

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Preface

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0wm4r8j6>

Authors

Ocker, C

Elm, S

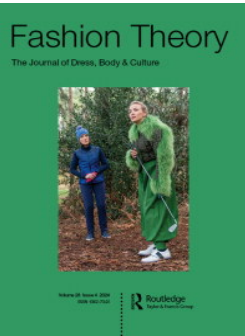
Publication Date

2020

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



Fashion Theory

The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rfft20

Top Boy Crossdressing: The *Life of Heliogabalus* in the *Historia Augusta*

Susanna Elm

To cite this article: Susanna Elm (28 Oct 2024): Top Boy Crossdressing: The *Life of Heliogabalus* in the *Historia Augusta*, Fashion Theory, DOI: [10.1080/1362704X.2024.2416758](https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2024.2416758)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2024.2416758>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 28 Oct 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 161



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Top Boy Crossdressing: The *Life of Heliogabalus* in the *Historia Augusta*

Susanna Elm

Susanna Elm, FBA, is the Sidney H. Ehrman Chair and Distinguished University Professor of History and Ancient Greek and Roman Studies in the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. She specializes in the social, economic and cultural history of the Later Roman Empire. Her most recent monograph is *The Importance of Being Gorgeous: Gender and Christian Imperial Rule (in late Antiquity)*, UC Press 2025.
elm@berkeley.edu

Abstract

Focusing on the *Life of Heliogabalus* in the so-called *Historia Augusta* or *Imperial History*, an anonymous late fourth century CE work, the chapter argues that beautiful rulers who cross dressed with abandon were part of late Roman imperial masculinity and its representation. This was so because the Christian emperor Theodosius was very aware of same-gender or homoerotic attraction as unifying force, which he also employed to strengthen the rule of his sons, made full co-rulers as children. However, as the highly satirical *Life of Heliogabalus* makes clear, gorgeous, soft young emperors had to maintain and make visible specific power relations. If they could not demonstrate that they

controlled their generals rather than the other way round, the power of homoerotic attraction could backfire.

KEYWORDS: Heliogabalus, exoletus, Roman emperors

[Alexander Severus] rejected the appellation *dominus* [master/lord] and ordered that he be addressed in letters as if he were a private citizen, using only the title *imperator*. He removed all the jewels from the footwear and garments that Heliogabalus had used. Instead, he wore, as his portraits show, a white dress without gold, as well as a common *paenula* [cloak] and *toga* (*SHA Alex. Sev.* 4.1–2).

The later Roman empire was a time obsessed with dress. Obsessed with power dressing, to be precise, because what “everyone” discussed in elaborate detail was the dress of the male elites, to which those doing the discussing belonged. While they occasionally commented on what women ought (not) to wear, those doing the talking were most interested in what their peers wore; that is, they were most interested in themselves (Rollinger 2020). In Latin the term denoting a male (presenting) member of the elites is *vir*. The term *vir* thus does not mean male person *per se*, but someone who lived according to the codes of elite manliness, or *virtus* (Williams 2014). *Virtus*, manliness, or *vir*-ness, as I will call it in what follows, has recently received a good deal of scholarly attention. In part, such attention results from a renewed interest in masculinities as well as from trans* studies (Bonnell Freidin forthcoming; Campanile, Carlà-Uhink, and Facella 2017; Keegan 2022; Olson 2017; Strassfeld 2022, 33–54). It is also informed by the transformation of the later Roman empire into a Christian one.

This transformation was made manifest in an exemplary fashion by the late Roman emperor Theodosius, also known as “the Great.” In 380 CE, Theodosius issued an edict in which he invited all his subjects, “all the peoples,” to “dwell” in the universal (or catholic) Christianity proclaimed by the bishops of Rome and Alexandria. This edict signaled an intensification of the Christianization of the later Roman empire with imperial support, which had preceded Theodosius’s reign by about seventy years and would continue under his sons Honorius and Arcadius, and his grandson Theodosius II (Elm forthcoming). It is relevant to what follows, because this slow process of Christianization also led to a reinterpretation of the codes of elite male comportment. The male elites of the later Roman empire were under significant pressure to reframe what being a *vir* meant for someone who was Christian. At the same time, concepts of being a Roman *vir* were further destabilized by the increasing presence of “barbarians” within the Roman army, at Rome’s frontiers, and within its borders as a consequence of invasions

(Maas 2024). In short, during the later Roman empire, male members of the elites, or *viri*, were engaged in changing what being themselves meant.

The importance of being splendid

One central way to perform such reframing and to make these processes and their outcomes visible was dress.¹ Scholars have taken note of these developments, but they have focused nearly exclusively on what the experts in the emerging empire-wide Christianity wore, namely bishops, ascetics, and monks.² Alternatively, they have focused on those who are usually associated with clothes, jewels, elaborate coiffeurs, and refined shoes: women, and in particular women who rejected those clothes to signal their intention to lead an ascetic life (Harlow 2004b; Morgan 2018; Olson 2014; Upson-Saia et al. 2014). As Barbara Vinken highlights in this volume, such interests reflect modern concerns and ideas according to which dress, fashion, elaborate self-decoration (and its rejection) are primarily the domain of women (Kraß 2016; Vinken 2022, 35–48; Vinken 2013). Carried into the later Roman empire, this perspective is misleading. As mentioned, the vast majority of our sources focus on the brilliant, intricate, colorful, and very costly clothing of elite men. A late Roman elite *vir* showcased his manliness, or *vir*-ness, through glittering sparkle, as the titles of the late Roman senators illustrate. A senator of the lowest rank carried the title *clarissimus vir*, or most shiny man. The second highest ranking senator was a *spectabilis vir*, a man well-worth looking at. The highest rank was occupied by the *illustris vir*, or illuminated man, who might become most illuminated or *illustrissimus vir* should he be chosen as the consul of the year. The rest of the elite men were merely *perfectissimi*, most perfect.

As the elaborate “paintings in words” of our written sources emphasize, such glittering men wore looks that had originated with the military. Ample cloaks of finely woven wool, embroidered in gold and held in place with bejeweled fibula brooches, multicolored and artfully draped silk garments and undergarments, tight pants, over-knee boots, which also came bejeweled, jewel-encrusted shoes – all these had evolved from military clothing that preserved the “barbarian” origin of many Roman legions. Sarmanthian cavalry, thundering Bavarian infantry, African and Saracene archers, fur-clad “Scythian,” another name for Gothic units, preserved “accessories” of their “ethnic” origin, all of which had by the end of the fourth century merged into the elite male Roman look. Only a specific belt or *cingula* signaled the wearer’s office and whether he was a member of the civil administration, called *militia*, or the actual army, also called *militia* (Harlow 2004a; Olson 2017, 105–34; Von Rummel 2007, 386–94, 401–6).

Changes and shifts in elite manliness became most evident and were fostered and prefigured at the apex of the social pyramid, in the person of the most sacred, divine emperor (*sacratissimus divinus imperator*). The emperor

was a present god, a *deus praesens* – thus the oath sworn to Theodosius by his soldiers, and the way in which his panegyrist Pacatus addressed him on the occasion of a victory –, and a “god we can see” (Veg. *Mil.* 2.5; *Pan.lat.* (2)12. 3.6–8: *deum ... quem videmus*). Divine emperors were singled out by their spectacular beauty, *decus* or *forma*, if they were legitimate; otherwise, they were tyrannical, deformed monsters (Elm 2019). The emperor’s immense, divine beauty was most immediately made manifest in his golden, glittering regalia. After Constantine, these consisted of a bejeweled diadem with pearl pendants, a purple military cloak (*paludamentum*) held together by jeweled brooches, gold-embroidered undergarments, jewel encrusted imperial booties, and a scepter and globe. The regalia allowed the emperor to recede behind his clothes, or in John Chrysostom’s pithy words, now “the emperor is his cloak (*himation*)” (John Chrysostom, *On the Holy Martyrs* 3, PG 50.650).

However, as has become apparent, an emperor’s physical beauty still mattered. The increasing elaboration of the imperial regalia did not eliminate a focus on the ruler’s actual, physical body (Elm 2019, 6; Neri 2004, 133–43, 161–5). According to Pacatus, Theodosius had been singled out by the supreme divine and by “all the votes of all men” as most sacred emperor because his “native land was blessed, [his] house illustrious, [his] beauty divine, [his] age perfect, and [he] was experienced in military and civilian affairs” (*Pan.lat.* (2)12.3.6–8, 4.5, 7.2, 8.3, 47.2–3). Pacatus’s words paint the picture of a sovereign who was the best of all rulers because he combined true Roman Republican *virtus* with imperial splendor, both expressed through his vestments and the beauty (*decus*) of his body. His *forma venerabilis* (venerable gorgeousness) “so graces imperial power, that to put it plainly, it is a moot point whether it is rather [his] manly courage (*virtus*) which insinuates itself into our minds or [his] face into our eyes!” (*Pan.lat.* (2)12.6.2–3).

However, Pacatus also made clear that imperial vestments mattered deeply and were therefore the focus of intense debate and controversy. An emperor lived by his clothes, but he could also, in the worst possible case, die by them. In fact, the victory Pacatus praised so emphatically in the oration I just quoted had been over another Roman emperor, whose defeat in a civil war battle made him into a “purple-clad” little homegrown slave and hideous monster, in short, into a woman-like tyrannical usurper, whose defeat was accompanied by despoiling him of these regalia, by stripping him naked (Lunn-Rockcliffe 2010). In sharp contrast, Pacatus praised Theodosius, the victorious and therefore legitimate emperor, in terms that evoked the heroes of Rome’s Republic. Theodosius had defended Rome’s liberty “while in armor, and increased [its] dignity while clad in the [Republican] toga (*togatus*)” (*Pan.lat.* (2)12.1.2; and 2.2–4) (Vitiello 2015). In other words, the shape and form of the imperial vestments remained controversial and such controversies over appropriate imperial dress reflected tensions among the elites regarding the ruler’s legitimacy (and by implication their own).

Emperors and their courts were aware of this. They actively used shifts in clothing, expressed in statues, mosaics, or on silver plates meant to honor select high-ranking officials, to signal their understanding of imperial virtues, including the emperor's imperial *virtus* or *vir*-ness, his manliness or masculinity. Theodosius's legitimacy had been sealed through victory in battle, so that Pacatus could easily exalt his body hardened (*durus*) "in the camps, the winters spent under canvas, the summers sweated through in the midst of battle, days and nights expended in fighting and keeping watch, the fiercest of fights on land and on sea" (*Pan.lat.* (2)12.8.3–4).³ However, Theodosius's imperial *vir*-ness also had to signal his version of Christianity, the all-encompassing universal (*catholicos*) Christianity he favored and in which he wished "all the people" in his realm to "dwell." Moreover, his imperial *vir*-ness had to encompass a recent phenomenon, namely the new practice of making imperial sons into fully fledged rulers, or Augusti, at age four, five, or the immensely mature eleven.⁴

To be clear, emperor or *imperator* meant battle commander. To be an emperor was predicated on victories in battles and wars; that was an emperor's most important virtue. Being Christian did not change that, but it required adjustments, as did the reality of an Augustus aged four. A four-year old *imperator* could be (presented as) battle-ready and could, of course, win victories (fought on his behalf by others). However, what a four, five, eleven or twelve-year-old Augustus could do particularly well was being beautiful. As I argue elsewhere, a combination of enhanced Christian universality and hence integrating unity, and the necessity to fold child-emperors into the "canon" of imperial virtues and their representation prompted Theodosius and later his sons, who had become co-Augusti at four and five, and in Honorius's case sole emperor of the West at eleven, to promote a soft, copious, fluid, expansive and expansively gendered form of imperial masculinity (Elm 2025).

In so doing, the emperors and their advisors employed manifestations of same-sex desire integral to the circles of the late antique elite, including the Roman Senate, and the imperial bureaucracy (Masterson 2014, 11). These circles were realms of male homosociality as defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.⁵ In the later Roman case, expressions of same-sex desire figured prominently in the intricate fabric of communication, facilitated by the education (*paideia*) expected of all elite members (Masterson 2014, 3). Here, same-gender desire framed symmetrical relationships of friendship and solidarity, but it also mitigated steep power imbalances. Thus, the immense power and divine glory of the emperor was expressed as erotic attractiveness to lessen differences of status and rank: the emperor was beautiful and extremely desirable for all who saw him, but he also loved and desired all those in his care, and especially his elite male subjects (Masterson 2014, 41–89). It was such notions of imperial beauty and erotic desirability that Theodosius mobilized to signal a copious, all-encompassing, unifying imperial *vir*-ness that included Christian ideas as well as child emperors (Elm 2025).

His elite audience understood his intentions very well. However, everyone also knew that such moves were risky. Fluid, soft, expansively gendered imperial masculinity was erotically attractive and thus a powerfully cohesive force. But it was also dangerous, especially when young, gorgeous imperial boys were guided by strong military men who were not their fathers (McEvoy 2013, 144–52). Phrased differently, Theodosius might have felt free to make his young boys into full emperors, the apex of Roman *vir*-ness, but his elite male subjects were also free to consider such moves preposterous. Nothing brings these stakes and their implications into clearer focus than the voice of one elite critic: the author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* in the *Historia Augusta*.

The Life of Heliogabalus in the Historia Augusta

The *Historia Augusta* or *Imperial History*, which includes the *Life of Heliogabalus*, is a notoriously difficult source.⁶ Written in Rome or Italy in the 390's or early 400's, during the early rule of the adolescent emperor Honorius, the *Historia Augusta* reads as if six different historians had presented the emperor Constantine with a collection of imperial biographies from Hadrian to Carinus (Haake 2015, 271). Ever since Hermann Dessau's foundational article of 1889, it is clear that a single author composed the entire work (Dessau 1889; Rohrbacher 2016, 3–16; Zinsli 2014). This author was not Christian and he wrote from a pro-senatorial perspective with a rather jaded view of imperial governance (Haake 2015, 269–74; Scheithauer 1987, 39–64). Indeed, the *Historia Augusta* was a unique endeavor with its own literary style (Rohrbacher 2016, 3–16; Thomson 2012). This is important, because the *Lives* of the *Historia Augusta* are often mined to reconstruct historical events of third century emperors about whom we have few other sources. However, I read the *Historia Augusta*, and hence the *Life of Heliogabalus*, as a cohesive work.⁷ In other words, in what follows I am presenting the literary character Heliogabalus, and not the third-century emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus known as Elagabalus, to illustrate some of the contemporary debates regarding imperial *vir*-ness Theodosius and his sons had sparked (Mader 2005, 131 n. 2; Rohrbacher 2016, 14; Zinsli 2014, 2). The *Life of Heliogabalus* illuminated, responded to, and satirized the author's time and place, Italy in the 390s and early 400s, in the voice of an elite *vir*, who wished to entertain himself and his audience while also looking at the dark side.

Heliogabalus's Life

Writing as Aelius Lampridius, the author created the figure of Heliogabalus inspired by Suetonius, historians such as Dio Cassius or Herodian, a collection of culinary recipes associated with Apicius, Pliny

the Elder's *Natural History*, and Juvenal's satires. This *ultimus Antoninorum* or last of the Antonines was the climax of an inexorable march toward more and more excessive tyranny.⁸ Heliogabalus was the ultimate tyrant, a *princeps pessimus*, offering a version of male gender performance at the outer edges of the thinkable. Every trope denigrating the tyrannical ruler is exaggerated to create the most *prodigiosus tyrannus*, the most monstrous of them all.⁹ Tyrants, as all knew, are of ambiguous manliness and indeterminate or compound gender, because they lack the restraint of a *vir*. Because they are not *vir*i, they lack the rigor to control their desire (*libidines*). Thus, they do everything to excess: the luxury of their clothing, the extravagance of their banquets, the vastness of their greed, the scope and variety of their sexual partners and positions. As less-than-manly men, tyrants are soft and brittle, easily malleable by women and those fluid and compound beings known as eunuchs (Gualerzi 2005, 26–32; Scheithauer 1987, 13–27, 54–64, 73–87, 165). Heliogabalus, “the most impure male, *homo omnium impurissimus*” (*SHA Heliogab.* 24.4, 26.1, 33.1) embodies all this to the extreme (Scheithauer 1987, 59). The way in which Lampridius constructed his *Life* reflects these features. It too is characterized by excessive amplification and seeming disorder to become a carnivalesque Saturnalian farce, a caricature chosen carefully to reflect real anxieties and tensions (Mader 2005, 158–65, 167).

In keeping with the biographical genre, Lampridius begins with Heliogabalus's origin.¹⁰ No one knows how fathered him, least of all his “oriental,” Syrian mother Symiamira, a woman worthy of her depraved son.¹¹ Since his mother lived like a prostitute, Heliogabalus was in effect illegitimate.¹² His sordid origin foretold his end. Eventually, Heliogabalus's pretorian guards, tired of his perversities, rose up to liberate the state (*ad liberandam rem publicam*) and executed his cronies such “that their death matched their life” (*SHA Heliogab.* 16.5–6): by perforating their anus.¹³ Next they “killed the emperor in a latrine to which he had fled” (*SHA Heliogab.* 17.1), dragged his corpse through the streets and tried to stuff it into a muddy sewer (*cloaca*), which was, however, too narrow for the corpse so that they weighted it down and threw it into the Tiber – the first emperor's corpse to suffer such degradation. His mother was killed with him, his name was erased by order of the Senate and his memory condemned.¹⁴

Heliogabalus's life fitted its beginning and end. He became emperor while very young (Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Elagabalus had been fourteen) so that he was utterly dependent on his mother and grandmother without whom he could not even enter the Senate house.¹⁵ Indeed, he was the first emperor to make his mother into a senator. She sat in the Senate as *clarissimus vir* and participated in the drafting of decrees.¹⁶ He then formed a new Senate on the Quirinal Hill, consisting entirely of women, a *senaculum, id est mulierum senatum*. Under Symiamira's leadership this new, second Senate immediately proceeded

to enact “ridiculous laws” for elite married women or matrons, decreeing who could wear what clothes in public, who should kiss whom first, who could ride a horse versus a mule, what kind of chariot could be used, who could wear gold and who could place jewels on their boots, the technical term is that for the emperor’s footwear, *calciamentum*.¹⁷ Real senators, actual *viri clarissimi*, meanwhile, were derided as *mancipia togata*, slaves wearing a toga. It was an upside-down world in which women were treated as senators, as *clarissimi viri*, and senators, dignified *gravissimi viri*, as if they were enslaved.¹⁸

The emperor as exoletus

When women act as and hence “become” men, are masculinized, the classic rules of Roman gender and power dynamics demanded that the men associated with them act as and “become” women (Bonnell Freidin, [forthcoming](#); Gunderson 2000, 59–86). Lampridius’s Heliogabalus went further by creatively combining his dependence on his grandmother and mother, the *clarissima vir*, with an all-encompassing gender performance to build his “status” as tyrant extraordinaire.¹⁹ According to Lampridius, the young Heliogabalus exulted in intercourse with men and women; a prince “who received his desires in every cavity of his body” (*SHA Heliogab.* 5.2). Further, she/he presented themselves consistently as a woman. For example, Heliogabalus played Venus when reenacting the story of Paris, where they delighted in letting their clothes slip down to his feet, and, naked and on her knees with one hand on his breasts, the other on his genitals, s/he would thrust their considerable derriere at his suitor.²⁰ She “became” Salambo; dressed, bathed, and shaved with women as a woman, always eager to enhance her feminine appeal.²¹ Indeed, Heliogabalus was the first emperor to choose the jeweled diadem not because of its Persian royal association, but because she thought it more becoming for a woman’s face and even wore it “at home” (*SHA Heliogab.* 23.5).

Second, with advancing age, Heliogabalus increasingly enjoyed prostituting himself as a *meretrix*, as a prostitute acting in a female sexual capacity, for example when publicly performing fellatio on his lover Hierocles. Here, Heliogabalus demonstrated a categorical preference for being penetrated by men with extra-large genitals.²² “In fact, in Rome he did nothing else but keep agents to search out for him men with large genitals (*bene vasatos*), and bring them to court, so that he could enjoy their special endowments” (*SHA Heliogab.* 5.3). Furthermore, “he made a bath in the palace public and at the same time opened that of Plautianus to the people, so as to recruit in this way the service of well-hung men. Careful attention was given to searching the *whole* city in depth and among the sailors for *onobeli* (men hung like donkeys), which is what they called those who looked extra virile (*viriliores*)” (*SHA Heliogab.* 8.6–7). Heliogabalus used the size of a man’s endowment as

principal criterion for appointment to offices that carried the highest senatorial rank of *illustris vir* – legates, consuls, generals of the highest rank – which led to the formation of rivaling political factions based on penis-size.²³ Of course, he was always accompanied by large numbers of men chosen for this very characteristic.²⁴

According to Lampridius, strong and extremely well-hung men and the search for them were a distinct, even central feature of Heliogabalus's person and character, "imperial politics ... [as] an extension of the tyrant's sexual perversity" (Mader 2005, 145). This particular feature of his rule found its apogee in Heliogabalus's marriage to Zoticus, where the author takes an episode also reported by Dio Cassius for Marcus Aurelius Antoninus to new heights, thus making it into a constituting factor of his reign.²⁵ In Lampridius's telling, Zoticus, originally an athlete from Smyrna to whom Heliogabalus had taken a shine because of the size of his genitals, had gained such immense power that all the chief office holders considered him the husband of the emperor (*quasi domini maritus*).²⁶ Not surprisingly, Zoticus utterly abused his position of intimacy with the ruler, selling access to the ruler and dictating policy at exorbitant prices. Heliogabalus indeed proceeded to marry Zoticus, whereby the emperor assumed the role of the bride accompanied by her maid.²⁷ "After that he would ask philosophers and *gravissimi viri* whether they in their adolescence had also passively enjoyed what he was now enjoying (*in adulescentia perpessi esset quae ipse pateretur*), and this with the greatest impudence" (*SHA Heliogab.* 10.6).²⁸

Wedding ceremonies between emperors and their often low-status lovers were not new, neither in actuality nor as a trope of invective.²⁹ Thus, Suetonius and Dio Cassius mention Nero's wedding to the beautiful Sporus and Domitian's love for Earinus.³⁰ However, Sporus as well as Domitian's celebrated lover Earinus had been eunuchs (and slaves), persons the sources describe as both female and male or neither male nor female, or on occasion as a third sex (*tertium genus*). In other words, while Nero and Domitian had performed marriage rituals with admittedly unsuitable lovers (and while married to their wives, of course), as a rule they had married their lovers, widely celebrated for their exquisite beauty, in the role of the bridegroom.³¹ Nero performed his wedding as husband to his eunuch bride or wife, and Domitian's role in relation to the gorgeous Earinus was also clear.³² In contrast, Lampridius left no doubt that Zoticus was fully male and performed sexually as a man, that in fact for Heliogabalus Zoticus's most desirable feature was his majestic cock. There could be no doubt whatsoever who penetrated whom in this union: Zoticus the *dominus* Heliogabalus.³³

Lampridius's *Life of Heliogabalus* carefully constructs the (fictional) emperor's gender performance as absolutely comprehensive: he was all things to all women and all men. However, as Heliogabalus grew older (than his fourteen years of age when assuming the imperial throne),

distinct preferences emerged. While progressing past puberty, Heliogabalus increasingly enjoyed the sexual role connotated as that of a woman, namely penetrated by strong, exceptionally well-hung men. As Lampridius emphasized, these emerging preferences characterized and defined Heliogabalus's imperial performance and his government; those became the deciding factors of his rule. Lampridius's Heliogabalus was a (freeborn) young man, who even once he had passed his adolescence (where such behavior was acceptable if perhaps not exactly praiseworthy for a future *gravissimus vir*) never fully and certainly not exclusively took on the sexual role of a *vir*, and instead continued to assume the passive role of a woman with great enthusiasm. The emperor, so Lampridius, had therefore been an *exoletus*, continued to act as an *exoletus*, and surrounded himself by troops of other *exoleti* as well as the most luxurious little boys and youths.³⁴

Exoletus or *exoletus*, literally “outgrown (male),” like other Latin and Greek technical sexual terms, is hard to translate. As a rule, *exoleti* were late - and post-adolescent males, usually of servile status and often working as prostitutes, who assumed the passive sexual role in intercourse with adult men.³⁵ Occasionally, free-born, adult men likewise assumed such positions and the opprobrium they encountered was significant, especially for a *vir*. Such behavior, a *vir*'s voluntary abdication of his proper sexual role and hence his manliness, had already been proscribed in the Republican *Lex Scantinia*.³⁶ This law was probably not enforced toward the end of the fourth century, if indeed it had ever been, but it was known and retained on the books as a deterrent. A new law by Theodosius and his co-rulers in 390 issued a stern warning to elite adult *viri* not to engage in such acts: a stark reminder of where the boundaries of appropriate elite male gender performance were drawn. Lampridius's Heliogabalus, who had become emperor as an adolescent, had failed to transition from boy or *puer* – another technical term for a person assuming the passive position – to *vir*. He remained enthralled to his mother and “endured” grown men, who were not only more virile than most but grotesquely so and who dominated his court. Most prominent among them was Zoticus, who lorded over even the chief office holders, regulated access to the imperial person, and enjoyed a familiarity with the ruler that resembled that of a husband and wife, as indeed show-cased by their wedding, in which the emperor was the bride.³⁷

The ambience of the time: Boys as emperors

Lampridius, that is, author of the *Historia Augusta*, was a deeply allusive writer whose wordplays and intertextual references are legion. He also had a distinct political agenda. No friend of Roman imperial rule as a whole, the author targeted some emperors with greater venom than others (Scheithauer 1987, 39–64). One object of such derision, one

potential target of the *Life of Heliogabalus*, was the emperor Constantine, who had made Christianity a legal religion and who had also introduced the imperial diadem (Zinsli 2005, 2014, 255–64). However, Constantine was not the only target. One of the author’s most pronounced bones of contention were child emperors. Writing as Flavius Vopiscus of Syracuse, the author praised Tacitus for having become emperor as a grown man in contrast to “those monsters of times past – Nero, Heliogabalus, Commodus,” whose innate flaws were further amplified by their youth when elevated to imperial rule. At the moment of Tacitus’s election, Vopiscus reports that Maecius Faltonius Nicomachus, another fictional character, addressed the Augustus and the Senate as follows: “May the gods save us, conscripted fathers (*patres conscripti*), from boy emperors (*principes pueros*) and prepubescent boys as fathers of the fatherland (*patres patriae dici impuberes*) ... whose hand a schoolmaster must guide for the signing of his name and who is induced to confer a consulship by sweetmeats or toys ... What wisdom is ... in having as emperor one who ... stands in dread of a guardian ... who appoints as consuls or generals or judges men whose lives, whose merits, whose years, whose families, whose achievements he knows not at all? ... I appeal to you, Tacitus Augustus, ... in the name of our common fatherland and our laws that, if Fate should overtake you too speedily, you will not name your young sons as heirs to the Roman Empire, so that you are not bequeathing the Republic, the conscripted fathers, the Roman people like your little villa, your *coloni*, your slaves ... It is a great glory to a dying prince to love the Republic more than his sons” (*SHA Tac.* 6. 4–9).

Child emperors so young that they feared their guardians and could not sign anything into law unless their schoolteachers guided their hand, were one bone of contention. The *Life of Heliogabalus* addressed another bone of even more significant contention: what happens when these school-boy emperors grow into adolescents and young adults and still fear their guardians, strong men who were not their fathers?³⁸ What if they failed to transition properly from *puer* to *vir*? Heliogabalus had been left to the influence of his mother and to his own devices, and had mightily indulged in the attentions of strong, well-hung men who were not his father. Rather than transitioning from *puer* to *vir* he had married his strong man. That made him an *exoletus*. An emperor as *exoletus* was a monster of extraordinary proportion, because it joined together in one the two outer extremes of a Roman male person’s comportment: the *dominus* and *sacratissimus*, *divinus imperator* and the *exoletus*, the lowest of the low (Elm 2019; Varner 2007). Such a vision, the merging into one the lowest and highest expression of Roman manliness and hence of imperial power, could only be imagined as satire and carnivalesque Saturnalian farce. It had no place in any other genre, least of all history, not to mention reality.³⁹ And yet, Lampridius’s “history,” his *Life of Heliogabalus* imagined and hence made visible just that –

just such a nadir – if in a mixture of horror and laughter. If boys could become emperors, guided and guarded by strong men who were not their fathers, it did not require an enormous leap of imagination to think of such little emperors as growing into *exoleti*. And if one could think thus with less-than-manly men, then imperial representation itself came close to its limits on either end of the spectrum because such thoughts significantly expanded who could (and did) embody imperial virtue: a broad range of men, beginning with small boys, progressing to adolescent youths who had barely grown beards and not shed their soft attributes to end – where?

Assuming that the *Life of Heliogabalus* was written between 394 and 405, the author and his audience had witnessed instances where the experiment of very young boys as emperors went astray as they grew into young men, for example in the case of Valentinian II. who died by suicide in 392. Honorius, who assumed imperial rule at barely eleven, had been protected and guided by his *magister militum* Stilicho. In 398, the thirteen-year-old Honorius had married Stilicho's daughter, which was a clear signal that he had now successfully transitioned to *vir* – to be confirmed even more fully the moment they had children (which never materialized). Nevertheless, no one could know for certain where this experiment would lead (Lejdegård 2002, 45–59). The author of the *Historia Augusta* and those whose views he expressed remained skeptical. For them, a boy on the throne as *sacratissimus imperator* remained anathema. Even if much of the divine majesty, the *virtus* of this *imperator* emanated from his regalia, from his ornate vestments, even if this Augustus was victorious in every battle military commanders fought in his name (as they did for adult emperors), such an arrangement negated Roman manliness and hence imperial power. It was as if the emperor wore the clothes of the one type of person who could never assume Roman imperial rule, because they could never become an actual father (of the realm): women. The *Life of Heliogabalus* declared rather loudly that such a constellation violated the divinely authorized order of things, the *ordo rerum*, and created a world up-side-down. If emperors were no longer hardened, austere, blood-splattered men (*viri*) wearing simple cloaks (*paenulae*), but silk-encased, jewel encrusted boys (*pueri*) – perhaps even *pueri* who liked being fucked by their generals (metaphorically speaking, of course) – then what were the chances that the entire *imperium Romanum* would suffer the same fate?

It was a monstrous thought worth “thinking with” in a manner as exaggerated as the behavior of its subject. Heliogabalus, as befitting an imperial *exoletus* and most tyrannical tyrant, did not triumph on the battlefield but in the banquet hall, out-banqueting all who came before him.⁴⁰ His banquets never cost less than one hundred thousand sesterces per course, included exotic fare such as parrots heads, and, manifesting his own monstrous combining of incompatibles, mixed incompatible, indigestible ingredients such as peas and gold nuggets, lentils and pieces

of onyx, rice and pearls.⁴¹ His clothes were equally amplified. “He was the first of the Romans, it is said, who wore clothing wholly of silk, though garments partly of silk were in use before his time. Washed linen he would never touch, saying that it was for beggars” (*SHA Heliogab.* 26.1–2).⁴² “He would wear a tunic made wholly of gold. He also wore one of purple, and another Persian one studded with jewels, of which he said that it weighted him down through his pleasures. He wore jewels even on his shoes, sometimes engraved ones, which would make all laugh – as if one could see on jewels attached to feet the engravings of famous artists! He also wanted to wear a jeweled diadem which he considered more beautiful and becoming for a woman’s face” (*SHA Heliogab.* 23.3–5) (Turcan 1993, 207–8). Further, Heliogabalus delighted in wearing a Dalmatian cloak, popular toward the end of the fourth century as a distinct garment of the Christian clergy, here associated with wayward young boys in need of correction.⁴³ Covered thus from head to toe in silk, gold, and jewels, Heliogabalus sparkled, glittered, and made himself well worth looking at as a *clarissimus, spectabiles, illustris exoletus*.

Divine Cross-dressing

Heliogabalus, to be sure, was a cross-dresser.⁴⁴ Like the young Achilles or Bacchus before him, he wore clothes associated with women, in particular while he was still young (Heslin 2005; McNelis, 2020). Recently, Roland Betancourt and others have drawn attention to the later Byzantine reception of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, called Elagabalus, according to which the emperor was not merely cross-dressing, that is, choosing to wear women’s clothes for specific occasions and periods, but a transgender woman who sought gender affirming surgery (Betancourt 2020, 106–112; Butler 2019). Betancourt’s evidence is illuminating, especially because he highlights the medical possibilities of transition and the reality of pre-modern trans* lives. At the same time, Lambridius’s focus on Heliogabalus’s dress, on vestments, shoes, hair ornaments, the diadem combined with his elaboration of the comprehensive and wide-ranging nature of his sexual partners, which included large swarms of very young boys, emphasizes cross-dressing.

It does so, I think, for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this paper, to which I would like to return. Achilles, as just mentioned, had spent part of his adolescence, when he was about fourteen or so, dressed as a young woman. Later, he became the paragon of the epic warrior, a hero who combined human and supra-human characteristics. Bacchus was another figure oscillating between the divine and the human: both were among the heroes on which the young emperor Honorius and his court relied to shape his battle-readiness at eleven and twelve years old. In other words, to be both male and female, or neither male nor female, to live (and love) beyond gendered binaries, was a signifier of the divine

and the monstrous (Carlà-Uhink 2017; Strassfeld 2022, 33–54; Varner 2007). Supremely beautiful emperors, whatever their age, existed beyond the gendered dynamics of other mortals. However, as human beings, which they undeniably were, they were also dependent on the discernment of their subjects. Soft, copiously gendered imperial beauty was divine and powerful as Theodosius understood very well – if the actual emperor was seen as living up to the task. If that was in doubt, then the most sacred, divine emperor could morph into a monstrous *exoletus* just as fast as he was stripped of his regalia.

Notes

1. I am taking the subtitle from Rollinger (2020).
2. Doerfler (2014) focuses on Ambrose of Milan; Olson (2017) 1–3 focuses on the “core period” from ca. 200 BCE to 225 CE.
3. Gunderson (2000, 133, 179, 192–213); for the domination of such manliness or virtues over feminized “foreigners” in Republican and early imperial authors Lowrie (2015); Williams (2010, 132–42).
4. Scholars often talk about the mothers or generals at the court of these very young emperors as regents, especially once the father had passed away. This is misleading, because there was no moment in which a Roman emperor or Augustus was not a full ruler. The best way to think of such adult persons is as legal guardians: McEvoy (2013, 9).
5. Sedgwick (1985) 1: “‘homosocial’ is a word [that] describes social bonds between persons of the same sex [...]; it is applied to such activities as “male bonding,” which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a *continuum* between homosocial and homosexual.”
6. In what follows, I am using Turcan (1993) and Magie (2000), with my modifications.
7. Icks (2011, 7); Mader (2005). For the date of *SHA Heliogab.* see Zinsli (2014, 281–90, 656), who narrows it to between 394 and 405.
8. *SHA Heliogab.* 1.7; Mader (2005, 131); for the sources Zinsli (2014, 35–140).
9. *SHA Heliogab.* 1.2.
10. *SHA Heliogab.* 1.4–2.3.
11. *SHA Heliogab.* 18.3: *probrosissima mulier et digna filio.*
12. *SHA Heliogab.* 2.1; Zinsli (2014, 180).
13. See also *SHA Heliogab.* 10.1 and 15.1–4.

14. *SHA Heliogab.* 17.2–4; *SHA Heliogab.* 18.23 for his mother’s death.
15. Zinsli (2014, 237), rightly cautions that *SHA Heliogab.* 2.1 only hints at his age which is otherwise not emphasized; the actual Elagabalus would have been under his mother’s guardianship.
16. *SHA Heliogab.* 4.1–2; “... the only one of all the emperors under whom a woman attended the senate as if she was a *clarissimus vir*,” *SHA Heliogab.* 12.3, 15.6.
17. *SHA Heliogab.* 4.2–3; the first act following Heliogabalus’s death was to outlaw women in the Senate: *SHA Heliogab.* 18.3.
18. *SHA Heliogab.* 10.6; cf. 11.2; 20.1: “he often showed such contempt for the Senate that he called the senators slaves in the toga.”
19. The author evokes Suentonius’ Nero as Heliogabalus’s precursor; Anagnostou-Laoutides and Charles (2014, 203–8); for Neronian taste as indication of imperial behavior: Gowers (1994, 131–50).
20. *SHA Heliogab.* 5.2; *SHA Heliogab.* 5.4.
21. *SHA Heliogab.* 5.5; 7.3.
22. *SHA Heliogab.* 6.5, 26.3–5, 31.7. Gleason (1995, 65): “A man who actively penetrates and dominates others, whether male or female, is still a man. A man who aims to please – any one, male or female – in his erotic encounters is *ipso facto* effeminate.”.
23. *SHA Heliogab.* 9.3; cf. 11.1 and 12.1–2.
24. *SHA Heliogab.* 31.6; Mader (2005, 146–7); Williams (2010, 86–91).
25. *SHA Heliogab.* 10.2, 5; Cass. Dio 80.13.4, 80.15–6.
26. Cass. Dio 79.16 describes Zoticus’s origins.
27. *Nubere* designates the woman’s part in a wedding.
28. In addition to Cass. Dio, the author alludes to Juv. 2.117–38.
29. Dalla (1987, 62–9); Masterson (2014, 23–5 n. 32); for formalized male partnerships in Byzantium see Rapp (2016, 40–7).
30. For Nero and Sporus see Suet. *Nero* 28, 46, 48–9; Cass. Dio 62.18, 28; Richlin (1993, 550–4); Tougher (2013, 56–6).
31. Though Nero according to Suet. *Nero* 29, had been the bride when marrying Doryphorus, imitating the moans of a virgin; Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.4 reports that he did the same with a certain Pythagoras.
32. Earinus was celebrated by Mart. *Epig.* 9.11, 12, 13, 16, 17, and 36; and Stat. *Sil.* 3.4; Cass. Dio 67.2.3.
33. Such marriages were more than invective. *CTh* 9.7.3 issued in 342 by Constantine II and Constantius decreed that “when a man weds as a woman, what should this ‘woman,’ who would abandon manliness (lit. *viros*, ‘men’) want when sex has lost its place? When there is this crime ... when Venus is changed into another form,” the guilty parties were to suffer “exquisite punishments.” The interpretation of this law is debated, but the abandonment of

- the dominant gender to marry appears to cause the sanctions: Dalla (1987) 167–8; Masterson (2014) 23–5 for discussion and further bibliography.
34. *SHA Heliogab.* 26.4–5: *exsoletos undique collectos et luxuriosissimos puerulos et iuvenes ... exsoletos habitu puerorum, qui prostituuntur*; 31.6: *causa vehiculorum erat lenonum, lenarum, meretricum, exoletorum, subactorum etiam bene vasatorum multitudo*; 12.4: *in conviviis exsoletos maxime iuxta se ponebat eorumque adtrectatione et tactu praecipue gaudebat*; according to Suet. *Titus* 7, Titus also enjoyed *exoletorum et spadonum greges*, troupes of *exoleti* and eunuchs.
 35. Richlin (1993, 531) for the richness of the essentially untranslatable vocabulary denoting Roman male sexual passivity; Taylor (1997, 358–63); Gunderson (2000, 149–86); Williams (1999(2010), 83–4); Williams (2014); Zinsli (2014, 197–9, 500–1).
 36. The opprobrium was such that not even slaves should be forced into such a position. For the *lex Scantinia*, which punished non-consensual sex with a free-born boy or young man: Juv. 2.435; Suet. *Domit.* 8; Dalla (1987, 7–35, 41–9, 82–99); Richlin (1993, 530–41); for other sexual relations of a free man with another one of lower status see Nappa (2018, 100–4, 121–6, 179–90).
 37. Heliogabalus’s successor Alexander Severus removed all *exoleti* (and infamous women) from court: *SHA Alex. Sev.* 34.4; Zinsli (2014, 190).
 38. For the dynastic implications see Icks (2014).
 39. For Roman satire more generally see Habinek (2005); Nappa (2018).
 40. *SHA Heliogab.* 24.2, 30.4–5.
 41. *SHA Heliogab.* 19.3–5, 21.1–4, 23.7–8, 28.6; he further violated the natural order by bringing the sea inland, erecting mountains of snow in the summer; feeding fish to peasants and never eating fish while near the sea; as Zinsli (2014, 186) points out, many of these transgressions poke fun at cherished Roman traditions; Mader (2005, 160–2).
 42. Neri (1999); for the foreign luxury connotations of silk see Eberle (2023).
 43. *SHA Heliogab.* 26.2, alluding to Juv. 6.265–7; in Gell. *NA* 6.12 Scipio accuses a certain Galus of wearing a *dalmatica* as a sign of being a *cinaedus*; Val. Max. 3.5.1; Neri (1999, 219, 230); Zinsli (2014, 643–9, 681–93).
 44. That is, a person who choses for a certain time to dress but not to live permanently or to perform as a person of the “opposite” gender; “GLAAD Media Reference Guide—Transgender,” GLAAD, www.glaad.org/reference/trans-terms.

References

- Anagnostou-Laoutides, Eva and., and Michel B. Charles. 2014. "Unmanning an Emperor: Otho in the Literary Tradition." *The Classical Journal* 109: 199–222.
- Betancourt, Roland. 2020. *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bonnell Freidin, Anna. *Forthcoming*. "Gender in the Roman Empire." In *Blackwell Companion to Gender*.
- Butler, Shane. 2019. "The Youth of Antiquity: Reception, Homosexuality, Alterity." *Classical Receptions Journal* 11 (4): 373–406. <https://doi.org/10.1093/crj/clz010>.
- Campanile, Domitilla, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, and Margherita Facella, eds. 2017. *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*. London: Routledge.
- Carlà-Uhink, Filippo. 2017. "'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*, edited by Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, and Margherita Facella, 3–37. Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies. London: Routledge.
- Dalla, Danilo. 1987. *Ubi Venus mutatur: Omossessualità e diritto nel mondo romano*. Seminario giuridico della Università di Bologna, 119. Milan: Giuffrè.
- Dessau, Hermann. 1889. "Über Zeit und Persönlichkeit der *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*." *Hermes* 24: 337–392.
- Doerfler, Maria. 2014. "Coming Apart at the Seams: Cross-Dressing, Masculinity and the Social Body in Kate Antiquity." *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, edited by Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten, 37–51. Farnham: Routledge.
- Eberle, Lisa P. 2023. "Foreign Silk on Roman Bodies: Gender, Wealth and Empire in the Metropole." In *Gendering Roman Imperialism*, edited by Hannah Cornwell and Greg Woolf. Leiden: Brill, 203–222.
- Elm, Susanna. 2019. "An Icon of Ugliness: Eutropius the Eunuch." In *From Living to Visual Images: Paradigms of Corporeal Iconicity in Late Antiquity*, edited by Michele Bacci and Vladimir Ivanovici. *RIHA Journal* 0222-0229, 0226. <https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2019/0222-0229-special-issue-paradigms-of-corporeal-iconicity/0226-elm>.
- Elm, Susanna. *Forthcoming*. "Late Roman Toleration? or How to Read an Imperial Edict: Theodosius to All the People on the Catholic *religio*." In edited by Karen Barkey and Jonathan Laurence. Cham: Springer.

- Elm, Susanna. 2025. *The Importance of Being Gorgeous: Gender and Christian Imperial Rule (In Late Antiquity)*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Gleason, Maud. 1995. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gowers, Emily. 1994. "Persius and the Decoction of Nero." In *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History, and Representation*, edited by Jas Elsner and Jamie Masters, 131–150. London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gualerzi, Saverio. 2005. *Né uomo, né donna, né dio, né dea. Ruolo sessuale e ruolo religioso dell'imperatore Elagabalo*. Bologna: Patron.
- Gunderson, Erik. 2000. *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Haake, Matthias. 2015. "In Search of Good Emperors.' Emperors, Caesars, and Usurpers in the Mirror of Antimonarchic Patterns in the *Historia Augusta* – Some Considerations." In *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, edited by Henning Börm, 269–303. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Habinek, Thomas. 2005. "Satire as Aristocratic Play." In *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, edited by Kirk Freudenburg, 177–191. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harlow, Mary. 2004a. "'Clothes Maketh the Man': Power, Dressing, and Elite Masculinity in the Later Roman World." In *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, edited by Leslie Brubaker and Julia Smith, 44–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harlow, Mary. 2004b. "Female Dress, Third-Sixth Century: The Messages in the Media?" *Antiquité Tardive* 12: 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.AT.2.300074>.
- Heslin, Peter J. 2005. *Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Icks, Martijn. 2011. *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Icks, Martijn. 2014. "The Inadequate Heirs of Theodosius: Ancestry, Merit and Divine Blessing in the Representation of Arcadius and Honorius." *Millennium* 11 (1): 69–100. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mill-2014-0105>.
- Keegan, Cael M. 2022. "Transgender Studies, or How to Do Things with *Trans*." In *The Cambridge Companion of Queer Studies*, edited by Siobhan B. Somerville, 66–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kraß, Andreas. 2016. "Meterosexualität oder wie schwul ist der moderne Mann? (2008)." In *Die Blumen der Mode – Klassische und neue Texte zur Philosophie der Mode*, edited by Barbara Vinken, 395–412. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

- Lejdegård, Hans. 2002. *Honorius and the City of Rome: Authority and Legitimacy in Late Antiquity*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet.
- Lowrie, Michèle. 2015. "The Egyptian Within: A Roman Figuration of Civil War." In *Translatio Babylonis: Unsere Orientalische Moderne*, edited by Barbara Vinken, 13–28. Paderborn: Fink.
- Lunn-Rockliffe, Sophie. 2010. "Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 3 (2): 316–336. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jla.2010.a404242>.
- Maas, M. 2024. *The Conqueror's Gift. Ethnography and Empire at the End of Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mader, Gottfried. 2005. "History as Carnival, or Method and Madness in the *Vita Heliogabali*." *Classical Antiquity* 24 (1): 131–172. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2005.24.1.131>.
- Magie, David. 2000. *Historia Augusta* [Imperial History], vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Masterson, Mark. 2014. *Man to Man: Desire, Homosociality, and Authority in Late-Roman Manhood*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- McEvoy, Meaghan A. 2013. *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367-455*. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McNelis, Charles. 2020. "Bacchus, Hercules, and Literary History in Statius's *Achilleid*." *Classical Journal* 115: 442–455.
- Morgan, Faith Pennick. 2018. *Dress and Personal Appearance in Late Antiquity: The Clothing of the Middle and Lower Classes*. Leiden: Brill.
- Nappa, Christopher. 2018. *Making Men Ridiculous: Juvenal and the Anxieties of the Individual*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Neri, Valerio. 1999. "Considerazioni sul tema della *luxuria* nell'*Historia Augusta*." In *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Genevense*, edited by François Paschoud, 217–240. Bari: Edipuglia.
- Neri, Valerio. 2004. *La bellezza del corpo nella società tardoantica: Rappresentazioni visive e valutazioni estetiche tra cultura classica e cristianesimo*. Bologna: Patron.
- Olson, Kelly. 2014. "Toga and Pallium: Status, Sexuality, Identity." In *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, edited by Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and James Robson, 422–448. New York: Routledge.
- Olson, Kelly. 2017. *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rapp, Claudia. 2016. *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium: Monks, Laymen, and Christian Ritual*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richlin, Amy. 1993. "Not before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3: 523–573.

- Rohrbacher, David. 2016. *The Play of Allusion in the Historia Augusta*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Rollinger, Christian. 2020. "The Importance of Being Splendid: Competition, Ceremonial, and the Semiotics of Status at the Court of the Late Roman Emperors (4th–6th Centuries)." In *Gaining and Losing Imperial Favour in Late Antiquity*, edited by Kamil Cyprian Choda, Maurits Sterk de Leeuw, and Fabian Schulz, 36–72. Leiden: Brill.
- Scheithauer, Andrea. 1987. *Kaiserbild und literarisches Programm: Untersuchungen zur Tendenz der Historia Augusta*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1985. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desires*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Strassfeld, Max K. 2022. *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Taylor, Rabun. 1997. "Two Pathic Subcultures in Ancient Rome." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7: 319–337.
- Thomson, Mark. 2012. *Studies in the Historia Augusta*. Bruxelles: Collection Latomus.
- Tougher, Shaun. 2013. "The Aesthetics of Castration: The Beauty of Roman Eunuchs." In *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, edited by Larissa Tracy, 48–72. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Turcan, Robert. 1993. *Histoire Auguste [Imperial History] vol. III/1: Vies de Macrin, Diaduménien, Héliogabale [Life of Macrinus, Diadumenianus, Heliogabalus]*. Paris: Belles Lettres.
- Upson-Saia, Kristi, Carly Daniel-Hughes, Alicia J. Batten, and Conrad Grebel, eds. 2014. *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Varner, Eric A. 2007. "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits." In *Role Models in the Roman World: Identity and Assimilation*, edited by Sinclair Bell and Inge Lyse Hansen. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 185–205.
- Vinken, Barbara. 2013. *Angezogen: Das Geheimnis der Mode*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Vinken, Barbara. 2022. *Ver-Kleiden: Was wir tun, wenn wir uns anziehen*. Vienna: Residenz-Verlag.
- Vitiello, Massimiliano. 2015. "Emperor Theodosius' Liberty and the Roman Past." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 108: 571–620.
- von Rummel, Philip. 2007. *Habitus barbarus: Kleidung und Repräsentation spätantiker Eliten im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Williams, Craig A. 1999 (2010). *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Craig A. 2014. "The Language of Gender: Lexical Semantics and the Latin Vocabulary of Unmanly Men." In *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, edited by

- Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and James Robson, 461–481. New York: Routledge.
- Zinsli, Samuel C. 2005. “Gute Kaiser, schlechte Kaiser. Die eusebische *Vita Constantini* als Referenztext für die *Vita Heliogabali*.” *WIENER STUDIEN Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie, Patristik und lateinische Tradition* 1 (118): 117–138. <https://doi.org/10.1553/wst118s117>.
- Zinsli, Samuel C. 2014. *Kommentar zur Vita Heliogabali der Historia Augusta*. Bonn: Rudolf Habelt.