Sexuality and Gender

*The Romans did not have our concept of sexuality; we will talk about this more in class – much more – but it is important not to see them and their expressions of sexuality in our terms. Their concept of gender, like that of the Greeks, was very much a binary concept: one was either a ‘real’ man (whatever that might be) or womanish, and thus incomplete. However, the Roman empire was also a vast place, containing many peoples, not all of whom shared Rome’s concepts of gender and sexuality, so we must be aware that many of the things that the Romans were shocked at were most likely acceptable to some group in the empire (if the Romans hadn’t wiped them out, that is).*

*Because so much emphasis was placed on being a* vir,[[1]](#footnote-1) *a Roman man, accusing a free Roman male of being the passive partner in a sexual relationship was an effective line of attack in Roman politics and social life, as it was something considered shameful. As a result nearly every major Roman politician of the Late Republic was accused of being the passive partner to someone. For example Julius Caesar was accused of having been the passive partner of King Nicomedes of Bithynia in order to get a fleet out of him that the Romans needed:*

49 1 There was no stain on his decent reputation except his ‘marriage’ with King Nicomedes, but that was a deep and lasting reproach, which laid him open to insults from every quarter. I say nothing of the notorious lines of Licinius Calvus (‘Whatever Bythynia and Caesar’s buggerer had’). I pass over, too, the invectives of Dolabella and the elder Curio, in which Dolabella calls him "the queen's rival, the bottom half of the royal bed," and Curio, "the brothel of Nicomedes and the whorehouse of Bithynia." 2 I take no account of the edicts of Bibulus,[[2]](#footnote-2) in which he posted his colleague as "the queen of Bithynia," saying that "in the past he loved a king, but now he loves the status of king." At this same time, so Marcus Brutus declares, one Octavius, a man whose disordered mind made him somewhat free with his tongue, after saluting Pompey as "king" in a crowded assembly, greeted Caesar as "queen." But Gaius Memmius makes the direct charge that he acted as cup-bearer to Nicomedes with the rest of his shagged out friends at a large dinner-party, and that among the guests were some merchants from Rome, whose names Memmius gives. 3 Cicero, indeed, is not content with having written in a range of letters that Caesar was led by the king's attendants to the royal apartments, that he lay on a golden couch arrayed in purple, and that the virginity of this son of Venus[[3]](#footnote-3) was lost in Bithynia, for when Caesar was once addressing the senate in defence of Nysa, daughter of Nicomedes, and was listing his obligations to the king, Cicero shouted out: "No more of that, please, for it is well known what he gave you, and what you gave him back." 4 Finally, in his Gallic triumph his soldiers, among the songs which are usually jokingly sung by those who followed the chariot,[[4]](#footnote-4) shouted these lines, which became a by-word:

Caesar rides all over the Gauls, but Nicomedes rode him;

Hey! Now Caesar rides in triumph, the one who rode all the Gauls,

Nicomedes does not ride in triumph, who rode the conqueror."

Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar* 49

*Some things about Rome were depressingly familiar however, including double standards about how women should express their sexuality. The historian Sallust wrote of the female supporters of one revolutionary Catiline in ways that can be taken to refer to a group of liberated women. It should be remembered, however, that Sallust may have made this entire figure up to make a moral point about the lax morals of the women of his own period:*

At this period, too, Catiline is said to have attached to his cause great numbers of men of all classes, and some women, who had, in their earlier days, supported an expensive life by the price of their beauty, but who, when age had lessened their profit but not their extravagance, had contracted heavy debts. By the influence of these females, Catiline hoped to gain over the slaves in Rome, to get the city set on fire, and either to secure the support of their husbands or take away their lives. In the number of those ladies was Sempronia, a woman who had committed many crimes with the spirit of a man. In birth and beauty, in her husband and her children, she was extremely fortunate; she was skilled in Greek and Roman literature; she could sing, play, and dance, with greater elegance than became a respectable Roman, and possessed many other accomplishments that tend to excite the passions. But nothing was ever less valued by her than honour or chastity. Whether she was more careless with her money or her reputation, it would have been difficult to decide. Her desires were so ardent that she oftener made advances to the other sex than waited for solicitation. She had frequently, before this period, forfeited her word, reneged on debts, been accomplich to murder, and hurried into the utmost excesses by her extravagance and poverty. But her abilities were by no means despicable: she could compose verses, make jokes, and join in conversation either modest, tender, or immoral. In a word, she was distinguished by much refinement of wit and had grace of expression.

Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 24-5

*In the following speech Cicero is defending Marcus Caelius Rufus on a range of charges from attempting poisoning to killing an ambassador to Rome. One of the prosecutors was Clodius, whose sister Clodia provided key testimony. Cicero ripped her to shreds in court by taking on the persona of a famed ancestor of hers to address her, as otherwise attacking women (especially powerful women) openly in court was very risky. Clodia was older than Rufus, but he was not quite the youth that Cicero makes him out to be, and the double standard that Cicero applies*

“Woman, what have you to do with Caelius? What have you to do with a very young man? What have you to do with one who does not belong to you? Why have you been so intimate with him as to lend him gold, or so much an enemy of his as to fear his poison? Had you never seen that your father, had you never heard that your uncle, your grand-father, your great-grandfather, your great-great-grand-father, were all consuls?

34 Did you not know, moreover, that you were married to Quintus Metellus, a most illustrious and courageous man, and most devoted to his country? From the first moment that he put his foot over his threshold, he showed himself superior to almost all citizens in courage, and glory, and dignity. When you became his wife, and, being previously of a most illustrious race yourself, had married into a most renowned family, why was Caelius so intimate with you? Was he a relation? A connection? Was he a friend of your husband? Nothing of the sort! What then was the reason, except some folly or lust? Even if the *imagines[[5]](#footnote-5)* of us, the men of your family, had no influence over you, did not even my own daughter, that celebrated Quinta Claudia, admonish you to emulate the praise belonging to our house from the glory of its women? Did not that vestal virgin Claudia recur to your mind, who embraced her father while celebrating his triumph, and prevented his being dragged from his chariot by a hostile tribune of the people? Why had the vices of your brother more weight with you than the virtues of your father, of your grandfather, and others in regular descent ever since my own time; virtues exemplified not only in the men, but also in the women? Was it for this that I broke the treaty which was concluded with Pyrrhus, that you should every day make new treaties of most disgraceful love? Was it for this that I brought water into the city, that you should use it for your impious purposes? Was it for this that I made the Appian road, that you should travel along it escorted by other men besides your husband?”

35 But why, O judges, have I brought a person on the scene, of such gravity as to make me fear that this same Appius may on a sudden turn round and begin also to accuse Caelius with the severity which belongs to the censor? But I will look to this presently, and I will discuss it, O judges, so that I feel sure that I shall show even the most rigid scrutineers reason to approve of the habits of life of Marcus Caelius.

But you, woman, (for now I speak to you myself, without the intervention of any imaginary character) if you are thinking of making us approve of what you are doing, and what you are saying, and what you are charging us with, and what you are intending, and what you are seeking to achieve by this prosecution, you must give an intelligible and satisfactory account of your great familiarity, your intimate connection, your extraordinary union with him. The accusers talk to us about lusts, and loves, and adulteries, and Baiae, and doings on the sea-shore, and banquets, and revels, and songs, and music parties, and water parties; and intimate also that they do not mention all these things without your consent. And as for you, since, through some unbridled and headlong fury which I cannot comprehend, you have chosen these things to be brought into court, and dilated on at this trial, you must either efface the charges yourself, and show that they are without foundation, or else you must confess that no credit is to be given to any accusations which you may make, or to any evidence which you may give. some one, and before all I will select your youngest brother, who is one of the best-bred men of his class, who is exceedingly fond of you, and who, on account of some childish timidity, I suppose and some groundless fears of what may happen by night, has always, when he was but a little boy, slept with you his eldest sister. Suppose, then, that he speaks to you in this way. “What are you making this disturbance about, my sister? why are you so mad? ‘Why thus with outcry loud do you exalt such trifles into things of consequence?’

You saw a young man become your neighbour; his fair complexion, his height and his countenance and eyes made an impression on you, you wished to see him oftener; you were sometimes seen in the same gardens with him; being a woman of high rank you are unable with all your riches to detain him, the son of a thrifty and parsimonious father: he kicks, he rejects you, he does not think your presents worth so much as you require of him. Try some one else. You have gardens on the Tiber, and you carefully made them in that particular spot to which all the youth of the city comes to bathe. From that spot you may every day pick out people to suit you. Why do you annoy this one man who scorns you?” I come now again to you, O Caelius, in your turn; and I take upon myself the authority and strictness of a father; but I doubt which father's character I shall select to assume. Shall I not the part of some one of Caecilius's[[6]](#footnote-6) fathers, harsh and vehement? “For now, in truth, at length my bosom glows,
My heart with passion rages;” or that other father?— “Oh thou unhappy, worthless son.” Those are very hard-hearted fathers; “What shall I say, what wishes dare I form, When your base actions frustrate all my prayers;” Such a father as that would say things which you would find it difficult to bear. He would say, “Why did you take yourself to the neighbourhood of a whore? Why did you not shun her notorious blandishments? Why did you form a connection with a woman who was nothing to you? Squander your money, throw it away; I give you leave. If you come to want, it is you yourself who will suffer for it. I shall be satisfied if I am able to spend pleasantly the small portion of my life that remains to me.”

38 To this morose and severe old man Caelius would reply, that he had not departed from the right path from being led away by any passion. What proof could he give? That he had been at no expense, at no loss; that he had not borrowed any money. But it was said that he had. How few people are there who can avoid such a report, in a city so prone to evil speaking! Do you wonder that the neighbour of that woman was spoken of unfavourably, when her own brother could not escape being made the subject of conversation by profligate men? But to a gentle and considerate father such as his is, whose language would be, “Has he broken the doors? they shall be mended; has he torn his garments? they shall be repaired;”the cause of his son is easily explained. For what circumstances could there be in which he would not be able easily to defend himself? I am not saying anything now against that woman: but if there were a woman totally unlike her, who made herself common to everybody; who had always some one or other openly avowed as her lover; to whose gardens, to whose house, to whose baths the lusts of every one had free access as of their own right; a woman who even kept young men, and made up for the parsimony of their fathers by her liberality; if she lived, being a widow, with freedom, being a lascivious woman, with wantonness, being a rich woman, extravagantly, and being a lustful woman, after the fashion of prostitutes; am I to think any one an adulterer who might happen to salute her with a little too much freedom? Some one will say, “Is this then the discipline which you enforce? Is this the way you train up young men? Was this the object with which a parent recommended his son to you and delivered him to you, that he might devote his youth to love and pleasure, and that you might defend this manner of life and these pursuits?”

If, O judges, any one was of such vigour of mind, and of a natural disposition so formed for virtue and continence as to reject all pleasures, and to dedicate the whole course of his life to labour of body and to wholesome training of his mind, a man who took no delight in rest or relaxation, or the pursuits of those of his own age, or games, or banquets, who thought nothing in life worth wishing for, except what was connected with glory and with dignity, that man I consider furnished and endowed with good qualities which may be called godlike. Of this class I consider were those great men, the Camilli, the Fabricii, the Curii and all those men who have achieved such mighty exploits with inadequate means. But these examples of virtue are not only not found in our practice, but they occur but rarely, even in books.

40 The very records which used to contain accounts of that old fashioned strictness of morals, are worn out and that not only among us, who have adopted this school and system of life in reality more than in words, but also among the Greeks most learned men, who, though they could not act in such a manner were nevertheless at liberty to speak and write honourably and magnificently; when the habits of Greece became changed other precepts arose and prevailed. Therefore some of their wise men said that they did everything for the sake of pleasure; and even learned men were not ashamed of the degradation of uttering such a sentiment. Others thought that dignity ought to be united with pleasure, so as by their neatness of expression to unite things as inconsistent with one another as possible. Those who still think that the only direct road to glory is combined with toil, are left now almost solitary in their schools. For nature herself has supplied us with numerous allurements, by which virtue may be lulled asleep, and at which, she may be induced to connive; nature herself has at times pointed out to youth many slippery ways, on which it is hardly possible for it to stand, or along which it can hardly advance without some slip or downfall, and has supplied also an infinite variety of exquisite delights, by which not only that tender age, but even one which is more strongly fortified, may be caught.

42 Wherefore, if by chance you find any one whose eyes are so well tutored as to look with scorn on the outward beauty of things; who is not captivated by any fragrance, or touch, or flavour, and who stops his ears against all the allurements of sound; I, and perhaps a few others, may think that the gods have been propitious to this man, but most people will consider that he has been treated by them as an object of their anger. Let this path be abandoned, deserted and uncultivated as it is, and hemmed in with hedges and brambles. Let some allowance be made for age; let youth be allowed some little freedom; let not everything be refused to pleasure; let us not require that true and proper system of life to be always predominant; let us allow desire and pleasure at times to get the upper hand of reason, as long as some sort of rule and moderation is observed in that kind of licence. Let youth have a due regard for its own chastity; let it not deprive others of theirs; let it not squander its patrimony; let it not be swallowed up by usury; let it not attack the house or the fair fame of another; let it not bring shame on the chaste, or disgrace on the upright, or infamy on the virtuous; let it abstain from alarming people by violence; from mixing in plots against people; let it keep itself from wickedness; lastly, when it has yielded for awhile to pleasures, and given up some time to the sports of its age, and to these frivolous and passing passions of youth, let it in due time recall itself to attention to its domestic affairs, to forensic employment and to the business of the state; so that it may appear from satiety to have thrown away, and from experience to have learnt to despise, those things which it had not been able properly to estimate by its unassisted reason,

Cicero, *In Defense of Marcus Caelius Rufus*

Cinaedus/Cinaedi

*We’ve encountered a number of men who were described as cinaedi by the Romans in the dress section. This is not really a translatable term, so I have left it in Latin in many texts. It began at first for a term for a type of sexy Greek dancer who performed after dinners. It then began to be used for effeminate homosexuals, and was used freely as an insult to describe those who did not confirm to male gender standards.*

The cinaedus Vesbinus buggered Vitalius

CIL 2319b

*People were always on the look out for signs of a cinaedus – in fact, some people made a speciality out of it:*

53 But I should like to tell you a story, one that you may possibly have heard before. It seems that one of the clever people of Tarsus — so the story runs — once went to a certain city. He was a man who had made it his special business to recognize instantly the character of each individual and to be able to describe his qualities, and he had never failed with any person; but just as we recognize animals when we see them and know that this, for instance, is a sheep, if such is the case, and this a dog and this a horse or ox, so that man understood human beings when he saw them and could say that this one was brave and this one a coward and this one an impostor and this man wanton or a catamite or an adulterer. 54 Because, therefore, he was noted for his display of power and never made a mistake, the people brought before him a person of rugged frame and knitted brows, squalid and in sorry state and with callouses on his hands, wrapped in a sort of coarse, gray mantle, his body shaggy as far as the ankles and his locks wretchedly shingled; and our friend was asked to tell what this man was. But after he had observed the man for a long while, the expert finally, with seeming reluctance to say what was in his mind, professed that he did not understand the case and bade the man move along. But just as the fellow was leaving, he sneezed, whereupon our friend immediately cried out that the man was a catamite.

Dio Chrysostom *Discourse* 33

*This reading is included in the dress and posture section, but I thought it useful to repeat it here, as it shows that in real life even famous generals were accused of being cinaedi:*

And finally, when Pompey appeared at a public trial, Clodius, having at his beck and call a rabble of the lewdest and most arrogant thugs, stood in a conspicuous place and put to them such questions as these: "Who is a lustful general?" "Who is the man looking for a man?" "Who scratches his head with one finger?" And they, like a chorus trained in responsive song would answer each question by shouting out "Pompey" every time he shook his toga.

Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 48.7

**Lesbians**

*Compared to other forms of sexuality, the Romans very rarely talked about lesbians, whom they called tribads, mainly because it challenged their minds to imagine a woman being the active partner with another woman. Here is one rare poem on the topic by Martial, though notice that he assumes she’ll also spend time on boys as well, as well as a number of other things, all of which are appalling:*

The lesbian Philaenis buggers boys

and, more savage than a husband’s lust,

she pounds on eleven girls a day.

And with her dress tied up she plays with a handball,

and covers herself with sand, and with her arm

easily swings weights heavy enough for sodomites/strongmen[[7]](#footnote-7),

and covered with dust from the foul arena,

she is flogged by an oiled up coach,

and doesn’t she dine or lie down for dinner

before she has vomited seven pints of unmixed wine,[[8]](#footnote-8)

and she only thinks it decent to return to drinking

when she has eaten sixteen steaks,[[9]](#footnote-9)

After all this, when she goes at it

she does not suck pricks. She thinks that far too unmanly -

but she regularly devours the groins of girls.

May the Gods give you back your sanity, Philaenis,

since you think it manly to go down on women.

Martial, *Epigrams* 7.67

*Lucian wrote a sequence of dialogues in Greek of which the major characters were sex female workers. In the following conversation between two of them, one of them describes being hired by a woman for the night.*

CLONARION: I have heard a strange thing said about you, Leaina. People say Megilla, the wealthy lady from Lesbos, is in love with you, as if she were a man, and that she--I can't explain how, but have heard it said that the two of you are a pair, just like--What's the matter? You are blushing. Is it true then?

LEAINA: It is true, Clonarion. I am ashamed. It is so strange.

CLONARION: By the great Adrasteia, you must tell me about it! What does that woman require of you? Exactly what do you do when you get into bed together? Now I am sure you don't love me. If you did, you would not think of hiding such things from me.

LEAINA: I do love you, Clonarion. I love you more than anybody else. But this is such a strange matter. I am so ashamed. That woman is so terribly like a *man.*

CLONARION: I don't understand. Do you mean to say she is one of those man-like females of Lesbos who will not suffer in their beds the company of men, but prefer to find pleasure, instead, with other women, as if they themselves were men?

LEAINA: She is a bit like that.

CLONARION: In that case, Leaina, tell me everything, please! How did she seduce you, in the first place? And how was it that you let Megilla have her way with you? And what came after? Tell me everything, please!

LEAINA: You see, Megilla and Demonassa, the Corinthian, sweating and very hot, pulled off her false hair--I had never suspected her of wearing a wig. And I saw her head was smooth-shaven as that of a young athlete. I was quite scared to see this. But Megilla spoke up and said to me:

"Tell me, O Leaina, have you ever seen a better looking young man?"

"But I see no young man here, Megilla!" I told her.

"Now, now! Don't you effeminate me!" she reproved. "You must understand my name is Megillos. Demonassa is my wife."

Her words seemed so funny to me, Clonarion. I started to giggle. And I said:

"Can it be, Megillos, that you are a man and lived among us under the disguise of a woman, just like Achilles, who stayed among the girls hidden by his purple robe? And is it true that you possess a man's organs, and that you do to Demonassa what any husband does to his wife?"

"That Leaina," she replied, "is not entirely so. You will soon see how we shall couple up in a fashion that is much more voluptuous."

"In that case," I said, "you are not a hermaphrodite. They, I have been told, have both a man's and woman's organs."

"No," she said, "I am quite like a man."

"Ismenodora, the Boietian flute player, has told me about a Theban woman who was changed into a man. A certain good soothsayer by the name of Teiresias------Did any accident like that happen to you by chance?"

"No, Leaina," she said. "I was born with a body entirely like that of all women, but I have the tastes and desires of a man."

"And do those desires of yours satisfy you?" I asked, smiling.

"Let me have my own way with you, Leaina, if you don't believe me," she answered, "and you will soon see that I have nothing to envy men for. I have something that resembles a man's estate. Come on, let me do what I want to do and you will soon understand." She pleaded so hard that I let her have her way. And you must understand that she gave me a splendid necklace and several tunics made of the best linen. Then I embraced her and held her in my arms, as if she were a man. And she kissed me all over the body, and she set out to do what she had promised, panting excitedly from the great pleasure and desire that possessed her.

CLONARION: But exactly how did she manage it? What did she do? Tell me, Leaina! Tell me especially that!

LEAINA: Please, don't ask me for details. These are shameful things. By the Mistress of Heaven, I will never, never, tell you that!

Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*

**Non-normative gender presentation**

*With such defined standards for both men and women, it is not that surprising that the Romans reacted badly to anyone who did not fit their moulds. Most individuals who showed any problematic (to the Romans) gender signs were killed at birth. Some Romans, like Pliny the Elder, felt that the fact the Romans had stopped doing that was a sign of their moral decline.*

Individuals are occasionally born, who belong to both sexes; such persons we call by the name of hermaphrodites; they were formerly called Androgyni, and were looked upon as monsters, but at the present day they are employed for sensual purposes. In the decorations for his theatre Pompey the Great, among the decorations of his theatre, erected certain statues of remarkable persons, which had been executed with the greatest care by artists of the very highest reputation. Among others, we here read an inscription that reads thus: "Eutychis, of Tralles, was borne to the funeral pile by twenty of her children, having had thirty in all." Also, Alcippe gave birth to an elephant1—but that must be looked upon as a prodigy; as in the case, too, where, at the commencement of the Marsian war,female slave gave birth to a snake. Among these monstrous births, also, there are beings produced which unite in one body the forms of several creatures. For instance, Claudius Caesar informs us, in his writings, that a Hippocentaur was born in Thessaly, but died on the same day: and indeed I have seen one myself, which in the reign of that emperor was brought to him from Egypt, preserved in honey.We have a case, also, of a child at Saguntum, which returned immediately into its mother's womb, the same year in which that place was destroyed by Hannibal. 4. The change of females into males is undoubtedly no urban myth: e The *Annals[[10]](#footnote-10)* tell us that, in the consulship of P. Licinius Crassus and C. Cassius Longinus, a girl, who was living at Casinum with her parents, was changed into a boy; and that, by the command of the Aruspices, he was conveyed away to a desert island. Licinius Mucianus informs us, that he once saw at Argos a person whose name was then Arescon, though he had been formerly called Arescusa: that this person had been married to a man, but that, shortly after, a beard and marks of virility made their appearance, upon which he took a wife. He had also seen a boy at Smyrna, to whom the very same thing had happened. I myself saw in Africa one L. Cossicius, a citizen of Thysdris, who had been changed into a man the very day on which he was to be married to a man.

Pliny the Elder Book, *Natural History* 7.4

*Some authors both denied these possibilities (or even the desire for them) and at the same time they felt that they had to excuse their coverage of what they obviously thought their readers might feel was a rather prurient interest in gender changes:*

Not that the male and female natures have been united to form a truly bisexual type, for that is impossible, but that Nature, to mankind’s consternation and mystification, has through the bodily parts falsely given this impression. And this is the reason why we have considered these changes of gender worthy of record, not for the entertainment, but for the improvement of most of our readers. For many men, thinking such things to be portents, fall into superstition, - not only isolated individuals, but even nations and cities

Diodorus 32.12.1

*Pliny the Elder reported on changes of gender in his Natural History:*

(4) The change of females into males is undoubtedly no fable. We find it stated in the Annals, that, in the consulship of P. Licinius Crassus and C. Cassius Longinus, a girl who was living at Casinum with her parents was changed into a boy, and that, by the command of the Haruspices, he was conveyed away to a desert island. Licinius Mucianus informs us, that he once saw at Argos a person whose name was then Arescon, though he had been formerly called Arescusa: that this person had been married to a man, but that, shortly after, a beard and marks of virility made their appearance, upon which he took to himself a wife. He had also seen a boy at Smyrna, to whom the very same thing had happened. I myself saw in Africa one L. Cossicius, a citizen of Thysdris, who had been changed into a man the very day on which he was married to a husband.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.4

*Some wrote verses from the perspective of those who had shifted their gender, as in this case. As elsewhere a shift in body form meant a shift in gender – and a complete change in interests and personality:*

Formerly I raised my youthful hands to Venus, offering her pine torches to grant me a child, for already in the wedding chamber I had untied my virgin dress. Now suddenly I see myself revealing a man’s form. They call me bridegroom, bride no longer. After the altars of Aphrodite, I garland those of Ares and Hercules. In the distant past Thebes sang of Tiresias. Calchis today has seen me put aside a woman’s turbanto assume a man’s cloak.

Euenos of Athens,[[11]](#footnote-11) *Palatine Anthology* 9.602

*The Romans believed that any child born showing the signs of both sexes was a monstrum, an ill-omen from the gods, and should be destroyed to allay their anger. Livy reports numerous instances of such actions, including this one in 200 BCE:*

31.12 A despatch was read in the Senate from Quintus Minucius, the praetor commanding in Bruttium, in which he stated that money had been stolen by night from the treasury of Proserpine at Locri and there was no clue to the perpetrators of the crime. The senators were extremely angry at finding that acts of sacrilege were still going on and that not even the example of Pleminius, notorious alike for the guilt and the punishment which so swiftly followed, acted in any way as a deterrent. C. Aurelius was instructed to write to the praetor and tell him that the senate wished an enquiry to be made into the circumstances of the robbery on the same lines as the one which the praetor Marcus Pomponius had conducted three years previously. Whatever money was discovered was to be replaced, and the deficit made up; and should it be thought necessary expiatory sacrifices were to be offered in accordance with the instructions of the pontiffs on the previous occasions. Their anxiety to atone for the violation of the temple was made all the keener by the simultaneous announcements of portents from numerous localities. In Lucania it was alleged that the heavens had been on fire; at Privernum the sun had been glowing red through the whole of a cloudless day; at the temple of Juno Sospita in Lanuvium a terrible noise was heard in the night. Numerous monstrous births were also reported amongst the Sabines a child was born of doubtful gender; another similar case was discovered where the child was already sixteen years old;[[12]](#footnote-12) at Frusino a lamb was born with a head like a pig; at Sinuessa a pig with a human head, and on the public domain-land in Lucania a foal appeared with five feet. These were all regarded as horrid and monstrous products of a nature which had gone astray to produce strange and hybrid growths; the hermaphrodites were looked upon as of especially evil omen and were ordered to be at once carried out to sea just as quite recently in the consulships of C. Claudius and M. Nero similar ill-omened births had been disposed of. At the same time the senate ordered the decemvirs to consult the Sacred Books about this portent. Following the instructions found there, they ordered the same ceremonies to be observed as on the occasion of its last appearance. A hymn was to be sung through the City by three choirs, each consisting of nine maidens, and a gift was to be carried to Juno as Queen of the gods. The consul C. Aurelius saw that the instructions of the Keepers of the Sacred Books were carried out. The hymn in our fathers' days was composed by Livius, on this occasion by Publius Licinius Tegula.

Livy, *From the Founding of Rome* 31.12 (see also 27.11.4).

*The 4th century author Julius Obsequens gathered up all of Livy’s omens in his history and reports more of such births, such as this one in 95 BCE:*

There was a rain of milk at Caere. When Eutychides entered the temple of Jupiter Trophonius at Lebadia he brought out a bronze tablet on which were written, things which were relevants to the affairs of the Roman state. A bolt of lightning killed many animals. At Venafrum the ground subsided in a deep sinkhole. Vultures were killed and eaten by other vultures tearing away at a dead dog. A two-headed lamb, and a boy with three hands and three feet were born at [uncertain place]. The spears of Mars in the Regia moved. At Urbinum a hermaphrodite was born and carried down to the sea. There was peace in domestically and overseas.

Julius Obsequens, *Book of Prodigies* 50

1. *Vir* is one Latin word for man. The Romans only use it for Romans as a general rule, however, as only Romans were really manly men of the right sort – according to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. He was co-consul with Caesar in 59 BCE and hated him. He spent the entire time in his house claiming to be looking for omens in an attempt to block every piece of legislation by Caesar. Caesar just ignored him, but that didn’t stop Bibulus posting up various diatribes all over Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Caesars claimed descent from the goddess Venus. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In a Roman triumph the triumphing general rode in a chariot at the head of select groups of his troops (and a lot else: it was a big show). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. These were death masks of famous and distinguished male ancestors. These were on display in the courtyards of the house, and having many of them meant you had a very noble family tree. (For comparison, Cicero had none of these as he had no ancestors who had held any noble rank in Rome [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Caecilius was a writer of comedies, whose plays specialized in grumpy, old-fashioned fathers. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Latin word is *draucis,* the ablative plural of *draucus,* a term that only Martial seems to use in Classical Latin. There is a debate over its meaning, however, with AE Houseman arguing that it meant a person who performs feats of strength in public, rather than being a slur for men who felt same-sex desire. This might be something to look at if you are interested in working on this area for your assignment. I can give you the reference for the article on the topic, which doesn’t (I think) require Latin to understand, just an understanding of how languages work in borrowing words. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Greeks and Romans drank their wine diluted with water (and drank quite a lot of it too), and saw drinking unmixed wine as the sign of an alcoholic or a barbarian. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Here is a rather interesting [post](https://blog.oup.com/2015/12/martial-epigrams-roman-food/) on translating Martial that talks about this word. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Various Roman priesthoods kept a range of annals, marking notable and thus problematic events to do with the natural world, including humanity. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Not that this will matter to you, but this is most likely by another Euenus of Ascalon or even a range of other Eunuses, some of whom also were from Athens. This will only be of importance (most likely) if you end up studying obscure Athenian poets and philosophers and care about which Euenus you are dealing with there. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Meaning the parents had hidden them to save them from such a fate. It seems that even if such children were discovered when older, they were much less likely to be put to death than as infants, so hiding a child could work, even if it did not in this case, and would be likely to fail also if there was a time of extreme crisis. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)