

# Being Transgender: A History of Breaking Taboo

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## Gender in Ancient Rome: Origins



- Gender roles immortalized in foundational literature
- Women are seized and “won over” by the early Roman Males
- Dido’s portrayal in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas’ arrival renders her hysterical and she abandons her duties
- Reaction to the Trojan Men

## Mythology



- Primordial Androgyny of the gods
- Juxtaposition of innate virility and innate fecundity in divine figures
- Myth of Hermaphroditus and the divine/mortal conflict of the hermaphrodite
- Gender Deviation as Portent, interpreting the divine will in the appearance of non-cis individuals
- Process of Divination

## Religious Cults



- Mystery cults featuring non-cis adherents abound
- Exploration of the *Galli*
- Transgender or Eunuch?
- Romanization of foreign cults and practices, and their general acceptance

## Elagabalus



- Elagabalus, a Trans Emperor?
- Gender Presentation and “Passing”
- Sex-change surgery
- Conduct as a woman and taking husbands
- The repulsion felt by the Roman elite towards Elagabalus
- “The life of Elagabalus Antoninus, also called Varius, I should never have put in writing—hoping that it might not be known that he was emperor of the Romans”—*Historia Augusta*

## American Political Policy



- Lack of overt religiosity in official political statements
- Far less candor than the Roman authors had
- Shift of primary concerns from existential threat to society, i.e. masculinity
- Concern for physical safety of cisgender women
- Apparent lack of acknowledgement or concern regarding transgender men

## Conclusion

- The appearance of non-cisgender individuals and mythological figures is by no means a modern phenomenon
- Roman conceptions of gender similar to American ones, but not identical
- Perception of transgender individuals diverge officially; Existential threat vs Threat to physical safety
- However, perhaps just as superstitious and unnecessary?

## References

- Figure 1. *The Suicide of Queen Dido*, by Augustin Cayot (1667-1722) - Marie-Lan Nguyen (2011), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=777459>
- Figure 2. *Rape of the Sabine Women*, by Pietro da Cortona - Web Gallery of Art: Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6489179>
- Figure 3. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, Louvre, by Marie-Lan Nguyen (2005), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=249393>
- Figure 4. *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, Louvre, By Autrata - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8641826>
- Figure 5. *Statue of a Gallus Priest*, Musei Capitolini, By Anna-Katharina Rieger - <http://trivium.revues.org/docannexe/image/3362/img-4.jpg>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=19279949>
- Figure 6. *Cybele Enthroned*, Getty Museum, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2294857>
- Figure 7. *The Roses of Heliogabalus*, By Lawrence Alma-Tadema - Superb magazine, The Désirs & Volupté exhibition at the Musée Jacquemart-André - direct link, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=755081>
- Figure 8. *Head of Elagabalus*, in the *Capitoline Museums*, by © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=53962342>
- Figure 9. *Texans protest the Trans bathroom bill outside the senate committee hearing on SB-6*, by Stephanie from Austin, TX, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=67914329>