima* was, therefore, written for a female audience as "Only women would appreciate and enjoy such a collection of women's success stories as appear here."<sup>94</sup> She acknowledges that it would be possible for a man to write with the intention of a female audience; however, a "careful reading... supports the authorship of a woman."<sup>95</sup>

While Topping's arguments are interesting and well argued, Mango does point out that the author uses masculine participles for themselves in all manuscripts used in Delahaye's *Vita Prima*, which he argues "invalidates" Topping's argument for female authorship.<sup>96</sup> However, using masculine pronouns as a universal is not an uncommon practice in androcentric languages, Greek included. There is a significant tradition of women writing/presenting as men, as indicated by the story itself. Furthermore, it is

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<sup>93</sup> Eva Catafygiotu Topping, "St. Matrona and Her Friends," *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for Her 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Camberley, Surrey: Porphyrogenitius, 1988), 222.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>96</sup> Mango, "Introduction," 14.

unclear whether these manuscripts used the same source, although they are very close to each other, and if the pronouns could have been altered from an earlier version.

Therefore, it may be too hasty to rule out Topping's argument based on these participles.

The authorship of the *Vita altera*, a later version of Matrona's life, is much less of a mystery. This version was written by Symeon Metaphrastes, a tenth-century hagiographer, and is also preserved in Delahaye's *Acta Sanctorum*.<sup>97</sup> The sources for Delahaye's editions are Vatican codex 804, Vatican codex 810, and Ottobon. 427, all in Greek and from the twelfth century.<sup>98</sup> These manuscripts are also very similar and Delahaye has noted their variations. This version is not only shorter, but also changes some events most likely to make this hagiography more in line with cultural values of the tenth century. This is not unusual in later versions of hagiographies of female saints; for example. Stephen Davis notes that the fifth century *Life and Miracles of St Thecla* not only has an "undercurrent of misogyny," but also reflects the shifting domestication of ascetic practices, particularly for women.<sup>99</sup>

In the *Vita altera*, Metaphrastes removed the male monastic habits that Matrona and her fellow monastics wore at her convent. In this version, Matrona also made one of her followers receive her husband's permission for joining Matrona in monasticism. As Crystal Lynn Lubinsky notes, this seems quite out of character from the Matrona of the *Vita prima* who "has no difficulty in abandoning husbands or advising women to do the

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<sup>97</sup> *AASS*, Nov. 3. 813-22.

<sup>98</sup> *AASS*, Nov. 3 813, and Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine*, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Stephen Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 50-55.

same.” Lubinsky classifies this alteration as Matrona being “transformed from a rebellious female religious authority, into a supporter of the social marital hierarchy at the expense of spiritual goals.” Lubinsky further argues that “This is clearly the work of a later redactor toning down the female perspective found within the original story.”<sup>100</sup> She also explains the cultural shift that would have been the impetus for such an alteration to Matrona’s story: “the stress on chastity in late antiquity changed to stress on motherhood, families, or holy wives centuries later when the *Vita altera* was produced.”<sup>101</sup>

The popularity of St. Matrona continued beyond the tenth-century Metaphrastic retelling in the *Vita altera*. There is another version of this hagiography, known as the *Vita tertia* and also preserved in the *Acta Sanctorum*. This version is a very short summary of Matrona’s life found in a single Greek manuscript, Venice St Marci bib. Cod., f332, extant from the eleventh or twelfth century.<sup>102</sup> Further evidence of her popularity is the continuance of hymns written to honor Matrona. According to Eva Catafygiotu Topping, “as late as the eleventh century hymns were still being composed for her feast day.”<sup>103</sup> The multiple versions of Matrona’s life as well as hymns composed centuries later suggest that the cult of Matrona continued on well after her sixth-century death; the life of Matrona must have resonated with Christian audiences beyond late antiquity and into the medieval period. Though alterations were made to control her

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<sup>100</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>102</sup> *AASS* Nov 3, 822 and Lubinsky *Removing Masculine Layers*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Eva Catafygiotu Topping, “St Matrona,” 214.

narrative and reinforce the medieval author's contemporary values, the *Vita Prima* also reflects the views of gender as they were in her late antique context.

### **The Cultural Views on Sex and Gender Within Matrona's Historical Context**

Those familiar with ancient Mediterranean ideas on sex and gender know that they do not exactly match up to the binary established in western modernity. Peter Brown explains ancient understanding of sex differentiation based on the works of physicians Aretaeus and Galen: sex differentiation was believed to begin in the womb and was dependent on heat. Males were thought to contain more heat and were considered to have reached their "full potential" as a fetus.<sup>104</sup> Those born female were considered "failed males;" they failed to reach full potential through the necessary heat in the womb and were instead "more soft, more liquid, more clammy-cold, altogether more formless than were men."<sup>105</sup> Because female bodies were not as hot, they could not properly heat up their excess blood and so menstruated instead and then used the excess blood during pregnancy.

In this way, genitalia were not seen as the ultimate cause of sexual difference, merely one of many bodily expressions of sexual difference. According to Kristi Upson-Saia, sex was much more of an "anatomical spectrum" than a binary. She states that the "view predominantly held by ancient philosophers and physicians, such as Aristotle,

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<sup>104</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Galen, and Soranus, was a one-sex model.”<sup>106</sup> This model worked as a spectrum to plot individuals as more or less having formed with that ultimate potential of maleness. Therefore, women were not so much seen as a separate sex, but a less formed person. Furthermore, genitals were not viewed as distinct sexual organs. Rather, the vagina was viewed as an inverted penis. Upson-Saia notes that, therefore, genitals were not even viewed as the essential bodily difference between sexed bodies.<sup>107</sup> As Thomas Laqueur puts it, the “boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind.”<sup>108</sup>

On this spectrum of degree, males and females could slide between masculinity and femininity in the social construction of gender. However, this spectrum did not encourage a freedom of expression, but rather often acted as a source of shame and anxiety. Men were still expected to act within social norms of masculinity and faced accusations of effeminacy if they did not. Therefore, on this spectrum within the one-sex model, effeminate males ranked just above women in regard to full formation of the person. As already stated, females were considered “failed males” with effeminate males having at least achieved malehood if not the full potential of what that entailed in the ancient mind. Eunuchs, which Matrona presented as, were part of this category as well. They were viewed as not female, but not quite male either.

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<sup>106</sup> Kristi Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue, and Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 10.

<sup>107</sup> Upson-Saia, “Gender and Narrative Performance in Early Christian Cross-Dressing Saints’ *Lives*,” *Studia Patristica* XLV (2010): 46.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 25-26.

These notions of sex differentiation further influenced sexual practice, particularly in gendered notions of masculinity. Because heat was considered the source of maleness, it was also considered the source of masculinity. Therefore, in order for a male to remain “manly,” it was vital to maintain their heat. Brown notes that “this heat, unless actively mobilized, might cool, leading even a man to approach the state of a woman... No normal man might actually become a woman; but each man trembled forever on the brink of becoming ‘womanish.’”<sup>109</sup> One such way a man protected this heat was through sexual restraint. Because heat was used to create semen, it was expended during sex. Men were then encouraged to use self-restraint in order to maintain their virility and avoid the body approaching formless womanhood.

These notions of sex were then reflected while also constructing the cultural norms regarding gender. Upson-Saia argues, “Although individuals’ natural gender was not measured primarily through genitalia, it was nonetheless exhibited and interpreted through the body.”<sup>110</sup> She notes that specifically, men were expected to demonstrate masculine features of reason, restraint, and domination; performances of gender identity for men were expected in order to “forestall charges of effeminacy.”<sup>111</sup>

Women, on the other hand, had a different set of challenges. Just as females were viewed as less than the ideal in terms of sex, they were also viewed as less than the ideal in gender performance. These masculine demonstrations of reason and restraint were

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<sup>109</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> Upson-Saia, *Early Christian*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 11.



viewed as beyond women's capabilities. Femininity was commonly constructed as an embodiment of certain vices such as "vanity, greed, indulgence, and hyper-sexuality."<sup>112</sup> Therefore men, were expected to exhibit reason and restraint, whereas women were viewed to be less capable of such things and were associated with their opposites.

Those living within these cultural notions of gender applied them to certain performances, such as the relationship between masculine reason and rhetorical performance, but they also represented this gendered embodiment through their clothing. Upson-Saia attests that there were many arguments that dress had a natural element: "At times, dress was assumed to be an extension of the wearer's soul, whether one's clothing exhibited his inherent self-mastery or self-indulgence."<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the dress that a man wore was expected to demonstrate his self-restraint or domination; as such, simple clothing without adornment was part of the ideal masculine dress. In this way, their clothing should demonstrate the "inherent virtue of Roman men." As with many other patriarchal cultures, the ideal was associated with masculinity.

The constructions of sex and gender in the ancient Mediterranean may not have been more accepting or liberating than in our own time; however, it is clear that the strict binary that has been imposed on the world by western modernity was not present in this time. Furthermore, there were some notions of changing one's position on the sex/gender spectrum. For example, the first century BCE historian Diodorus Siculus records in his *Universal History* many cases of what we would now consider to be intersex individuals.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 5.

In these recorded cases, the subjects were all assigned female at birth but at some point, often after their marriage to men, they developed what Diodorus calls a tumor that then erupted or was cut into to reveal a penis and testicles.<sup>114</sup> In one case, the subject continued to present as a woman and remained married to their husband until they wished to be divorced and then revealed their genitalia in court and subsequently changed their name and gender presentation.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, the act of changing one's gender is also not unheard of in ancient history. In his *Roman History*, Cassius Dio records the behavior of the Emperor Elagabalus. According to Dio, Elagabalus only maintained a masculine appearance while trying someone in court, but otherwise maintained feminine affectations.<sup>116</sup> Elagabalus wore women's clothing, make up, and a wig, for example; however, Dio records this was not only a change in presentation, but performance as well, including a change in voice, working with wool, and dancing while walking, performing religious rituals, or giving a speech.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, Elagabalus was bestowed in marriage, this usually refers to the actions of the bride, to Hierocles, referred to as Elagabalus' husband and Elagabalus used the terms wife and queen in self-reference.<sup>118</sup> Dio also recorded Elagabalus telling a lover not to refer to him as lord, because he was a lady.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, Elagabalus requested

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<sup>114</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 32.10-11.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 32.10.

<sup>116</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 80.14.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 80.16.

what might be considered today to be gender confirmation surgery, specifically asking physicians if it would be possible to create a vagina through an incision.<sup>120</sup>

There is no doubt that Elagabalus represents the closest account to a self-identified trans individual in ancient Mediterranean history. Although we lack a first-person account, Dio provides an account that seems to give a glimpse at Elagabalus' identity as a woman. However, as assigned male and living as a woman Elagabalus' gender transgression went against patriarchal standards of male superiority. Whereas it is culturally understandable for a woman to desire to be a man within patriarchal societies, as demonstrated by often neutral cultural reactions to tomboyism in young girls,<sup>121</sup> a man desiring to be a woman in such societies is deemed particularly transgressive. As such, historians, both those contemporary to Elagabalus and modern, have treated Elagabalus negatively.<sup>122</sup> Dio refers to these behaviors, for example, as lewdness. Given this contemporary reception of Elagabalus, we may understand that this was deemed outside the norm for the ancient Mediterranean views of gender; however, Elagabalus further demonstrates the existence of gender variance in the historical record. Elagabalus serves as an example of gender transition, which we can recognize as trans\* behavior, in late antiquity. However, there is another more common category that also illustrates this idea of changing one's sex/gender in the ancient world: eunuchs.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>122</sup> My introduction gives a brief trajectory of modern reception of Elagabalus.

## Eunuchs and Gender

The act of becoming a eunuch moved a person to a new classification within the sex/gender spectrum. Eunuchs were often considered a third sex or gender: they were considered not female but not quite male either. In *De semine*, Galen states that eunuchs are “not female and not male, but some third, different from both, neither this nor that.”<sup>123</sup> The mutability of eunuchs was also represented in laws regarding eunuchs as well: in a fifth-century law, “Leo II referred to eunuchs as ‘transformed into entirely different beings.’”<sup>124</sup> As Brittany Wilson suggest, eunuchs were “gender-liminal figures... with ambiguous social and sexual roles.” She explains, “As ‘un-manned’ men or ‘non-men,’ eunuchs embodied all characteristics of effeminate men, but they were also portrayed as ambiguous figures who upset the male/female gender binary.”<sup>125</sup> One explanation for their transformation into a gender-liminal state is a lack of heat. As stated above, heat was believed to be the source of male perfection. In *Paedagogus*, Clement argues that heat is caused, in some part, by masculine hairiness; therefore, after castration a man is no longer as hairy and therefore not as warm. In *Paedagogus*, smoothness of the skin, or lack of hair, was also associated with women’s passive role, which could then be assumed to be the case for eunuchs as well.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, according to Clement, it is a

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<sup>123</sup> Galen, *De semine*, 1.16.

<sup>124</sup> Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 102.

<sup>125</sup> Brittany Wilson, “‘Neither Male nor Female’: The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8.26-40,” *New Testament Studies*, 60 (2014): 406-407.

<sup>126</sup> Clement, *Paedagogus*, 3.3.

lack of warmth which causes gender transformation for eunuchs. This transformation, however, was not just seen as one of the physical body, but of a eunuch's behavior as well.

Although they were placed in male monasteries when choosing ascetic communal life, eunuchs were often expected to perform less masculinity than those considered fully male as well. The fifth century *Life and Miracles of St. Thekla*, for example, briefly mentions eunuchs and characterizes them "as having a proclivity toward greed, mischief, and cupidity because they are 'half-man, half-women.'"<sup>127</sup> The *Life of Matrona* further demonstrates this difference. While working the ground, a fellow monk asked how Babylas/Matrona came to have both ear lobes pierced. It was uncommon for even eunuchs to have both ears pierced, but they often had one pierced. Matrona responds to the monk that she had belonged to a woman that covered her in luxuries including gold hanging from both lobes. This satisfies the monk's curiosity as it conforms to societal expectations of eunuchs. If masculine restraint was expected of those considered fully male, it was common to see more adornment on eunuchs similar to what was expected of women.

The sexual restraint of eunuchs is also debated within ancient discourse. Eunuchs were often used to protect women and children; the poet Claudian referred to this as a eunuch's *unica virtus*, which can be translated as their "sole virtue," but because *virtus* is associated with manliness (*vir* means "man"), it can also be translated as a eunuchs "one

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<sup>127</sup> Davis, *The Cult of St Thekla*, 52.

manly quality.”<sup>128</sup> Eunuchs were given positions involving intimacy with women because in some ways they were believed unable to have sexual affairs with these women. Of course this is not accurate, but impregnation was at least not a possibility.<sup>129</sup> The idea of the sexless eunuch is common in Christianity as well, such as Matthew 19:12 in which Jesus speaks of those made a eunuch for the sake of heaven or the rumors that Origen did exactly this and castrated himself in order to rid himself of sexual urges.<sup>130</sup>

Other literature from late antiquity seems to imply the opposite: not only could eunuchs be sexually active, but they were also involved in all types of sexual activities viewed as transgressive. Even within Christianity, figures such as Jerome and Tertullian spoke out against women being alone with eunuchs. Jerome advised against women bathing with eunuchs, because they were still men in feelings.<sup>131</sup> Tertullian, likewise, condemns women that use Eunuchs to satisfy their own lusts and alludes to eunuchs mutilating themselves for the purpose of lust.<sup>132</sup> Based on these and other texts against eunuchs, Shaun Tougher argues that in “popular opinion,” eunuchs were “known for their corruption and sexual depravity” and were further “described as a libertine, a friend of prostitutes, a corrupter of virgins, more lustful than a billy-goat, and [were] compared to Priapis and Pan.”<sup>133</sup> Tougher argues that these accusations may have been fueled by

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<sup>128</sup>Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 1.105. Kuefler also translates it both ways in *The Manly Eunuch*, 96.

<sup>129</sup> Shaun Tougher, “Byzantine Eunuchs,” *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, edited by Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), 170.

<sup>130</sup> Eusebius, *Church Histories*, 4.8.

<sup>131</sup> Jerome, *Epistle* 107.11.

<sup>132</sup> Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 2.8.

anger over the high positions some eunuchs received in the imperial court. This lack of restraint in sexuality seems much closer to the views of women than men as discussed earlier.

In addition to the changed physical characteristics associated with castration, eunuchs were expected to lack the physical abilities that those considered fully male possessed. For this reason, the monks were surprised to see Matrona's physical accomplishments. The *Vita* says that they "marveled" at how well she endured ascetic demands of fasting, prayer, emotional restraint, resisting desire, and performing obedience.<sup>134</sup> Matrona also proved her endurance in the manual labor common to monasticism. The *Vita prima* says that she so impressed the other monks, who had taken into account that eunuchs were "frail by nature," because she not only kept up with them but surpassed them in their labors. The *Vita* further notes that they were most impressed that while performing extreme asceticism, she never felt despair as is common for those who "practice continence."<sup>135</sup>

Because Matrona was perceived to be a eunuch, less physical ability and restraint was expected from her. According to Matrona's hagiography, eunuchs were viewed as "frail by nature" as a sexed and gendered category; therefore, Matrona's accomplishments greatly impress the other monks that would be considered to have reached a fuller potential of human on the spectrum of sex. These examples demonstrate

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<sup>133</sup> Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs," 174.

<sup>134</sup> *Vita prima*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

that not only were the views of sex and gender different from the binaried one that formed in western modernity, but also that these categories were considered malleable in Matrona's historical context.

The demonstration of Matrona's strength and restraint is likely used to demonstrate her holiness. Hagiographies in late antiquity regularly praised women's "manly" demonstrations because of the alignment of masculinity with virtue, but also used miracles to demonstrate the subject's holiness and alignment with divine will. Matrona's own hagiography mentions that miraculous signs were "necessary" to prove saintly conduct.<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, this trope does not continue into the middle ages.

For example, the hagiography of Hildegund Von Schönau, a twelfth-century figure who presented herself as a man and entered a monastery does not exhibit this trope. According to Valerie Hotchkiss, while Hildegund's hagiography praises her, it regularly emphasizes her womanly weaknesses.<sup>137</sup> Not only was she not as learned as the other monks, especially in regards to Latin, she was also physically much weaker. In both cases, Hildegund "tried to overcome her natural infirmities but failed to withstand the rigors of Cistercian life."<sup>138</sup> Hotchkiss argues that, for the most part, Hildegund did not exhibit much in the way of saintly acts yet the narrators of her hagiography were quite invested in praising her as a "saintly woman." Hotchkiss believes this praise could have been an attempt to protect the reputation of the monastery which housed her

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>137</sup> Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 43-44.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.



unsuspectingly.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, this medieval hagiography of a similarly gender-crossing subject did not attempt to praise Hildegund for “manly” displays as Matrona’s did. This medieval story seems to emphasize Hildegund’s femininity, or is “obsessed” with it as Hotchkiss says,<sup>140</sup> despite maintaining Hildegund as a saintly figure. This different treatment of gender-crossing saints perhaps demonstrates the cultural significance of “manly” women within late antique Christian literature in a way different from medieval literature.

Matrona is not the only presumed female saint who either presented herself as a eunuch or was assumed to be one in late antiquity. There are some theories as to why the category of eunuch is so often used by gender-crossing saints. For example, there have been psychoanalytical interpretations of this phenomena that argue that this form of “gender reversal implies that male impersonation is symbolically equivalent to castration.”<sup>141</sup> Lubinsky explains that the other monks assumed that these saints were specifically eunuchs because of the “aberration between the physiology of the female monks and conventional adult men. The female monks [were] beardless, fair of face, and delicate of voice.”<sup>142</sup>

This pragmatic need likely explains why so many gender-crossing saints were known as eunuchs. For example, the hagiography of Mary, the subject of the next

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>141</sup> Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make*, 27; see e.g. M. Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classic Antiquity*.

<sup>142</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 152.

chapter, says she was assumed to be a eunuch because of her beardlessness and delicate voice. However, in the case of Matrona, her hagiography tells us that her gender status as a eunuch is her own decision, not just the assumption of her fellow monks. Furthermore, with Pelagia no explanation is given; however, Pelagia's hagiographer notes that she is known as Pelagios the eunuch and that her body is changed through asceticism. Therefore, it is unclear if Lubinsky's reason holds true for Pelagia as well or if she chose that gender category as Matrona did.

Rather than viewing the "impersonation" of maleness as *only* pragmatic though, or as a symbolic castration of these presumably female bodied figures, I argue that these figures were working within their own cultural notions of the malleability of sex and gender. These figures embodied masculinity through their use of an already liminal masculine category. In antiquity, there was no category for the non-binary position of someone born a woman, so it seems within reason that these saints found the masculine embodiment of a liminal social position as an acceptable categorization for themselves. Because eunuchs were already seen as a liminal category on the gender spectrum, perhaps these saints viewed them as a natural option for their own gender variance. In this case, the presentation as eunuchs is not a symbolic castration or reflection of saintliness in the gender-crossing saint, but rather a gendered act within the cultural logic of the ancient Mediterranean.

The ancient literature on eunuchs demonstrates that gender was neither truly binary nor considered fixed in the ancient past. While eunuchs were viewed as the lowest form of maleness by some ancient literature, others put them in completely different

sexed and gendered categories. The fact that they were placed in male monasteries (as these institutions did demonstrate some implications of a binary view in antiquity) suggests that on some level eunuchs were still considered male; however, their role within female private spaces, sometimes including women's nudity,<sup>143</sup> suggests that their social recognition as males was erased.

The act of castration was expected to result in physical changes of strength and a lack of hair; however, gendered expectations were also believed to be transformed by the act. Eunuchs were often associated with what were considered feminine qualities such as lust, extravagance, weakness, passivity, and an overall lack of restraint. Some ancient sources place eunuchs in the category of women completely. Philo of Alexandria, for example, mentions men who "completely changed into women."<sup>144</sup> In his analysis of Philo's description, Manfred Horstmanshoff argues "could even be interpreted as if they underwent a transsexual operation."<sup>145</sup> Aristotle also explains that eunuchs have "changed into female."<sup>146</sup>

As the cases of intersex individuals also demonstrated above, gender was not viewed as fixed in the ancient Mediterranean. Through the act of castration, eunuchs occupied new categories of sex and gender within the cultural constructions of them. As liminal figures, it is interesting that Matrona and other gender-crossing saints often

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<sup>143</sup> Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, 106.

<sup>144</sup> Philo of Alexandria, *On Special Laws*, 3.41.

<sup>145</sup> Horstmanshoff, "True Eunuch," 105.

<sup>146</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 5.3.

specifically performed and embodied the social category of eunuchs. As eunuchs, they were present in what were considered male spaces, yet expected to exhibit less manliness than their brothers viewed as fully male. However, it is clear in Matrona's *Vita* that Matrona exhibited more masculine qualities than her brothers with relative ease. Matrona is demonstrated as being more manly, despite her categorizations as both woman and eunuch. Matrona, and others like her, show that gender in late antiquity was not only not binaried, but that the categories were unfixed and an array of ambiguity could and did occur within many different types of historical sources.

### **Matrona's Vast Array of Gender**

Matrona's gender presentation is especially important for our understanding of the ancient world, because she is commonly viewed as a historical figure, not a hagiographical fictional character. Of course, her hagiography, as with the genre in general, is largely considered an exaggeration, particularly the miracles attributed to her. Hotchkiss explains "Hagiography is not easily classified; most medieval readers perceived the saints' lives as authentic 'historical' sources, yet the literary tendencies and repetition of motifs and themes betray a certain account of fictionalization."<sup>147</sup> However, because Matrona is much more likely to have lived, some of her hagiography can be examined for its historicity.

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<sup>147</sup> Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make*, 15.

Unlike the several other hagiographies of “disguised” women, often referred to as the “transvestite” saints, Matrona was likely a historical person who actually did change her gender presentation. It is likely that she did enter the monastery of Bassianos as a eunuch named Babylas and that she did create a convent under Bassianos’ approval and guidance. Because Matrona did not leave her own account, it is still important to remember that her life and the gender presentations and performances within it, are still through the filter of her most likely male monastic writer. In her book, *Early Christian Dress*, Kristi Upson-Saia argues that in all the hagiographies of gender-crossing saints, the male writer attempted to emphasize the subjects’ status as women. This is certainly true for Matrona as well; however, as a most likely actual person who presented herself and performed in masculine ways, as scholars we can attempt to understand Matrona’s presentation and performance though her interiority and identity may not be available to us.

There are various points throughout her hagiography where Matrona’s gender presentation seems to change. Therefore, the complexities of Matrona’s presentation and performance must be analyzed to create a full picture of Matrona’s gender. In doing so, Matrona’s gender embodiment can be understood through her gendered acts in a Butlerian sense. In Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

Butler argued that while gender may seem natural and fixed, it is produced through sedimented discourse. Through performance of gender within the confines of gender norms, gender is constantly re-produced and recognized by others within a society. But while these performances create and re-create gender norms, performance can also be subversive. In Butler's line of thinking, gender is not something one is, but rather something one does. As Joseph Marchal puts it, "Thus Butler reverses some of the common sense of what bodies are and mean by stressing the doing aspect of embodiment."<sup>149</sup> In this way we can understand Matrona's gender embodiment through her acts, including speech.

First, when describing her initial shift into masculine presentation, Matrona refers to it as a transformation. The *Vita prima* says that Matrona was "completely transformed into a man and bore a man's name Babylas."<sup>150</sup> The word used for transformation is μετασχηματισθεῖσαν, meaning "to transform or change."<sup>151</sup> This same μετασχηματιζω is used in Philippians 3:21 to state that Jesus would "transform" bodies into bodies of glory.<sup>152</sup> There is a second meaning of μετασχηματιζω that is "to change or disguise oneself." However, there seems to be no underlying notions of deceit in the passage about

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<sup>149</sup> Joseph Marchal, "On the Verge of an Introduction," *Bodies on the Verge: Queering Pauline Epistles*, ed. Joseph Marchal (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 14.

<sup>150</sup> *Vita prima*, 4.

<sup>151</sup> *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, based on Walter Baur's lexicon (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 641. Jeffrey Featherstone also translates it as "transformed." His translation can be found in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, edited by Alice-Mary Talbot.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

Matrona as can be found in the use of the word in 2 Corinthians 11:15 in the description of false apostles.<sup>153</sup>

In contrast, the *Vita altera* uses the word προσποιηθεῖσα to say that Matrona “pretended” to be a eunuch.<sup>154</sup> This could be further evidence that the later medieval version had much more of an interest in the erasure of Matrona’s gender variance and emphasis on her femaleness, such as in the hagiographies of twelfth-century Hildegund. However, the use of μετασχηματισθεῖσαν with its primary definition of changing one’s form as in a transformation, rather than the use of a word like προσποιηθεῖσα with its meaning that one is acting or gesturing in order to make one think something that is not the case, leads me to assess that the narrator’s understanding of this gender shift was not an act of deception, but a transformation of Matrona. Furthermore, the use of ὅλην in the *Vita prima*, meaning “wholly or completely,”<sup>155</sup> to refer to the transformation seems to further suggest the text describes a complete transformation into a man, rather than simply a disguise.

After Matrona spent three years as the eunuch Babylas, Bassianos discovers her assigned sex. In a dream, a divine figure tells Bassianos, “The eunuch you have in the monastery is not a eunuch, but is female.”<sup>156</sup> At this point, Matrona’s hagiography seems to return to feminine categorizations temporarily. When Bassianos confronts Matrona, he

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> *Vita altera*, 6.

<sup>155</sup> *A Greek Lexicon*, ed. Danker, 704.

<sup>156</sup> *Vita prima*, 6.

asks her how she took part in the eucharist and gave the kiss of peace to her brother monks. She responds that she covered her head (as was considered required for women during mass) with her cloak during the eucharistic ritual.

In this statement, Matrona recognizes her own categorization of female in the custom of covering her head during her receipt of the eucharist. However, her response to the second part of his question seems to negate this categorization. She responds that she gave her brother the kiss of peace, despite Bassianos' implied gender difference between her and them, but she did so because she did not see her brothers as possessing human mouths, but rather she was kissing "angels of god."<sup>157</sup> Matrona seems to erase all gendering of the monks in Bassianos' monastery. The implication of such a statement would be that all who live monastic lives are then devoid of their gender, which seemingly invalidates her own acceptance of her gendered requirements as someone categorized as a woman.

Matrona further explains to Bassianos her dream of monks saving her from her husband and how she "transformed into a man," once again using μετασχηματιθεῖσαν in one manuscript of the text.<sup>158</sup> Matrona says that, with the aid of her friend Susanna, she took off her women's clothes, cut her hair, and "became a man both in clothing and purpose."<sup>159</sup> Although Matrona seems to recognize the necessity of some restrictions

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Vita prima*, 8 in manuscript Vaticano Palatino 80.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 8.



placed on her because of her female body, she also seems to negotiate the gendered categories and attest to her own masculine transformation.

After Matrona's explanation of her presence at the monastery, the *vita* says that Bassianos "marveled" at her wisdom. It further says that he "accepted her purpose" and encouraged her to continue in asceticism.<sup>160</sup> However, at this point, Bassianos had her wear a head covering and moved her out of the monastery first into Susanah's house and then to a women's monastery in Emesa.<sup>161</sup> Matrona's husband heard that a woman was discovered in one of the nearby monasteries and so he went to all of them to find her. When he came to Bassianos' monastery, he demanded that they give him back his wife. One of Bassianos' disciples told him that they had no women there, that they had received a eunuch named Babylas but that he had since left them to live in a cave in Jerusalem.<sup>162</sup>

While this may have been a lie to protect Matrona from her husband, this is not the last time that someone from the monastery continues to use masculine pronouns and the name Babylas for Matrona. When Matrona returns to Constantinople with one of her disciples, she first goes to Markellos, a deacon from Bassianos' monastery who had arranged for her to go to Emesa. After Matrona told Markellos that she had returned to receive Bassianos' blessing, Markellos went to Bassianos and told him that the eunuch Babylas had returned with another brother<sup>163</sup>. During this conversation, both Markellos

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 9-11.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 10.

and Bassianos use masculine pronouns to refer to Matrona. There is no apparent reason for the two to use masculine references for Matrona, yet they do so throughout the conversation about her return.

Furthermore, it is not entirely clear how much Matrona returns to feminine presentation in the time between Bassianos making her leave the monastery and her return to Constantinople to open her own. Bassianos had her use some cloth as a head covering after confronting her, but her *Vita* does not mention anything further about her clothing beyond that point.<sup>164</sup> It seems likely that she would wear feminine habits at the monastery in Emesa, but she does not stay there long because her husband continues to follow her. When she left the convent, it says she only took a hair shirt with her.<sup>165</sup> According to Lubinsky, hair shirts were typically only worn by male monastics, so at this point her presentation had likely returned to a fully masculine one.<sup>166</sup> At one point, Matrona's husband passes her on the street but does not see her when she bends over as if to pick up a stone in order to avoid him.<sup>167</sup> Perhaps he did not recognize her because of a more masculine presentation. Matrona is spoken of as a holy woman throughout this part of her hagiography and of drawing women to live with her in asceticism; however, her hagiography is not clear on her presentation at this time.<sup>168</sup> It seems safe, therefore, to

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>166</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 137.

<sup>167</sup> *Vita prima*, 14.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 19-23.

presume that she continued to wear the hair shirt associated with male monks, and likely that she may have, in general, presented herself with more masculine clothing and affect.

Not only does she seem to continue a masculine presentation, but she seems to be recognized as masculine. The use of masculine pronouns and name when she returns to Markellos suggests a continued masculine embodiment during this period and a social recognition of this by Markellos and Bassianos. Scholarship on Matrona has viewed her masculine presentation as temporary and instrumental to escape her husband.<sup>169</sup>

However, even within the cultural logic of the ancient Mediterranean, gender was viewed as changeable. Multiple shifts may not have been the norm, but there are several examples of shifting one's sexed and gendered categories. Although it is not entirely clear that Matrona did return to feminine presentation, I argue that if she did, it would not be proof of her natural gender state, rather it demonstrates what scholars of gender have been claiming for years: that gender is fluid and not fixed even within individuals.

Some points of interest occur with Matrona's gender presentation and authority that deserve more attention. At the end of Matrona's *Vita prima* she receives permission from Bassianos to open a convent for females to follow his monastic rule. According to this version, Bassianos "had ordained her overseer of souls, so to speak, and had granted her authority for the laying of hands on others, he did not give her woolen girdles and veils, such as women are accustomed to use, he gave her wide, dark leather men's girdles and white men's cloaks, which they wear continuously."<sup>170</sup> The unknown author of

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<sup>169</sup> Bennaser, Davis, and Lubinsky.

<sup>170</sup> *Vita prima*, 51.

Matrona's hagiography appears to associate her receipt of authority with her gender presentation; however, the use of "they" in the neuter implies it is not only referring to male monastics and that the members of Matrona's convent dressed in masculine habits. The masculine appearance then would not be solely based on her authority as the head of the convent.

Matrona in some ways is said to have received more authority than would normally be given to a woman in the fifth century. The word which I have translated above as overseer is ἐπίσκοπος, which also means "bishop." The author of the hagiography then immediately adds a disclaimer that bishop is their own term or expresses their anxiety and distances themselves from calling Matrona a bishop by adding ὡς ἂν τις εἴποι, "so to speak." It is unclear if Matrona was given ecclesiastical authority, but the word bishop does denote a strong sense of authority within Christianity at this time. This may be an indication of the amount of reverence both Matrona's monastic followers and Bassianos had for her. The distancing done by the author of the *Vita prima* would, however, serve to keep this reverence within the orthopraxy of male ordination while still maintaining the high level of authority Matrona must have received from Bassianos.

Certainly, the authority of laying of hands given to Matrona is indicative of episcopal authority. To be clear, however, at this point in Christian history, there was no formal process to confer the title of bishop. Bishops and congregations made new bishops. Henry Chadwick explains that, by the third century, the choice of a bishop rested with a congregation, both clergy and lay members, and a bishop from another church

would lay hands on the nominee for consecration into the position.<sup>171</sup> Very little is known about Bassianos outside of Matrona's hagiography. If Bassianos was a bishop, he would then have authority to consecrate others to that position as it said he did with Matrona. Whether referring to Matrona as ἐπίσκοπος was meant to confer her actual ecclesiastical status or to confer a symbolic one, it is clear that Matrona was recognized to have a great deal of authority.

Furthermore, Matrona's continued masculine presentation along with the rest of her monastery is removed from the later versions of her life. As previously stated, because Matrona was most likely an actual person, the hagiography closest to her life chronologically would largely be considered the one most accurate to her life by historians. Therefore, her assignment of authority by Bassianos and being given masculine monastic habits likely did occur. The removal of this part of her life from the ninth century *Vita Altera*, then, is likely an act of recovering the story to a preferred narrative, one which conforms to tenth-century norms, by a later writer.

As stated above, the domestication of female saints in later versions of their hagiographies was common in order for the predominantly male authors to conform the holy figures to cultural standards of their own time. This tenth-century version of Matrona appears to be attempting to do exactly that. The inclusion of Matrona's masculine habits in the earlier version would not serve a clear purpose for the author, and so, was likely true. Even in the sixth century when the *Vita prima* was written, there would be no apparent reason to add Matrona's return to masculine presentation. In fact, it

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<sup>171</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 52.

would be transgressive in many ways. However, it would serve a purpose to later remove this aspect of her life from the later version.

Later medieval reconstructions seem to simplify a complexly gendered *Life*; yet, current scholars are also perpetuating the erasure of gender variance. In one of the only pieces of scholarship that focuses on Matrona specifically, Khalifa Bennaser's 1984 unpublished dissertation states that Matrona's "disguise" was temporary despite the male monastic habit she is given, which Bennaser mentions only three sentences later.<sup>172</sup> Bennaser argues that Matrona decided to "put on men's clothes and joined a monastery of men" in order to avoid her husband finding her.<sup>173</sup> Bennaser then states that her return to masculine presentation is no longer in order to disguise her, but is rather in recognition of her great piety. Other scholarship has argued that male attire in these hagiographies are used to demonstrate the female subjects had moved beyond the culturally perceived limitations of their sex. Georges Sideris in his 2016 article, written in French, titled "The Monasteries of Bassianos and Matrona," states a similar reason of "angelic lifestyle" for the masculine dress of the ascetics at Matrona's monastery.<sup>174</sup>

Crystal Lynn Lubinsky's 2013 book *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood* is perhaps the most overt example of removing gender complexities.

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<sup>172</sup> Khalifa Bennaser, "Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit with a Translation of the Life of St Matrona," PhD diss (Rutgers University, 1984), 44.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>174</sup> Georges Sideris, "Bassianos, les monastères de Bassianou et de Matrônes (Ve-VIe siècle)," *Le saint, le moine et le paysan: mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan*, ed. by Olivier Delouis, Sophie Métivier and Paule Pagès (Paris: Publ. de la Sorbonne, 2016), 16.

Her book looks at the many hagiographies of what she calls female “transvestite” monks in order to argue for the female identities of the subjects. Lubinsky states that “transvestism was a means to an end” and “should be considered a female enterprise within the legends for the sustainment of a holy womanhood.”<sup>175</sup> She argues that the layers of masculinity are only superficial and instrumental. Lubinsky notes that after Matrona reunites with Bassianos in Constantinople, Matrona’s husband is no longer in the narrative and “it is unclear whether he ceases to search or dies.”<sup>176</sup> Lubinsky argues that transvestism is always a pragmatic choice in order to protect an ascetic womanhood. At this point, however, Matrona’s pragmatic reason of escaping her husband is no longer valid, yet she continues masculine presentation.

Lubinsky also argues that Matrona’s masculine habit “is an outward sign of her authority, leadership, and power.”<sup>177</sup> This is a common argument for Matrona’s masculine dress in her monastery. Many scholars have argued that her presumed return to masculine attire was an attempt at authority not normally available for women or as representing that that authority was given to them despite that it is not normally available for women. Lubinsky further states her masculine dress “has become purely symbolic.”<sup>178</sup> Lubinsky links no evidence to support these claims. There are no other examples of women taking masculine appearance as a symbol of their authority that she

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<sup>175</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine*, 7.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 185.

mentions; therefore, this assumption is likely based on cisnormative bias she seems compelled to place on Matrona. Her claim is particularly unconvincing because women were regularly in positions of authority in monastic contexts. Female heads of convents, such as Macrina discussed below, lead convents and exuded authority without shifting their gender presentation. This instrumentalization of Matrona's presentation ignores the history of many women that led convents in order to construct a cisnormative historical narrative.

### **Conclusion**

Matrona's presentation and performance as the leader of her monastery in masculine attire could be interpreted in ways that does not insert cisnormativity into it. Using insights from transgender studies allows for an emphasis on gender performativity and embodiment. Instead of positing masculine authority as the reason Matrona took on masculine appearance, we can view it as part of her masculine performance, and as part of her masculine embodiment. Therefore, she followed cultural norms of masculinity to further perform her own masculine self.

Scholars continuously dismiss gender-crossing by rationalizing it as a pragmatic choice in order to negotiate patriarchal structures. This continued rationalization of Matrona demonstrates that scholars continue to have trouble seeing beyond their own bias. Postcolonial studies have long pointed out that history is written through an epistemological bias. For example, in *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty says that the discipline of history is Eurocentric and attempts to "translate" other lifeworlds



into European means of understanding.<sup>179</sup> This was done with the idea that these European modes of understanding had universal validity. Chakrabarty then argues for what he calls History 2: understanding the other within their own context rather than translating them into a European one. In order to do this, Chakrabarty argues that one must look at another lifeworld as one that can “illuminate possibilities for our own lifeworld.”<sup>180</sup> In order to work within History 2, one must acknowledge and understand other lifeworlds as real possibilities for their own.

Chakrabarty’s work is important for understanding not only contexts outside of Europe, but also those of the ancient past. In his recent book, *The Realness of Things Past*, Greg Anderson argues for the application of post-colonial theory, such as that written by Chakrabarty, to understand the past within its own cultural context. He argues that current historical analytical models cause historians to “flatten and homogenize all non-modern lifeworlds, those of the pre-modern ‘West’ included.”<sup>181</sup> Anderson focuses on how modern ideas about the state influence how historians write about the ancient city-states of Greece: “we tend to analyze it as if the Athenians were living out our modern vision of their history, not their own.”<sup>182</sup> Anderson further argues that in order to correct this and “to produce histories that are more ethically defensible, more philosophically robust, and more historically meaningful, we need to analyze each non-

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<sup>179</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>181</sup> Greg Anderson, *The Realness of Things Past: Ancient Greece and Ontological History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

modern lifeworld in its own ontological terms.”<sup>183</sup> I argue that we do precisely that when it comes to gender in the ancient past. As scholars like Chakrabarty and Anderson have suggested, historians must move beyond their own cultural bias in order to understand other cultures. The way in which gender has been constructed within modernity is not the way it was constructed in the past. Scholars must put these epistemological biases aside and study cultures on their own terms rather than attempting to translate them into our own.

As scholars, therefore, we must consider Matrona’s gender variance seriously. The ancient Mediterranean thought of sex, as well as its gendered associations, as something that was not fixed, that could in fact change. It is rather the modern notion of sex and gender that maintains it must be fixed and naturalized within the body. Current scholarship, then, is enforcing this modern Eurocentric model on the ancient past. Postcolonial feminist scholars have already given a plethora of examples on why scholars should not place this model on other cultural contexts.<sup>184</sup> We must treat the ancient past, with its own constructions of sex and gender, the same way.

Although Matrona’s flight from her husband and the issues of attaining authority in a patriarchal system should be noted, to treat these as the only possible reasons for her masculine gender presentation elides gender variance within the historical record. This approach actively, whether deliberately or not, constructs a cisnormative and anachronistic perspective of the past. Matrona has very little scholarship focused on her

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>184</sup> For example, see Gayatri Reddy, *With Regards to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

to begin with, and that which does exist commits epistemic violence against her and other gender variant figures. As much as we cannot reach the interiority and identity of Matrona in order to call her transgender, we also cannot do the same to attest a cisgender identity. Rather than erase any possibility of a masculine identity, I argue that we make room for the possibility of gender variance, that we take these episodes of gender non-conformity seriously in order to avoid the erasure of an already marginalized group. This applies to all of the gender-crossing saints, which will be established in the subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 2 “A Man Mised”: Gender Variance in the *Life of Mary*

In the previous chapter, I established how scholars are imposing the gender binary of western modernity onto gender-crossing saints. This is not the same sex/gender system in late antiquity; however, scholars continue to work within this epistemological bias. The same is true for the treatment of Mary who went by Marinos. Similar to Matrona, Mary’s gender crossing is treated as a pragmatic decision in order to enter monastic life. However, these arguments have even less evidence to substantiate them in the case of Mary. For example, the arguments that could be made in regards to masculine appearance being representative of Matrona’s authority cannot be made for Mary. Neither is Mary stalked by an abusive husband, who might be avoided with a masculine “disguise.” In fact, Mary does not gain anything from her masculine appearance, other than entrance into a male monastery, and is rather at a disadvantage at one point because she continues to live as a man.

The case of Mary thus further demonstrates a seeming compulsion by scholars to give a pragmatic, external excuse for gender crossing. Scholars seem to feel that a choice to enter a monastery meant for men *needs* a reason beyond gender variance. This compulsion to find a reason is particularly clear with Mary, because she offers no indication for her choice that would support a cisnormative view of the past.

## **The Life of Mary**

After the death of her mother, Mary's father, Eugenios, raised his daughter both with her education and piety in mind. When she became an adult,<sup>185</sup> Eugenios told Mary that he had decided to leave her everything and enter a monastery. Mary objected, saying that he was saving his own soul to the detriment of hers. Mary convinced her father to let her accompany him after cutting her hair and changing into men's clothing. Together, they gave away all of their belongings and Mary's father, following Mary's idea, cut her hair, changed her clothing, and gave her the name Marinos. Eugenios warned her to watch her conduct, not the conduct of those around her, in the monastery so that she did not cause the other monks to break their vows.

In the monastery, Mary demonstrated great asceticism to the notice of her brothers. They assumed she was a eunuch because of her beardlessness and voice or that these were symptoms of her extreme asceticism, particularly that she only ate every other day. After a few years, Eugenios died but Mary continued in the monastery, progressively demonstrating more holiness, including healing the sick.

Mary, with three other brothers, were sent outside the monastery to look after solitary monks who did not live within the community. They stayed at an inn where the innkeeper's daughter became pregnant by a soldier. The soldier told her to blame the pregnancy on the young beautiful monk, Marinos. She told her father that Marinos impregnated her and the innkeeper went to the monastery and complained to the superior there. When Mary returned, the superior told her of the accusation, to which Mary said

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<sup>185</sup> In some versions, she is still a child. For example, see Agnes Smith Lewis' Syriac edition.

she had sinned and asked for forgiveness. The superior expelled her from the monastery, but Mary stayed at the gates.

When the innkeeper's daughter gave birth, her father brought the baby boy to Mary. Mary continued to live outside the gates while taking care of the baby as its father for three years. The other monks threatened to leave if the superior did not allow Mary back into the monastery, to which the superior agreed. Mary and the child lived in the monastery and Mary continued to care for the child as its father while taking on the menial duties of the monastery. Growing up in the monastery, the child eventually also became a monk. After many years, Mary was found dead in her cell. When preparing her body for burial, the monks were astonished to find her female body and called for the superior. The superior felt he had sinned against Mary by casting her out. He called the innkeeper to also view Mary's body and see her innocence though she had endured through the accusation and burden of the child. At Mary's funeral, the innkeeper's daughter, possessed by a demon, told the truth about the soldier impregnating her. She was then healed by the tomb of Mary.

Mary's hagiography disrupts the gender norms of late antique Christianity in many ways. Mary defies expectations of familial burdens and excels in ascetic practice often thought to be beyond those assigned female. Unlike most of the other gender-crossing saints, Mary spends most of her life with masculine presentation and embodiment: she enters the monastery young with her father and lives as Marinos until her death many years after her adopted son becomes a monk. Furthermore, Mary highlights many tropes within gender-crossing hagiographies, yet stands out as unique in

some ways. For example, many other monks are accused of sexual wrong-doing, but Mary chooses to accept the blame and raises the child she is accused of fathering. This contradicts the common rationalizations that gender crossing is a means of gaining pragmatic advantages, whether authority or safer travel, because Mary's gender variance probably brought more hardships than if she had revealed her body and returned to feminine presentation. Although we can never reach the interiority of Mary or gender-crossing saints like her, the *Life of Mary* can offer insights into alternative motivations for gender variance not acknowledged by current scholarship.

Mary's hagiography does not suggest where or when Mary lived. Nicholas Conostas notes that, unlike many saints who had localized cults, Mary's "geographic origins are shrouded in legend," because she "was venerated throughout the medieval world, in both east and west."<sup>186</sup> Multiple manuscripts of the hagiography exist in numerous languages including Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopian, and eventually medieval French and German, demonstrating its continued popularity throughout the Christian world.<sup>187</sup> Crystal Lynn Lubinsky ponders whether the lack of time or location is the reason for its popularity.<sup>188</sup> Without these specifics, many regions were able to establish cults to Saint Mary and claim her as their own. For example, the Syriac edition translated by Agnes Smith Lewis claims that Mary was born in Bithynia.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Nicholas Conostas, "Introduction to the Life of St. Mary/Marinos," ed. Alice- Mary Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 1.

<sup>187</sup> Conostas, "Introduction," 1.

<sup>188</sup> Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 32.

Leon Clugnet and Marcel Richard, however, do offer some possibilities of their own for the time and location that Mary's hagiography originated in each of their critical editions of the text. Because Mary's story was well established by the eighth century, Clugnet suggests that Mary lived in the sixth century in modern day Lebanon outside of Tripoli. Clugnet supports this claim through the established tradition in the region of the Marian cult that Mary lived in the monastery of Qannoubine in the Valley of Qadisha.<sup>190</sup> However, Clugnet also traces the multiple cults that emerged around Mary, both in the east and west as well. Richard similarly estimates that the hagiography was at least first composed between 525 and 650.<sup>191</sup> This estimation is largely based on the eighth-century *Vita Syriaque* which "was already old and there were already several reviews before this date."<sup>192</sup>

Several critical editions and translations of the *Life of Mary* are available. Agnes Lewis Smith produced a translation of the Syriac text, and critical editions of the Greek have been produced by Leon Clugnet and Marcel Richard. Lewis' translation of the Syrio-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest is the oldest of the three. In her English translation, Lewis states that she found the Syriac Palimpsest in 1892 in the convent of St Catherine

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<sup>189</sup> *Select Narratives of Holy Women: Translation from the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest*, trans. Agnes Smith Lewis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 37.

<sup>190</sup> Leon Clugnet, "Introduction," eds. L. Clugnet, E. Blochet, I. Guidi, H. Hyvernat, F. Nau, and F.-M.-E. Pereira, *Vie et Office de Sainte Marine: Textes Latins, Grecs, Coptes, Arabes, Syriaques, Ethiopien, Haut-allemand, Bas-allemand, et Francais* (Paris, 1905) vi; Guita G. Hourani, chairperson of the Maronite Research Institute, uses Clugnet's assertion to support her own claim of this as the location of Mary's life. [http://www.maronite-institute.org/MARI/JMS/january00/Saint\\_Marina\\_the\\_Monk.htm](http://www.maronite-institute.org/MARI/JMS/january00/Saint_Marina_the_Monk.htm)

<sup>191</sup> Marcel Richard, *La Vie ancienne de Sainte Marie Surnommee Marinos*, ed. Marcel Richard, *Opera Minor*, vol 3. No 67 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), 112.

<sup>192</sup> Richard, *La Vie*, 111.



on Mount Sinai.<sup>193</sup> The Syriac text was full of the stories of ancient Christian women. When comparing her palimpsest with other manuscripts, the earliest of which was from the ninth century, Lewis found that those were much more condensed versions of Mary's story. She also argues that the handwriting on those manuscripts are from a later date than the one she discovered and translated.<sup>194</sup>

Also writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Leon Clugnet transcribed many of the extant manuscripts into a critical edition with the help of several others. Clugnet argued that the Latin manuscript was the oldest version: "Now you just have to quickly go through these different texts to immediately recognize that the simplest, most devoid of amplification and, therefore, the most consistent with the original drafting is the Latin text."<sup>195</sup>

However, Marcel Richard's edition of the *Life of Mary called Marinos* argues that the Greek version is the oldest. Richard argues that the Latin version Clugnet attests as the oldest is a translation from a corrupted Greek version. Richard calls his edition of the Greek text the *Vita antiqua*. He reconstructs the *Vita antiqua* using four manuscripts: the primary manuscript Athonite Vatopedi 38, f52-55 from the tenth century, Athonite Iviron 408, f110r-116r from the fourteenth century, Athonite Philotheou 52, f150v-163v from the eleventh century, and Moscow, Bibl. Syn 148, (Vlad. 410) f69v-71v from the fifteenth century.<sup>196</sup> The three Athonite manuscripts have been preserved in the library of

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<sup>193</sup> Lewis Smith, *Select Narratives*, preface.

<sup>194</sup> Lewis Smith, *Select Narratives*, xix.

<sup>195</sup> Clugnet, "Introduction," iii.

the monastery of Mount Athos, a Greek peninsula upon which all women are banned from setting foot.<sup>197</sup>

Richard comes to the conclusion that the Greek version is the oldest after comparing his edition to the *Vita rescripta* (BHG 614), the *Vita aucta* (BHG 615d) and the *Vita syriaca* (BHO 697). Richard asserts that the story was likely first an oral transmission, but his reconstructed edition would be closest to the original written text because the sources he used, particularly the Anthonite Vatopedi, contained the most vulgarisms, specifically “the use of *ἐαυτου* for the three genders, use of the accusative with preposition, curious use of the verb *ποιειν*, *οὔδε* for *οὔδεμια*, etc.” Richard argues that these vulgarisms are a “good sign of antiquity.”<sup>198</sup> He also notes the importance of Agnes Lewis Smith’s work with the Syriac version; however, this version was a translation of the Greek version, evident by the arrangement and style.<sup>199</sup> I have found Richard’s arguments compelling for these reasons. I have used Richard’s *Vita antiqua* as the principal edition used for this chapter.

### **Pronouns and Names**

As stated in the previous chapter, the authors of gender-crossing hagiographies wrote in such a way as to emphasize that these figures were women. While the characters

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<sup>196</sup> Richard, *La Vie*, 86 and Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 31.

<sup>197</sup> Stephen Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2002): 3.

<sup>198</sup> Richard, *La Vie*, 87.

<sup>199</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 32.

with whom the gender-crossing saint interacts typically have no idea about the saint's previous gender assignment, the author usually continues to remind the reader of the saint's "true" identity. Kristi Upson-Saia argues, "these texts received little censure precisely because they worked to strip cross-dressing of its transgressive nature. Through several narrative techniques, the *vitae* attempted to diffuse the dress practice's challenge to the conventional gender binary by inscribing and naturalizing femininity into the ascetic's hidden body."<sup>200</sup> The authors of these *vitae*, therefore, mostly used the feminine names and pronouns for the gender-crossing subjects. Upson-Saia notes that this practice can sometimes be confusing since other characters often use masculine names and pronouns for the gender-crossing saint, which "paradoxically served to confuse the gender identity of the protagonists."<sup>201</sup> Although this can confuse the gender identity of the protagonists, feminine pronouns and names are used for external audiences and likely emphasize the protagonists status as female.

The *Life of Mary* is the exception. Throughout the Greek *Vita antiqua* of the *Life of Mary*, the narrator uses the name Marinos and masculine pronouns to refer to Mary after she alters her gender presentation and performance until her death. At the point of her death, the narrator returns to Mary and feminine pronouns, emphasizing the discovery of her female body. The return to feminine references at the end may support Upson-Saia's argument that the discovery of the saint's female body is a narrative device to

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<sup>200</sup> Kristi Upson-Saia, "Gender and Narrative Performance in Early Christian Cross-Dressing Saints' Lives," *Studia Patristica* XLV (2010): 43.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

reinforce their “true gender”: “No matter how convincing her disguise was in the preceding narrative, in the end her appearance is always shown to be a temporary façade that obfuscated her true femininity.”<sup>202</sup> The majority of the narrative in the case of the *Vita antiqua*, however, refers to the protagonist as “he” and Marinos.

In Clugnet’s Latin version, which Richard argues is from a later date than his Greek one, the narrator alternates back and forth between masculine and feminine pronouns and frequently refers to Mary as both “Marina” and “Brother Marinus.” In Lewis Smith’s translation of the Syriac version, the narrator continues to use feminine pronouns until the abbot calls Mary to perform duties out of the monastery which leads to the accusations and subsequent removal from the monastery. At this point the narrator begins using the name Marinus and masculine pronouns. Like in the *Vita antiqua*, this changes back to feminine names and pronouns when Mary’s female body is discovered.

The changes to masculine name and pronouns by the narrator in the *Life of Mary* is quite different from the other *vitae* of gender-crossing saints. There is an exception in the *Life of Euphrosyne*, in which the narrator alternates gendered pronouns during a dialogue between Euphrosyne, a porter, and the abbot. Upson-Saia explains this section as the author’s attempt “to reflect the porter and abbot’s perception of the monk’s gender, resulting in startling compound sentences that merge the monk’s male and female identities.”<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Upson-Saia, “Gender and Narrative,” 46.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 48.

Within these narratives, it seems difficult for the authors to continue to emphasize the protagonists' femininity when they present and perform their gender embodiment in such culturally masculine ways. Upson-Saia notes, "Such confused gender language no doubt contributed to readers' understanding of the saints' blurred gender. Thus, although, the *vitae* authors made a significant effort to naturalize femininity, their narrativization of cross-dressing could not entirely achieve this goal."<sup>204</sup> The gender variance is so much a part of gender-crossing *vitae*, that although authors attempted to "naturalize" their femininity, they could not fully succeed in doing so. In the case of Mary, the author does not seem as concerned with naturalizing her femininity throughout the narrative.

Most scholarship concerning gender-crossing saints use feminine pronouns for the subjects of these hagiographies just as the hagiographies themselves do. However, Robert Mills switches pronouns for Eugenia throughout his article "Visibly Trans?: Picturing Saint Eugenia in Medieval Art."<sup>205</sup> Mills refers to Eugenia with feminine pronouns prior to her change in gender presentation and after her revelation of her female body, but refers to the subject as Eugenius and with masculine pronouns while presenting as a man in the monastery. By doing so, Mills recognizes the gender embodiment of the subject at the point of the narration being analyzed. Mills' article is particularly interested in the art work that depicts the moment of revelation of Eugenia's body, showing her begin to open

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Robert Mills, "Visibly Trans? Picturing Saint Eugenia in Medieval Art," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, Number 4 (2018): 540-564.

her robe and expose her breasts. Because, Eugenia “passes” at the monastery, it is this point in the story that she is “visibly genderqueer” according to Mills:

Here is an image that potentially resonates with modern debates about trans visibility. The scene does not connote gender passing so much as gender crossing. Frozen in time to a moment just before the chest is revealed fully, Eugenia’s boyishness lingers even as ‘he’ is on the verge of becoming ‘she.’ Yet the anticipation of that revelation, at least in the mind’s eye, provokes a vision of the saint’s gender that seemingly transcends the binary frame in which it is simultaneously embedded.<sup>206</sup>

Mills argues that artwork of this moment suspends Eugenia in a moment of gender queerness that is not found in other artwork of Eugenia. Because Eugenia is posed in a position of sliding from masculine back to feminine embodiments, or a point of being visibly genderqueer, Mills uses “they” to refer to Eugenia while analyzing the artwork of this scene. I appreciate Mills’ careful reasoning and use of pronouns for Eugenia’s gender and applaud the attempt to fully recognize the gender variance in gender-crossing saints through pronoun choice.

However, I have chosen not to follow suit with Mills in order to create consistency in how I refer to my subject and minimize confusion. In some ways, it would be more consistent with the text to jump back and forth between “he” and “she” specifically in this chapter because the *Vita antiqua* does so. However, because I decided to consistently use feminine pronouns for the other subjects, I have decided to do the same with Mary for continuity throughout this dissertation. I want to bring attention to Mills’ article and how it uses pronouns, however, because this is an important

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 548.

conversation to continue in this field. Although I have made my own choice for pronouns for the subjects in this project, I by no means consider this to be the only or “correct” choice when writing about ancient gender variance.

### **Options for those assigned female?**

The *Life of Mary* begins with a conversation between a father and his child. Mary’s father tells her about his intentions to join the monastery, to which she immediately rebukes him for abandoning her soul in order to save his own.<sup>207</sup> The *Life* tells us that Mary is already an adult when her father makes this decision and her father says that he is leaving everything he owns to her at this departure. However, when Mary argues that he must see to the salvation of her soul as well, her father begins to cry and asks what he is to do with her.<sup>208</sup> Mary then says that she will join him at the monastery after changing her gender presentation.

During this conversation, the option of Mary going to a monastery for those assigned female is never mentioned. Scholars have written that this is an indication that there were none available in the area for Mary to go to. For example, Clugnet attests, “there would be nothing surprising that in these primitive times, where monasteries of nuns did not yet exist or, at least, were very rare, some women, wishing to flee the world, have used the same means, that is to say have disguised their sex in men's clothes, in

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<sup>207</sup> *Life of Mary*, 2.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

order to be admitted to men's monastery."<sup>209</sup> Clugnet, here, is referring to the many gender-crossing saints and not just Mary. He suggests that the lack of female monasteries is the reason many of these saints changed their gender presentation in order to partake in religious life.

Richard makes a similar claim in his critical edition of the *Life of Mary*: "This story was born at a time and in a place where female monasteries were still rare. History supposes, in fact, that the saint could only engage in religious life by entering a monastery of a man. However, the frame, common to all Lives, shows the male coenobitism already very organized."<sup>210</sup> Richard argues that while male monastic life had reached a point of standard organization, female monasteries must have still been rare in the time and place that the *Life of Mary* is supposed to have taken place. Much like Clugnet, Richard argues that it can be assumed, that is "history supposes," that Mary's only option for a religious life was to change her gender presentation in order to enter a male monastery.

Other scholars have also cited Clugnet and Richard, but have also not offered any further evidence to support these statements. For example, Lubinsky states, "Richard uses the fact that this legend seems to be witnessing an era when female institutions were rare, hence why women attempted to join male monasteries and why hagiographers use certain monastic administrative titles and offices."<sup>211</sup> Bennaser likewise makes the same claim:

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<sup>209</sup> Clugnet, "Introduction," 11.

<sup>210</sup> Richard, *La Vie*, 111.

<sup>211</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 31.



“It is possible to attribute the reason, or one of the reasons, of assuming male attire, at least in the case of one of our saints, that of St. Marina, to this unavailability of convents of women.” Bennaser then quotes the same section of Clugnet’s introduction that I do above.

However, neither Richard or Clugnet nor the later scholars who reference them, offers any evidence to support these claims. Rather than “history” supposing this, as Richards puts it, it is the assumption of these authors that Mary changed her gender presentation because there is no mention of a female monastery in this dialogue so they must not have existed. Therefore, Clugnet and Richard both assume that Mary changed her gender presentation to follow her father into the monastery, because there was no other option for religious life for someone assigned female in the time and place her *Life* takes place. This is an especially unsupported claim given that it is not clear when or where the *Life of Mary* is supposed to take place. Furthermore, there is evidence of early Christian asceticism among women that will be further discussed below. How, then, can it be assumed that there were no female monasteries available for Mary to go to?

Furthermore, this assumption is rarely given as a reason for other gender-crossing saints, possibly with the exception of Clugnet’s statement. Most often, gender crossing is explained as a necessity for escape and hiding, as many scholars claim Matrona did.

Davis explains the motivation for all gender-crossing saints in a small blurb in his article:

Some of the heroines (Apolinaria, Eugenia, Euphrosyne, Hilaria) take on male dress in order to escape their parents’ inflexible expectations of marriage and to travel incognito to monastic areas. Others leave already existing marriages, sometimes with their husbands’ consent (Athanasia), and sometimes against their husbands’ wishes (Matrona, Theodora). Still others, like the prostitute Pelagia, disguise themselves as men in order to mark their conversion to Christianity and

the monastic life, and their break from a sinful past. In all cases, the act of crossdressing enables the women to enter the monastic life unhindered by binding familial or social prejudices.<sup>212</sup>

Davis offers quick insights into most of the gender-crossing saints' motivations without offering any evidence for these assumptions. Implicit in all of these assumptions is that asceticism offers women more freedom, which has also been argued regarding female ascetics that did not gender cross.<sup>213</sup> However, he does not argue that a lack of female monasteries is the root for any of these saints' gender crossing. It appears to be an argument reserved for Mary alone, perhaps because other assumptions of motivations are more easily available for the other saints, particularly escape from familial and social obligations. The other gender-crossing saints are assumed to change presentation so that they are not easily discovered by their husbands or parents who would remove them from religious life. Mary has no such burden, so it appears scholars felt required to create and appeal to one for her in order to support cisnormativity.

Davis does mention one saint who has her husband's permission to leave her marriage: Athanasia. Davis includes her in this list of women supposedly escaping social parameters while making a note that she had her husband's consent; therefore, she does not fit his explanation of gender crossing as a way to escape these obligations. Athanasia and her husband, Andronicus, embraced asceticism after the death of their children. They both decided to enter monasteries. Athanasia, at first, entered a woman's monastery.

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<sup>212</sup> Davis, "Crossed Texts," 4.

<sup>213</sup> For example, see Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*.

However, she eventually met her husband on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. She recognized him, but he did not recognize her because of her extreme asceticism over the years they were apart. She also wore men's clothing and went by the name Athanasios on this pilgrimage. Athanasia returned with Andronicus to his monastery and lived in an adjacent cell. They lived together for twelve more years without Andronicus knowing that his brother was also his wife. After her death and revelation of her female body to the monastery, Andronicus then found a letter explaining that he had been living with his wife.

Athanasia's initial gender crossing is explained, like Thecla's, as motivated by the need for safe travel. When she left her monastery to go on pilgrimage, she made the transition to masculine gender presentation. However, she continued her masculine presentation and performance by returning to Andronicus' monastery after he begged the person who he thought was a new friend to stay with him. Although gender crossing is often viewed as a break from familial ties, in the case of Athanasia and Mary, this is not so. These two saints were not trying to hide from familial obligation, as Matrona is said to be have done. Rather, gender crossing seems to *support* their familial connections.

According to Hotchkiss, gender crossing "successfully eliminates the sexual aspects of their relation so that Athanasia and Andronikos can fulfill their religious vocations without sacrificing natural affinities."<sup>214</sup> Of course, we can assume this would not be the case with Mary joining the monastery with her father. However, if Mary had

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<sup>214</sup> Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 29.

joined the monastery out of love for her father, much like Athanasia possibly did for love of her husband, Mary could have left monastic life after her father's death. Instead, she spent most of her life as a man, even after being accused of sexual impropriety and expulsion from the monastery. Therefore, Mary's masculine embodiment went beyond the love of her father and continued well after his death.

Furthermore, Athanasia first lives in a female monastery; therefore, similar arguments cannot be made for her as they are for Mary. Both hagiographies, however, are believed to be from around the same period (Athanasia and Andronicus were from the fifth century). Although Mary could have been from a different location, since there is no location provided in the *Life of Mary* to know with certainty if female monasteries were not in existence in the area. Nevertheless, Athanasia's hagiography seems to provide some evidence of female monasteries. Furthermore, many scholars specifically argue that the gender-crossing saints that are hiding from their families avoid female monasteries because they will be discovered. These hagiographies largely take place around the same time period and mostly in the eastern half of the Roman Empire. This implies that female monasteries are in fact an option in this time period. These arguments used to support cisnormative historical narratives, then, are directly contradicting each other.

Furthermore, Susanna Elm provides ample evidence that female monasteries were just as active as male ones in her book *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Elm states that her book has two tasks. First, a historiographical one that decenters Benedictine monasticism, and "The second and larger task is to reconstruct how the monastic norm did evolve and change. Here the role of women becomes crucial.

It becomes clear that fourth-century women ascetics adopted organizational patterns and forged institutions via a complex process involving both the transformation of the given model of the family and a reaction against that very model. Moreover, women did so in concert with men.”<sup>215</sup> Elm specifically demonstrates how women were just as involved in creating monastic systems in the fourth century as the men who were famed for doing so.

Elm’s book uses a vast array of sources to show that women’s monasticism was just as active as men’s in fourth-century Egypt and Asia Minor. For example, Elm tracks the shift from having an individual virgin living in a household to the family home becoming a site of monastic life.<sup>216</sup> She takes Macrina as her first example.<sup>217</sup> Macrina was not only able to preserve her virginity despite her family’s initial attempt to arrange her marriage (something her mother Emmelia had wanted for herself but unable to achieve), but also brought the rest of the household into asceticism in the family home in Annesi, which Emmelia and Macrina maintained after the death of Macrina’s father.

It was not long after this that Macrina’s home monastery began allowing outside women to join them in ascetic life. Elm also complicates the notion that Macrina’s brother, Basil of Caesarea, who contemporaries viewed as “the founder of monasticism in Asia Minor,” started his monastery before Macrina did.<sup>218</sup> Specifically, Elm notes that Macrina and Emmelia arrived in Annesi, the eventual site of female and male ascetic

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<sup>215</sup> Susanna Elm, *‘Virgins of God’: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), viii.

<sup>216</sup> Elm, “‘Virgins of God’: Variations of Female Ascetic Life,” *‘Virgins of God.’*

<sup>217</sup> See *Life of St. Macrina* by Gregory of Nyssa.

<sup>218</sup> Elm, *‘Virgins of God,’* 61.

communities, ten years before Basil. Elm also states that when Basil did arrive, “His elder sister Macrina adhered to an ascetic regimen consisting of prayer, frugal nourishment, and manual labour which included a nominal, yet highly significant amount of work ordinarily reserved for slaves.”<sup>219</sup>

Only after the death of their brother Naucratus, did Basil move to an ascetic dwelling in the wilderness that Naucratus had lived in and it was at this point that Macrina convinced her mother to renounce material life and free their household slaves in order to all live together as ascetic sisters in their house. According to her brother, Gregory of Nyssa, in his biography of Macrina, Macrina is the only member of the family that remained calm and collected during this time of mourning. When Basil returned to Annesi, it was an ascetic house in which head of house duties were fulfilled by Macrina. Elm argues that these transitions “further represents the first step towards the transformation of an ascetic household to an ascetic institution.”<sup>220</sup> She further points out that within this famous ascetic family, Macrina was the first to take on an ascetic life, which influenced the other members to follow suit.

Furthermore, Macrina accepted new members into what was quickly becoming an ascetic institution, including those from much lower status compared to her aristocratic family. Eventually, Basil created his own ascetic community and created monastic rules for the governance of segregated men’s and women’s communities. Elm argues, “Macrina is viewed by some as merely a component of Basil’s monastic programme,

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 82-83.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 88.

which consisted of a double monastery under Basil's guidance, with his sister as an aide. Nothing in Basil's writings suggests such an interpretation. Indeed, because of her significantly earlier experience and her uninterrupted presence, Macrina may well have been the dominant figure at Annesi; her share in developing what is known as Basilian monasticism ought not to be underrated." Elm argues that rather than seeing Basil as the center of this monastic system in Annesi, Macrina's influence should be taken much more seriously and her ascetic community should be acknowledged for its existence prior to Basil's.

Elm continues to establish throughout her book the presence of female ascetic life through the rise of fourth-century monastic systems. By doing so, Elm demonstrates the gender bias present in most studies of this period. Women are often ignored by historians and men, like Basil, are given credit for the creation of communal ascetic life despite evidence of women's participation and possibly initial creation of such communities. I believe that a similar bias has led to the assumption that Mary entered a men's monastery due to a lack of women's communities. Because women are often ignored in history, their ascetic pursuits have likewise received little attention. Therefore, the assumption that there are no female monastic institutions for Mary to go to partly stems from a bias against seeing the accomplishments of women that did form them at the time.

Although we do not know the exact time or location Mary is supposed to have lived, Clugnet and Richards have given reason to believe it would have been the fifth or sixth centuries, possibly in Syria, but most definitely in the east. Elm, however, has demonstrated that women's communal asceticism was likely well established prior to

when Mary would have lived in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Although it is still possible that there may not have been a women's monastery nearby, there is no mention of that dilemma in the *Life of Mary*. Therefore, it seems that the assumption that Mary joined a men's monastery because of the supposed lack of a women's community is a biased one that both ignores the role of women in monastic developments and seeks to put Mary into a cisnormative understanding by imposing a pragmatic reason for her gender variance despite evidence to support otherwise.

### **Parenthood**

Several years after living in the monastery and proving her obedience and piety, Mary is sent out of the monastery to serve other monks outside the community. During the trip Mary and the other monks stay at an inn where the innkeeper's daughter has sex with a soldier. When she finds out she is pregnant, she tells her father that the Monk Marinos is the one to blame. Mary does not fight these accusations, rather she accepts responsibility for raising the child. This aspect of Mary's *Life* raises multiple points about gender and the discourse of parenthood in late antique Christianity.

Mary is not the only gender-crossing saint to be accused of fathering a child. Theodora of Alexandria is accused, quite similarly, of impregnating a woman and then given the child to raise. In both cases, the accused saints did not reveal their female bodies in order to attest their innocence. Instead, they both raised the children as fathers and their bodies, and innocence, were revealed upon their death. This popular trope is found in several hagiographies and reinforces cultural notions that women were



hypersexual and dangerous to men in this way. In other hagiographies that do not involve impregnation, such as Eugenia's, the saint is still accused of sexual misconduct in order to cover up the seductive nature of the female accuser. Although the assigned female saints in gender-crossing hagiographies seem to offer a foil to the seductress women that blame them for their own sexual misconduct, the trope does support misogynistic views of women. It reinforces notions that women are seductive temptresses for men, particularly those attempting to live ascetic lives, and that women cannot be trusted. It is important to note that this rhetoric is still popular in many societies with deleterious effects for women, men, and gender non-conforming persons alike and contributes to rape culture, cultures in which rape against certain bodies is normalized and justified, currently.

Some scholars have argued that this trope within gender-crossing hagiographies is a retelling of other Christian stories. One such example is the biblical story of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39), in which the unnamed wife attempts to seduce Joseph and then accuses him of trying to rape her after he refuses.<sup>221</sup> John Anson further notes that this trope within gender-crossing hagiographies bears striking resemblances to the stories of Saint Macarius the Great, founder of the monastic community in Scetis. Macarius, a hermit in the Egyptian desert, is accused of impregnating a woman and beaten for it. Macarius takes the accusations and subsequent beatings without protest of his innocence, much like Mary does. However, in Macarius' case, the woman who accuses him has difficulty in

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<sup>221</sup> See John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Viator*, 5, 1974, 17 and Davis, "Crossed Texts," 25-28.

child birth and feels it must be because of her lies. After she confesses that Macarius did not have sex with her, she is finally able to deliver the child.<sup>222</sup> Although these stories are quite different from the events described in Mary and other accused gender-crossing saints, these are the intertextual references that these scholars have used to analyze this trope.

Anson further argues that the “transvestite” versions of this story reverse the dynamic within Macarius’ circumstances. The seductress is a common theme within the hagiographies of holy men; however, Anson notes that in the case of gender-crossing saints, the “slandorous woman” is used to demonstrate the holiness of the female bodied saints being accused. Anson states, “In the transvestite legends, by contrast, where another disguised woman bears the charge of the seducer, it is as if she undoes the guilt of her whole sex by becoming the victim of its designs against men.”<sup>223</sup> Anson seems to be arguing that this trope within gender-crossing saints is in response to misogynistic cultural ideas that associate women with hypersexuality and, therefore, sin.

This is reminiscent of similar arguments regarding the Virgin Mary as redemption for all women, undoing the effects of their association with the sins of Eve. In this way, these “disguised women” are able to redeem their “whole sex,” meaning all other females. This further demonstrates the misogyny deeply ingrained in Christian literature. Anson’s main argument in his article is that monastic men wrote gender-

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<sup>222</sup> *Life of Serapion*, in *Apophthegmata Patrum*, (Coptic), trans. Evelyn White, found in Anson, “Female Transvestite,” 18.

<sup>223</sup> Anson, “Female Transvestite,” 19.

crossing hagiographies in order to come to terms with their own anxieties about the sexual nature of women and possible temptation. Therefore, he argues that gender-crossing saints accused of impregnating women seeks to undo the socially constructed nature of female hypersexuality, thereby easing the anxieties of the monastic writers while reinforcing misogynistic views.

The trope of the “slandorous woman,” which possibly may reference back to these other Christian stories, is also present in other gender-crossing hagiographies. While Mary and Theodora, as well as a couple of others, keep silent and raise the child they are accused of fathering, several others decide to expose their female bodies in order to prove their innocence. Eugenia, for example, exposes her breasts in court to the judge who happens to be her father but unable to recognize her until this point. We can hopefully assume that he is able to recognize her after he realizes she is female-bodied and it is not a recognition of her breasts specifically. Often times, those that reveal themselves also exorcise the woman accusing them afterwards, further undoing the sins of their sex according to Anson.<sup>224</sup>

Although the origins for these tropes are discussed in the scholarship surrounding gender-crossing saints, the impacts of those figures who grin and bear these accusations are rarely discussed. Saints like Mary and Theodora choose not to expose themselves and to continue living as men. In these cases, the arguments that gender crossing is a pragmatic choice, seems to fall flat: these figures are disadvantaged by their masculine appearance rather than gaining some sort of advantage. Both Mary and Theodora are

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<sup>224</sup> Specifically, Eugenia, Apollonaria, Hilaria, and Susanna. Anson, “Female Transvestite,” 19.

given the children they are accused of fathering to raise. Through they are given a child that they must now raise and provide for, these saints continue their masculine presentation rather than exposing their bodies as Eugenia does. Rarely are the implications of this form of ancient parenthood discussed, particularly within the gender dynamics presented in these stories.

Within early Christian discourse, motherhood is often seen as a burden preventing spiritual life. As seen in the last chapter, this does change in the early medieval period in which the *Vita altera* of Matrona's *Life* is written. However, much of the ancient literature viewed children as a burden specifically for pious Christian women. The dangers of childbirth alone are a topic within this discourse. Infant mortality levels were high in the ancient world, around one-third of children were estimated to die within the first few days of birth.<sup>225</sup> Women were also very much in danger of dying from childbirth. The *Life of Melania the Younger*, for example, gives an account of a woman whose fetus had died during childbirth but could not be expelled from the womb. Melania miraculously aids her to deliver the stillbirth, and thus saves the woman's life, through the use of a belt from a holy man.<sup>226</sup>

In *On Virginit*y, Gregory of Nyssa also discussed the dangers of childbirth as he attempts to argue for the superiority of life as a virgin: "But her time of labour comes upon the young wife; and the occasion is regarded not as the bringing of a child into the

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<sup>225</sup> Maria Doerfler, "Holy Households," in *Melania: Early Christianity Through the Life of One Family*, ed. Catherine M. Chin and Caroline T. Shroeder (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017) 72.

<sup>226</sup> Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*, 61.

world, but as the approach of death; in bearing it is expected that she will die.”<sup>227</sup>

Tertullian, likewise, advises, rather than die wastefully in child birth or fevers, to embrace martyrdom and its subsequent “glorification.”<sup>228</sup> Childbirth could provide danger to the mother and was used in these examples to demonstrate that spiritual renunciation, through martyrdom in Tertullian’s example and asceticism in Gregory’s, was the far superior choice for women.

If both mother and child survived the trauma of birth, children and domestic life were also constructed as a burden on spiritual life for women in early Christian discourse. In some cases, women were praised for leaving their children, provided that they made sure they would still be taken care of. For example, in the fourth century Jerome wrote that after the death of one of her daughters, Paula decided to leave her remaining children to start a monastery in Jerusalem. Jerome praises Paula’s ability to leave her weeping children in order to pursue asceticism, even saying her eyes were dry as her young son stretched out for his mother. Jerome says that her love of God overcame her love as a mother.<sup>229</sup> Maria Doerfler explains, “Stories of youngsters thrust from their mother’s breasts and left weeping at the harbor may strike contemporary readers as the height of maternal irresponsibility; by late ancient standard, however, ascetic heroines of Paula’s caliber acquitted themselves of their responsibilities in entirely socially appropriate ways,

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<sup>227</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, 3, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5. Ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893).

<sup>228</sup> Tertullian, *De Fuga*, 9.

<sup>229</sup> Jerome, Letter 108 to Eustochium, 6.

appointing guardians and providing financial support for children who had not yet reached the age of majority.”<sup>230</sup> Therefore, as long as arrangements were made for the children, it was socially acceptable for mothers to liberate themselves from the burden of motherhood in favor of ascetic life.

In some instances, miraculous events aid in the disburdenment. For example, Perpetua was able to go into the arena free from the burden of her child because of what she perceived as divine intervention. When Perpetua is arrested, she was still nursing her child and he stays with her in the prison. In an attempt to dissuade Perpetua from professing her Christianity to the judge and subsequently face martyrdom, Perpetua’s father pleads with her on behalf of all of her family, but especially for her child who he says will not live long without her.<sup>231</sup> After Perpetua is sentenced to be executed, her father refuses to bring the child to her. However, in what Perpetua attests as God’s will, her son no longer needs to be breastfed. Furthermore, Perpetua writes that she did not experience the physical discomforts from sudden weaning.<sup>232</sup> Perpetua is relieved that she can freely face martyrdom knowing that her child will survive without her with her family.

The death of a child is sometimes also portrayed as the work of God and liberating for the mother. For example, Melania the Younger longed for an ascetic life but felt it her duty to try to have children. According to her hagiographer, she persuaded her

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<sup>230</sup> Doerfler, “Holy Households,” 75.

<sup>231</sup> *Passion of SS Perpetua and Felicity*, 5.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

husband to agree to attempt to have children twice and then to live in a continent marriage. During her pregnancy with their second child, she prayed that she would be freed from the material world and allowed to live in asceticism. She then went into early labor and her child lived just long enough to be baptized. Soon after her older child dies as well and Melania and her husband turn to asceticism together.

Melania's grandmother, Melania the Elder, also had a similar divine intervention according to Jerome. Jerome writes that when Melania lost her husband and two sons, she did not cry at all, but said "I will be able to serve you, Lord, because you have freed me from so great a burden."<sup>233</sup> Melania the Elder turned to asceticism after her remaining son was married and settled. Both Melania's demonstrate that motherhood was considered such a burden, that hagiographical writers portray mothers as happy for the divine intervention that frees them from it, even in the form of the death of their children.

The subject of the last chapter further demonstrates the discourse so far discussed around ancient Christian motherhood. Before joining Bassianos' monastery, Matrona leaves her daughter with her trusted friend, Susannah, to take care of her. Much like Paula leaves her children to found her own monastery, Matrona entrusts her child with someone who will provide for all of her needs. After Bassianos makes Matrona leave the monastery, she returns to Susannah's house until she is sent to Emesa. Once there, she is told that her daughter, Theodote, has died. However, Matrona did not despair over her death:

Finding that she had died, [Matrona] felt joy rather than sorrow, that she was delivered from caring for [Theodote], and [Theodote], also set free, had departed

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<sup>233</sup> Jerome, Epistle 39 to Paula, 5.

before experiencing the evils of life. And as greatly as she was distressed to have been separated from the monastery, so great was the consolation in casting off the child; for this was also God's work, to lighten in one part the sorrow she felt in another.<sup>234</sup>

Motherhood was seen as so burdensome for spirituality, her hagiographer describes Matrona's reaction to the death of her child as one of relief. She grieves much more over leaving Bassianos' monastery; in fact, the death of her child is consolation for that grief according to her hagiographer. Much like Perpetua's release from maternal responsibility is framed as divine intervention, the death of Theodote is framed as a gift from God (much like the meaning of her name).

Of course, this framework within ancient stories about holy women could be a way to cope with the very real realities of child mortality rates. Doerfler explains that these stories may not tell us how ancient holy women truly felt about these deaths:

They do, however, provide a glimpse at the rhetorical culture that had sprung up around the ubiquitous tragedies of infant mortality and parental bereavement. Such accounts may have been read through the lens of ascetic excess or divine chastisement – and were no doubt read in the way by many contemporaries. By crafting rival narratives of liberation and empowerment, Gerontius, Jerome, and other champions of late ancient renunciation not only offered apologia for ascetic practice but created role models for other elite women sympathetic to spiritual pursuits and afflicted by personal grief.<sup>235</sup>

The liberation after the death of a child could have acted as a cultural coping mechanism in which women could pour their grief into ascetic practice. However, by presenting the death of their child as a disburdenment toward ascetic life, Doerfler explains that the

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<sup>234</sup>*Life of St. Matrona*, 10.

<sup>235</sup> Doerfler, "Holy Households," 75.



male authors of these women's *Lives* offer an alternative narrative of empowerment to the all too common event of childhood deaths. However, it should be noted that these "champions" for these ascetic women were childless and celibate men, such as Jerome. Perpetua, the only known female author discussed in this section, is relieved that her child is no longer dependent on her as opposed to welcoming his death. The authors of several other works, such as Matrona's *vita*, are unknown, though debates over the sex of these authors continue; therefore, their social positionality and its effect on how the loss of children is received is unknown. I am curious if these hagiographies were written by mothers who lost their children, if they would treat the issue differently.

Although Doerfler notes that divine intervention was used to understand the loss of children, not all of these liberations of familial responsibility are the result of divine intervention. As previously discussed in the case of Paula, some women chose to leave their children in order to pursue ascetic life. This is also a reflection of the cultural rhetoric around motherhood. Doerfler notes that throughout these ascetic stories, separation of mothers and their children are portrayed as "necessary" in order to fully commit to an ascetic lifestyle: "An ascetic woman might be 'relieved' of her child by divine fiat or by her own strength of faith and character. To enter the life of renunciation, these narratives suggest, nevertheless required the severing of familial ties."<sup>236</sup> While some instances of these narratives may serve as a cultural coping mechanism for child mortality, the overall rhetoric remains that children were a burden on the holy woman.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 75.

Women were praised in these stories, such as Paula and Matrona, for leaving their children in the care of others in order to pursue their own asceticism.

This rhetoric is largely gendered. Cultural expectations for mothers to be more involved in child rearing is likely involved in ancient Christian discourse around parenthood. Although marriage and children may be viewed as a detriment to men's spiritual lives as well, for example Gregory of Nyssa is appealing to virgins of all genders, these narratives tend to focus on the burden parenthood brings to those occupying the social category of women specifically. In the *Life of Mary*, this burden is not represented in the same way for those fulfilling the familial category of father. Mary's own father attempts to leave her in order to enter a monastery, about which she chides him for saving his own soul at the expense of her own.<sup>237</sup> The narratives of women ascetics, however, seem to be encouraging them to do precisely that. Mary's father responds to her, "Child, what am I to do with you, you are female and I wish to enter a monastery of men, and how would you be able to be with me, for the devil wages war on God's servants through your sex?"<sup>238</sup> Mary then responds that she will cut off her hair and wear the "clothes of a man."<sup>239</sup>

In this exchange, the burden on the father doesn't so much seem to be the result of having a child, but rather of having a child that is assigned female. Once Mary declares that she will become a man and enter the monastery with her father, there is no more

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<sup>237</sup> *Life of Mary*, 2.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*.

discussion and the plan is put into action. Her father seems to accept that there is no longer a burden on his asceticism, as long as he enters with an ascetic presented as his son. The burden of parenthood is presented very differently, therefore, for fathers in the *Life of Mary*.

Likewise, Mary takes on a child as its father. When the innkeeper's daughter accuses Mary of impregnating her, Mary does not fight the accusation. Instead, Mary confesses to the abbot of the monastery that "I am a man misled."<sup>240</sup> (Constas, also using the *Vita antiqua*, translates this line as "I have sinned as a man.") Mary is kicked out of the monastery and continues to live exposed to the elements at the gates of the monastery. After the innkeeper's daughter gives birth, the innkeeper brings the child to Mary and left him with her.<sup>241</sup> From this point on, Mary takes care of the child, continuing to live at the gates. Determined to take care of the child Mary is accused of fathering, the *Life of Mary* says, "First he proceeded to get milk from some herdsmen and to feed the child *as his father* [my emphasis]."<sup>242</sup>

With the innkeeper leaving the child Mary, Mary seems to feel responsible for the child and commits herself to care for it. Khalifa Bennaser notes, "She carried out the responsibility with great resignation and the devotion of a real mother until she died."<sup>243</sup> I

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Khalifa Bennaser, "Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit with a Translation of the Life of St Matrona," PhD diss (Rutgers University, 1984), 73.

take some issue with Bennaser's use of a "real" mother which seems to hinge on biological connection to the child. Bennaser's gendering of Mary and the role she played for the child as "mother" is neither historically accurate or helpful. Bennaser not only seems to insist on gendering Mary based on her sex, but also associates the notion of care giving with only motherhood, which is clearly not case within this hagiography.

The *Life of Mary* clearly calls Mary the baby's father not mother. Just as Mary's father continued to fulfill all of Mary's needs after her mother's death and brought her with him into the monastery, Mary performs the same function for this baby. Mary's father acted as her sole caregiver and Mary does the same for her adopted child. She cares for him in all the ways he needs and eventually bring his into the monastery with her when she is allowed to return. Mary raises the child as his father, just as the text clearly states.

Although caring for this baby boy was quite onerous for Mary, the burden on her does not seem to be a spiritual burden, but only a material one. Mary at this point must be concerned with feeding the baby and the baby's soiling Mary's garments.<sup>244</sup> After three years, the abbot finally allows Mary to return to the monastery with the little boy. Much like Mary was no longer a barrier to monastic life to her father once she became a man, Mary's child does not create a barrier for her to return because he is assigned male. However, the child continues to be an added physical challenge to Mary: "But the child was always following behind him, crying and saying 'Dada, Dada,' and such things

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<sup>244</sup> *Life of Mary*, 14.

children say when they seek food. Thus, as well as the trials a monk endures, Marinos was continually distressed about providing enough for the child.”<sup>245</sup>

Mary’s role as a single father neither blocks her readmittance to the monastery nor bars an exceptional ascetic life despite the rhetoric surrounding the burdens of motherhood. While mothers are frequently told in late antiquity that they could not be fully part of ascetic life while having children, Mary occupies the category of father. Mary is clearly recognized as a father both by her fellow monks and the young child following her calling out “Dada, dada.” Therefore, despite the material challenges involved in raising the child, Mary is not burdened by the child in the same way antiquity considered a mother to be.

In fact, these extra challenges are part of her saintliness. When Mary dies, her female body is discovered during burial preparations. The abbot realizes she was innocent of the sexual transgression she was accused of and immediately repents for his actions towards Mary. The abbot also forces the innkeeper to repent for his part in the treatment towards innocent Mary. At the funeral, the innkeeper’s daughter comes possessed by a demon and confesses. The *Life of Mary* says that she was healed by the tomb of Mary, a sign of Mary’s sanctification. As a result, “everyone glorified God because this sign took place, and because of [Mary’s] endurance, for she was steadfast until death, refusing to make herself known.”<sup>246</sup> The author of her *Life* seems to place her

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid 21.

endurance of the challenges of parenthood as another sign of her holiness along with the healing of the possessed woman.

Unlike Paula who needs to leave her children in order to fully embrace ascetic life and reach sanctification, Mary is able to bring the child she cares for into asceticism with her. Eventually he becomes a member of the monastery after growing up within it. This is all part of Mary's journey to sainthood rather than a detriment to it. Mary's gender crossing allows her to cross into traditionally masculine categories such as the male monastery and fatherhood. Because of the gendered nature of the discourse on parenthood, Mary's role as father seems to shift her story enough so as to not have parenthood be the total barrier it would be if she were the child's mother instead. Mary instead is spiritually uninhibited as the father of a son who can enter the monastery with her as she did with her father. Furthermore, her ability to fulfill the material needs of her child as his father as well as endure the accusations and punishments for a sexual encounter she did not have, is considered another sign of her saintliness. This seems far different than the discourse around motherhood and attests to the impact of Mary's gender variance on the narrative of her *Life*.

### **The Big Reveal**

In the *Life of Mary*, Mary lives the majority of her life as the monk Marinos despite the extreme hardships that accompany it. Despite being accused of impregnating the innkeeper's daughter, Mary continues her masculine gender presentation and embodiment (saying she "sinned as a man"). This leads to her expulsion from the

monastery; however, she continues this embodiment as she lives on the streets outside of the monastery. At any point, Mary could have revealed her female body, as many of the gender-crossing saints do in their own hagiographies; however, Mary continues masculine embodiment for the rest of her life, possibly demonstrating how important it was for her identity.

It is not until Mary's death that the monastery discovers that she is female-bodied. After the monks find Mary dead, they begin to prepare her body for burial: "But as they set out to wash him, they found that he was a woman, and shrieking, they all began to cry out and said in a single voice, 'Lord, have mercy.'"<sup>247</sup> Hearing the disturbance, the abbot asks what the problem is and they reply "Brother Marinus is a woman."<sup>248</sup>

This scene is similar to some of the other gender-crossing saints whose female bodies are discovered after their death. For example, Pelagia's female body is also discovered during burial preparation. The bishops and holy men prepared to anoint Pelagia's body, "As they did so, they saw she was a woman. They gasped with astonishment in their hearts, then, raising their voices, they cried out to God, saying, 'Praise to you, Lord; how many hidden saints you have on earth – and not just men, but women as well!'"<sup>249</sup> Pelagia only spent three years as the eunuch Pelagios, but her impact as a holy man left the inhabitants of Jerusalem shocked when they discovered her female body upon her death. Just as the monks shouted out over Mary's body in shock, the

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<sup>247</sup>Ibid, 18.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid, 19.

<sup>249</sup> *The Life of Saint Pelagia the Harlot*, 49, (Syriac) translated by Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

bishops and holy men did the same over Pelagia's. The female body with its cultural associations with vice and weakness seems to glorify these saints all the more upon its discovery at the subject's death. However, part of this shock may also be that the subjects "passed" so well as men until their death.

This is not the case for all gender-crossing saints. Other saints that faced similar accusation of sexual impropriety, which is a common trope as discussed above, decided to reveal their body in order to prove their innocence. In Eugenia's *Life*, a widow, Melentia, tried to seduce Eugenia and then accused her of attempted rape when Eugenia rejected her. Eugenia stands trial before her father, the prefect of Alexandria, who does not recognize her. Eugenia tears off her clothing and exposes her breasts in order to prove her innocence. Her father then recognizes her as his own child and Eugenia returns to feminine presentation. Therefore, in a similar situation as Mary, Eugenia decided to reveal her body to escape punishment for something she did not do and Mary does not.

Mills' article is particularly interested in this point of Eugenia's *Life*, because it is the point that she is "visibly trans [or] gender queer."<sup>250</sup> During the rest of her time at the monastery, Mills argues that she is a "passing male." Mills sets up this distinction in order to analyze what he considers to be visibly gender queer depictions of Eugenia, that is art that depicts her tonsured and in male attire but with exposed, or partially exposed, breasts. To create this juxtaposition, Mills describes what is meant by passing:

Passing is a common but controversial trope in modern accounts of trans experience. The key factor at play in the ability to pass is whether the person is represented is readily identifiable as transgender. Is their gender queerness visible

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<sup>250</sup> Mills, "Visibly Trans?" 544.



in some way, or do they manage to get through life as a cis-looking trans person?<sup>251</sup>

By this understanding, Eugenia passes as male until her trial, but Mary continues passing until her death. Therefore, Mary continues to have what would be considered “passing privilege,” considered a privilege because of the hardship and explicit oppression often faced by those “visibly trans,” throughout her life.

As Mills points out, the subject of passing is a controversial one, both in trans and non-binary communities and in the scholarly approach to transgender studies. J. Halberstam has explained, “For many gender deviants, the notion of passing is singularly unhelpful. Passing as a narrative assumes that there is a self that masquerades as another kind of self and does so successfully; at various moments, the successful pass may cohere into something akin to identity. At such a moment, the passer has *become*” [emphasis in original].<sup>252</sup>

Halberstam explains that the problem with passing narratives is that it not only depicts gender variance as a “masquerade,” or “disguise” as many scholars use to describe these gender-crossing saints, but also that it places the work of identity in the act of passing. This then constructs the notion that one “becomes” their gender identity through passing. Halberstam instead, insists that “identity might be best described as a process with multiple sites for becoming and being.”<sup>253</sup> In other words, although one’s

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 542.

<sup>252</sup> J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 21.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

gender presentation and performance may be part of one's gender identity, one's gender identity is not based on their ability to pass as a certain gender.

With this in mind, Mary did pass as male according to her *Life*. She entered the monastery as a man with her father and was accepted as a man. Her brothers initially suspected she was a eunuch because she was beardless, but after her supposed impregnation of the innkeeper's daughter, they must have accepted her as "fully male" in ancient Mediterranean understanding (see previous chapter). Mary was readmitted, along with her son, and lived the rest of her life as a man. Mary spent more of her life with masculine embodiment than with a feminine one. Yet, the point that she passed as male is not the important one.

What is important about this continued masculine embodiment is that she chooses to remain "passing" despite the consequences of doing so. When faced with similar consequences, Eugenia and other gender-crossing saints, chose to expose their bodies and disrupt their own status as "passing." When faced with the accusation of sexual acts with the innkeeper's daughter, instead of Mary exposing her body, she asks for forgiveness for being a "man misled." It is unclear what exactly Mary means by this since she is innocent of the accusation, however, she maintains her social category as a man throughout. Mary is so dedicated to her status as not only a man, but a monk, that she lived on the street for several years before she is accepted back into the monastery. This seems to likely indicate that being a man and a monastic were so wholly part of her life, that she would rather live through extreme hardships than to give up on them. As Halberstam points out,

we should not view passing as the foundation of her masculine identity; however, we might view her masculine identity as the foundation of her desire to pass.

### **Conclusion**

The *Life of Mary* is a short hagiography, but it is one full of gender variance. Mary joins her father in the monastery as his son, but continues to live as Marinos long after his death. If she had only entered the monastery to be with her father, this would have given her an opportunity to leave; however, Mary demonstrates even more ascetic fervor after her father's death, even healing the sick and banishing demons. She entered the monastery as a son, but eventually becomes a father for a baby she is accused of siring. Her continued dedication to her own son while excelling in her monastic duties demonstrates that the discourse of motherhood did not apply to her. This may be a further indication of the gender confusion in gender-crossing hagiographies that Upson-Saia attests to: although ancient writers attempted to naturalize the femininity of their subjects, at times they acknowledged these subjects in masculine ways such as their names and pronouns. Perhaps Mary's masculine embodiment overcame the common desire of hagiographers to naturalize her femininity in the narration of the *Life of Mary*.

Although Mary continued her masculine embodiment, even to her own detriment, modern scholars feel the need to explain away her gender variance. The assumption that she did not continue her feminine embodiment and go to a women's monastery because there were none available is not based on any evidence. The assumption is made only because she chose masculine embodiment and lived in a monastery intended for those

assigned male. Furthermore, there are several examples of monastic systems developing in the centuries prior to when the same scholars believe Mary would have lived or her hagiography would have been written. There are also several sources of monastic women from Mary's time period, implying that these monasteries were available in the analysis of gender-crossing saints believed to alter their gender presentation in order to hide from their families.

Mary clearly is depicted as living a life full of gender variance in the *Life of Mary*. She occupied masculine categories of son, eunuch, monk, and father. Yet, Mary is continually put into cisnormative terms while scholars attempt to offer explanations for her gender variance. This compulsory cisnormativity is further evident in works such as Crystal Lynn Lubinsky's. Lubinsky argues, "[Mary] possesses the largest spectrum of sexual and gender roles of all the female monks. She has been received in the story as a young woman, daughter, male eunuch, man, father, and finally woman again at the tales conclusion when her true sex is discovered; notice, however, that her womanhood is the only constant throughout."<sup>254</sup>

Given the amount of time that seems to span between entering the monastery, likely as a teenager, and her death, well after her adopted son takes his own vows within the monastery, Mary seems to spend the vast majority of her life as a man. The only constant, then, that Lubinsky could be referring to in her argument as the basis of Mary's womanhood is Mary's female body. This, therefore, fixes Mary's gender within her sexed body as part of an essentialist view of gender. Not only does this impose a

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<sup>254</sup> Lubinsky, 165.

cisnormativity on Mary, it does so while recognizing the evidence against it. Furthermore, it does so in direct contradiction to the gender system in place and is, therefore, anachronistic. This further demonstrates a seeming compulsion to put everything within a cisnormative framework.

Gender-crossing saints are often explained as shifting their gender presentation in order to negotiate patriarchy, either through ease of travel or through claims of authority, yet at no point in Mary's *Life* do either of these present as possible motivations for Mary. In fact, Mary's continued masculine embodiment was much more of a burden for her than a solution for patriarchal oppression. She was slandered, expelled from the monastery, and forced to live on the street and raise a child, with all the material burdens that these present, rather than return to her previous gender embodiment. Furthermore, this suffering seems to add to her holiness.

Rather than contribute to the discourse on motherhood, the hagiographer includes Mary's endurance as a sign of her sanctification. Her willingness to father a child that is not hers, though materially burdensome, does not hinder her saintliness. Instead, it is treated as a further reason to view her as saintly. This could possibly be taken as a recognition of her masculinity by the author and audiences of the hagiography. Moreover, her endurance of so many burdens seemingly indicates how integral her masculine embodiment may have been to Mary's life. Although we can never reach Mary's interiority, the possibility that Mary's gender variance was motivated by a masculine identity should be acknowledged and taken seriously in historical scholarship. In order to do so, historians must stop presenting gender crossing as solely pragmatic and forcing

figures like Mary into cisnormative terms. Instead, a recognition of Mary as gender variant, as a father, as a brother monk that uses terms such as “a man misled” to refer to herself, should be incorporated in Mary’s treatment.

### Chapter 3 The First is the Last: Thecla's Gender Variance

Thecla is the first known assigned female saint who takes part in gender crossing. Unlike the saints discussed in the previous two chapters, her change of appearance is not the central focus of her story. In the end of her story, Thecla cut her hair and put on men's attire and, with Paul's blessing, began a journey of itinerant preaching before settling in the wilderness of Seleucia.<sup>255</sup> Like the other gender-crossing saints, scholarship largely seeks to understand Thecla's gender variance as pragmatic: primarily as a means to travel safely without the fear of rape. Although Thecla is the first gender-crossing saint chronologically, I have decided to leave her as the last of the case studies in this project.

Thecla is the subject of far more scholarship than any of the other gender crossing saints. Mary and Matrona were the subjects of very little scholarship, mostly in critical editions and as part of research on the genre; however, Thecla, and the cult associated with her, is the subject of multiple monographs and articles in recent scholarship.<sup>256</sup> Thecla, then, has many more examples of both ancient response as well as current scholarship that seem to reinforce cisnormativity back onto Thecla. Furthermore, Thecla has been argued to be the prototype of the genre upon which all other gender crossing hagiographies are based.<sup>257</sup> Several saints, including Syncletica and Eugenia, specifically

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<sup>255</sup> Seleucia is located in modern-day Turkey

<sup>256</sup> Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*; Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla*; McLarty, *Thecla's Devotion to name a few.*

credit Thecla's example for their own actions that transgress gender norms in favor of masculine presentations. I reserved Thecla for last in order to demonstrate how transgender studies analyses can apply to her masculine presentation in the *ATH* though it occupies a limited amount of her story. Thecla takes on masculine presentation at the end of her story; however, this limited description of her masculine appearance does not make it a less important aspect of her story. Furthermore, actions that we can understand as a masculine performance occurs throughout the story and should be part of how we understand Thecla's gender. This change of appearance, then, can be viewed as the last step within the narrative to create a masculine embodiment when analyzed with masculine performances prior to the presentation.

### **The Acts of Thecla**

In *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla begins the story as a young woman living with her mother in Iconium. She had entered an engagement to marry Thamyras prior to the opening of her *Acts*. Thecla overheard Paul giving a sermon of beatitudes especially focusing on salvation through chastity and virginity. Thecla was so enchanted by Paul's sermon, she would not move from her window for three days while Paul spoke below it to others, and she decided to dedicate herself to a life of virginity.

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<sup>257</sup> H. Delahaye specifically argues that these hagiographies are all copies of Pelagia and then Thecla, despite Thecla being the oldest of the genre, *Les legends hagiographiques* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1927).



Her mother informed Thamyris of Thecla's behavior and Thamyris has Paul arrested for leading the youth away from marriage into celibacy. Thecla snuck out of her home in the middle of the night to visit Paul in prison and heard more of his teachings. When discovered, they were brought before the prefect who ordered Paul to be cast out of the city, but agreed to burn Thecla at her mother's insistence. However, when they tried to burn her, she was saved by a miraculous downpour. Thecla was released and followed Paul out of the city and into Antioch. The local magistrate, Alexander, asked Paul if Thecla is with him; to which Paul replied he did not know her. When Alexander learned that Thecla is unaccompanied by a man, he attempted to rape her. Thecla fought him off, knocking off his crown and Alexander had her thrown to the beasts for humiliating him.

Thecla was stripped and put into the arena, but the female lions protected her from the other animals. As more beasts were brought out, Thecla prayed and jumped into a pit of water (filled with man-eating seals) and baptized herself. A cloud of fire surrounded Thecla at this point which protected her from the beasts and hid her naked body from the spectators. They tried to bind Thecla with cords to bulls to have her ripped apart, but the cloud of fire burned off the cords. Thecla was released followed by a declaration of her faith. Thecla "having girded up and sewn a garment into a masculine mannered robe"<sup>258</sup> went in search of Paul. When she found Paul, she told him everything that happened; he then told her "Lead on and teach the word of God."<sup>259</sup> Thecla then took on life as an itinerant preacher, performing miracles, and then settled in Seleucia.

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<sup>258</sup> *Acts of Paul*, 4.15.

Thecla is first introduced in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla (Ath)*, which were part of a larger piece referred to as *The Acts of Paul*. While the author of these *Acts* is unknown and debated even in the first several centuries of their existence, the mention of the work in Tertullian's *On Baptism*, written between 196 and 206 CE, places the authorship sometime before the third century CE.<sup>260</sup> Thecla's story has enjoyed some popularity both among ancient Christians and current historians; however, Thecla's change to a masculine gender presentation is rarely discussed. Instead, both ancient religious and current academic texts focus on Thecla's feminine values. Furthermore, current scholarship that does discuss her presentation views her gender variance as a means to an end: namely avoidance of rape and other violence that commonly befell lone women on the roads of the Roman Empire. However, this interpretation of Thecla's gender variance is far too simplistic, and a transgender studies approach will disrupt cisnormative interpretations and demonstrate that Thecla constructs a masculine embodiment through her performances.

Manuscripts of the *Acts of Paul* are extant from as early as the third century in fragments. In Jeremy Barrier's critical edition of the *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, he provides a table of the names, dates, and location of extant manuscripts and papyri fragments that contain the *Ath*: twenty six in total in Greek, Coptic, Latin, Syriac, and Armenian.<sup>261</sup> There have been several critical editions beginning with Joannes Ernest

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 4.16.

<sup>260</sup> Jeremy Barrier, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla: A Critical Introduction and Commentary* (Germany: Mohr Sibeck, 2009), 23.

Grabe in 1698 using manuscripts from the twelfth century.<sup>262</sup> Beginning in the late nineteenth century, discoveries of more manuscripts has led to newer critical editions using manuscripts closer to the original version of the text, i.e., a sixth-century Coptic manuscript, the Heidelberg papyrus, and two Greek papyri from Egypt, the Hamburg Papyrus from the fourth century and the Bodmer Papyrus from the third century. The *ATH* was largely circulated and preserved separately from the *Acts of Paul*; however, the Heidelberg papyrus, one of the most extensive remaining early versions of the *Acts of Paul*, includes the *ATH* within the larger text.<sup>263</sup> These last two papyri, the earliest written extant versions of the *ATH*, support the long held assumption that the *ATH* was originally written in Greek and then translated into several other languages.<sup>264</sup> Although there are many critical editions of the *ATH*, I primarily rely on Jeremy Barrier's most recent edition and commentary to the text because of his prioritization of these three earliest manuscripts.

Although the author of the *ATH* is unknown, theories about the authorship started in antiquity. In *On Baptism*, Tertullian posits the author as an unnamed presbyter in Asia Minor who was removed from office for penning the story.<sup>265</sup> As J.D. McLarty notes, Tertullian wrote to reject the authority of the story and would be, therefore, a biased

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<sup>261</sup> Barrier, *The Acts*, xii-xv.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 27-28.

<sup>263</sup> J.D. McLarty, *Thecla's Devotion: Narrative, Emotion and Identity in the Acts of Paul and Thecla* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2019), 5.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>265</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 17.

source.<sup>266</sup> With the lack of any other evidence to support Tertullian, scholars have posited their own theories about the authorship of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

Several scholars have suggested that the *ATH* was an oral tradition first, and possibly created and transmitted by women. Greco-Roman women were commonly acknowledged as storytellers according to both Christian and non-Christian writers including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Plato, Apuleius, and Lucian. All of these authors indicate that women were commonly storytellers, although these female storytellers were often not seen positively.<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, Virginia Burrus argues that in societies such as the ancient Mediterranean with strict sex segregation, “sex-specific” folklore is produced. “Sex-specific” folktales, especially chastity stories, in which the private female sphere is highlighted, most likely would have been created and perpetuated by women according to Burrus.<sup>268</sup>

Stevan Davies, Virginia Burrus, and Stephen Davis (among others) all argue for the likelihood that *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, at least its oral roots, was created by a community of continent women, possibly widows. According to Davies, it is particularly convincing that Thecla was created by women because of her interactions with men who “seek to use her sexually,” or Paul who does not “take her seriously but regard[s] her as a beautiful woman, prone to temptation...” Davies thus concludes that “The author of this

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<sup>266</sup> McLarty, *Thecla's Devotion*, 7.

<sup>267</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1987), 70-71; Stephen Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>268</sup> Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, 68-72.

work was someone deeply resentful of the male sex and highly sensitive to the difficulties of women;”<sup>269</sup> the most likely option to fit this description would be another woman. Furthermore, Burrus argues “The Christian beliefs and the ascetic life style shared by such women would have defined them as a distinct social group, and the chastity stories would have functioned to validate beliefs and practices and to motivate proper life style within this group.”<sup>270</sup> This fits nicely within Burrus’ arguments regarding folklore: folk tales are used to validate practices of a community.

Finally, the story was also perpetuated by women who were not able to practice chastity but still viewed it as ideal as evident through the *Life of St Macrina*. Macrina’s mother, Emmelia, wanted to live a chaste life but was forced into marriage by her family. Emmelia almost certainly told Thecla’s story to her daughter which is further discussed below. Although there is not enough evidence to say for certain, Thecla was possibly created and probably perpetuated by women in order to validate the practice of chastity.

In contrast, Kate Cooper argues that most of the evidence from antiquity indicates male writers for the Apocryphal Acts, such as the *ATH*, and that these Acts focus on female sexual renunciation in order to use sophisticated rhetorical and literary devices.<sup>271</sup> Cooper explains that rhetoric was important to create a following for a “public man.”

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<sup>269</sup> Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 105.

<sup>270</sup> Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, 98-9.

<sup>271</sup> Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and The Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

Through rhetoric, men were able to claim honor and power for themselves.<sup>272</sup> According to Cooper, this use of rhetoric continued through accounts of holy heroes: “The rhetorical approach to asceticism pushes back the terms of the definition to another discursive level: *accounts* of ascetic behavior themselves become performances, designed to elicit a new sense of allegiance from an audience.”<sup>273</sup>

Therefore, the accounts of heroines like Thecla was part of a strategy of acquiring power for Christianity’s “claim to moral superiority.” Furthermore, they specifically elicit allegiance for the apostles that teach the heroines in the Apocryphal Acts.<sup>274</sup> Therefore, Thecla’s continence is reflected on Paul and apocryphal authors gain more allegiance for him. The rhetorical nature of power is especially clear through the denouncement of those holding state or financial power. Thecla refuses to listen to the people in her life that hold more traditional power such as her family and local officials in order to follow the morally superior Paul. Cooper argues that the Apocryphal Acts create an alternate sense of society and power for minority Christians in the Roman empire through the use of sexually renunciant female protagonists.

Regardless of who composed the *ATH*, Thecla reached peak popularity among ancient Christians in the fourth through sixth centuries.<sup>275</sup> Barrier argues that the *Acts of*

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>275</sup> Barrier, *The Acts*, 27.

*Paul*, including the episode with Thecla, “was used widely by the early church.”<sup>276</sup> He further notes that its inclusion in the canonical list in the Codex Claromontanus, a sixth-century New Testament manuscript, indicates that the *Acts of Paul* continued to be authoritative until this time. Furthermore, during the fifth century, a second Greek text was written about Thecla: *The Life and Miracles of Thecla*. *The Life and Miracles* was written between 444 and 448CE, but the miracle stories were part of an oral tradition dating back to the fourth century.<sup>277</sup> This text is about ten times longer than the foundational Thecla *Acts*.<sup>278</sup> According to Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, medieval copyists believed it to be the work of Basil of Seleucia, but Basil was criticized by the author in the text; therefore, like the *ATH*, the author remains unknown.<sup>279</sup> *The Life and Miracles* summarizes the events in the *ATH* and then details 46 additional miracles that take place in Seleucia, emphasizing Thecla’s connection to that place, the main site of her cult.<sup>280</sup> As with the later versions of the *Life of Matrona*, *The Life and Miracles of Thecla* also alters Thecla’s story to adjust to the values at the time it was written. Davis notes an “undercurrent of misogyny” in the *Life and Miracles*: namely through statements

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>277</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 41.

<sup>278</sup> Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 10.

“concerning the moral weakness of women [which] undercut the work’s dynamic portrayals of female devotees.”<sup>281</sup>

Johnson also notes that the *Life and Miracles* attempts to paint Paul much more favorably than the *ATH*. For example, when Alexander attempts to rape Thecla in Antioch, Paul completely abandons Thecla when she needs him. In *The Life and Miracles*, Paul tells Alexander that he isn’t sure that Thecla is a woman, which Johnson argues is an attempt to help Thecla through cunning.<sup>282</sup> Although the (likely male) author of *The Life and Miracles* may have written the text with certain agendas, the lengthier text demonstrates how important Thecla remained through the fifth century.

In the first few centuries of Christianity, Thecla was a very celebrated saint and her cult continued to grow, particularly among Christian women. Thecla is often considered the first female martyr<sup>283</sup> and both texts and material culture from the first few centuries attests to just how popular Thecla was. Davis’ book *The Cult of Saint Thecla* gives a meticulous account of the material culture that survives from her cult. Davis argues that the material and textual remains of Thecla’s cult demonstrates that Thecla’s “popularity rivalled that of Mary in the early church.”<sup>284</sup> While some objects such as clay flasks, often a souvenir from a pilgrimage, or curtains could belong to any person, there are also many items found with Thecla’s image that were specifically intended for

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<sup>281</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 50.

<sup>282</sup> Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, 46.

<sup>283</sup> “Martyr” means “witness” and not necessarily someone who dies.

<sup>284</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 4.



women, for example hair combs. Furthermore, Davis has compiled a list of women named after the saint, as listed on their tombs often accompanied by the saint's picture. It was quite common for women to be named after Thecla, perhaps especially if their mother hoped their daughter would follow in the saint's holy footsteps.

While material evidence is still extant to attest to the popularity of Thecla-related pilgrimage, there also remain accounts of these pilgrimages including to Thecla's shrine, Hagia Thekla, in Seleucia. According to a fourth century travelogue by Egeria, a Spanish nun, Thecla's shrine in Seleucia was also home to semi-eremitic monastic disciples to the saint.<sup>285</sup> Along with the shrine, Egeria describes the structure as having many monastic cells for both men and women and a church at the site. During her pilgrimage to the shrine, Egeria recounts that readings of the *ATh* were part of the devotional practices of Thecla's disciples living there. According to Davis, the shrine was moved in the fifth century to a nearby cave and a small basilica was built there.

The Emperor Zeno built a larger basilica at the Hagia Thekla shrine sometime after 476. As told by Evagrius, Zeno had received a promise from Thecla that his reign would be re-established after he was usurped by Basiliskos. When Zeno had successfully returned to power, he dedicated a large church to Thecla.<sup>286</sup> According to Davis, a "flurry of architectural activity" took place at the Hagia Thekla in the second half of the fifth through the sixth century: "At least two other churches were built in this period, as well

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 38.

as a public bath, and a number of cisterns.”<sup>287</sup> Davis argues this “flurry” of expansion demonstrates the level of popularity of the saint and the rapidly growing number of pilgrims to the site.<sup>288</sup> The material evidence and accounts of pilgrims demonstrates the level of popularity Thecla maintained at least until the sixth century.

### Gendered Responses to Thecla

Although the evidence demonstrates the extensive popularity of Thecla among early Christians, there were some negative reactions to Thecla as well. Tertullian’s *On Baptism* provides the *terminus ante quem* for dating the *ATH*, but it is written with extreme condemnation. Tertullian mentions the *ATH* in order to refute multiple “wrong” teachings on baptism. His main concern is a woman of the Cainite heresy preaching that baptism was unnecessary for salvation.<sup>289</sup> In his response, he lists those that the power of baptism was conferred to including bishops, presbyters, deacons, and even laymen if the others were not present.<sup>290</sup> This leads to Tertullian’s complaint with the *ATH*.

According to Tertullian, women were not conferred with the power of baptism: “But the impudent woman, who has by all means usurped [the power] to teach, will not now too seize for herself the right of baptizing, unless some new beast will come forth

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>289</sup> Tertullian, *OB*, 1.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 17.

like the former; so that just as the one removed baptism, some other would confer it to herself.”<sup>291</sup> In the *ATH*, Thecla baptized herself in the arena and Tertullian seemed to be afraid that other women would use Thecla’s example to usurp this power.

The *ATH* reads: “she turned and saw a great trench full of water, and said, ‘Now is the exact time for me to be cleansed.’ And so she threw herself into the water and said, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, I am baptized this last day.’”<sup>292</sup> Thecla baptized herself and presumably went on to baptize others in her life of itinerant preaching. This seemed to make Tertullian very nervous and he condemned these imaginary women (because he presumably didn’t actually know of any or he would have named them like he did the Cainite woman), and possibly their supporters, because they “defend Thecla's example as a license for women's teaching and baptizing.”<sup>293</sup>

Therefore, in order to assert or protect the patriarchal structure of performing rites, Tertullian discredited *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. He asserted, “But if certain Acts of Paul, which are wrongly written of him, defend Thecla's example as a license for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that the presbyter in Asia who compiled that writing, as if he were to add to Paul's glory from his own, after being convicted and confessing that he had composed it from his love of Paul, was removed from his

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> *Acts of Paul*, 4.9.

<sup>293</sup> Tertullian, *OB*, 17.

position.”<sup>294</sup> Tertullian claimed that Thecla’s story was false, made up by a presbyter who had since been defrocked for the work of fiction.

Furthermore, Tertullian made sure to remove any sense of apostolic authority related to the *Acts*. Not only did he say they were wrongly attributed to Paul, but he further denies that Paul could have had any part in the events with Thecla. He argued, “For how credible would it seem, that he gave women the power to teach and baptize if he did even not permit women to learn resolutely? Let them be silent, he said, and consult their husbands at home.”<sup>295</sup> Tertullian quotes 1 Corinthians 14:35 in which Paul insists on women being silent in the church.<sup>296</sup> Tertullian argued that the Paul that instructed women to not speak, which in turn limits their ability to preach, could not be the same Paul that allowed Thecla to baptize herself and then called on her to be an apostle and spread the gospel.

Ironically, however, the verses Tertullian cites are themselves contested as being genuinely Pauline. Lee Johnson, among others, argues that this commandment by Paul is an interpolation. Some manuscripts have this verse in a different position in 1 Corinthians or completely separate from the rest of the text as if it were written in the margins. Furthermore, the *Codex Vaticanus* has markings that seem to indicate its fourth-century contemporaries also doubted the verses authenticity.<sup>297</sup> If Johnson’s assertion of

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<sup>294</sup> Tertullian, *OB*, 17.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

interpolation are correct, then Tertullian may also have been right: the same Paul did not tell women to be silent in churches and also commissioned Thecla to preach and baptize, but not for the reason Tertullian had in mind. Regardless of interpolation, Tertullian attempted to discredit the *ATH* in order to prevent other women from baptizing as Thecla did.

Tertullian may have been utterly opposed to Thecla, but that was not the case with all patristic writers. As with all patristic writers, Tertullian had a certain following but was not authoritative everywhere. At a time when Christian orthodoxy was in the beginning of its formations and very contested, all Christian writers were controversial. Attitudes towards Thecla, then, would be one of many ways in which these writers would differ. Susan Hylan states, “Tertullian is a very small minority rejecting *ATH*....Even Jerome, who also disputes the authorship of the *ATH*, nevertheless accepts Thecla’s story, for he places her alongside Mary as one who welcomes virgins into heaven (*Ep.* 22).”<sup>298</sup> Another patristic writer, Gregory of Nazianzus, found solace with Thecla when he withdrew to Hagia Thekla in 374 while trying to avoid an unwanted office appointment.<sup>299</sup> Moreover, many other ancient Christian sources show a very positive opinion of Thecla and her influence on Christian women specifically. Thecla’s itinerancy

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<sup>297</sup> Lee A. Johnson “In Search of the Voice of Women in the Churches: Revisiting the Command to Silence Women in I Corinthians 14: 34-35,” in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2009), 135-154.

<sup>298</sup> Susan E. Hylan, *A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 103.

<sup>299</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 5.

may have acted as an example for other women. Davis argues that Thecla's characterization as an itinerant teacher would act to encourage other women who "claimed that they inherited the right to teach from Thecla, [thus] would also have claimed the right to travel freely in order to enable themselves in that calling."<sup>300</sup>

At the end of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul finally accepts Thecla and commissions her as an apostle to spread the Gospel. As Maud Burnett McInerney points out, apostles are by definition public figures.<sup>301</sup> Women following in her footsteps would likely argue that they should act similarly and embark on a life of itinerancy. McInerney argues that it is specifically the combination of "apostle and virgin" that Tertullian found so threatening to his patriarchal vision of the church.<sup>302</sup> That is, Thecla's status as both a woman not belonging to any man and as an itinerant preacher are particularly threatening to patriarchal norms.<sup>303</sup>

Thecla's story certainly seemed to have encouraged historical women to shed familial ties and live as an itinerant. Ross Sheperd Kraemer asserts, "The specific story of Paul and Thecla is almost certainly a fabrication. But there must have been women just like Thecla, who did deny marriage and childbearing, authority and hierarchy, who taught

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>302</sup> Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins From Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 18.

<sup>303</sup> This is particularly interesting because Tertullian supported the Montanist sect which had female prophets that had left their husbands. For a look at the complicated nature of Tertullian's misogyny, see Maud Burnett McInerney's first chapter "Strange Triangle: Tertullian, Perpetua, and Thecla" in *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc*.

and baptized, who were accepted and revered by many, and who fully saw themselves within the tradition of Paul and his troublesome Corinthians.”<sup>304</sup> There are some specific examples of this in the ancient texts.

In *The Life and Miracles of Thecla*, there is a story of an itinerant woman whom Thecla saves from attackers.<sup>305</sup> Stephen Davis argues that while traditional forms of pilgrimage were taking place to Thecla sites, the woman in *Miracles* shows that solitary itinerant wandering may have also taken place among Thecla devotees.<sup>306</sup> Many women took part in pilgrimages to Thecla’s sites, particularly in Seleucia, but itinerancy may have also been popular by her example. Although probably not a lone traveler, Melania, a fourth century aristocratic woman involved in ascetic movements, is one well-known example of a historical woman who made pilgrimages to many holy sites.

Grace Stafford also notes the prevalence of female pilgrims in her article, “Early Christian Female Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Saint Menas, Saint Simeon the Elder, and Saint Thecla.” Stafford argues that shorter pilgrimage trips may have been more common for “ordinary” people that could not afford the long trips of the elite like Melania. Based on the archeological remains and literary texts extant about the three shrines she focuses on, Stafford argues that women were likely as active in pilgrimages as men in late

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<sup>304</sup> Ross Sheperd Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>305</sup> *Life and Miracles of Thecla*, 34.

<sup>306</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 71.

antiquity. Viewing pilgrimage as irregular or unsafe for women, Stafford argues is likely the result of elite male writings.<sup>307</sup>

Stafford demonstrates this with three miracles preserved in Greek and Coptic collections in which lone female pilgrims are rescued by Saint Menas from assault on the way to the saint's shrine. These miracles are similar to the miracles of Thecla saving lone female travelers in *The Life and Miracles of Thecla*. Stafford argues that although these stories illustrate the anxieties about travel for pilgrims, particularly considering "there was never a decision that rendered a woman completely safe," a "kernel of truth" is also clear in these miracle rescues: women traveled to pilgrimage sites by themselves.

What we should be sure to note is that for these miracles to be effective, they needed to represent recognisable situations that the reader could relate to. While it is easy to view them as entirely fictional, we should consider that some miracle accounts could have been inspired by real events. Women were not always in a situation where they could travel with male protection and many pilgrimages, especially short-distance ones, may have been made alone or in the company of other women.<sup>308</sup>

Based on Stafford's argument, not only did women likely travel alone to pilgrimage sites, but specifically to Thecla's shrine as well. Therefore, it was likely that some of these women did in fact do so following Thecla's example of itinerancy.

Furthermore, Thecla is a model for women who defy their families in order to maintain their virginity and reject marriage. Fourth or fifth century Syncretica is an example of this: she left her family's home, lived in the tomb of a deceased relative, and

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<sup>307</sup> Grace Stafford, "Early Christian Female Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Saint Menas, Saint Simeon the Elder, and Saint Thecla," *Studies of Late Antiquity* 3, no. 2 (2019): 253-4.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.



cut off her hair. Her *Life* claims she did so as a “disciple of the blessed Thecla.”<sup>309</sup> Tertullian may have had reason after all to worry then; “This evidence suggests finally that devotion to Saint Thecla- the practice of emulating her life- may in fact have functioned as a subversive, social stimulus in the lives of fifth-century Alexandrian virgins, prompting women like Syncletica to eschew their roles within urban households and to venture into the desert.”<sup>310</sup> It is unclear if Syncletica was a historical person, but because she is recorded as following Thecla’s example, it certainly seems within the imagination of antique writers that real women would want to emulate Thecla in this way.

Therefore, Thecla appears to have inspired women to turn away from familial ties and turn to itinerancy in defiance of social norms. Davies further argues

The [apocryphal] Acts do not condemn marriage per se, but they do condemn the sexual intercourse entailed by marriage; and they encourage women to assert themselves to refuse to submit to the desires of their husbands. If their husbands object, and refuse to allow their wives to live continently, then the flight of women from home and spouse is urged.<sup>311</sup>

In the case of Syncletica, she turned to itinerancy to avoid marriage and its sexual activity, but Davies points out that married women may have also been inspired to itinerancy in order to avoid sexual activity with their husband and breaking not only filial ties to parents but marital ties as well. Tertullian may not have known specific examples

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<sup>309</sup> *The Life of Syncletica*, 8.

<sup>310</sup> Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 111.

<sup>311</sup> Davies, *The Revolt*, 110.

of this occurring, however, the crowd of Antiochian women in the *ATH* that cried out for Thecla's freedom and embraced her afterwards may have been enough to scare him. According to McInerney, "Thecla, in fact, violates all late antique models for proper feminine behavior and thus challenges socially conservative ecclesiastical hierarchy which Tertullian was trying so hard to establish in the first years after his conversion to Christianity, and which, as we have seen, he did not renounce even after embracing the New Prophecy."<sup>312</sup>

Although McInerney's use of "all" to say that Thecla violates "all" models of proper feminine behavior is not accurate given the several examples of well-received pious women performing similar actions that are discussed above, McInerney's argument that these actions would certainly be threatening to Tertullian's view of ecclesiastical hierarchy is valid. Tertullian, therefore, condemned and denied *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* because Thecla was threatening to patriarchal standards both by renouncing filial ties and by claiming authority to preach and baptize in the church, and in doing so she inspired other women to do the same. Although Tertullian may have disapproved of Thecla, the women discussed above that emulated her must have found her story quite empowering.

However, more often Thecla's story seems to influence a more domestic version of asceticism. For example, Gregory of Nyssa also seems to approve of Thecla and her influence over his sister Macrina. In his *Life of Saint Macrina*, Gregory tells readers that

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<sup>312</sup> McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 35-6.

after Macrina was born, his mother, Emmelia, had a vision of Thecla and made Thecla Macrina's secret name.<sup>313</sup> Gregory must have believed that Thecla "of great fame among virgins," had greatly impacted his sister's asceticism, as he gives this explanation before the accounts of Macrina's extreme piety. It was Thecla's model of piety, particularly her virginity, which seems to be emphasized when Gregory exalts her.

Thecla would have been influential for female piety, especially if women were the primary source for the distribution of her story. If we turn to the example of *The Life of Saint Macrina*, there is a specific example of a woman spreading Thecla's story: we can assume that Macrina's mother, Emmelia, told her Thecla's story because she secretly named Macrina after the protomartyr. Furthermore, if we consider Davis' material evidence, Thecla's story seemed to be popular enough to continue to appear on women's combs from late antiquity.<sup>314</sup> Women seemed to have been deeply involved with devotion to Thecla.

Moreover, Thecla's story may have also been spread because of its disassociation from patriarchal marriage. According to Burrus, "The very structure of the chastity story presents the husband and political ruler as villains and opponents of women."<sup>315</sup> When analyzing *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the structure of villainous men can clearly be seen: Thecla rejects men, Paul is cowardly, the animals that attack her are also male,

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<sup>313</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*. The use of a secret name is not something that is common in other literature from the time and seems to emphasize Macrina's likeness in virtues to Thecla.

<sup>314</sup> Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, 192.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

while on the other hand the lioness protects and dies for her, and the crowd of women shout for her to be set free. With the exception of her mother, all the women in Thecla's story are painted in a positive light and all the men, including Paul, are portrayed negatively.

Therefore, the storytellers who disseminated Thecla's story may have been (married) women who felt themselves to be in conflict with patriarchal marriage. Burrus argues folklore may explain this: "The folk-story functions 'cathartically' by enabling the expression of repressed emotions. The folk story also serves as wish fulfillment insofar as it enacts pleasurable fantasy which is not being realized in the 'real world.'" <sup>316</sup> Women who felt trapped within patriarchal marriage may have felt a cathartic release through the story of Thecla in which a young woman defies her mother, refuses her fiancé, and fights off other would-be male dominators, especially when all her would be dominators are met with supernatural intervention.

Furthermore, this may be the case with our known Thecla storyteller- Emmelia. Gregory of Nyssa said that his mother did not wish to get married, but was forced to by her circumstances.<sup>317</sup> Perhaps Macrina's mother secretly named her daughter Thecla and told her the story in order to work out her own feelings of being forced into marriage when desiring a life outside of it. With this real example of a married woman propagating Thecla's story among the other reasons, there seems to be adequate evidence that women

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>317</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*.

were heavily involved in the spread of Thecla devotion as part of their negotiations with patriarchal structures.

These married women probably passed on these desires to their daughters, as is the case with Macrina. As previously mentioned, Davis demonstrates how common it was for women to be named after the saint and argues that it may have been the most common female Christian name sake after Mary in late antique Egypt.<sup>318</sup> He further argues “the evidence for women naming their children after Thecla indicate that her cult was active not just among monastic women but also among women in families and households. The practice of naming female children after Thecla may even be seen as a popular expression of the urge to imitate the female martyr among married women.”<sup>319</sup>

Macrina, as well as other daughters, may have been named Thecla in order to urge them to follow Thecla’s example of piety. In fact, Davis argues, “The life of perpetual chastity as exemplified by Thecla (and Macrina) remained the preeminent model and goal; mothers who came belatedly to the virtue of sexual continence could only hope to see the goal truly fulfilled in the lives of their daughters.” This seems especially likely for Macrina when considering her mother had intended lifelong virginity but was only able to achieve the status of a continent widow; she was able to live out her goal vicariously through her daughter Macrina, secretly named Thecla.

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<sup>318</sup> Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*, 201.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

Gregory preserves the life of his sister in order that her asceticism might be an example for others just as Thecla's was an example for her. As Thecla was especially known for her virginity, or to be "virgin *par excellence*" as Davis says,<sup>320</sup> Gregory seems to have been emphasizing Macrina's virginity by mentioning her secret name of Thecla and the protomartyr's "fame among virgins." *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* especially emphasize salvation through chastity. When Thecla first listens to Paul from her window, Paul is espousing his beatitudes. While these beatitudes list many forms of being blessed, several focus on chastity. Paul's beatitudes emphasize chastity, but especially virginity, as the source of salvation.<sup>321</sup>

This seems to be reflected in Gregory's account of Macrina's life. On her deathbed, Macrina reassures her grieving brother by telling him that she was destined to be glorified in the afterlife.<sup>322</sup> On her deathbed, Macrina feels assured of her salvation which may be attributed to Paul's beatitudes in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Hylén explains, "Calling Macrina... 'Thecla' not only associates [her] with Thecla's virginity, but also may suggest that [she] attained status similar to that of Thecla."<sup>323</sup> Because Macrina's life emulated Thecla's, especially her virginity, Macrina, or her brother and author of her *Life*, may have felt assured of her salvation.

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<sup>320</sup> Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*, 21.

<sup>321</sup> *Acts of Paul*, 3.5-6.

<sup>322</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*.

<sup>323</sup> Hylén, *Modest Apostle*, 100.

Furthermore, Gregory may have believed Macrina's monastic enterprises were a result of her association with Thecla. Macrina was able to bring Emmelia in line with her own asceticism and the two created a monastic community of women within their home. Peter Brown notes that female monastic communities were often more organically created in this manner in the eastern part of the empire at this time; wealthy ascetic women tended to remain within the family home and created a community of virgins around them: "Virgins tended, rather, to coagulate into small groups in a more frankly organic manner. Intense friendships between female companions played an essential role."<sup>324</sup> Macrina's relationship with her mother was the intense bond required for the community that was then opened to other women. Macrina seems to have preceded her brothers in asceticism and may have set the example for theirs, especially because she set up both male and female monastic communities on her family's estate.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore, Hylen puts forth an argument that Thecla inspired Macrina and women like her to live ascetic lives: "[Thecla's] boldness and bravery are not forgotten, and her memory validates other enterprising women like Macrina, Melania, and Olympias."<sup>326</sup> Thecla's asceticism, therefore, may have influenced Macrina's monastic enterprises.

While Thecla may have inspired Macrina, much to Gregory's delight, to a life of asceticism, this is a radically different form of asceticism than previously discussed: the

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<sup>324</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 265.

<sup>325</sup> Hylen, *A Modest Apostle*, 99-100.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

wandering preacher, Thecla. As Davis aptly notes, “However in the case of Macrina, the identification of Thecla as a role model was not meant to augur a break from her family. To the contrary, Macrina’s ascetic discipline was situated early on within her mother’s household.”<sup>327</sup> Unlike the example of Syncletica, Macrina’s asceticism does not force her to give up any familial ties. Macrina does not leave the home and embrace itinerancy as Thecla did. This form of asceticism could be quite less threatening to patriarchal norms: Macrina does not transgress into public space, but remains in the private sphere which was considered the proper place for a virtuous woman.

If Macrina had embarked on a life of itinerancy and transgressed patriarchal social norms, it is possible that Gregory may not have approved so highly of his sister and her emulation of Thecla. Kate Cooper explains that public men were constantly defending their honor and emphasizing their ability to disassociate themselves from culturally perceived weaknesses.<sup>328</sup> Patristic writers, as mentioned above, were public and controversial figures that also took part in this performance of honor. Cooper argues that their female relatives were part of this claim of honor: “the modesty of his wife and female relatives was of use to [a man] only if it was widely acknowledged.”<sup>329</sup> Therefore, Macrina is lauded as a performance of her brother’s honor. Her performance of ascetic virtues, then, reflect upon Gregory. It is unlikely that he would have written about her in such a way that would reflect badly for him, including if she transgressed gender

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<sup>327</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 63.

<sup>328</sup> Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 12.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 13.



boundaries, such as through itinerancy. Perhaps we would have never heard of Macrina at all if this had been the case. This is also indicative of the move toward more domesticated monasticism, especially among women, in the fourth century. These later *vitae*, such as Macrina, may have been constructed with the purpose of encouraging this more domestic version of monasticism for women and to discourage the limited amount of itinerancy done by women in the couple of centuries prior, thus “taming” the subversive elements of Thecla’s example.

Although the reception of Thecla was generally positive, it focused on very specific parts of her story. Similar to how Upson-Saia notes hagiographers focus on gender-crossing saints’ femininity within the text, the discourse around Thecla also focused on her femininity. Furthermore, imagery of Thecla included in the material study by Davis either portrays Thecla in women’s clothing or none at all, which might intentionally emphasize her female body. This nudity in imagery is in contrast to the text in which Thecla’s naked body is covered by the cloud of fire in the arena, which further suggests that aesthetically, the idea is specifically to highlight Thecla’s female body, eschewing the depiction of a powerful miracle with biblical references to focus on biological sex. Whereas the *ATH* attempts to occlude Thecla’s gender by pointing to her status as a latter-day embodiment of the people of God, clothed with cloud and fire, later depictions unveil her, focusing on her assigned gender.

Similar to how Eugenia was depicted in medieval art according to Robert Mills, the imagery of Thecla avoided her masculine presentation, or even her holy gender

queerness. Mills notes, “Whereas textual renditions of the legend highlighted the saint’s perceived status as a gender crosser, image makers tended to maintain an overriding emphasis on Eugenia’s femininity, thereby rendering invisible or seriously underplaying her temporary acquisition of male identity and prerogative.”<sup>330</sup> Mills notes that most images depict Eugenia after her return to feminine presentation, but some images, meant to depict her during the time she would have presented as a man, alter her image in favor of a feminine one. For example, a fifteenth-century piece “shows Eugenia clearly dressed as a female nun, replete with veil, rather than as a tonsured male abbot.”<sup>331</sup> Mills gives another example of a baptism scene at the monastery in which Eugenia’s long hair covers her breasts in contrast with her fellow new monks already tonsured. Eugenia’s hagiography makes it clear that Eugenia would be in masculine presentation during these scenes; however, according to Mills, the alteration of Eugenia’s gender presentation in the artwork “suggests her masculine performance has been filtered through an emphatically feminizing lens.”<sup>332</sup> Furthermore, Mills argues this in contrast to the images which captures the moment of Eugenia’s gender queerness by depicting her in masculine garb and tonsured hair but exposing her breasts.

Although I agree with Mills that these images capture gender queerness rarely seen in ancient and medieval Christian imagery, the emphasis on Eugenia’s exposed

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<sup>330</sup> Robert Mills, “Visibly Trans? Picturing Saint Eugenia in Medieval Art,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 544.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

breasts seems to continue the “feminizing lens” Mills spoke of with the other images. Thecla likewise is depicted in art naked.<sup>333</sup> This emphasis on Thecla and Eugenia’s naked bodies reinforce their category as assigned female. These depictions of Thecla avoid her masculine gender presentation and emphasize her naked body, instead of miraculous occlusions, in order to filter Thecla through a feminizing lens and elide her gender transgressions.

Furthermore, texts that mention Thecla do so in very feminine terms. Those that revere Thecla view her as the pinnacle of Christian feminine virtue through her commitment to her virginity. The women of Thecla’s cult identify with her in her escape from the bonds of patriarchal Roman marriage. Whether they do so by running away from their family to live in a tomb like Syncletica, or retreating within their own home like Macrina, these women maintain their virginity and reject marriage in emulation of Thecla. Furthermore, holy women that emulated Thecla, like Macrina, are viewed as “manly,” further demonstrating the gender continuum in late antiquity. However, her change in gender presentation does not seem to be encouraged as an acceptable expression of masculinity for those assigned women. While there are many other stories about women who identify with Thecla, most do not seem to take on her masculine presentation. Throughout most of these positive references to Thecla, her change in gender presentation is never brought up.

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<sup>333</sup> For example, the limestone roundel relief depicting Saint Thecla with lions and angels (Kansas City, Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum) found in Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*, fig. 29.

Moreover, in the clearly negative response to Thecla that remains extant, there is also no mention of her gender presentation. Much like the positive response of Thecla, the negative focuses strictly on her status as assigned female. In *On Baptism*, Tertullian condemns Thecla and those who use her example for accessing authority that he thought did not belong to them. Tertullian mentions the *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* in order to refute multiple “wrong” teachings on baptism, such as the possibility of women baptizing based on the example of Thecla, who baptized herself in the arena. Tertullian was afraid that other women would use Thecla’s example to usurp this power.

Although these examples of Thecla’s authority may demonstrate her masculine embodiment, such as discussed with Matrona’s authority, Tertullian continues to view Thecla specifically in terms of her assigned female status. His only complaint against Thecla and those that use her example is that they are going outside of their gender roles in the act of baptism. While he attempts to deny the authenticity of the *ATH* through the rumor of the defrocked presbyter, he never directly attacks Thecla on basis of gender presentation. Furthermore, when he attempts to further dissuade readers of Thecla’s authenticity, he appeals to Paul’s supposed restrictions against women. Tertullian repeats 1 Corinthians 14:35 in which women are told to remain silent in the church. Again, Tertullian attempts to deny Thecla’s story based on her categorization as a woman. Tertullian, therefore, condemns Thecla because he strictly views her as female, but performing masculine roles. Tertullian argues that Thecla’s actions, specifically baptizing and preaching, are exclusively male roles. Although Tertullian may not speak against

Thecla's gender presentation, he perceives her masculine performance as a threat to his views on gender within ecclesiastical roles.

Those who revered Thecla may have elided the change of gender presentation in order to focus on her feminine virtues. Thecla is instead upheld as the famous virgin, or as having "fame among virgins" as Gregory of Nyssa said. Although celibacy and virginity are encouraged for both men and women, men had certain ecclesiastical positions of authority that implied such virtues. Women on the other hand had little according to male patristic traditions. One of the few positions within Christianity was the college of virgins that for female virgins in the church that dedicated themselves to lifelong virginity. Even the word *virgo* is a feminine noun in Latin and can mean both a virgin as well as a young woman. Therefore, while virginity could be construed as a gender-neutral term, it is often viewed as feminine and understood as a particularly idealized virtue for Christian women. Therefore, when Thecla is exalted solely for her famous virginity, she is exalted in a way that emphasizes her femininity.

Both the positive and negative receptions of Thecla by ancient Christians completely ignore Thecla's gender variance. It is unclear why this is, although a number of different factors likely played a role, including a desire to "domesticate" Thecla's example on the part of her supporters and a general condemnation of her masculine performances on the part of her detractors. However, as ascetic movements shifted from eremitical to coenobitical structures, it is likely that the authors of these texts, predominantly men, would encourage women to remain in the private sphere and

discourage their itinerancy, which is the portion of the story that we see a change in Thecla's gender presentation. Ancient Christian writers then, focus on her femininity in order to coopt Thecla and promote the patriarchal values of the later centuries.

### **Current Scholarship on Thecla's Gender and New Possible Approaches**

While the lack of any discourse on Thecla's gender presentation in ancient texts is confusing, the lack of this discourse in current scholarship is problematic. Moreover, those that do address it, often treat it as a means to an end. They treat Thecla's masculine presentation as a simple way to negotiate patriarchal structures. For example, many discuss the dangers for women on the roads of the Roman Empire. Referring to any chaste woman from the apocryphal acts, Virginia Burrus states, "When she leaves the house, she is crossing boundaries, intruding into the male world and provoking disapproval, hostility, and suspicion of infidelity."<sup>334</sup>

Thecla renounced all attachment to men, and all familial ties for that matter, and this places her in a vulnerable position in the patriarchal society of the Roman Empire according to many current scholars. According to Stephen Davis, "women who travelled, especially those who travelled alone, faced ever-present danger of physical or sexual violence against their persons."<sup>335</sup> The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* confirm this. In Antioch when Alexander asks Paul about Thecla, Paul replies, "I don't know the woman whom

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<sup>334</sup> Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*, 90.

<sup>335</sup> Davis, *The Cult*, 33.

you speak of, nor is she mine.”<sup>336</sup> Upon hearing that Thecla does not belong to any man present, Alexander immediately attempted to rape Thecla in the street. Scholars, including Burrus and Davis, posit that this is the reason that Thecla cuts her hair and dresses as a man at the end of the story: to protect herself from further sexual assaults.<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, because Thecla has renounced all ties to men, she is particularly at risk of sexual assault due to cultural presumptions that she is an “unchaste woman.”

It is true that by Roman cultural standards, Thecla is particularly vulnerable to attack. Women were not expected to be without familial ties, especially those to a man. While Roman women did have some rights and freedoms that women in other cultures, Athenian women for example, did not have, they were still under the authority of the men in their lives. A Roman woman could control their own inheritance for example, but their marriages, and divorces for that matter, were still largely controlled by their fathers, with some exceptions. As a woman with no ties to a man, Thecla was entirely independent. This was not only against the norm, but likely very threatening to those invested in maintaining the patriarchal structures of the Roman Empire. Therefore, notions of purity were used to keep women within the confines of the domestic space. Women in public without supervision were assumed to be unchaste. These cultural norms around purity set in place a system where women that do not follow the norms are much more at risk of sexual assault. Or at least, these norms informed, or reflected, beliefs that women were

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<sup>336</sup> *Acts of Paul*, 4.1.

<sup>337</sup> Although Davis points to possible other reasons such as enacting Galatians call for equality in baptism or as a sign of their “radical break” from society.

particularly in danger when in public outside of supervision. Much like rape culture today, myths about rape being primarily by strangers or as the result of women traveling alone in dark alleys, as opposed to the reality that the majority of sexual assault is committed by someone the victim knows, function to distract from the reality of sexual assault and control women. Thecla's near rape by Alexander may have served a similar purpose for ancient readers and scholar's association of Thecla's masculinity to her safety from assault may further perpetuate this aspect of current rape culture. However, because Thecla was nearly raped in Antioch, these issues should be considered when examining Thecla's example of masculine gender presentation, but this should not be the only explanation for her gender variance.

To explain away Thecla's masculine presentation as only a means to avoid violence is to make a cisnormative assumption about her gender identity. Such an interpretation only serves to flatten the character of Thecla and reinforce ideas about gender that naturalize gender in line with sex. By taking into account Queer and Transgender studies approaches and theories, we can understand Thecla's gender in such a way that does not reflect a compulsion towards cisnormativity and, therefore, does not commit epistemic violence against gender non-conforming people.. This interpretation looks at Thecla's performance, rather than her assigned sex, in order to understand how her behavior constructs a masculine embodiment, both through her appearance and her actions.



The protection against rape argument particularly falls flat when we consider that women are not the only victims of sexual assault. Men were raped in the ancient world just as they are today. While it is true that women are and were more likely to face sexual violence, there are texts that record the fears of men regarding rape. In Julia Watts Belser's *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction: Gender, Sex, and Disability in the Ruins of Jerusalem*, she discusses the fear of rape the Jewish men felt when they were captured during the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century (contemporary to when Thecla supposedly lived).

Belser recounts a section of the Bevlī Gittin in which the Jewish captives discuss that it would be better to jump into the sea and drown than to suffer rape in Roman captivity. After the female captives jump off the ship to drown, the male captives realize they must as well, because, “If women, for whom this is the accustomed manner [of sex], respond in such a way, | Then we for whom this is not the accustomed manner, should do so as well.”<sup>338</sup> The men in this Rabbinic text decided that they too should commit suicide over the likelihood of facing rape as slaves. Within the Roman Empire, slaves had no rights, including over their own bodies, and rape of slaves by their masters was common. Although this is a particular case in which these men were facing slavery and a loss of all bodily autonomy, this shows that the Roman world was not without rape of men. Thecla taking on a masculine presentation would certainly not be a guarantee against rape in the Roman Empire. This explanation is demonstrative of the compulsion to rationalize

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<sup>338</sup> Julia Watts Belser, *Rabbinic Tales of Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 53.

gender variance within modern interpretations of gender-crossing saints as well as a perhaps unconscious perpetuation of our own rape culture which denies that men can be the victim of sexual assault.

A similar situation to Thecla's also occurred in the seventeenth century: Antoinette Bourignon dressed in a hermit's habit and leaves her family's home. According to Marie Delcourt, Bourignon's masculine attire did not keep her out of danger during her travels.<sup>339</sup> Recognizing her "as a woman," a soldier attempted to rape her when she took lodging in a village.<sup>340</sup> The village priest then concealed her and called for the archbishop. The archbishop told her that dressing in masculine garb was a mistake and dangerous. Although scholars often view masculine attire as protection against rape while female bodied ascetics travel, these events demonstrate that this is not the case. The soldier attempted to rape her despite her masculine garb and the archbishop further advises the against assuming masculine presentation. It seems that the archbishop viewed the danger she faced as a result of the masculine garb rather than as protection against that danger.

The later version of Thecla's hagiography also seems to suggest that masculine appearance may not protect one from rape. When Thecla first begins to travel with Paul in the *ATH*, she offers to cut her hair.<sup>341</sup> In the *Life and Miracles of Thecla*, it appears that

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<sup>339</sup> Marie Delcourt, "Female Saints in Masculine Clothing," *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (London: Studio Books, 1961).

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>341</sup> *Acts of Paul*, 3.25.

she does alter her appearance at this point. When Alexander asks if Paul knows Thecla in the *Life and Miracles*, Paul says he's not sure if she is a woman. Although it is unclear from the text if she did cut her hair, Johnson argues Paul's statement suggests "her appearance is certainly already male to the degree that Paul can reasonably suggest she is not a woman."<sup>342</sup> Alexander's attempt to rape Thecla despite a more masculine presentation seems to suggest that even in the fifth century, masculine presentation would not be a guarantee against rape. As Stafford argues about lone travelers, there is no decision that leaves a woman completely safe. The assumption that Thecla changed her presentation in order to make travel safer is a cisnormative interpretation that overstates the historical evidence to erase gender variance as a historical possibility.

Furthermore, more contemporary studies demonstrate that as a community, transgender individuals are at a much higher risk of sexual assault than cisgender individuals. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies and Subcultural Lives* by J. Halberstam demonstrates that often transgender individuals face sexual assault because they are transgender. Halberstam examines the case of Brandon Teena, who was brutally raped and murdered because he was a transgender man. Halberstam analyzes these acts of violence against Brandon to show that they were an attempt to reinforce cis and hetero normativity, commonly referred to as "corrective rape," onto Brandon. Brandon is certainly not alone in facing sexual violence because of transphobia.

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<sup>342</sup> Johnson, *Life and Miracles*, 47.

According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, sixty-three percent of those surveyed reported experiencing a serious act of discrimination from a list including physical and sexual assault due to bias. Furthermore, twenty-three percent reported experiencing “catastrophic” levels of discrimination, meaning that they experienced at least three of the major life-threatening acts of discrimination from that list.<sup>343</sup> Although it would be anachronistic to say that Thecla was a transgender man or that this normativity would be the same in this ancient culture, certain similarities can be found within cultures that value heteropatriarchal marriage for its reproductive function.

A lone female bodied person that presented themselves as a man, might face an *increased risk* of sexual violence because of that presentation in such cultures. Just as the archbishop explained this danger to the nearly raped Antoinette Bourignon, male attire could be viewed as more of a danger for a female bodied itinerant like Thecla. If someone discovered Thecla’s female body, they could have raped her because of her rejection of heteropatriarchal standards for women in order to reinforce those standards through acts of physical violence on her female body. Therefore, transgender studies demonstrates that masculine presentation is not a guarantee against rape as many scholars have said about Thecla’s presentation.

Looking specifically at Transgender studies is particularly helpful for interpreting Thecla. In the introduction of the *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker

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<sup>343</sup> Jaime Grant, Lisa Mottet, Justin Tanis, et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 8.

defines the field of Transgender studies as work that makes visible norms and the “cultural mechanisms” that work to suppress subversion.<sup>344</sup> Transgender studies further disrupts and denaturalizes normative linkages between sexed bodies and gendered identities, or “sense of self.” Thecla is part of this work as someone who exists in multiple gendered presentations, first in a traditionally feminine way and then a masculine one. This change in presentation in an assigned female person disrupts and denaturalizes gender norms as perceived within the modern gender binary.

Rather she demonstrates that gender is not fixed, which was clearly the case within her own cultural context as demonstrated in chapter 1. Furthermore, Thecla’s gender presentation takes place after several adaptations of performances that were viewed as masculine, such as baptizing and preaching. Although it is impossible to reach Thecla’s interiority and gender identity, we see that her presentation changes, seemingly without any hesitation from Thecla, when she embarks on a new life that will further continue these acts of masculine performance. One critique that transgender studies often articulates against queer studies is that transgender studies is more “attuned to questions of embodiment and identity.”<sup>345</sup> While we can’t know how Thecla may have identified in postmodern terms of gender, she does seem to embody masculinity in her new life.

We can further think about Thecla’s gender presentation using performative theories presented in Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. Butler argued that while gender

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<sup>344</sup> Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” *Routledge Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Wittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

may seem natural and fixed, it is produced through sedimented discourse: through performance of gender within the confines of gender norms, gender is constantly re-produced. But while these performances create and re-create gender norms, performance can also be subversive. In Butler's line of thinking, gender is not something one is, but rather something one does. If we apply this line of thinking to Thecla, Thecla's gender is not in a fixed and natural state. Rather through performance within traditional feminine norms, she produces her gender within feminine terms. Therefore, when she alters that presentation and performance, she produces her gender as a masculine embodiment.

### **Conclusion**

We must consider that nearly all aspects of Thecla's life have changed at the end of her *Acts*: she has taken and defended her vow of lifelong virginity (perhaps acting manly according to the literature associating holy women with "manly" virtues), she has baptized herself as a Christian, and she is now setting forth on a life of lone itinerant preaching. At this point of the story, her entire performance of self alters, including her gender performance. As pointed out by Tertullian's condemnation of Thecla, baptizing and preaching are understood as masculine activities. And with the many dangers of the Roman roads, itinerancy is especially viewed as a masculine role. Thecla's gender, then is not only embodied through her change in attire, but also in the roles she takes on. This embodiment is neither fixed by her sexed body nor does it fit within a modern gender binary. Rather it is indicative of gender variance within late antiquity. Tertullian viewed

this gender variance as a usurpation of masculine authority based on Thecla's performances. Tertullian's condemnation, then, attests to Thecla's masculine performance and embodiment.

However, Tertullian is not alone in viewing gender crossing as an attempt to gain authority as several modern scholars have rationalized gender crossing this way as well. As current interpreters of Thecla's gender presentation and performance, however, we could view this as further evidence of a masculine embodiment. This masculine authority was understood to take place and exercised within male bodies. Therefore, these actions enacting what were considered masculine roles were as much part of Thecla's gender-crossing as her appearance.

This constructs a masculine embodiment that, as Stryker says, completely disrupts the normative expectations for a person like Thecla in ancient Mediterranean society. If gender is something that Thecla does and not what she is, at this point Thecla produces a masculine self through her performance in roles culturally constructed as masculine. Furthermore, according to Butler, these subversive performances disrupts the gender system and not just the individual.<sup>346</sup> When Thecla resists gender norms, it affects these norms more broadly as they require sedimentation to be reinforced as natural. This is evident with Thecla as her gender performance ripples out and is emulated by later performances of holiness by people assigned female.

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<sup>346</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

This understanding of Thecla is a much more complex one than the flattened version in which she changes her appearance only to avoid sexual violence. No other work on Thecla seems to take any of these theories on gender and embodiment into account. And, frankly, this is problematic. By explaining away Thecla's gender variance, scholars elide Thecla's masculine presentation and embodiment. Furthermore, this impulse to create explanations for ancient gender variance goes well beyond Thecla. As the first gender-crossing saint, she not only sets an example for later gender-crossing saint, but the scholarship also seems to continue applying cisnormative historical narrative to those later gender-crossing saints as well. This is a problematic trend in ancient history, then, to elide all gender variance in our understanding of the past, despite its clear evidence and historical beliefs concerning gender as malleable. This cisnormative approach to Thecla, and those like her, only serves to naturalize gender and reinforce anachronistic ideas of a fixed gender dependent on sex. However, by analyzing Thecla, and others like her, with a transgender studies approach, we recognize the past with the fullness and complexity these figures deserve.



## Conclusion

This project has analyzed gender-crossing saints whose lives would have spanned the first through sixth centuries. In all of the hagiographies examined here, these saints, though assigned female, constructed masculine embodiments through their presentations and performances within culturally defined norms of masculinity. These figures transgressed gender boundaries within their cultural context, yet they were revered by Christian communities for their holiness. The writers of these hagiographers certainly convey this holiness to their audiences not only by writing about their extreme ascetic practices, but also by attributing supporting miracles to them. These miracles seem to indicate to readers a divine recognition of the holiness of these saints as they were, as they lived, and as they presented themselves.

According to Kristi Upson-Saia, these hagiographers seemed intent on emphasizing these saints' status as female. Those within the narrative regularly recognize these saints as holy men, yet upon the revelation of their body they seem to become holy women once again both for these characters and in how they are remembered by late antique Christians. However, for contemporary scholars to continue this narrative without leaving a possibility for a masculine or non-normative identity and self of these subjects reinforces bodily essentialism as the foundation of gender and imposes modern cisnormative binary epistemology on an ancient culture unlike our own.

Although this project ends in late antiquity, stories of gender crossing continue into the medieval church. One of the most well-known examples (who was constantly brought up any time I told someone what my dissertation was about) was Joan of Arc. In

fifteenth-century France, Joan set out to Charles VII with a message she said she received from God that she was to save France and lead Charles to his official coronation. She arrived in men's clothing. Charles, as well as others after, had her checked to confirm both her female body and her virginal status.<sup>347</sup> Joan was able to convince Charles and his ecclesiastical investigators of the genuineness of her claim and she eventually led French armies into battle. She continued her use of masculine attire, including her use of armor when entering battle. Eventually, Joan was captured by the enemy and sent to England to stand trial in an ecclesiastic court. Most of Joan's account of her life are found in these court records.

Joan's masculine dress is one of the primary concerns of the ecclesiastical court. Joan maintained throughout that her attire is at the order of the divine voices she hears and was adamant that she would not change to feminine attire under any circumstances. According to Valerie Hotchkiss, an early literary account, the *Chronique de la Pucelle*, claims that Joan defends her clothing that they were "necessary for warfare," and "male clothing protects her from sexual advances or abuse."<sup>348</sup> However, Hotchkiss notes that if Joan had actually used this defense at her trial it "would have exonerated her from any charges of wrongdoing, since protection of virginity, as even one of her enemies admitted, legitimated transvestism in the eyes of the church."<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> I think it is important to note here that virginity is a social construct and the hymen is not an accurate way to determine someone's sexual activity or lack thereof.

<sup>348</sup> Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 52.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

Hotchkiss notes that Joan was questioned about her clothes nearly as much as she was about the voices she heard. Hotchkiss notes “Although the veracity of Jeanne’s visions might be debated, the reality of her appearance offered incontrovertible proof of transgression.”<sup>350</sup> Therefore, Joan’s masculine clothing and refusal to change without a command from God, was an important part of Joan’s conviction and subsequent execution. She probably refused to exculpate her dress on pragmatic terms, and she was burned as a heretic. Furthermore, Joan’s body was exposed to the crowds, likely an additional humiliation because of her refusal to give up transgressive dress, before completely burning.<sup>351</sup>

Many of the circumstances for Joan of Arc differ from the hagiographies examined here. For example, it is clear to everyone that she is female and she never claims to be or to desire to be a man. Nevertheless, Joan is another clear example of gender variance within a discourse of holiness. Joan may have been executed based on the decision of the ecclesiastical court, but she was soon after made a saint by the same Roman Catholic church. As with the saints focused on throughout this project, Joan is found to exhibit a holiness despite her transgression against what some have considered to be the scriptural condemnation of cross-dressing. Furthermore, she is not the last to do so. Gender variance and its association with holiness, then, is not confined to a late antique popular genre. Although the height of popularity for these stories may have been during that late antiquity, gender variance continued throughout many Christian periods,

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>351</sup> Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*.

with perhaps the most famous example of all coming many centuries later. The example and reception of Joan of Arc further demonstrates that these hagiographies were not just stories meant to amuse and teach the values of the writers, but that they are a reflection of gender variance within these cultures.

It is evident from ancient sources that gender variance did exist as part of Christian ascetic practice. The council of Gangra demonstrates the existence of such communities through their condemnation. Eustathius and his followers seemed intent on ascetic practice that transcended gender, which appears to have meant what would be deemed as cross-dressing by those assigned female within that community. Furthermore, Matrona is considered to have been an actual person, though it is unknown if any of the other figures were.

In some sense, it is irrelevant if the specific individuals in these hagiographies were historical people. Their stories seem to reflect real practices of gender-crossing happening within Christian communities. They certainly reflect their audiences' acceptance of some degree of sanctity associated with gender fluidity. Although their hagiographers seem intent on not encouraging others to follow in their gender transgressions, it appears they were already in practice among some communities and individuals. These saints are praised as holy men within their narratives and as holy women within their ritualized memorials; however, what they truly represent is the existence of a holy gender variance.

## The Insistence on Womanhood

As established in this dissertation, the current historiographic treatment of these gender-crossing figures imposes a cisnormative historical narrative. This narrative does not fully reflect the sex/gender system within the cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean, nor does it reflect the gender variance that seems to be present throughout historical time periods and cultures outside of western modernity (and within western modernity but largely ignored and condemned). This narrative is largely maintained through the repeated *apologia* for gender crossing. By giving explanations that gender crossing was necessary for their negotiation of patriarchal structure, such as family, religious hierarchies, or rape culture, scholars have denied the possibility of internal motives or the diversity of gender expression.

The propagation of cisnormativity may be unintentional in some cases due to the gender system of which many scholars are part. As members of western societies, we are socialized into certain ideas about gender normativity, including cisnormativity.<sup>352</sup> As Judith Butler argues, gender norms become naturalized through generations of repetition.<sup>353</sup> This repetition creates an ideology in which femininity is associated with female bodies and masculinity with male bodies. J. Halberstam, argues “This widespread indifference to female masculinity, I suggest, has clearly ideological motivations and has sustained the complex social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and power.”<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> These normativities have also largely been transported to those outside of western societies as well through neo-imperialism. See R.W. Connell, “Masculinities and Globalization.”

<sup>353</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>354</sup> J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.

Halberstam argues that female masculinity is often ignored as legitimate expressions of masculinity due to gender norms that are naturalized within male bodies by society.

Halberstam further connects this link of maleness and power with the reception of female masculinity, “as longing to be and to have a power that is always out of reach.”<sup>355</sup>

Halberstam, then, illustrates the common explanation for gender-crossing saints through this theoretical understanding of how social structures shape our understanding of this type of gender subversion.

These social structures operate within a gender system that reinforces these ideas. Despite some progress towards gender equality, as well as setbacks, we live within cisheteropatriarchal systems, that is systems that construct and maintain gender conformity and heteronormativity and male/masculine dominance. It can be very difficult, particularly for those with privilege, including cis-privilege, to perceive this bias towards cisnormativity. Allan Johnson explains that everyone participates in systems of power, such as patriarchy, through socialization and paths of least resistance.<sup>356</sup> Johnson notes that because socialization is how we understand how to participate in social life, a “personal identity” is developed through it. Because socialization is so intertwined within our own personal sense of self, this can create problems when faced with subversion:

Invariably, some of what we learn turns out not to be true and then we may have to deal with that. I say ‘may’ because powerful forces encourage us to keep ourselves in a state of denial, to rationalize what we have been taught. It is a way to keep it safe from scrutiny, if only to protect our sense of who we are and ensure our being accepted by other people, including family and friends. In the end, the

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>356</sup> Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Then, or an Us,” *Introduction to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Approaches*, ed. L. Ayu Saraswati, Barbara L. Shaw, and Heather Rellihan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 23-31.

default is to adopt the dominant version of reality and act as though it's the only one there is.<sup>357</sup>

When scholars come across gender variance, this subversion of gender norms puts that socialization at risk. Because we have been taught to rationalize this “dominant version of reality,” namely cisnormativity, explanations of gender variance that maintains cisnormativity are given rather than break with that socialization.

This is related to Johnson’s other explanation of how we participate in patriarchy as a system: paths of least resistance. Johnson notes that these paths are what guide our choices both conscious and unconscious. Johnson notes that because of the work of socialization, most choices of social resistance will not occur to a person.<sup>358</sup> Therefore, the idea of a saint that is assigned female but has constructed a masculine gendered self may not even occur to most scholars that have written about the genre of gender-crossing saints. However, of the options that are realized, people will most often take the path of least resistance, the path that is “to go along” with this dominant version of reality. Johnson notes that a choice involving social resistance is one that puts our own acceptance in jeopardy.

This, therefore, puts one’s privilege in jeopardy. Johnson illustrates this with the example of a young man witnessing the sexual assault of a drunk woman at a college party. According to Johnson, this choice of social resistance may risk the young man of being accused “of siding with a woman and thereby appearing to be less of a man

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

himself.”<sup>359</sup> A choice of social resistance rather than following a path of least resistance, then, risks the loss of privilege. As such, the acceptance of gender variance within the historical record and the possibility of a trans\* saint puts cis privilege at risk. Therefore, if that option is realized by the scholar, acceptance within their social life and the maintenance of privilege may also be a factor for following the path of least resistance and maintaining cisnormativity.

Although I do believe that the cisnormativity imposed on these historiographic narratives are largely unintentional and the result of living within a patriarchal social system, this does not excuse its prevalence. It is the responsibility of all, especially those with privilege, to understand these and other normativities as oppressive. We must educate ourselves in order to prevent propagating oppressive normativity, such as the cisnormativity imposed on these figures. Those that do not actively work against these oppressions contribute to them, as shown in this project. One’s intentions, or lack thereof, are not important when they contribute to epistemic violence as is the case with these historical narratives.

That being said, it does appear to be the intention in the case of some scholarship. For example, Crystal Lynn Lubinsky’s *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood* does appear to be intentionally removing the possibility of gender variance from these narratives. Lubinsky argues that these stories maintain a holy womanhood and an inward identity of that womanhood by the subjects; this argument seems to be based

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.



on a bodily defined and fixed gender essentialism. Lubinsky begins her introduction with her choice of words, namely transvestite, in her book. In this section she states,

the terms ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ are not applicable because in these legends transvestism is a female enterprise to safeguard their chastity and spiritual aspirations. These characters should *never* be considered humans who were male, but female bodied. Hagiographers do not describe these women as changing sex or as realizing their spiritual strengths within an opposite gender beyond masculine disguise.<sup>360</sup> (my emphasis)

With this statement, located on only the second page of her book, Lubinsky shows that she does not construct a cisnormative narrative out of ignorance. Rather, she has explicitly thought about these possibilities and rejected them. By stating that these figures should “never” be viewed as transgender, Lubinsky actively erases gender variance from these stories while demonstrating her own lack of understanding of transgender history. Furthermore, Lubinsky sets up a straw person argument by citing no one as undertaking this type of historical project. Therefore, this argument is an attempt to deny any possibility of someone arguing for a transgender studies approach in future scholarship in order to protect a cisnormative view beyond her own work.

Lubinsky’s central argument that transvestism acted as only a means to safeguard a holy womanhood is largely based on bodily gender essentialism. Lubinsky breaks her argument into outward, social, and inward signs of masculinity expressed by these saints in order to demonstrate in each case that masculinity was only a “ruse” or a “deception” to safeguard their ascetic practices.<sup>361</sup> She continues the argument of strict pragmatism

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<sup>360</sup> Crystal Lynn Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: the Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 2.

<sup>361</sup> Ideas that trans people are deceiving people through their gender expression is commonly used in anti-trans rhetoric as well.

for saints even when masculine presentation is no longer pragmatic, such as in the case of Matrona and Mary.

In Matrona's hagiography, her husband is no longer the reason for her masculine presentation when she returns to Constantinople, yet, she continues masculine presentation within her own monastery. Lubinsky attempts to explain this as a "symbolic" masculinity with no further evidence on which to base it.<sup>362</sup> In Mary's example, continued masculine presentation is much more of a detriment to her than a pragmatic choice. If Mary had demonstrated that she was female bodied, she would have avoided punishments for her accused sexual misconduct. Furthermore, she would not have been forced to provide for a child she was not responsible for. In this case, Mary's masculine presentation was a disadvantage to ascetic practice within a monastery. Her endurance through which made her considered all the more holy, but certainly not a pragmatic choice. However, Lubinsky continues to argue for these figures that transvestism was always "forced" with no other option.<sup>363</sup>

Moreover, throughout the outward and social masculinity sections, Lubinsky argues for a bodily defined womanhood while regularly acknowledging that these saints performed masculinity and were accepted as such by internal audiences. Lubinsky's own descriptions often make the case for a socially constructed idea of masculinity for these saints; however, she undermines this view of gender for an essentialist one. For example, she discusses the bodily transformation of many of these saintly figures due to extreme

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<sup>362</sup> Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers*, 185.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

ascetic practices, something she refers to as passive transvestism. Lubinsky uses the example of Anastasia Patricia, who was introduced as a eunuch hermit that the abbot Daniel of Scetis provides provisions of water for in the desert. Anastasia's past life was not given in her hagiography until after her death. Her outward appearance was not detailed, nor was she given a masculine name; the only things alluding to her gender given at the beginning of the story is the title "eunuch" and the use of masculine pronouns.

When Anastasia died, as with many of the other saints within this genre, her withered female body was revealed to both the internal and external audience. After their shock subsided, Daniel and his disciple buried Anastasia and decided to hold an agape for τοῦ γέροντος, the old man.<sup>364</sup> Despite the discovery of Anastasia's body, Daniel still referred to her as a man. Daniel then told his disciple about her life, demonstrating that his continued reference to her as a man was not from a lack of knowledge of the supposed motive for her "ruse." Lubinsky then compares this scene of revelation to that of Apolinaria, who is also discovered to have a female body altered through asceticism.

When a physical change is mentioned in the hagiographies, women are not described in masculine terms; there are no descriptions of their bodies as masculine... This is not the description of a masculine body, but a body of an ascetic woman... Even though she is accepted as a man by internal audiences, it is not the intention of the hagiographer to construct a story in which she is somehow no longer physically a woman.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> *De S Anastasia Patricia*, 52:16.

<sup>365</sup> Lubinsky, 121

Lubinsky constructs her argument against these saints being viewed as anything but women based on their bodies. In this section of her chapter on outward masculinity, she demonstrates that these figures are described in masculine terms and accepted as men by the internal and, for part of Anastasia's story, external audiences. Yet her argument against seeing these figures' actions as anything but a ruse for asceticism, is that they are described as having female bodies. She likewise states that despite many of these figures living as men for "sizable portions" of their lives, "the one enduring nature retained through the tales is that of a holy womanhood – they begin and end the tales as women."<sup>366</sup>

With the examples of those saints that die before their sexed bodies are revealed, there is no basis for arguing that they end as women except to base that argument on their bodies. This, then, places the idea of womanhood as being only found within female bodies and manhood within male bodies. Although she often illustrates the ways masculinity is socially constructed within these hagiographies, Lubinsky argues that these socially constructed selves are not indicative of "real" masculinity. Instead, Lubinsky argues an essentialist view of gender as fixed within one's sexed body. Therefore, Lubinsky purposely maintains a cisnormative view of historical figures through a transphobic understanding of gender.

Furthermore, Lubinsky demonstrates a lack of understanding of both transgender studies as well as transgender individuals. In her chapter on inward masculinity, Lubinsky attempts to demonstrate that these figures maintain a feminine interiority or

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 153.

identity. One of her arguments for this is that their characters don't change despite masculine exterior changes: "They do not change as persons because the same positive human traits are present in their personality before and after outward and social masculine transformations. These female characters, no matter how deceptively masculinized, are portrayed as the same women who were introduced at the beginning of the tales."<sup>367</sup> This statement seems to assume that a masculine interiority or identity would mean that an individual's entire personality would also change. She further demonstrates this through the continuance of familial love. She argues,

female monks retain all of the relationships and concerns of their lay lives, which includes concern for children, love for husbands, fear of sexual compliance, and love or fear for family members during their monastic career. They are in fact mothers, wives, daughters, and women hiding within masculinity to gain the freedom to dedicate their lives to strict asceticism; this observation proves the nonexistence of inward masculinity.<sup>368</sup>

Lubinsky is apparently under the assumption that a change within gender identity results in a fully new person. Undergoing gender transition, in any sense of what that may entail, does not mean a person suddenly changes all of their values and feelings, or that they give up any sort of familial attachments they had prior. Her argument that this "proves" a lack of interior masculinity demonstrates her overall lack of understanding of transgender people.

Lubinsky repeats this idea in her conclusion by arguing that she demonstrates the pragmatism of masculinity "to reveal the continuity present in these women's natures

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

which negates ideas that they become male in any genuine, or inward, sense.”<sup>369</sup> This continuity of “nature” seems based on two possibilities given Lubinsky’s argument as analyzed here: their “nature” meaning their personalities which do not necessarily change as the result of gender identity, or their “nature” meaning that they are bodily female including an assumption that this necessarily indicates an essentialized female gender. Either way, Lubinsky’s argument is based on a misunderstanding of what it means to be transgender as well as a transphobic understanding of gender as bodily essentialism.

Further analysis of why it is so important for Lubinsky and other scholars like her to maintain an understanding of these figures of having feminine interiority and identity is needed. Although the previous discussion of socialization within a cis-hetero-patriarchy is certainly still relevant in this case, I do believe there is more to it. This protection of cisnormativity also seems indicative that these scholars may feel that women’s history is under threat. In “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn,’” Elizabeth Clark outlines some of the feminist historiographic reactions to post-structuralist erasure of subjects for a historiographic view that there is only the text: “by decentering subjectivity, authorship, and agency, [post-structuralists] leave no ground on which feminist politics can be built.”<sup>370</sup>

Although Clark discusses a variety of approaches, she does mention one that focuses on women’s bodies. This approach is based on a “strategic essentialism,” a

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>370</sup> Elizabeth Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian After the ‘Linguistic Turn,’” *Church History*, 67, no 1(1998): 2.

concept coined by Gayatri Spivak, that attempts to maintain the category of “woman” through essentializing women’s experiences.<sup>371</sup> This led to an appeal of the body as “the ‘bedrock’ that no deconstruction can touch.”<sup>372</sup> Lubinsky’s use of the body as the center of female experience and subjectivity appears to be working along these same lines. Clark notes that this approach was quickly refuted by women of color and post-colonial historians and other historical scholarship influenced by gender studies has pointed out the issue with this type of approach: “there is no body except that which is marked and constructed by the social process.”<sup>373</sup> Therefore, Clark argues this approach is not “any sure escape” from post-structural theory.<sup>374</sup>

This assertion of an essentialized womanhood in face of the erasure of these universal categories, as briefly discussed in the introduction, seems to be at the heart of Lubinsky’s argument. There seems to be a fear that viewing these saints as transgender or gender variant will take away from women’s history. If women’s history is solely the work of adding women, then that could be true. However, if one is more interested in a feminist historiographic method of analyzing systems of gender and how they affect multiple genders, women and non-conforming people included. These figures are still assigned female and socialized within a gender system that views them as women. Viewing these saints as exhibiting trans\* behavior, does not take away from that, it

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 10.

merely constructs a more fully inclusive idea of gendered history. Joan Wallach Scott explains the basis of feminist history similarly:

Feminist history then becomes not the recounting of great deeds performed by women but the exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies. With this approach women's history critically confronts the politics of existing histories and inevitably begins the rewriting of history.<sup>375</sup>

These saints, then, are still very much part of feminist history. However, this history should not be based on what Scott calls "recounting great deeds" of women. Scott argues, rather, that feminist history is much more about the gender systems within history. These saints are just as much a part of, and more fully so, this type of history through a methodology that truly looks at how those systems operate and recognizes the gender variance within them.

### **Current Implications**

As transgender people become more visible in western society, transphobic backlash has become more prevalent in popular discourse as well. Anti-Trans policies have become laws throughout the United States that have kept trans people from access to everyday necessities including bathrooms. As I write this, it is a matter of days since the Supreme Court ruled in favor of sexuality and gender identity protections in the workplace, making it illegal for a trans or gender non-conforming person for being fired

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<sup>375</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 27.



on the basis of their gender.<sup>376</sup> There were no federal protections against this prior to this decision. However, discrimination can still take place in the majority of U.S. society including health care, access to social programs such as homeless shelters, and many others.

Violence against trans people on the basis of them being trans is extremely prevalent and twenty-five trans or gender non-conforming people have been murdered in the United States so far this year.<sup>377</sup> According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, sixty-three percent of survey participants reported serious acts of discrimination including job loss, eviction, bullying/harassment, physical and sexual assault, homelessness, denial of medical services or incarceration as a result of bias against their gender identity or expression.<sup>378</sup> Although some progress has been made for trans rights, trans people remain the target of prevalent discrimination and violence.

Although this widespread discrimination is part of living within a cisheteropatriarchal system in which everyone is a participant, it is regularly justified through religious belief, particularly Christianity. In the summer of 2016, Pope Francis said, “Today children – children! – are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex...And this [is] terrible!”<sup>379</sup> Francis further referred to this as “ideological

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<sup>376</sup> *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, 590 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2020).

<sup>377</sup> “Violence Against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2020,” Human Rights Campaign, Accessed July 27, 2020, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-trans-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2020>.

<sup>378</sup> Jaime Grant, Lisa Mottet, Justin Tanis, et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 8.

colonization” and lamented that this “[ideology of] gender” was being forced upon the rest of the world.<sup>380</sup> As the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, the largest branch of Christianity in the world, Francis’ words are part of an institutional religious discourse that fuels an anti-trans discrimination. It is particularly noteworthy that this was said by the leader of a Christian branch in which reverence of saints as holy people remains an important practice. It is, therefore, especially important to acknowledge gender variance within these stories of gender-crossing saints. To erase gender variance from Christian historical narratives only fuels this discrimination.

Although institutional figures such as the Pope ignore gender-crossing saints as part of Christian history, these saints have become part of lived religion within LGBTQ communities. For example, the blog *Q Spirit* by self-identified lesbian Christian and ordained minister of the Metropolitan Community Church Kittredge Cherry seeks to bring such figures to attention in order “to help LGBTQ people discover and believe that God loves them” and “expand the meaning of holiness.”<sup>381</sup> One of Cherry’s blogs entitled “Trans Saints? Early cross-dressing monks and martyrs” focuses on the existence of these saints saying, “These intriguing queer saints are venerated as women by the official

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<sup>379</sup> Francis, “Meeting with the Polish Bishops,” Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Poland on the Occasion of the XXXI World Youth Day, 27 July 2016, accessed July 2020, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/08/02/0568/01265.html#en>, question

<sup>380</sup> The meaning of ideological colonization and the implications of this statement have been thoroughly studied and brought to my attention by my colleague Danielle Dempsey.

<sup>381</sup> Kittredge Cherry, “About Q Spirit,” *Q Spirit* (blog), accessed July 20, 2020. <http://qspirit.net/about/>

church, and they might be categorized today as transmen, butch lesbians or genderqueer who were assigned female at birth.”<sup>382</sup>

Cherry then reprints two articles from fellow blogger Terrence Weldon with his permission also focusing on gender-crossing saints. Weldon’s articles from his blog, *Queering the Church*, also use “Trans” in the title when referring to these saints. In “Trans Saints? Cross-Dressing Monks,” Weldon acknowledges that these stories are mostly dismissed as “hagiographic fiction,” but states, “whatever the full historic truth, it seems to me these are useful stories to hold on to as reminders of the important place of the transgendered, and differently gendered, in our midst.”<sup>383</sup> In his other blog post, “Trans in Faith: Early Cross – Dressing Saints and Martyrs,” Weldon says that gender identity may not have been the motivation for their gender crossing; however, “in the very presence in church records, they show that in times past the church was willing to recognise and pay honour to a group of people who set aside standard gender expectations to live a life of their own choosing.”<sup>384</sup> This recognition from queer religious blogs brings focus to these saints gender and holiness as well as the institutional acceptance of them within the church.

Queer people are currently constructing a discourse around trans\* holiness, or at least a transmasculine holiness, within Christianity, and this is not without historical

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<sup>382</sup> Kittredge Cherry, “Trans Saints? Early cross-dressing monks and martyrs,” *Q Spirit* (blog), Published October 3, 2019, <http://qspirit.net/trans-saints-cross-dressing-monks/>

<sup>383</sup> Terrence Weldon, “Trans Saints? Cross-Dressing Monks,” *Queering the Church* (blog), Published November 8, 2009, <https://queerchurch.wordpress.com/2009/11/08/cross-dressing-monks/>

<sup>384</sup> Terrence Weldon, “Trans in Faith: Early Cross – Dressing Saints and Martyrs,” *Queering the Church* (blog), Accessed July 20, 2020, [http://saints.queerchurch.info/?page\\_id=353](http://saints.queerchurch.info/?page_id=353)

basis. As detailed in the introduction, early Christians took part in gender transgressive ascetic practices. Peter Brown notes that ascetic practice gave way to “angelic” indeterminacy of sex in some cases.<sup>385</sup> This angelic transcendence of gender or sex is not an uncommon discourse; Basil of Ancyra makes a similar statement about ascetic transcendence to be angelic in *De Virginitate*.

We also know from the condemnation by the council of Gangra that Eustathius and his followers lived together, not segregated by sex, wearing the same clothing and shaving their heads. Although monastic habits were similar looking for men and women, communal angelic indeterminacy or gender transcendence is often measured by women’s indeterminacy, or women taking on traditionally masculine appearance of clothing and hairstyle. This seems largely due to two reasons: 1) because God was viewed as male, masculinity was viewed as closer to the divine and 2) as with most patriarchal cultures, maleness is often used as the universal. Although the binary of western modernity was not part of the sex/gender system of the ancient Mediterranean, gender transcendence was often put into a binaried terms involving the most common gender categories. A similar example can be seen in Rabbinic treatment of intersex individuals, a category of sex that disrupts both sex and gender binaries.

Unlike the contemporary naturalization of the gender binary, the rabbis make gender variant bodies visible and work to include the *androgynos* within law. And yet, despite the fact that the injury of the *androgynos* would seem to pose a “universal” category of human rights, this universality is still framed through the poles of gender dichotomy. To belong, the *androgynos* must be like men and women in order to qualify.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 332.

Rabbinic treatment of the *androgynos*, an intersex category, demonstrates an acceptance of the existence of sexual variance and not the naturalization of the gender binary within western modernity. However, an absence of a gender neutral universal, particularly within binaried Jewish laws, led to this variance being framed within the dichotomy of gender categories of men and women. Likewise, an absence of a gender-neutral universal can be seen in the ascetic practices of gender transcendence towards angelic existence. This angelic indeterminacy is still framed within a binaried thinking and, therefore, women took on the viewed universal in their appearance. However, this all points to a theology around gender transformation. A theology based on moving beyond, and therefore, changing one's gender. Although this was less visible for men, it was enacted by women through masculine appearance.

The discourse surrounding holy women being made men or “manly” runs along a similar theological notion of gender transformation. This discourse can certainly be considered misogynistic, including transmisogynistic, as representative of a gender hierarchy that treats men as superior and more able to achieve holiness while women are associated with its opposites. However, it is still representative of a holiness being achieved through a gender transformation.

The hagiographies of gender-crossing saints are further proof of this theological notion of gender transformation and holiness. The saints subvert gender norms and construct masculine embodiments within the cultural gender expectations for men.

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<sup>386</sup> Max Strassfeld, “Translating the Human: The Androgynos in Tosefta Bikurim,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no.3-4 (2016): 596.

Although it is unknown if these saints were real people, they were real to the Christians who read their stories and they were a reflection of real attitudes and behaviors happening within Christian society. Hagiographers may have emphasized their female bodies, but they also present them as holy despite their gender transgressions. Hagiographers may not have intended for other Christians to imitate these transgressive actions, but other Christians may have just as Syncletica and Eugenia imitated Thecla. Almost certainly, many Christians did so internally, if not externally, reading these stories as sanctifying their own sense of gender variance or transcendence, which, after all, is a Biblical mandate.

I propose that a gender variant, or trans\*, theology already existed within early Christianity. Early Christians may not have put it in these terms, but there was a theology involving the holiness of gender variant people, particularly of transmasculine ones. Although multiple sanctions against this behavior existed, gender variance was still part of ascetic practices and discourse. When Macrina or Olympias are said to not be women, but men, this is part of a discourse that makes gender variance holy. When desert ascetics fast away bodily determinacy and take on masculine presentation, they are part of a discourse that makes gender variance holy. When gender-crossing saints are viewed as holy people able to enact miracles, they are part of a discourse that makes gender variance holy. This theology of gender variance, then, already existed in early Christianity and it is being continued within queer and trans religiosity now.

As indicated by the *Q Spirit* and *Queering the Church* blogs, queer and trans Christians are already searching for representations of themselves within Christian

history. Therefore, the way historians present these narratives matter. Continuing to exclude the possibility of gender variance and trans\* behavior commits epistemic violence that contributes to discrimination and acts of physical violence against current trans and gender non-conforming people. Joan Wallach Scott explains why historiography matters:

Nonetheless, the discipline of history, through its practices, produces (rather than gathers or reflects) knowledge about the past generally and, inevitably, about sexual difference as well. In that way, history operates as a particular kind of cultural institution endorsing and announcing constructions of gender.<sup>387</sup>

History constructs gender, according to Scott. It does not just reflect societal attitudes towards it, but is one social institution of many that constructs both how gender is viewed in historical contexts as well as currently. Therefore, it is important that historians ensure that the way we write history does not impose cisnormativity onto it. Not only so that we can more accurately portray the past, but so that we do not continue to construct gender in ways that propagate violence against those who are already so marginalized by society.

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<sup>387</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics*, 9.

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