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

Religious Cults

- 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

- 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 Vairus, 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

- Mythology
- 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

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- 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
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