Fashioning Identity: Clothing and the Image of the Syrian in the Roman Empire

by

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This work is dedicated to my parents,
Josephine and Edward

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role that clothing played in creating identity in Ancient Rome, with a focus on Syrian identity. The historical background which led to Syria's becoming a Roman province necessitated that a uniquely Syrian identity be established, but when this identity was created by the Romans it often drew on stereotypes and prejudices which were inherited from earlier Greek accounts. In many cases, the Romans crafted a Syrian identity based on what they viewed as Syrian clothing. Artistic and literary depictions of Syrian and Near Eastern clothing remained remarkably consistent throughout Greek and Roman accounts, but these depictions are sometimes at odds with the surviving depictions from the Near East, as found at sites such as Palmyra. Finally, my thesis examines how these stereotypes and assumptions about Syrians, especially descriptions of clothing, influenced the biographical accounts of the Severan emperor Elagabalus.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are many ways in which identity can be constructed. It can be organized around almost any commonly shared trait, such as physical appearance (physiognomy, clothing, hairstyle, among others), religion, language, or social role. These traits are not only used to create identity today, but were also used in the ancient world. Often the first level of categorization that ancient authors used to construct identity was geographic, distinguishing between groups of people based on "the assumption that a people could be associated with a particular space or territory."[1] Another strategy was to divide groups of people in a region based on what language they spoke. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the Greek distinction between those people who spoke Greek and those who did not. In addition to geography and language, ancient authors could also focus on describing the clothing of foreign peoples they encountered as a means of separating them from others. In this case, we might think of the Roman distinction between those males who were allowed to wear a toga and those who were not, which indicated whether an individual was a Roman citizen or not. One reason that clothing and appearance are so effective at creating identity is that they are non-verbal signifiers; their non-verbal character eliminates the need for the internal and external society to understand each other before categorization can be made and instead relying on sight and appearance to convey (and assume) identity. By using these criteria, ancient authors were able to create identity categories for the different peoples and cultures which they encountered as their own Greek or Roman cultures expanded into new territories—whether these categories

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[1] Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 272.

were based on pre-existing identities, were purely arbitrary, or were (as usual) somewhere in between.

The expansion of the Roman Empire brought the Romans into contact with the diverse peoples and cultures residing in what would become new Roman client kingdoms and provinces who would become both allied peoples and subjects. While in some cases defining the inhabitants of these provinces into meaningful cultural or ethnic groups and identities was a relatively straightforward task (the *Britanni* being simply *ultimi*, for example), in other provinces this process was more complex, and could even be complicated by attempts at categorization. One such place where the creation of identity was complex and uncertain was in the Roman province of Syria.

One of the major reasons for the difficulty in creating identity (and even of 'reading' identity in ancient Syria in modern times) was that the region had undergone numerous conquests and invasions, causing the borders separating the Roman province from the rest of the eastern Mediterranean coast and the interior Near East to constantly change. Nevertheless, in cases such as the province of Syria, creating or recognizing meaningful identity categories was important, especially for the Romans. While the local peoples and cultures almost certainly must have created cultural categories meaningful to themselves, these categories may have been seen as inadequate to Roman interests or purposes in the region. Many of the identity categories which today catalogue or define the local populations of Roman provinces were largely the product of Roman imperialism, often imposed on non-Roman groups who found themselves in the newly designated Roman provinces. This is the case in Roman Syria, where Roman administrators and authors created a "Syrian" identity and an institution of social

organization that inhabitants of the province could adopt for themselves, but which was also forced onto inhabitants of the province.[2]

It should hardly come as a surprise that creating and imposing identity groups onto other communities was not without complications. For example, creating an identity based on geographical factors alone risks grouping together people with few to zero other cultural similarities solely because of their location. But although the effects of such an undertaking could have been detrimental to the inhabitants of a given location, this process could benefit the ruling power in that region. By removing more specific designations from subject groups, Roman authors could make generalizations about the groups they ruled, which in turn would come to form a body of knowledge about that region. This knowledge often amounted to little more than misconceptions, biases, and stereotypes, but it soon began to inform how Romans would "read" the identities of individuals from that geographical region. The facts or fictions contained in that body of knowledge were responsible not only for informing Roman attitudes towards these provincial regions and their inhabitants, but would also help to maintain structures of imperialism throughout the region by helping to establish a division between the Romans and the cultures they came in contact with. While this undoubtedly happened throughout the empire, Syria featured the perfect conditions for these stereotypes to really form the bulk of Roman "knowledge" of the province because of its ill-defined geographical and political boundaries.

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[2] For the purposes of this thesis, I follow Kevin Butcher and use the term "Syrian" to denote peoples, groups, or objects found in the geographical region of Syria, rather than using it to define a sense of "cultural and ethnic unity" (Butcher 11).

When discussing Syrians, the Romans for the most part adopted the body of knowledge developed by the Greeks, as discussed in further detail below in Chapter One. The stereotype that peoples from the East were poor soldiers, decadent, and lascivious seems to have begun in the Greek world and continued in different eras and genres of Roman literature.[3] The fact that this legacy endured for so many centuries suggests that there were other forces at play beyond a regard for the literary or historical authority of earlier Greek authors. It even seems that these tropes became so common in the literature of the early empire that hand-wringing over Eastern luxuries eventually became a trope or a cliché in literature.[4] These literary tropes endured almost as long as the Roman Empire itself, so that authors writing in the 3rd century CE frequently sound similar to authors writing in the 1st century BCE.[5] But an interesting turn happened in Roman accounts, when even Greece itself was given the same characteristics that were given to the Near East. The Near East, including Greece, was always viewed with suspicion and was seen as paradoxically both a place of knowledge and culture and a place of idleness and indulgence: Romans could gain scholarly knowledge even as they learned to live like the most debauched of Eastern rulers.

The tension between the beneficial East and the detrimental East continued to influence Roman accounts. This is seen especially in discussions of Near Eastern clothing in contrast to Roman clothing, as discussed below in Chapter Two. Roman views about Roman clothing come with an extraordinary amount of ideological baggage, such that something as simple as belting a tunic too loosely could be read for implications of

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[3] Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 347.

[4] See Isaac, 231: Literary attacks on Syrians/the East were so commonplace in the first century CE that Petronius was able to satirize them in a parody of an epic poem in the Satyricon (found at 124.3).

[5] Isaac, 47.

diminished morality and masculinity. While the form of clothing for both Roman men and women may have been largely the same, it was the accessories, colors, and manner of wearing it which separated the two groups, and men who adopted more feminine aesthetics in fashion or beauty were read as effeminate. When Romans described the clothing of the Near East, however, they described it so that gender categories collapsed in on each other. While the actual garments may have varied, all Near Eastern clothing was imagined to be particularly exotic, featuring elaborate decoration, expensive fabrics, costly dyes, and a level of ostentation which not even the wealthiest Romans could countenance. Not by accident, color, design, and jewelry were all aspects of fashion which the Romans associated with women, and it is no coincidence that Roman authors frequently viewed Near Eastern men as especially effeminate. Viewing the Near East through ideas about gender and masculinity was another useful way for Greco-Roman authors to contrast a more "feminine" Eastern society with a virtuous, "masculine" Greco-Roman society.[6] Descriptions of Near Eastern clothing turn up across many eras of literature, beginning in Greek accounts and continuing in Roman literature, across a wide variety of genre including invective, satire, poetry, and history. The opposition created in Roman literature ultimately produced an exotification of Syrian clothing and individuals.

All of the accusations and charges made about Syrians, e.g. that they were lazy, debauched, and at odds with Roman morals or values, can be found in the biographical accounts produced about the Roman emperor Elagabalus, who was emperor for four brief years from 218-222 AD. The three main biographical accounts of his reign, those written by Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the anonymous *Historia Augusta* author, are discussed in

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[6] Catharine Edwards, in *The Politics of Immorality in ancient Rome*, claims that in Roman discussions, "virtue is usually presented as masculine, while pleasure is feminine" (174).

Chapter Four. Despite the different authorial backgrounds, all these biographical accounts rely as much on exaggeration and gossip as they do on historical fact. The biographical accounts of Elagabalus emphasize elements of religious fervor, non-binary gender status, and a proclivity for sexual degeneracy, all of which were further set up in opposition to Elagabalus' status as emperor and served to distance him and his actions from proper Roman values. These biographies are in line with the broader Roman rhetoric found in discussing Syria, and at times the Near East as a whole. Because the political boundaries of Syria changed so frequently in the Roman world and came to envelop many different ethnic identities, the Romans not only imposed a universal identity of "Syrian" onto the inhabitants of the province(s) but also developed a rhetoric which is found throughout literary genres for the entirety of the Roman Empire. This rhetoric relies on cultural biases, stereotypes, and sensationalization in order to place Syrian identity outside what was acceptable in paradigms of Roman identity, clothing, sexuality, and gender.

Chapter Two: Greece, Rome, and the Near East

As remarked above in the introduction, the province of Syria provides an interesting case of the creation and assignment of identity within the Roman Empire. While this happened in practically every new province which the Romans added to their Empire, the historical background in Syria made this identity creation more complicated than in the the Western provinces, since the Eastern provinces had been known throughout the Greco-Roman world for some time, resulting in a large body of texts and information that Roman authors could use to create their own version of a Syrian identity. This chapter will examine the historical background of why identity creation in Roman Syria was so complex. It will also look at how Roman authors described the cultures they encountered in Syria, and briefly examine how earlier literary accounts influenced these Roman descriptions and ideas about the East. Lastly, it will look at the impact that these Roman views had back in Rome, especially in cases where Eastern culture was seen to be influencing Roman individuals or even Roman culture.

Historical Background

In Syria, the Romans encountered the remains of the once-powerful Hellenistic Seleucid Empire, which was built on the remains of the Persian Empire, which in turn had invaded the eastern Mediterranean coast following their defeat of the Assyrian empire. Even after Pompey had incorporated Syria into the Roman empire in 64 BC, the region shifted hands and loyalties, and was used as a strategic launching point for Rome's military actions against the Parthian empire, which invaded Syria in 40 BC.[7] The existence of these various empires and the presence of many different cultural groups

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[7] Butcher, 37.

throughout the province during its existence made available many possible ways to create a cohesive identity, both for those individuals and groups who lived in Syria and for the Romans who were attempting to maintain their empire. The multiplicity of cultures found in the province of Syria raised problems for Romans as well: how were Greek settlers to be categorized who had been living in Syria since the time of Alexander the Great or even earlier, or individuals from the province who had risen to prominence in politics at Rome? While Romans authors frequently referred to the inhabitants of this province as "Syrians," and indeed many of the inhabitants did begin to make use of this moniker in combination with many other pre-existing and meaningful categories of social organization, any given "Syrian" might in fact belong to any of a wide variety of groups.[8] The area that would eventually become the Roman province of Syria was a melting pot of cultures, not only of Greeks and Semitic peoples but also "peoples with very different customs and languages within the Semitic world itself."[9]

Attempting to recreate just how these different cultural groups identified themselves and related to others is likely impossible, and what survives in literary depictions of this region amounts to little more than "a map of surface appearances …seen and expressed by both insiders and outsiders."[10] Such attempts are further complicated by the mutability of the political boundaries in the Syrian region. However, because the Roman Empire included a number of different peoples and cultural groups organized in often arbitrarily divided provinces that were ruled or administered by a distant organizational center, with citizens who could and did travel across it in the

[8] Andrade, xvi.
[9] Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome* translated by Catherine Porter, Elzabeth Rawlings, Jeannine Routier-Pucci (London: The Belknap Press, 2005), 275.
[10] Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 226.

process of trade and military service, the creation of meaningful identity categories was important not only for those in charge of the administration of the empire, but also those whose lives were changed and ruled by it.

One of the first problems encountered in writing about Roman Syria is the ambiguity of the term Syria itself. Ancient authors "fail to provide any clear guidelines" as to how best to define the province, and to attempt to reconstruct today what the Romans themselves meant during their long period of interaction with Syria is "especially difficult."[11] Part of the reason for this is uncertainty surrounding the name of the geographical region of the province, as some parts of the Near East that were originally called "Syria" acquired new names. Early Greek writers such as Herodotus in the 400s BC referred to the region as Palastine (Παλαιστίνη), while the Seleucid dynasty, which ruled the Near East following the conquests and death of Alexander the Great, referred to it as Coele-Syria. Later Greek writers seem to have used this term to refer to all of Syria except the region of Phoenicia, located further to the south and closer to what would become the Roman province of Judaea. When the Romans annexed the Province of Syria in 64 BC, the province encapsulated a geographical space that fell within the borders of modern day Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon. Following the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 AD, the province of Syria was combined with the province of Judaea to create Syria-Palaestina.[12] By 180 AD, the geographical region that had been placed under the broad name of Syria included parts of modern day Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Israel. To further confuse matters, in 193 AD Syria-Palaestina was split again,

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[11] Butcher, 10.
[12] Ian Mladjov, "Ian Mladjov's Resources: Maps," University of Michigan Department of History, accessed August 10, 2015. http://sitemaker.umich.edu/mladjov/maps&

creating out of the original province of Syria the regions of Syria Coele in the north of the province and Syria Phoenice in the south, while the name Syria-Palaestina was then assigned to the area that had once been Judaea. Lastly, in the ancient sources some regions in the Near East that had "never been part of a province called Syria … were nonetheless sometimes referred to, however vaguely, as Syrian."[13]

Just as there are uncertainties regarding the exact definition of what should geographically be known as Syria, there are similar uncertainties regarding what ancient authors meant when they referred to "Syrians." In ancient literature, describing an individual as "Syrian" could mean any number of things, including a shared origin, language, or culture; it could also mean that they were simply an inhabitant of the province of Syria regardless of origin.[14] Classical Greeks such as Herodotus used the term "Syrian" and "Assyrian" interchangeably to describe the peoples found in the general geographical region of Syria, believing that Assyrians, Syrians, and Arameans constituted "the same society that inhabited a vast landscape containing Syria proper, classical Assyria, Babylonia, and in between," and it seems probable, because of how they divided the eastern Mediterranean, that the Romans adopted and expanded this definition to include regions where ethnic Phoenicians and even at certain times Judaeans and Cilicians lived.[15] While it is clear that some of this amalgam of different cultures is adopted from Greek accounts, another factor may have been the lack of distinction between the different peoples living in the Near East. Roman authors seemed content to conflate many of the different peoples living in the East of their empire. Thus the terms

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[13] Butcher, 10.
[14] Isaac, 335.
[15] Andrade, 6-7.

Persae, *Medi*, and *Parthi* were conventionally different words for a very powerful kingdom with which Rome shared a border and with which Rome was never quite comfortable.[16] Furthermore, Roman geographers seemed to frequently confuse the Aral, Caspian, and Black Seas.[17] Even Ammianus Marcellinus, who otherwise demonstrates knowledge about the Near East, conflates the Persians, Parthians, and Medes into one group.[18] Beyond concerns about empires further east and about what cultures were more or less Syrian, there were further inconsistencies and uncertainties about Greeks who were living in Syria. It seems that later authors attempted to "distinguish ethnic Syrians from Greeks called Syrians" which suggests that "Greeks in Syria had meaningfully assumed the label 'Syrian' in ways that broadened its applicability and transformed it into a meaningful social category" for themselves, complicating the fact that in prior writing it largely applied only to "putative genealogical descendants of Assyrians or Arameans."[19] But at the same time, because these Greeks participated in Greek civic structures (or *politeiai*), despite their other identities they were "civic Greeks."[20] Syria remained not only an indistinct geographical marker, but an indistinct ethnic one as well, although the tensions present in the ethnic categories of Roman Syria would to some extents be mitigated by the creation of a Syrian institution and a Syrian identity by the Romans.

What all this indeterminacy suggests is that "it is difficult to pinpoint where Roman Syria stops and other parts of the Near East begin," both for modern scholars of

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[16] Andrew Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and indulgence in the Roman world,* (London: Routledge, 2000), 187.
[17] Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.
[18] Ball, 9.
[19] Andrade, 95.
[20] Andrade, 24.

the region and for the Romans themselves.[21] While the question of whether there was a sense of Syrian identity experienced by the "disunited collection of independent political entities" which made up the region of Syria prior to Roman annexation will likely never be resolved, what is certain is that the Roman empire was able to collect these disparate entities into a single province, "transcend[ing] their differences by providing an overarching system of governance [and] imposing an institution called Syria on the entire region."[22] This institution seems to have been adopted by the majority of inhabitants of what the Romans now called Syria, but whether the identity that went with the institution was truly universally accepted is, again, likely never to be answered. By creating a "Syrian institution" which the inhabitants of the province could opt into, the Romans begin to create at least the basis of a culture which they could recognize as distinct from others in their empire. This identity was then applied rather indeterminately by the Romans to the inhabitants of the geographical region of Syria, regardless of whether those inhabitants were "culturally" Syrian. The inhabitants of the new Roman province then had the opportunity to adopt that identity for themselves. The Syrians who were suddenly referred to as "Syrians" by the Romans did not simply become Roman overnight through the adoption of Roman culture or goods. Rather, they created "a new identity in the face of provincial society," which existed in addition to whatever existing identities they may have already had.[23] A similar creation of identity happened with regards to Greek and Roman culture and identity. Inhabitants frequently "interwove [the] diverse cultural idioms in circulation, embedded them in meaningful social categories and

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[21] Butcher, 10.
[22] Butcher, 79.
[23] Lidewijde de Jong, "Narratives of Roman Syria," *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics* (2007), 25.

contexts, and performed Greekness or Romanness for scrutinizing audiences" rather than simply becoming Greek or Roman at the expense of their previous identities.[24] The result was the creation of a culture and identity that was distinct from both existing Roman and local Syrian identities. In some regards, this seems to have contributed to the concerns and uncertainties Roman authors expressed in regards to the Syrians who were now under Roman rule, and furthermore led to concerns regarding this new culture's legitimacy. Inhabitants of the region were also able to identify themselves as "citizens of Greek collectives even when they enacted other ethnic and social affiliations, such as Syrian, Phoenician, or 'Arab'."[25] But because of how the inhabitants of the Roman Near East adopted and reinterpreted signifiers of Roman and Greek culture, "Roman imperial authorities and Greek intellectuals rendered them all 'imitation Greeks,'" and to distance this imitation Greco-Roman culture from their own, assigned "immutable 'barbarian' characteristics" onto the Near Eastern groups.[26] This act serves to maintain an insurmountable gap between what authorities or intellectuals might have viewed as their own truly Greco-Roman culture and what they viewed as the derivative and fundamentally barbarian culture(s) of the Near East.

Although the citizens of these cities could and did adopt and engage with different identity categories, those who assimilated more readily towards ideals of classical Greekness found more support in the system. As Andrade discusses, the culture which was brought to Syria and the Near East by the armies of Alexander the Great and which was adopted throughout the areas of Alexander's empire was neither static nor identical

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[24] Andrade, 21.
[25] Andrade, 23.
[26] Andrade, 29.

with classical Greek culture: it was a Macedonian interpretation of that earlier classical Greek culture and furthermore it could, and did, "integrate foreign idioms over time" so that "in certain contexts, Greekness was expressed through idioms that classical Greeks deemed 'barbarous'."[27] This resulted in the creation of "unequal social hierarchies," where institutions such as the Greek *paideia* became supremely important and began to dominate the literary output of the eastern provinces.[28] Privileging classical Greek forms of literature and education can be seen in the literature of the Second Sophistic, which constantly reverts to classical Attic forms of language and writing and valued classical Attic forms of Greekness. In addition to elite literature which consciously separates "proper" Greek identity from unacceptable forms, the interweaving of these local and foreign traditions is frequently expressed in media that were "accessible to many non-elite Greeks and diverse Near Eastern ethnics," including religious practices.[29]

Sorting out the numerous identities in the Near East was difficult for Greeks and Romans and remains even more difficult for modern readers of those Greek and Roman authors. The reality was much more complex than the stereotypes that they forged, as elements of multiple cultures were interwoven into a new identity.

Greek and Roman Views of the Near East

In Greco-Roman accounts, the complex web of identity that was found in Syria was rarely considered. If it was, it was often misread and misunderstood through the lens of the Syrian identity the Greeks and Romans had created for their own purposes. Although various cultures and peoples in the province of Syria adopted this identity,

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[27] Andrade, 3-4.
[28] Andrade, 24-5.
[29] Andrade, 24-5.

because it was largely created by the Greeks and Romans themselves, a considerable portion of it was drawn from Greco-Roman biases and stereotypes. Yet these conceptions of how Syrians acted and behaved were not simply a Roman invention; in many regards these ideas had an origin in Greek writing, and remained remarkably consistent over time. Establishing a negative portrayal of Syrians was incredibly useful for Rome, because it served to create a negative definition for Rome to define itself against: Syrians were in many ways imagined to be everything that proper Roman citizens were not. In written accounts, Syrians would always be easy to tell apart from other cultural groups based on their clothing and tendency towards luxury, and in theory at least, Syrians' clothing and character was the opposite of that of the Romans.

Both Greek and Roman authors consistently associated the ancient Near East with its love of luxury, so much so that it became one of it not the defining quality of the region. This association can be seen in some of the earliest examples of Greek literature, especially in Archaic poetry, where we find, in elegy and especially in Anacreon, an acceptance and even celebration of luxury.[30] This luxury, or *habrosyne*, was "strongly associated with the Greeks' Eastern neighbors the Lydians," with some poets celebrating the "long flowing garments, elaborately coiffed hair, perfumes, gold ornaments, and sensuality" of these Eastern neighbors while other more critical voices rejected these forms of luxury as being useless and even incompatible with the city.[31] Such differing opinions among early poets speak to the complex mixture of Near Eastern and Greek cultures in Archaic Greek history, a mixture that would only become more complicated

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[30] Leslie V. Kurke, "Archaic Greek Poetry" in *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147.
[31] Kurke, 147-8.

when the Greek world became more involved in the Near East through military campaigns.

Yet even as Greek and Near Eastern cultures were becoming more and more mixed, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, and even came into conflict with each other, some Greek authors were attempting to make the boundary between Greek and barbarian especially stark. Greeks were "ideally seen as non-barbarians, [while] barbarians were equally envisaged as being precisely what Greeks were not."[32] It is unsurprising that the term began to take on more and more negative aspects, so that barbarian men were "construed as naturally effeminate," naturally servile, and naturally poor soldiers, all characteristics which are opposed to the characteristics of the ideal Greek.[33] An example of the increasingly effeminized East can be seen in Greek accounts of the people of Lydia, who underwent a transformation from "a warrior nation into a crowd of effeminized, music-playing shopkeepers," a transformation which supposedly took place at the hands of their Persian conquerors.[34] However, it is uncertain whether this Lydian story is more of a product of anti-Persian sentiment or more of a product of Greek disdain and mistrust of Lydian wealth and its perceived negative influence, which existed before Lydia was conquered.[35] This would certainly be a continuation of the concerns found in Archaic Greek poetry, which clearly saw Lydia as a source of all luxury, as can be seen in this fragment of Xenophanes, quoted in Kurke:

> Having learnt useless *habrosynai* (plural) from the Lydians, as long as they were free of hateful tyranny, they went to the *agora* wearing purple cloaks, no less than

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[32] Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Other* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.
[33] Cartledge, 11-12.
[34] Christopher Tuplin, "The Limits of Persianization: Some Reflections on Cultural Links in the Persian Empire," in *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 153-4.
[35] Tuplin, 153-4.

a thousand in general, boastful, glorifying in their beautiful hair, drenched in unguents curiously wrought in scent.[36]

This fragment sets up many of the tropes that would become standard fare for talking about the East. Inhabitants of the East, or those in the West who were influenced by them, wore costly and luxurious garments (as will be discussed further in the next chapter), spent too much time on their appearances and especially their hairstyles, and often smelled of luxurious perfumes and lotions. Lydia was seen in Greece as "an originator of the arts and the practices of luxury," especially of the production of richly dyed cloth and the creation of expensive luxury garments.[37] As we shall see below, it was these outward aspects, especially ideas about clothing, which most came to be associated with the East, and clothing and appearance in particular would have a very major role to play in how Greco-Roman writers viewed and described people from the East.

Earlier Greek literature such as Archaic poetry or epic often distinguished between groups of Greeks and groups of non-Greeks. While Cartledge suggests that the negative image or idea of the barbarian really did not gain "pejorative, especially 'orientalist,' connotations" until the Classical era, it seems that some seed of the beginnings of these connotations can already be found in Archaic poetry and the worry over the increase in Lydian luxury in more Greek spheres.[38] Nevertheless, the Persian Wars of the 5th century BC were seen as "incursions of exotic foreigners whose way of life threatened that of the Greeks both symbolically and physically."[39] Even though the Greeks were ultimately victorious in defeating the Persians, the Persian Wars had a major

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[36] Fr. B 4 DK, quoted in Kurke, 151.
[37] Andrew Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 162.
[38] Cartledge, 13.
[39] Cartledge, 40.

influence when it came to shaping how the barbarian was viewed in the Greek world. From then on, Persia and the East as a whole would be seen as a land of luxury and decadence, with indolent inhabitants and despotic rulers who were given over to every kind of pleasure imaginable.

This image of the East would influence later Greek authors, such as those writing during the Second Sophistic. During the Second Sophistic, which lasted from around the mid-first to the mid-third century AD, Greek identity was yet again reinvented and refocused as a way to re-define what it meant to be Greek. For participants in this time period, Greek identity was rooted in "a mastery of 'pure' Greek language," and authors frequently used the Classical Attic dialect and emulated the literary style of Classical Greek authors.[40] By viewing themselves as "true" Greeks, authors of the Second Sophistic, many of whom were not geographically located in Greece itself, were able to portray themselves as true Greeks and true Greek men, and "reduced the barbarian and the feminine, which they sometimes conflated, to a state of objection" in order to illustrate their own social and cultural superiority.[41] Thus the Near East became a "barbarian terrain despite its widespread acculturation to Greek norms," and the inhabitants of that region were collectively described as barbaric and effeminate.[42] Authors such as Dio Chrysostrom could thus describe inhabitants of Tarsus as sexual deviants and flawed in regards to their masculinity, who engaged in all kinds of anti-masculine practices such as castration, anal and oral sex, and depilation.[43] Given the trend

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[40] Andrade, 247.
[41] Andrade, 250.
[42] Andrade, 250.
[43] Andrade, 256-7.

towards a Classical revival in the literature of this time period, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is such a tension surrounding the idea of being a legitimate Greek.

These Greek images of the East, from the Classical to the Second Sophistic, would also come to have a huge impact on how the Romans viewed the East. The Romans largely adopted these views on the East wholesale, often increasing the level of disdain and hand-wringing about the deleterious effects of the East on Rome itself. Roman authors were just as concerned with luxury and decadence as their Greek predecessors, and Roman authors who were concerned with the morality were especially concerned with finding out where threats to (what they saw as) traditional Roman values were coming from. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many authors pointed to the East and often found multiple sources for this moral decline. For example, Sallust blames Rome's overseas victories, especially Rome's final defeat of Carthage, but also claims that it was Sulla's campaign in the Asia which brought the Romans into contact with "Asiatic luxuries" such as wine, sex, and fine art, a watershed moment that was also identified as such by Cicero.[44] Livy found another Eastern source in the defeat of the Galatians in 189 BC, which saw proper Roman soldiers loitering about in Rome with a new interest in cithara-girls, harp-girls, fine antiquities and culinary decadence.[45] Fears that a decadent life would seriously damage military skill was seen in the story of King Antiochus, who according to Florus conquered the Greek islands only to give himself over to idleness and luxury, which contributed to the decline of his military abilities and his inevitable

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[44] Dalby, 11.
[45] Dalby, 12.

surrender to Roman military forces.[46] Roman authors were especially concerned that this should not happen to their own troops, which seemed a distinct possibility now that Rome was becoming involved in Eastern campaigns. Rome's increase in power and importance around the Mediterranean went hand in hand with its increased appetite for luxury goods, which for the most part came from the East and which also contrasted with the Roman self-perception of being a nation of simple rustic farmers working their land. In the East, including Greece, Rome was able to pursue new, imperial ambitions, but the contact and "influences of eastern cultures on Roman life became the object of new anxieties" about Rome's relation to these Eastern cultures.[47] Given these uncertainties in identity and Rome's newly important position, it is perhaps unsurprising that the view of the East was so negative.

Many of the peoples and cultures throughout the Near East received their own set of stock traits, with some characteristics being seen as common to all Near Easterners and some reserved for individual locations or peoples. This process rendered the different cultures and societies of the Near East as "inexplicably foreign."[48] One frequent claim about numerous cultures in the Near East was that they were particularly deceitful. Egypt was considered to be a land "most apt for treachery" and, especially in the Augustan age, was the embodiment of all the threats and dangers that the luxurious and decadent East could offer Rome, to its own peril.[49] Parthians, Persians, and Armenians were all seen as

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[46] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.
[47] Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22.
[48] Andrade, 27.
[49] Dalby, 172.

being deceitful, but beyond this they were also seen as using deceit as a military tactic.[50] While Romans may have viewed these soldiers with some level of disdain, most of their accusations of poor military skill were directed at the Syrians. According to Fronto's *Parthian Preface*, Syrians were mutinous, disobedient, constantly drunk, and unwilling even to pick up their weapons.[51] These descriptions of Easterners as treacherous and disobedient speak to how Rome viewed the East as embodying the opposites of all the qualities which the Romans held dear.

In addition to being portrayed as poor soldiers, Syrians and other Near Easterners were associated with in the trade of luxury goods. Syrians were depicted as obsequious and avaricious traders or shopkeepers, and another common image was that of the Syrian bar-, dancing-, or flute-girl, which was obviously not meant to be viewed as a respectable profession.[52] Other roles for Near Easterners included slaves, especially in the areas of dancing and sex work.[53] Authors of the Roman Imperial period frequently described Syrians as "depraved, servile, and androgynous."[54] In Juvenal's satires, Near Easterners are shown to be frequently effete and generally strange.[55] The idea that all Near Easterners were remarkably strange can also be seen in discussions of Near Eastern religious practice. While the rituals of Persians were viewed as "solemn and strange" by Roman authors, other Near Eastern religion was not described so favorably.[56] Other Near Eastern cults, such as those associated with Cybele, Attis, the 'Syrian Goddess,' and also

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[50] Dalby, 187.
[51] Quoted in Dalby, 130.
[52] Dalby, 129.
[53] Dalby, 128.
[54] Andrade, 253-4.
[55] S. H. Braund, "Juvenal and the East: Satire as an Historical Source," in *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire* (BAR International Series 553 (i), 1989), 45-7.
[56] Dalby, 187.

the god Elagabalus would bring to Rome during his short reign, were all characterized by their use of barbaric chanting, frenzied religious ritual, dancing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals, and practices such as self-castration, all of which seemed remarkably foreign and strange to Roman eyes.[57]

Throughout Roman literature, Syrians and Near Easterners were not held in high repute during the Roman Empire, precisely because of this connection with luxury – for ancient Greeks and Romans, "the 'charms of the Orient' could lead only to perversions of body and mind" and would turn otherwise upstanding Greek and Roman men into barbarians.[58] While Juvenal's satires present the reader with a mix of reality, fantasy, and stereotype as opposed to unbiased fact, his depictions of Near Easterners are very similar to those of other authors, and depict a version of Rome in which a traditional way of life has been "overwhelmed by eastern influences and by people from the East."[59] Such worries sound remarkably similar to Classical Greek fears about the expansion of Persia. Worries about Eastern goods, values, and religions replacing simple Italian goods, values, and religion were also to some degree worries about Easterners themselves.[60]

Interestingly, negative Roman ideas about the Near East also applied to Rome's closer neighbor, Greece. In Roman literature, the Near East and Greece together have something of a dual nature: it was not only a place to gain culture and education, but also a threat to Rome and Roman culture.[61] Greek was a first or second language for many

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[57] For more on the Galli, see Jacob Latham. "'Fabulous Clap-Trap': Roman Masculinity, the Cult of Magna Mater, and Literary Constructions of the galli at Rome from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Religion*, 92.1 (2012). Some other literary depictions of Near Eastern priests or religious practice includes Catullus 63 and Lucian's *De Dea Syria*.
[58] Sartre, 274.
[59] Braund, 48.
[60] Braund, 49.
[61] Dalby, 118-9.

inhabitants of the Roman Empire and there were many Greek loanwords that found their way into Latin, but Roman public officials could find themselves ridiculed for using too many Greek terms in public address, and while Latin was considered perfectly suited to military matters, Greek was thought to be a language fit for scholarship and artistic endeavor.[62] Just as we shall see later in discussions of clothing in the Roman world, one's choice of language was rarely neutral but instead carried significant ideological baggage. In a Roman context, the Greek language was seen as having some luxurious element to it, suggesting that the subjects denoted by Greek terms were more elegant than they might really need to be and that the speaker was trying to impress or show off in a way that was at odds with more traditional Roman ideals.[63] The use of Greek pseudonyms for fickle lovers in Roman poetry and the connection of multiple Eastern cities, including Athens and Corinth, with prostitution and other sorts of sexual indulgences also gave the Greek language a scandalous reputation.[64] Just as the Greeks attempted to distance their culture from that of the Lydians and Persians (and the Near East in general), Roman authors also attempted to separate their own Latin culture from that of the Greeks, which was viewed with some element of suspicion.

With Greece and Greek culture already on uncertain grounds in Rome, it is perhaps unsurprising that Roman views of the Near East, which had a considerable Greek presence and history, would be quite complicated. This can be seen in Roman descriptions of client kingdoms in the Near East. Many of these were maintained or even established by Rome and eventually became absorbed into the late republic or early

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[62] Dalby, 121.
[63] Dalby, 123.
[64] Dalby, 125-7.

empire. In many instances, the client rulers developed exactly the sort of blend of Greco-Roman and local idioms which had Roman authors so eager to distance them from "real" Greco-Roman culture, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Client rulers assumed Roman names, established cities named for members of the Roman imperial family, established cults to Rome or the emperor, and adopted the toga in order to create bonds and stress a cultural commonality with the Roman elite.[65] But while the client rulers stressed similarities, Roman authors hastened to describe differences. This can be seen in Cicero's accounts of the client kingdom of Commagene. While the governor of Cilicia, Cicero recorded his distrust of the cultural authority and legitimacy of Near Eastern elites in their own cities. Despite the ostensible cultural similarity between the two different areas, in some regards the Hellenistic Greek colonies of inland Anatolia especially could never compete with the cities of the classical Greek world. This suspicion of the Near Eastern cultural milieu allowed Cicero to deem the "Greek cultural forms [of the Greek city-states he governed] to be crude distortions or imitations of those at classical centers such as Athens and Rhodes."[66] Similarly, he described Antiochus, the client ruler of Commagene, as "untrustworthy, 'marginal' (*finitimus*), and undeserving of the toga," questioning Antiochus' presumed loyalty and adoption of Roman culture.[67] That Cicero had his doubts is perhaps a product of Antiochus' use of many different cultural elements in the symbols of his reign. He not only adopted the toga but also made use of elements from "Greek, Persian, neo-Hittite, and neo-Assyrian" culture in some of his building projects and royal symbols, and referenced the Seleucid, Achaemenid, and Armenian

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[65] Andrade, 98-9.
[66] Andrade, 88.
[67] Andrade, 87-8.

royal families.[68] Antiochus' cultural blending, typical enough of Hellenistic kingship, was evidently puzzling to classically-minded Romans (and Greeks), and it is perhaps unsurprising that Cicero found an individual so interested in merging these different identities and ideas together untrustworthy and unworthy of the toga. By commenting on Antiochus' use of various cultural forms, Cicero highlights the tension found throughout the Roman Near East between becoming unquestionably Greco-Roman and remaining unquestionably barbarian.

When Roman authors and civil servants "diligently policed the proper boundaries of Greekness and Romanness" through questioning the use of cultural idioms or the similarities between the Near Eastern elite and the Roman Elite, they were able to authenticate "the prevailing knowledge that the Near East was a barbarian space."[69] This could easily be done by policing how proper Greekness or Romanness was to be expressed, which was often done at the expense of more unique, local variations in expressing participation in this Greco-Roman identity. By questioning expressions of Greco-Roman-ness that did not line up with traditional models, Greek and Roman authors put the Near East on the margins of, or even beyond, Greco-Roman-ness.[70] In this way Greek and Roman authors could view all inhabitants of the Near East as "ethically barbarian, culturally barbarian, or both."[71] By doing so, Greek and Roman authors could continue to rely on stereotypes and generalizations to view the Near East, which would remain a mirror in which the Romans could recognize their own fears and anxieties.

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[68] Andrade, 85.
[69] Andrade, 28.
[70] Andrade, 251.
[71] Ibid.

Conclusion

With all the different peoples and cultures that came under the control of the Roman Empire, creating meaningful categories and groups was extremely important for the empire's administrators. While this came more or less easily in geographical terms, creating identity within those provinces could be much less straightforward. One example of this is the province of Syria, which had a long and varied history and an equally lengthy list of cultures which had at one point or another called it home. By the time that the Romans became seriously involved in the region, there were some considerable inconsistencies about the province's borders and its inhabitants. As a result, the Romans essentially created a Syrian identity which was then imposed upon the province, but which the inhabitants of the province could and did adapt and modify as they saw fit. However, in many regards this identity was made up of little more than stereotypes. The Romans did not invent these stereotypes themselves, but rather they largely imported ideas about the East that had been developed in the Greek world beginning in the Archaic period. These ideas continued to develop during the Classical period of Greek history and eventually entered into Roman literature and thought as Rome became increasingly involved in the East. The Romans certainly put their own spin on these ideas, emphasizing the Eastern qualities that seemed most important or dangerous in their own situation. One interesting result of this was that these Greek ideas about the East were eventually directed at the Greeks themselves.

While creating identity was necessary, it was also a messy and arduous process. The lasting impact of the Roman creation of a Syrian identity was that during the Roman Empire, the East was imagined to be wholly separate from the Rome itself. This can be

seen not only in the characteristics which made up the Roman Syrian identity, but also as we shall see later, in discussions of Eastern clothing and Eastern individuals who came to Rome.

Chapter Three: Roman Views on Clothing

One of the common threads in discussions of Near Eastern identity and most especially in the identity created for Near Easterners by Greek and Roman authors is the theme of luxury and decadence, and tendencies towards luxury frequently appear in Roman descriptions and depictions of Near Eastern clothing. This chapter will examine the role that clothing played in identity creation in the ancient world. It will examine Greco-Roman views of Near Eastern clothing in more detail, and will also examine how Greeks but especially (and most importantly) Romans conceptualized their own clothing.

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most immediate ways to create a community or identity is through clothing, not only in modern times but in antiquity as well. Clothing functions as a non-verbal signifier, and does not require that the wearer and the viewer have a similar background or any other means to communicate. Clothing also functions as both extremely public and extremely private, allowing it to be an extremely effective medium of communication. As stated by the French philosopher Roland Barthes, any "garment is always conceived, implicitly, as the particular signifier of a general signified that is exterior to it (epoch, country, social class)."[72] Objects of clothing are imbued with a meaning that can be spread and accepted throughout an entire community or culture, and acquire a "sign system" (Barthes's term) which announces when and where it was made and for the consumption of which social group. At the same time, what an individual actually choses to wear can be extremely personal: in most cases, wardrobes are based on personal taste and preferences (such as color and style), allowing the individual to feature

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[72] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, translated A. Stafford, (Berg 2006), 5-6.

certain items of clothing they think best displays themselves to the world. With just a glance, clothing has the potential to allow others to make guesses as to when and where the wearer's clothing was made, as well as make assumptions as to the wearer's gender, age, sexual preference, religious affiliation, ethnicity, social status, and economic status, to say nothing of clothing which more certainly shows off the wearer's affinity for specific bands, sports teams, countercultures, or personality. Thus to see clothing is to see a "mute yet effective way of immediately conveying a multitude of facts (or fictions) to the viewer."[73]

Clothing is a sign system that relies both on the wearer and the viewer to give it significance and because of this, interpretations of what certain clothing signifies can often be inaccurate, especially if an external community is not particularly well-versed in an internal community's history or culture. An external society can look at a common item or means of dress and make assumptions about that group, or even create a new identity for the community wearing it. Additionally, clothing might have more than one definition or reading, so that particular items of clothing might have different meanings depending on things such as physical location or setting. In such instances, because of the multiple readings that garments can acquire, which reading prevails (or becomes proper or standard) often depends on whether the original internal community or the receiving external community has more cultural influence.

Practically every item of clothing can be placed "into an organized, formal, and normative system that is recognized by society," turning the garment in question into a

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[73] Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5-6.

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regimented and regulated object.[74] These systems dictate who can wear what at which times and under what conditions, and they can take many different forms from sumptuary laws, which seek to prohibit luxury and extravagance, to the wearing of military uniforms and religious clothing, which often denote that the wearer has made some vow of service. Other laws may not be as rigidly defined or enforced, but may seek to provide guidance or advice, such as modern-day fashion magazine columns which tell readers what the trends are and what not to wear. In many situations, then, "clothing is important to society's sense of itself."[75] Through these systems of signs, codes, and rules, clothing becomes a way for society to organize itself in meaningful ways. It also becomes a medium through which society can express its values and beliefs and through which it conveys or removes status.

Just as clothing is a major way to create identity in the modern world, it was also important in the Roman world. As Olson says,

> clothing in past cultures was also capable of both forming and classifying character and morality. Fashion literally shaped its wearer: it permeated the character of whoever assumed that garment and established identity itself. And because clothing constructed a social persona for the wearer at the same time as it signified the wearer's identity, in many pre-industrial societies, clothing was the material creator of social position and an important tool in social regulation. Ideally, clothing was a system of signs that reflected, indeed helped construct, the social order.[76]

However, there are challenges to analyzing Roman literary sources on clothing. While there are many depictions of Roman clothing in surviving art and literature, scholars must always be careful of the pitfalls of taking Roman art as a face-value depiction of Roman fashion. The lower classes are almost never depicted, and there are discrepancies

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[74] Barthes, 7.

[75] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 1.

[76] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 1.

"between garments described in literature and those depicted in art."[77] This has led some scholars to suggest that the clothing depicted in Roman art is idealized and depicts important status elements, rather than clothing as it was really worn.[78] However, items of clothing which came to be regarded in Roman literature as indicative of "social and moral status do not appear (or appear only infrequently) in the visual evidence," complicating to some extent the argument that Roman art (especially sculpture) was intended to be a public presentation of social status.[79] At the same time, many of the extant textual sources also seem to straddle the boundary between prescriptive and descriptive writing. It must be the case that some authors did describe clothing as it was actually worn by themselves or their acquaintances, but just as in the case of sculpture, at times these authors must also have been guilty of presenting ideal manners of dress, especially as many Roman authors also fell to moralizing on clothing. This is especially prevalent in descriptions of female clothing. While garments themselves were not generally criticized in ancient sources (with the exception of Coan silk, which seems to have been associated with women of ill-repute), Roman authors did have a lot to say about the use of jewels and accessories. These were often depicted as an "un-Roman" frivolity which was better suited to barbarians.[80] But Roman authors were not limited to simply critiquing fashion, and some authors offered opinions or advice on to how women could improve their appearance and suggested how they should dress.

In ancient Rome, clothing could convey any number of important qualities about its wearer. Clothing in ancient Rome made up a system of "visibly hierarchized dress and

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[77] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 3.
[78] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones as cited in Olson, *Roman Women*, 3.
[79] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 4.
[80] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 85.

accoutrements that were restricted by status and law, and that additionally implied socially sanctioned behavior."[81] Important information about an individual could be discerned simply by the type of clothing they wore, so that Roman citizens were "marked by their entitlement to wear what was construed as distinctively Roman civic dress."[82] Because of this, it seems that in Rome, "the display of status through dress seems to have been most important to those whom it most benefited, and was subsequently less significant to those outside the upper ranks of Roman society," so that wealthy Romans whose power and status rested, to varying degrees, in their choice of clothing had much to say about who could or could not wear certain garments, colors, and fabrics, while poorer Romans who were more concerned with simply making a living really were not as concerned with proper and improper uses of clothing.[83] By restricting (both in actual practice and in writing) which members of society could wear or purchase expensive fabrics or finely finished garments, Roman authors could attempt to maintain their own sense of status. However, this elite viewpoint complicates the surviving literature, as that literature largely ignores the clothing of the lower classes and so presents a one-sided picture which is made up of elite concerns and preoccupations with clothing.

Another difficulty when discussing Roman views on clothing comes from the fact that the surviving Roman authors are all male. This also contributes to the one-sided perspective of Roman fashion writing, as we have no surviving female voices on clothing, either male or female, in antiquity. This should raise suspicions when it comes to accounts of female clothing, especially ones which have a considerable interest in

[81] Michelle George, "The 'Dark Side' of the Toga" in *Roman dress and the fabrics of Roman culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 94.
[82] Jonathan Edmondson, "Public Dress and Social Control in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome," in *Roman dress and the fabrics of Roman culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 22.
[83] George, 96.

moralizing or critiquing female clothing. In all Roman writing on the subject, female clothing is distinctly and recognizably female, even though Roman clothing for both men and women shared a basic shape.[84] Perhaps because of the basic similarities in garments, there was a very strict divide between clothing that was coded as expressly male and expressly female. Because clothing was in theory so strictly regulated to either men or women, there were serious repercussions for ignoring this divide. This is most often seen in the literature when it comes to men wearing items or styles of clothing that were thought of as female, such as Quintilian's assertion that "men would be disfigured by necklaces, pearls, and long dresses."[85] Given the issues with the sources, then, it is best to look at Roman accounts of clothing (female clothing in particular) with some degree of skepticism.

Roman Men's Clothing

Defining a masculine identity was very significant in ancient Rome, and ideas of masculinity (and, as will be discussed below, femininity) were frequently located in what were seen as traditionally or exclusively masculine garments. One of the most well-known definitions of how Roman men were to look and dress comes from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, which contains some 20 lines on the subject (1.505-524). From Ovid, we learn that Roman men are not to curl their hair, not depilate their legs, not be too pale, and in general not look slovenly or smell too bad.[86] Roman men were characterized by a general indifference to appearance and dress beyond the basics of hygiene. In a similar vein, Roman men were also meant to eschew overly colorful, elaborate, or complicated

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[84] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 10.
[85] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 10.
[86] See the summary of this passage in Richlin, "Making Up a Woman: The Face of Roman Gender," 204.

clothing, because to do otherwise was to invite accusations of being *mollis* (soft and/or effeminate). Martial has some snide comments on the masculinity of his companions, who are depicted as wearing scarlet and violet clothing, while Juvenal criticizes an orator who wears a diaphanous silk otherwise associated with courtesans in Satire 2.65-81.[87] Ultimately, Roman masculinity was often a negative identity, defined by a list of qualities or actions which were associated with the feminine or effeminate and which were, therefore, not permissible for the masculine individual.

Another major influence was the focus on the toga, which was one of the fundamental markers of Roman masculinity. Interestingly, there are suggestions that the earliest toga was a unisex garment that "did not emphasize the distinction between male and female dress" as later iterations of the toga did.[88] However, by the Republican period and certainly later, the toga came to represent key ideas of male Romanness. The toga communicated to those who saw it that the wearer was a Roman citizen and assured them of his Roman status. This was achieved with minute variations in the color and design of the toga itself. Beyond the simple, everyday toga (sometimes known as the *toga pura*), there were various forms of decoration which distinguished rank, such as the vertical purple stripes (*clavii*) which denoted senatorial rank, and there were even variations in color which were reserved for campaigning politicians (the *toga candida*), generals receiving a triumph (the *toga picta*) and emperors (the *toga purpurea*).[89]

The toga also carried significant ideological purposes, since it could display masculinity and citizenship status. One of the primary ideas conveyed by the toga was an

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[87] Edwards, 68.

[88] Glenys Davies, "What Made the Roman Toga *Virilis*?" in *The Clothed Body in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 127.

[89] Shelley Stone, "The Toga: From National to Ceremonial Costume," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 13-15.

assurance of the wearer's masculinity and his role not only as a citizen, but also an active and (sexually) dominant male.[90] It was not simply the material form of the toga itself that conveyed this masculine status, but rather how it was worn and, perhaps more important than anything, the wearer's behavior and actions which made the toga a manly garment.[91] For example, being able to control the difficult/intricate stylings of the toga was seen as supremely important, both in a practical sense and also in an ideological sense.[92]

This was in part due to the fact that the toga, with its intricate folds and patterns of draping fabric, was visibly different from female garments such as the *stola*. Garments such as the Greek *himation* (known in Latin as the *pallium*) – which was much simpler to wear than the toga and more popular among certain groups such as more Greek-minded Romans and modern-day college toga party attendees – was not as easily distinguished from female clothing.[93] Much like Greek culture in Rome, Greek clothing also had something of an uncertain position. For example, while the *pallium* could be viewed as anti-Roman in sentiment because of the role that Greek culture played in ancient Rome, wearing the *pallium* could also be seen as a sign of prestige.[94] The *pallium* could also be seen as a unifying garment, as it was worn by both poor and rich and there were no citizenship-based restrictions on wearers. However, it was believed by some authors that those who wore the *pallium* were giving up their masculinity and instead choosing to look and dress like effeminate Greeks.[95] These complications made he *pallium*

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[90] Kelly Olson, "Toga and Pallium: Status, Sexuality, Identity," in *Sex in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 429.
[91] Davies, 121.
[92] Davies, 125.
[93] Davies, 125.
[94] Olson, "Toga and Pallium," 429.
[95] Olson, "Toga and Pallium," 430.

ideologically complex, whereas the toga was a properly and even uniquely Roman outfit which lacked the cultural or social ambiguity.

Despite all the ideological trappings of the toga, it was also a hugely unpopular garment because it was unwieldly, bulky, and uncomfortable, and by the time of Augustus, it was severely declining in popularity.[96] Nevertheless, the toga endured as a ceremonial garment and it was required to be worn in law-courts and the *salutatio*, when clients greeted their patron.[97] Even during the Roman Empire, when the toga was ostensibly falling out of favor as a garment to wear, it frequently appears in biographical literature, where it is almost invariably connected to the "good emperors." This association shows up especially in Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*. Augustus is said always to conduct public affairs in a toga, and in addition to this keeps a toga close at hand in his private rooms in case he has sudden cause to wear them on state business, while Hadrian is said always to have worn a toga in public when he was in Italy.[98] In literature, the toga and the *stola* remained "emblematic of moral probity and civic mindedness," which was strengthened by the garment's association with individuals who were revered and respected.[99]

Roman Women's Clothing

As mentioned above, the ways in which Roman authors described female clothing are significantly more complex. Despite these difficulties, for the purposes of the present study it is especially important to look at how Roman authors described female clothing and appearance. In part this is because female clothing is so frequently used to denigrate

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[96] Stone, 13.
[97] Edmondson, 23.
[98] Edmondson, 33.
[99] Edmondson, 34.

Roman men in genres such as invective and rhetoric, but also because there is a strong association of female clothing and appearance with the clothing and appearances of individuals from the Near East. Looking at the major concerns that Roman authors expressed with regards to clothing (and especially female clothing) establishes a helpful point of reference for looking at how Romans looked at Near Eastern clothing, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

In general, Roman women were permitted more options in the wearing of colorful or decorative garments than were their male counterparts. There were still perceived moral dangers in wearing garments that were too fine or expensive, but, for the most part, decoration and color were permissible within reason. While authors such as Ovid advise women that there is no reason to wear golden flounces or expensive purple clothes, there were many other, less expensive colors for women to wear, including various shades of blue, yellow, green, and less expensive purples and reds, and Ovid ends his discussion on color and clothing by claiming: "As many flowers as fresh earth bears, when in balmy spring / she sprouts vine buds and sluggish winter flees, / wool slurps that many juices— or more!"[100] Concerns about color do not seem to feature in discussions of women's clothing except where women are seen as spending good Roman money on expensive foreign dyes and cloth.

The hallmark of the Roman matron was the *stola*, a garment which was worn over a *tunica*. According to Ovid, the *stola* was meant to cover the feet, and although there are uncertainties about what the *stola* actually looked like, there is some evidence to suggest that it was a floor-length dress which was either gathered into narrow straps at the

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[100] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, trans. Julia Dyson Hejduk (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 3.185-7.

shoulders or was attached to thin straps so that it "resembled a modern-day slip, though [it was] made of a fuller material which held in distinctive folds."[101] Much like the toga, the *stola* denoted status and rank: while it was originally only for married patrician women, it seems that by the time of the Second Punic War all freeborn women who were married to Roman citizens could wear the *stola*.[102] The costume of the *matrona* also included a distinctive idem of headwear, a set of fillets known as *vittae* which were made of wool. The fact that these *vittae* were also found on items that were sacred, pure, and inviolable suggests to Sebesta that the *vittae* marked her as sexually faithful to her husband, inviolable in her person, and worthy of respect.[103] The full outfit of the proper Roman *matrona* consisted of a tunic covered by a foot-length *stola* and her body wrapped in a *palla*, or shawl, which could also be used to cover her hair while in public. The outfit was by necessity modest and conveyed to viewers that the wearer was upholding traditional Roman values, a moral stance which was of particular importance during the Augustan age, given Augustus' "family values" legislations.

However, the popularity of the *stola* seems to have gone the same way as the toga. It also seems not to have remained a popular garment in the Imperial period, while it at the same time continued to command a considerable amount of moral and cultural resonance with Roman authors. While the outfit of a *matrona* was meant to evoke modesty and respectability, ancient authors also comment on women whose outfits did not reflect such values. The wearing of Coan silk was seen as particularly scandalous, and a respectable *matrona* would certainly never appear in it due to its association with

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[101] J. L. Sebesta, "Symbolism in the Costume of the Roman Woman," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 49.
[102] Sebesta, "Symbolism," 49.
[103] Judith Lynn Sebesta, "Women's Costume and Feminine Civic Morality in Augustan Rome," *Gender & History* 9.3 (1997), 535.

women of "doubtful reputation."[104] Ancient authors who described female clothing often were writing not simply about the fashions of the day, but also about social anxieties "concerning waste, female wealth and power, and foreign luxury" and the tension between the desire for adornment and decoration was seen as wasteful and fundamentally un-Roman.[105] Jewelry in particular was viewed as fundamentally feminine and was viewed with considerable suspicion. Roman authors viewed jewelry as having no real purpose besides enhancing beauty, but costing a considerable amount of money and resources to procure. Seneca the Younger even went so far as to describe pearl earrings as feminine madness (*muliebris insania*).[106] While decorative dress could show that the wearer was urbane and refined, wearing too much fine clothing and ornament "could result in softening over-refinement and luxury," both of which were frequently associated with the feminine.[107]

In addition to anxieties over jewelry, another major point of contention for Roman authors concerned makeup and perfume. Discussions of makeup and perfume were in many ways even more censorious than discussions of jewelry, and the use of makeup and/or perfume by men especially opened them up to accusations of effeminacy. For example, cosmetics and facial makeup were frequently seen as "aesthetically deceptive, repellant, and indicative of sexual licentiousness" in the Roman world.[108] Makeup has particularly negative connotations in ancient Rome. For Roman authors, "free women who use makeup are said to align their bodies with the open bodies of slaves and

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[104] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 14.
[105] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 85.
[106] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 86-7.
[107] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 9.
[108] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 59.

prostitutes."[109] These trends continue throughout Roman history, so that even Plutarch, writing in the second century AD, can say that an "extremely virtuous wife might shun even a hint of pomade and makeup, avoiding what is 'whorish,' *hetairikon* (*Coniugalia Praecepta* 142a)."[110] Yet even as makeup was seen to be socially dangerous and perhaps even unsuitable for respectable women due to its connection with women of ill repute, there is also a considerable body of texts which consist of makeup recipes and recommendations, even from authors such as Ovid and Pliny, who elsewhere in their works disparage makeup.[111] Clearly the status of makeup and its users in ancient Rome was every bit as complex as it is today, as it was seen both as a prerequisite for ideal beauty and as a sign of frivolity.

While makeup was typically associated with the feminine, it was also associated with effeminate men and barbarians—both groups of people who were, like women, also seen as opposed to traditional Roman masculinity. As Richlin says:

> If makeup is a sign of the female—of the difference between outside and inside, top and bottom—and the makeup itself is a paradoxical substance—repellent in content but producing beauty—it makes sense that the (imputed) wearing of makeup should have been used in Roman culture by extension to mark other kinds of difference as well: among males, to mark off those who wanted to be penetrated sexually by other males ("pathics," or *cinaedi*); and among nations, to mark off barbarians from their conquerors.[112]

Just as it was important to create a distinction between 'proper' Greco-Roman culture and its Near Eastern variants, it was important to create a distinction between 'proper' Roman masculinity and unacceptable expressions. Discussions of improperly masculine men all attribute to them what are otherwise traditionally female practices. For example, the

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[109] Richlin, 186.
[110] Richlin, 194.
[111] Richlin, 196.
[112] Richlin, 201.

Romans associated a smooth, hairless, and flawless complexion with the feminine ideal, and men who removed their beards or used makeup were generally perceived to be acting effeminately.[113] In the *Satyricon*, a *cinaedus* is depicted as having heavy makeup, which is falling off like chalk, and as being drenched in perfume, while Juvenal in Satire 2 imagines *cinaedi* to sit around at home wearing women's clothing and practicing makeup technique.[114] Just as makeup could be used to criticize Roman women, it could also be a charge lobbed at men who were perceived as effeminate or who were in fact foreigners.

Roman Views on Eastern Dress

Accusations of wearing makeup, perfume, and non-Roman, feminine clothing were not just directed at men that Roman authors suspected of being effeminate or sexually passive, but were also directed at Near Easterners. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Near Eastern men are almost always described by Roman authors as effeminate and sexually suspect. This section deals with how Roman authors discussed Eastern clothing in general. A more in-depth look at literary and material depictions of Eastern clothing in Roman art and literature follows below in Chapter Three.

The most common descriptor of foreign clothing is that it is always colorful. This is true for "barbarian" groups from the West as well as from the East: Gauls wear colorful striped trousers and Britons paint themselves blue, while of course the Greeks and Syrians have a penchant for expensive and richly dyed fabrics. However, descriptions of Western foreign clothing never reached the same pitch of anxiety as did descriptions of Eastern foreign clothing, especially in Roman authors. To my mind a major reason for this was because Western foreign groups, such as Gauls, Britons and Spaniards, are never

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[113] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 64.
[114] Richlin, 203.

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described as luxury-loving or especially decadent and are therefore never really considered effeminate.[115] Roman authors certainly stress the odd habits of western cultures and describe their appearances in ways that seem extreme when compared to the Roman norm, but they are never really discussed with the same level of anxiety and suspicion as cultures from the East.[116] Because the East was constantly equated with effeminacy in addition to its "barbarian" status, discussions of Eastern clothing were much more morally loaded and viewed with much more suspicion than even the colorful trousers of foreigners to the West.

There was also a political dimension to Roman concerns over foreign fashion, especially items that had their origins in foreign lands, especially the East. As Olson claims, "there is some indication, in many different genres, that certain expensive cosmetics, fabrics, gems, and perfumes were viewed as somehow suspicious, and that foreign adornments especially were therefore deemed by some as unattractive."[117] Thus concerns about gemstones and jewelry in Rome was not simply a fear that women were being frivolous, but also a concern about the sending of Roman money to foreign pockets and the perceived abandonment or traditional Roman ideas of simplicity of clothing.[118] Luxury and softness were also seen to lead to effeminacy, a dangerous and non-Roman

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[115] For example, see Martial 10.65, which seems to typify this East-West divide. Martial draws strong distinctions between himself, a Spaniard with a beard and hairy limbs and forceful voice, and his acquaintance Carmenion the Corinthian, who goes around with shining hair, a smooth face and body (because of his daily use of depilatories) and a lisping and feeble voice – all of which were effeminate/feminine traits.

[116] Dalby, 87. However, Roman descriptions of Western cultures such as the Gauls and Germans put them "lower on the scale of humanity than Romans of Italy," showing that effeminacy was not the only drawback in Roman terms.

[117] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 88.

[118] Olson, *Roman Woman*, 88.

characteristic which could lead to military weakness, which was viewed as extremely un-Roman and typically Eastern.[119]

As has already been touched on, Greek culture was viewed with some suspicion in ancient Rome, and the same was true for Greek clothing. We have already seen that the *pallium* was occasionally viewed as too closely resembling female clothing to make it suitable for "real" Roman men. Near Eastern clothing was often discussed along these same lines of gender: it rather invariably fell into the "feminine" category. Thus the toga and other Italian or Western clothing was seen as "unassuming garb for unassuming people" because it was (relatively) simple in design and usually only colored by the natural color of the wool.[120] In contrast, Eastern clothing was seen as more complex and above all more expensive, while at the same time being viewed as informal and inappropriate for Romans to wear.[121] A large reason that Eastern clothes were seen as expensive and luxurious was that they were more colorful than standard Roman wear. As the Roman Empire expanded, especially into the East, and grew more powerful around the Mediterranean, there was a considerable influx of luxury fabrics and garments: the desire for and subsequent importation of high-quality Egyptian linen increased; Romans were introduced to a particularly exotic and costly gold-embroidered cloth from Pergamum known as "Attalic cloth" and there was increased importation of silk both from the Near East and China.[122] Syria especially was famous for the purple dye (produced from the *murex*), which was held in such suspicion and contempt that it was

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[119] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.
[120] Berry, 122.
[121] Berry, 122.
[122] J. L. Sebesta, "*Tunica Ralla, Tunica Spissa*: The Colors and Textiles of Roman Costume," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 68.

called an "Assyrian poison."[123] Eastern luxury textiles were seen as simultaneously desirable and dangerous, a designation that was shared with finished Eastern garments. This ambiguity is a major factor when it comes to the political life which clothing could take on.

Political Fashion

Garments such as the toga and *stola* were "powerful means for defining who belonged within, and who was excluded from, the Roman citizen body."[124] Access to certain garments, fabrics, colors, and accoutrements was an important element when it came to creating identity, and the improper use of clothing or makeup could be grounds for concern. Clothing could also be used in political situations. In many situations clothing itself was imbued with political meaning, as we have already seen in the way that different togas and the *stola* itself could convey special status. In addition to this, the adoption of foreign clothing or styles was a political act, as exemplified by our discussion of the adoption of the *pallium* by Roman men. Foreign fashion was seen as particularly dangerous because "deviation in terms of dress was seen as a threat to the social order and was very closely associated in Roman mentality with moral deviance; for the cohesion of the *res publica* such deviance had to be kept in check."[125]

The perceived divide between proper Roman qualities and Eastern qualities would become even more useful in literary genres such as invective and satire, and in public rhetoric and the realm of Roman politics. Connecting a political figure with the East could be used to associate a political rival with luxury and decadence in order to portray

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[123] Dalby, 171.
[124] Edmondson, 26.
[125] Edmondson, 32.

him as incompetent or unfit for office, and "any deviations from the norms of the civic dress code provided ideal ammunition for a full-scale assault on an individual's moral character."[126] Thus how a man belted his tunic could open him to all manner of criticism tied to the allegation that a loosely belted tunic reflected loose morals.[127] Such criticisms, however, seem relatively harmless compared to criticisms of public officials who wore inappropriate, or even more shockingly, foreign, clothing while they were fulfilling a public duty or seen to be publically holding office.

The charge of wearing inappropriate clothing is used three times by Cicero against two different targets, C. Verres and L. Calpurnius Piso, who are both derided for wearing Greek dress while acting in their office of proconsul.[128] As if wearing Greek dress were not bad enough, Cicero describes Verres as wearing a purple *pallium* and ankle-length tunic (*talaris tunica*) – both of which were garments that were not only foreign but also effeminate.[129] Underlying Cicero's attacks is the assumption of the unity of outward appearance and inward morality: Verres neglected to wear appropriate clothing, so it could hardly be unexpected that he was also neglecting the duties of his office in favor of acting as a 'model of immorality' not only for the Greeks (who were immoral enough), but also for his own son (whom Cicero describes as being well-dressed).[130] Aside from Verres, Cicero attacks Marc Antony throughout the *Philippics* for his choices of clothing. The charges are many and varied, but all aim to express Antony's

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[126] Edmondson, 35.
[127] Edmondson, 35.
[128] Edmondson, 35.
[129] Edmondson, 35. Long-sleeved tunics are recorded as "indecorous" by Aulus Gellius, and furthermore he cites that Romans used a Greek term (*chirodotae*) to describe long-sleeved tunics – further cementing their suspect status.
[130] Julia Heskel, "Cicero as Evidence for Attitudes to Dress in the Late Republic," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 134.

unsuitability for his office. Cicero says that Antony wore Gallic-style clothing while on military campaign, which was to the orator's mind an improper mode of dress that disrespected the *dignitas* of Antony's military rank.[131] Elsewhere in the *Philippics*, Cicero accuses Antony of dressing improperly during the Lupercalia, apparently appearing in less clothing than befitted the prestige of his function in the festival or his rank as consul.[132] Aside from commenting on Antony's state of dress, Cicero also accuses him of essentially sleeping his way through the *cursus honorum*, suggesting that his political career was for sale and that Antony exchanged the *toga virilis* for the *toga muliebris*.[133] What is important is not so much the historical veracity of Cicero's claims, but rather how his attacks against Verres and Antony show the ambiguous status of Greek and foreign clothing in the Roman world and how clothing was viewed as indicative of morality, and especially of sexual *mores*.

Reading morality into clothing continued throughout the Roman Empire. While it could be used by politicians to disparage their enemies, it was also used by biographers and historians to comment upon the actions and lifestyles of the emperors. As mentioned above, conventionally "good" emperors were shown to wear proper Roman attire, while "bad" emperors were consistently depicted in inappropriate clothing and were shown to be almost obsessed with dressing up in various costumes.[134] Marc Antony served as the model for the literary bad emperor, and in his *Natural History*, Pliny goes so far to accuse Antony as being even more decadent than women and Eastern tyrants combined –

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[131] Heskel, 136.
[132] Heskel, 137-8. Although Cicero uses the term *nudus* to describe Antony's appearance, which would certainly have been shocking and HBO-worthy indeed, Heskel also says that the word may just have meant "improperly attired." Regardless of Antony's state of (un)dress, it was improper for his status as consul.
[133] Heskel, 140-1.
[134] Shelley Hales, "Men are Mars, Women are Venus: Divine Costumes in Imperial Rome," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 132-3.

Antony's costume(s) and actions are undesirable and improper (in this specific instance) because of their "association with the feminine and the foreign."[135] Elsewhere Antony was depicted as wearing "eastern costume" and Dionysian accoutrement in his attempt to follow his style icons, Dionysus and Alexander the Great.[136] In opposition to Antony's Dionysian image, which was perpetuated both during and after his life, Augustus created and then utilized what Hales calls the "Mars Costume," which featured military uniform and style and which expressed a more traditionally Roman form of manly divinity and esteemed Roman military values.[137] This costume was adopted by almost all following emperors – except, of course, for the bad ones, who were depicted as would-be Hellenistic kings "fopping around in fringed silk, loose clothes, and slippers" instead of Roman emperors.[138] This tendency was seen in Augustan times as an abandonment of "the traditional Roman way of life, character and values in preference for the high culture, pomp, and moral and philosophical relativism of the Hellenistic East," and again shows the ambiguous position which the Greek East held within Rome.[139] Suetonius says of Nero that he "never conformed to the traditional style of Roman civic dress; he wore clothing that was not even manly and, in the end, inappropriate for a human being to wear."'[140] It can be seen that in biographical accounts of emperors and important political figures, clothing and costume played an especially important role. Clothing was once again used as a mirror for morality, as well as qualifying an emperor's success in his office.

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[135] Edwards, 25.
[136] Hales, 135.
[137] Hales, 134-6.
[138] Hales, 135.
[139] Sebesta, "Women's Costume," 529.
[140] Quoted in Edmondson, 36.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role of clothing in constructing identity, and how that served as a fundamental process in ancient Rome for constructing not only a sense of Roman identity but also a sense of a general, foreign, Eastern identity. While garments such as the toga and *stola* came to represent Romanness for both men and women, even when these garments fell out of fashion a large part of Roman citizen identity was defined in a negative way, by describing what proper Romans were not to wear. This negative identity could and did lead to authorial anxieties about deviations from dress that was the social norms. These anxieties were most commonly seen in relation to discussions of the clothing of women, foreigners, and effeminate men, who were (to varying degrees) all linked together in their opposition to what constituted traditional Roman masculinity and Roman menswear. Because foreign and effeminate clothing were frequently seen as being the same, and because these forms of clothing were seen as incompatible with Roman ideology and Roman public life, they also became highly political. Accusations of wearing foreign, effeminate, and women's clothing was a common charge in political rhetoric and invective, and were used to raise doubts about a man's ability to lead, wage war, and hold public office. These accusations would also become very important in later biographies of the emperors, as will be discussed in more detail with regards to the biographical accounts of Elagabalus in Chapter Four. Ultimately, in ancient Rome clothing was always imbued with secondary meanings, all the more so when the item of clothing in question was foreign in origin.

Chapter Four: Near Eastern Clothing in Greece, Rome, and Palmyra

As we have seen in Chapter Two, clothing was especially important in the ancient world: not only did it convey the wearer's status, wealth, and their role in society, but clothing could be imbued with ideas about gender, culture, and sex. Clothing also became a key political item, in that deviating from acceptable norms for one's gender, rank, or status as a citizen could bring severe criticism. Aside from (or perhaps in addition to) all this ideological baggage, in the ancient world clothing was used as a convenient and often immediate way to differentiate between identities and groups of people. Stereotypes about the clothing and appearance of foreign cultures functioned in much the same way as stereotypes about the habits and customs of these same cultures: they differentiated them from Greece and Rome. In this chapter I shall examine the literary and artistic depictions of Near Eastern clothing from both Greek and Roman perspectives, looking at not only how these Greco-Roman accounts created a visual standard for representations of the Eastern foreigner that changed remarkably little throughout its long history. I will then look at how at how this standard image of the East compares to our existing Eastern material representations of Eastern clothing by examining the surviving funerary busts, reliefs, and wall paintings from the tombs of Palmyra, in Syria, with an focus on how clothing was used to create identity in Palmyra.

Introduction

As previously discussed, views of the East in Rome were often adopted from earlier Greek views. As we have also seen, these Greek accounts were not always the product of objective study, but were often influenced by the political climate of the time. A significant number of Greek accounts of Eastern clothes come out of the context of the

Persian Wars, and the results of these wars almost certainly influenced how the Greeks viewed the Persians, especially once Greek victory was established. The views of the Persians and, by extension, other cultures within the Persian sphere of influence in the Near East, such as Medes, Syrians, and even groups like the far-off Scythians, were hardly complimentary, and often described the Persians as servile and their rulers as despotic. Greek descriptions of Persian clothing places special emphasis on its colorful, elaborate, and expensive nature. Even the form of Persian clothing was different, as it featured long sleeved tunics and ankle-length pants, both of which appear to have been close-fitting, if artistic depictions of these garments are to be believed. This image of the Persian endured from the Classical era through the Hellenistic period, and interestingly, as it endured through time, it became less and less a representation of Persians in particular and more and more a depiction of Near Easterners in general. This visual and literary standard then passed into Roman accounts of the Near East, where, as we have already seen, it was conflated with ideas of indulgence and effeminacy. As with Greek accounts, these Roman accounts undoubtedly reflected some of the concerns and aspects of the political climate of the time in which they were produced. This can especially be seen in the increase in the idea that Eastern cultures and clothing were a threat to Rome in the literature of moralizing authors. These concerns over the East, and a relatively unchanged depiction of Eastern clothing, continued to endure until the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, a remarkably long period of time after these ideas first began to appear in the Greek world.

The literary and artistic tradition from the Greco-Roman world provides us with one perspective, but in addition to looking at how Greeks and Romans viewed Eastern

clothing, we are also able to examine what Near Eastern individuals had to say about their own clothing. The best evidence for this comes from the artistic tradition of the Near East. For example, on reliefs at Persepolis and Susa, it is possible to see the differences in culture and appearance of the different subject peoples of the Persian Empire.[141] These reliefs show that clothing in the East was not the monolithic and generalized standard that the Greeks depicted. Another interesting source of material evidence, and the major focus of this chapter, is the city of Palmyra in Syria. While the city originally experienced some degree of autonomy, it eventually came firmly under the control of the Roman Empire, and it was a key city because of its participation in overland trade between Rome and the East. Palmyra provides a number of statues and reliefs from a variety of contexts which depict the city's inhabitants and divinities.

The art of Palmyra can provide us with a perspective on Eastern clothing that is otherwise missing from the Greco-Roman literary and artistic tradition, as it portrays Near Eastern individuals as they wished to be depicted. Furthermore, examining the use of specific outfits and clothing types in the art of Palmyra can provide a window into how Syrian identity was created by residents of Syria themselves, as opposed to being created by an external group. While undoubtedly this identity was not the same throughout all of the Roman province of Syria, examining the material evidence from Palmyra can help to show how Syrians presented themselves and their clothing. While the reliefs and paintings do at times seem to accord with Roman accounts – for example, in the amount of jewelry or elaborate patterns of decoration – these Palmyrene depictions almost

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[141] Maria Brosius, "Keeping Up with the Persians: Between Cultural Identity and Persianization in the Achaemenid Period," in *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 138.

certainly are meant to be viewed and understood within specific contexts. Ultimately, the material evidence portrays a more complex and nuanced version of Syrian clothing than is presented in Roman literature. The presence of Greco-Roman clothing and mythological motifs in the artwork suggests that Greco-Roman culture was adopted and adapted in a knowing way by residents of Palmyra, while at the same time Near Eastern traditions continued alongside these Greco-Roman influences. It seems that the citizens of Palmyra were comfortable with both.

Near Eastern Clothing in Greek Literature and Art

In Greek art and literature, Near Eastern clothing is often depicted as colorful and elaborate. One of the most in-depth accounts is that of Herodotus, who in Book Seven of the *Histories* describes the contingents of Xerxes' army. Although Herodotus' account of the Persian army is largely concerned with how each contingent was equipped for battle and the etymology of the names of the various peoples making up the Persian force, he also describes the general clothing of the different groups:

> On their heads [the Persians] wore *tiaras* (τιάρας), as they call them, which are loose, felt caps, and their bodies are clothed in colorful tunics with sleeves (κιθῶνας χειριδωτοὺς ποικίλους) … Their legs were covered in trousers (ἀναξυρίδας)… The Median contingent wore the same clothes as the Persians, since it was in fact a Median style of clothing, rather than a Persian one.[142]

Herodotus mentions that many of the other cultural groups which make up Xerxes' force are dressed like the Persians, although he does account for some difference in appearance. For example, he claims that while the Cissians were dressed like Persians, they were turban-wearing (μιτρηφόρος) instead of following the Persians in wearing

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[142] Herodotus, *Histories*, tran. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.61-62

felt hats.[143] Interestingly, Herodotus does not really describe the clothing of the Assyrian contingent, although he does say that they wore bronze helmets in a barbarian fashion that were not easy to describe.[144] Lastly, the Scythians are described as wearing tall, stiff, pointed caps (κυρβασίας ἐς ὀξὺ ἀπηγμένας ὀρθὰς εἶχον πεπηγυία) and as wearing trousers (ἀναξυρίδας).[145] Although there is some difference in clothing of the individual contingents of the Persian Army, for the most part they are described as wearing some type of headgear (usually a wool or felt cap), colorful tunics, and long pants. By the time of Herodotus' writing, this type of outfit was a standard depiction of Near Eastern clothing throughout Greek literary accounts. While Herodotus' description may have an origin in reality, it also followed traditional Greek thoughts about Eastern clothing.

This standard depiction of Eastern warriors can also be seen in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Xenophon describes the Persian officers as wearing "purple cloaks (πορφυροῦς κάνδυς)… costly tunics (πολυτελεῖς χιτῶνας) and colored trousers (ποικίλας ἀναξυρίδα)," in addition to bracelets and other jewelry.[146] Whether or not this type of Persian outfit was spread throughout the Near East to as wide an extent as Herodotus reports, both Herodotus and Xenophon's descriptions of the clothing of the Persian army came to have important significance in discussions of Eastern clothing. This outfit, or at least certain elements of it such as long sleeves, colorful patterns in the garment, and a tendency to wear trousers, became a shorthand and code for describing all

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[143] Herodotus, 7.62.2.
[144] Herodotus, 7.63.1.
[145] Herodotus, 7.64.2.
[146] Xenophon, *Anabasis*, trans. Carleton L. Brownston (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1922), 1.5.8

peoples from the Near East. Regardless of whether or not Near Easterners were Medes or Persians, they were all assumed, in the Greek mind, to dress in this similar way.

In addition to Greek literature describing the clothing and customs of the East, there are also visual representations of Easterners in Greek art. These representations often focus on emphasizing the differences in clothing, as can be seen in depictions of Trojan archers on Greek temples and in depictions of Eastern warriors on Athenian red figure pottery. The Classical Greek image of the Persian warrior was applied not only to Trojan archers, but also to a very unique and quasi-Eastern group of people, the Scythians. The application of this standard image to the Scythians is very interesting and says much about how the Greeks viewed foreigners. Scythia was not located within the Eastern Mediterranean, and was instead located in the Eurasian steppes.[147] Beyond this issue of geography, Scythians were given their own cultural stereotypes in Greek literature, and the portrayal of Scythian archers in Athenian comedies was hardly a flattering one.[148] Nevertheless, the Persian costume as recorded in Herodotus appears in visual representations of Scythians. The assimilation of Persian costume to the otherwise very distinct Scythian culture is particularly interesting precisely because of the ways in which the Greeks dealt with each culture. In the *Histories*, the Persians can "appear surprisingly Hellenic," and Herodotus can even go so far as to speak well of the Persian values (as when he praises the instruction of Persian boys in riding, shooting, and telling the truth), but Herodotus also maintains that the Scythians are the "most barbarous of

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[147] Margarita Gleba, "You Are What You Wear: Scythian Costume as Identity," in *Dressing the Past*, ed. Gleba, Munkholt, and Nosch (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 13.
[148] Cartledge, 70.

barbarians."[149] This negative view of the Scythians as archetypical barbarians is echoed in Thucydides, who says that if the Scythians were united, they would be unstoppable either in Europe or in Asia, but that this will never happen because they are by nature incapable of doing so, since they lack sense and intelligence.[150] As we will see, what originally began as a Median or Persian outfit in Greek art would eventually become a Scythian costume, as well. This costume could then be used as visual shorthand for any Eastern figure at any time.

In Attic pottery, the typical Scythian attire "includes the tall pointed cap with flaps on the sides and back, and the dress consisting of a long-sleeved top and jacket with trousers, all made of patterned material and trimmed with decorated strips along the seams," although not every depiction of a Scythian in Attic vase art may contain all of these elements.[151] While the lack of uniformity between depictions of peoples of the same culture means that using Attic pottery as accurate evidence for Near Eastern clothing is more difficult than perhaps initially imagined, it does show that there were certain definitive elements of Near Eastern clothing, such as long sleeves, trousers, and a pointed cap, that were considered distinctly Eastern. Most of the representations of Scythians on Attic pottery date from 530 to 500 BC.[152] A red-figure depiction of a Scythian archer on a plate by Epiktetos from 520-500 BC (fig. 1) clearly marks the subject as foreign by portraying him in long sleeves and pants, and a cap with ear flaps. Both of these garments are covered in patterns, representing embroidery or other decoration on the garments themselves. While the figure is monochrome, it is not hard to imagine that these garments

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[149] Cartledge, 69.
[150] Thucydides, trans 2.97.6 is quoted in Cartledge, 69.
[151] Gleba, 14.
[152] Gleba, 14.

may have been quite colorful and elaborately decorated. Another depiction of a Scythian archer comes from the tondo of a red-figure kylix, attributed to Doulis, which is dated from 500-490 BC (fig. 2). Although this figure is partially hidden behind a figure in more typically Greek garb carrying a *hoplon*, the archer's arms and legs are clearly visible and are covered to the wrist and ankle by long sleeves and pants with broad horizontal stripes. He also wears a cap similar to the archer in the Epiktetos plate. Other depictions of Scythian archers on Greek pottery similarly depict the archer in long sleeves and long pants and emphasize the decorated nature of the archer's clothing. Similarly, the archer figure on the west pediment at the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina (fig. 3) features many of the key elements of Scythian dress in Greek art. The archer wears long sleeves, trousers, and an Eastern-style hat, all of which look similar to other examples of Scythian dress in Greek art. Modern color reconstructions of the statue have recreated patterns and decorations which are in line with other depictions of Eastern archers in Greek art. Interestingly, given that the west pediment of the temple has been reconstructed as depicting a scene from the Trojan War, this figure is likely not meant to represent an "ethnic" Scythian, but rather a Trojan archer. By this point, the standard visual representation of an Eastern (or even quasi-Eastern) Barbarian was firmly established.

By the 400s BC it becomes apparent that Scythian costume was not used only to represent Scythians, but "rather [is] employed either to represent a wider range of Asians," including mythical archetypes, legendary peoples such as the Trojans (as at the Temple of Aphaia) and Amazons (as on the Amazon fight scene on a vase attributed to the Eretria Painter dated to 420 BC, fig. 4), and also real cultures and peoples such as the

Persians.[153] This use of Scythian attire to represent a general sense of the East can be seen in the terracotta Nolan amphora, dated to ca. 480–470 BC, which depicts a Greek hoplite fighting a Persian warrior (fig. 5). The Persian warrior on this amphora wears a distinctive Eastern hat in addition to long sleeves and trousers, both of which are painted with a circular pattern similar to other examples of Eastern dress. He also wears a tunic under his breastplate which reaches to about mid-thigh and which is painted with a zigzag pattern, suggesting further color or decorative elements to his clothing. A red figure kylix by the Triptolemos Painter, dated to 460 BC, depicts an even more elaborately outfitted Persian warrior (fig. 6). All the elements of Eastern costume are present here, including the distinctive hat with ear flaps, long sleeves and pants painted with a zigzag pattern, and other highly patterned garments over top of those.

While these images correspond to Herodotus' description of Persian military attire, Attic depictions of Persians were "an amalgam of reality and fantasy, a perspective on the enemy in which his cultural identity is partly—but *only* partly—dictated by the existing stereotype of a different foreigner."[154] Most importantly, these depictions of Scythians, Amazons, and Persians are ultimately a Greek creation: "when pot painters fashioned Persian soldiers who amalgamated reality with the artistic model for Scythians, they were linking the Persians to a Greek template" of how the East should look.[155] What might this Greek template of the East say about its inhabitants? Cartledge identifies an important consideration when he points out that Amazons and Scythians were viewed as the "Other in its purest, polarized form [and] the ideal type of the anti-Greek: non-

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[153] Gleba, 14-15.
[154] Tuplin, 151.
[155] Tuplin, 151.

agricultural, non-urban, uncivilized, [and] nomadic."[156] Therefore it may have been the

case that in addition to signifying foreign and Eastern identity, the Scythian costume

could also signify that its wearer was far removed from Greek values and ideas, and

could be used to dress any group of people who the Greeks saw as opposite to

themselves. This would especially explain the paintings of Amazons who wear Scythian

clothing but are sometimes depicted with Thracian weaponry, perhaps in an attempt to

"emphasize their exotic and mythical aspect."[157] The Greek standard of Eastern clothing

formed the basis for Greco-Roman ideas about Eastern clothing. Most obviously, Eastern

clothing was distinct from that of the Greeks (and later, that of the Romans): it featured

long sleeves and long trousers which covered the body, and it was highly patterned and

presumably highly colorful. Furthermore, this type of Eastern outfit could be used to

clothe or depict any culture in the East, regardless of whether they were a historical

opponent or a mythic culture.

Near Eastern Clothing in Roman Literature and Art

These Greek ideas about Eastern clothing persisted into the Roman era, appearing

numerous times not only in the literary sources but also in visual media from the days of

the Republic all the way through to the Late Empire. Despite that considerable length of

time, Roman conceptions of eastern clothing have much in common with the ideas

expressed by the Greeks, and largely follow in the same vein. Both Greek and Roman

depictions of Eastern clothing focus on its different qualities in comparison to Greco-

Roman or Western clothing. As we have seen in Chapter Two, for Roman authors,

Eastern clothing could even include comparatively similar garments such as the Greek

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[156] Cartledge, 71.
[157] Shapiro 1983, 111, quoted in Gleba, 15.

pallium, and these garments were occasionally viewed with the same element of suspicion as were garments that originated in the Near East itself. In the Roman literary evidence we have, Eastern clothing was viewed as decadent and luxurious, and above all, effeminate and decidedly non-Roman. As discussed in Chapter Two, much of the discussion of Eastern clothing concerns its luxurious nature. These sentiments in turn are tied in with earlier ideas of the East as a place teeming with not only decadence but also decay, both of which corrupt any person (or Empire) unlucky enough to get involved with it.

Just as in Greek literature, Roman literature features numerous depictions of vaguely Eastern clothing which seem to apply to all and none of the cultures found in the Near East. One particularly rich source for Roman depictions of Near Eastern clothing is Virgil's *Aeneid*. It contains multiple descriptions of Near Eastern clothing, and very few of them are complimentary. In Book 9, Numanus, one of the Italian allies fighting against Aeneas and the Trojans, mocks Aeneas' Trojan ancestry by mocking his Trojan clothing saying, "you like your clothes dyed with yellow saffron and the bright juice of the purple fish. Your delight is in dancing and idleness. You have sleeves to your tunics and ribbons to keep your bonnets on. You are Phrygian women, not Phrygian men!"[158] Later in the *Aeneid,* Turnus asks the gods to help him defeat his enemy, saying, "Grant me the power to bring down that effeminate Phrygian (*semiviri Phrygis*), to tear the breastplate off his body and rend it with my bare hands, to foul in the dust the hair which he has curled with

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[158] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 9.614-7: Vobis picta croco et fulgenti murice vestis, / desidiae cordi, iuvat indulgere choreis, / et tunicae manicas et habent redimicula mitrae. / O vere Phrygiae, neque enim Phryges… All translations from the *Aeneid* are from David West (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

hot steel and steeped in myrrh!"[159] In the minds of the native Italians, Aeneas is just

another Eastern stereotype, an effeminate man who delights in wearing colorful clothing

and having his hair done. Another instance of Near Eastern clothing, this time not

associated with Aeneas, comes from Virgil's description of the battle dress of Chloreus,

who was once a priest of Cybele and who rides into battle on behalf of Aeneas. Virgil

describes Chloreus as

> resplendent in his Phrygian armour and spurring his foaming warhorse. The
> horse-cloth was of hide with gold stitching and overlapping brass scales in the
> shape of feathers. He himself shone with exotic indigo and purple. The arrows he
> shot from his Lycian bow were from Gortyn in Crete and the bow hanging from
> his shoulder was of gold. Gold too was the helm on the head of the priest, and on
> that day he had gathered the rustling linen folds of his saffron-yellow cloak
> (*croceam chlamydem*) into a knot with a golden brooch. He wore an embroidered
> tunic and barbaric embroidered trousers covered his legs (*barbara tegmina
> crurum*).[160]

Even Chloreus' horse is finely outfitted for battle, and Chloreus' appearance certainly

seems to hearken back to Greek depictions of Eastern archers: he wears a golden hat, an

embroidered tunic, and trousers. Unlike Greek literary descriptions of foreign archers,

however, in the *Aeneid* this outfit proves to be deadly – not for Chloreus himself, but for

the Volscian leader Camilla. Camilla sees Chloreus' fine, luxurious garments and then

"blind to all else and unthinking, she tracked him through the whole army, burning with a

woman's passion for spoil and plunder."[161] Virgil's account of Chloreus' clothing follows

well-established Roman ideas about Near Eastern clothing: it is really "more suitable for

a woman than a warrior."[162] The *Aeneid* established Greek ideas about Eastern clothing

for a Roman readership, namely that it was colorful and exotic, but also adds established

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[159] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.97-10.
[160] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.770-780.
[161] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.783-5.
[162] Henry Bender, "*De Habitu Vestis*: Clothing in the *Aeneid*," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) , 148.

Roman ideas about Eastern clothing into the mix. When Virgil's Italian characters such as Numanus and Turnus describe Aeneas' clothing and appearance, they make sure to emphasize that it is colorful and feminine. Similarly, Chloreus' resplendent Phrygian outfit actually causes the death of Camilla, a native Italian, because she neglects to pay attention to the battle around her in her eagerness and reckless desire to possess these luxurious arms (although surely Apollo's assistance in guiding the arrow must have played a part too). The *Aeneid* contains many ideas about Near Eastern clothing which read just as if they were lifted from earlier Greek accounts, while also containing much Roman political rhetoric about the East, luxury, and effeminacy.

Other literary representations of Eastern clothing similarly emphasize the strange and colorful elements of the clothing. Written 250 years after Virgil's *Aeneid*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* contains a description of a group of Eastern priests which features a number of Eastern stereotypes, including outlandish clothing and insatiable sexual appetite (8.26). The narrator of the *Metamorphoses* describes the clothing of the priests thus:

> Next day they put on varicoloured garments (*variis coloribus*) and beautified themselves hideously by daubing clay pigment on their faces and outlining their eyes with greasepaint. Then they set out, wearing turbans (*mitellis*) and saffron-colored robes (*crocotis*) and vestments of linen (*carbasinis*) and silk (*bombycinis*). Some had white tunics decorated with purple lance-shaped designs flowing in every direction, gathered up into a girdle (*cingulo*), and on their feet they wore yellow shoes (*luteis…calceis*).[163]

Apuleius' description of this priestly outfit follows established themes. The clothing is very colorful and features luxury materials, some with elaborate decoration. This depiction of Eastern clothing fits in with the fact that these priests are eunuchs in the

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[163] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), 8.27.

service of an unnamed goddess. Apuleius' narrator has one of the priests refer to the others as *puellae* and this association is further established by their wearing yellow garments, as the color was largely associated with, and in many ways specifically restricted to, women. One of the major reasons for this association is the Roman wedding ceremony, during which brides wore a special veil, the *flammeum*, which was yellow or flame-colored and which covered her hair.[164] According to Festus, the *flammeum* was also worn by the Flaminica Dialis, a Roman priestess who was especially highly regarded.[165] Apuleius' Eastern priests exhibit many of the Roman stereotypes about Easterners, and their elaborate clothing and presumably gaudy makeup reflect their questionable gender identity and sexual appetite. While Apuleius is undoubtedly going over the top for the humorous interests of his narrative, this description corresponds to the attitudes and assumptions of Cicero, Juvenal, Ovid, and Virgil noticed above.

Roman visual representations of Eastern clothing feature many of the same qualities found in Greek depictions. However, it does not seem that the Romans painted images of foreigners for their own consumption in the same quantity or with the same interest as the Greeks, and especially Athenian Greeks. There are very few examples of Roman-produced art objects from Rome itself which depict foreigners in a way analogous to the depictions of them found in Attic pottery, although certainly Greek-produced images could have circulated throughout the Roman world and thereby reinforced the already existing images of Easterners. However, many depictions of Rome's conquered enemies can be seen on triumphal art and architecture, and such

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[164] Laetitia La Follette, "The Costume of the Roman Bride," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 55.
[165] La Follette, 56.

monuments account for a considerable proportion of Roman depictions of foreigners. Unsurprisingly, these depictions are often "simply stereotypes that tell us more about their creators than they do about the barbarian peoples portrayed."[166] Roman triumphal architecture had a very different purpose than fine pottery, and was primarily concerned with showing Rome's military superiority and victory. Additionally, the construction of large, public monuments meant that the architecture was intended to be viewed within a specific context, such as in Rome itself.[167] Triumphal architecture was meant to celebrate Rome's victories over its inferior, barbarian enemies, and so certain features of the conquered enemies may have been played up in over to emphasize this. Despite differences of intent in depicting defeated foreigners on triumphal architecture or art, in many ways, both on these arches and in the few other examples of probable Roman-produced depictions of foreigners, Easterners look very similar to those who appear on Greek pottery.

One early example of a Roman depiction of Eastern clothing can be seen in the Alexander Mosaic, which shows Alexander the Great meeting the Persian king Darius in battle. The mosaic is dated to the 2nd century BCE and was found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii (fig. 7). It is "most probably derived from a Greek painted source, thought to be by Philoxenos of Eretria."[168] If the mosaic indeed follows a Greek original, it is perhaps unsurprising that the depiction of Persian clothing has much in common with earlier Greek descriptions. Although the mosaic is heavily damaged and the composition does not provide many examples of full-length clothing, it is still possible to discern the

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[166] I. M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000), 1.
[167] Ferris, 2. However, there are examples of triumphal architecture found elsewhere in Italy and around the Roman Empire.
[168] Ferris, 5.

elements which typify depictions of Near Eastern clothing. Most of the Persians, including Darius, are shown wearing a somewhat baggy, yellow, hood-like head covering. Furthermore, they are depicted as wearing long-sleeved tunics, which are portrayed in a variety of colors. One Persian in the foreground of the mosaic, whose body is largely blocked by a retreating horse, is clearly depicted as wearing bright red trousers with some element of embroidery or decoration. This mosaic continues many of the trends established in the earlier Greek pottery examples.

Another example can be found on the elaborately decorated breastplate of the Augustus of Prima Porta (fig. 8). The breastplate depicts the return of the standards lost in Crassus' disastrous campaign in Parthia, and features a Parthian and a Roman figure. The Parthian, depicted on the right, wears a loose fitting tunic which falls to his knees over a pair of ankle-length pants. A modern colorized reproduction depicts the Parthian as wearing a long sleeved garment under his tunic. While this is only faintly visible on the non-painted original statue, this attire is certainly in line with the earlier Greek representations of the East. He is also bearded, which accords with some Greek representations of Easterners, but not all, and he wears no eastern-style headgear featured in earlier and later art. This depiction of a Parthian is largely consistent with both earlier representations on coins, for example the denarius dating to 19/18 BC which depicts a captive Parthian on its reverse (fig. 9).[169] It seems that the Prima Porta Augustus set the standard for depicting conquered barbarians, as an outfit similar to the Parthian one on the breastplate is picked up for the depictions of conquered Dacians on Trajan's Column

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[169] Richard A. Gergel, "Costume as Geographic Indicator: Barbarians and Prisoners on Cuirassed Statue Breastplates," in *The World of Roman Costume*, ed. Sebesta and Bonfante (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 199.

(fig. 10), which was completed in 113 AD. These Dacians are depicted as bearded, wearing leggings or trousers and a long tunic, with some wearing a Dacian caps.[170] Another depiction of a Dacian, this time on a late Flavian statue, can easily be recognized by the Dacian cap, the single most important item of clothing for identifying Dacians – even though it very closely resembled the Phrygian cap.[171] The figure on this breastplate is additionally shown to be wearing shoes, pants (*bracae*), a long-sleeved tunic and a cloak.[172]

This image of the captive, defeated barbarian can also be found on later architecture such as the Arch of Septimius Severus, which was dedicated in 203 AD in Rome (fig. 11). The arch features several small relief panels which depict the sieges of four Parthian cities.[173] The arch also features reliefs of a triumphal procession which features a Parthian begging for mercy before the personification of Roma, as well as several reliefs showing Romans leading off captive Parthians.[174] On the arch, Parthians are all depicted as wearing a knee-length tunic, ankle-length pants, long sleeves under their tunics, and the distinctive Phrygian cap which looks only slightly modified from the ones depicted in Greek pottery. The Arch of Septimius Severus not only shows the continuation of a Roman tradition for depicting conquered barbarians, as expressed earlier on Trajan's Column, sculptures featuring ceremonial breastplates, and triumphal coins struck under Augustus, but also displays the continuation of earlier Greek standards for depicting barbarians.

Remarkably, the tradition of depicting Easterners in a standardized outfit

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[170] Ferris, 78.
[171] Gergel, 203.
[172] Gergel, 203.
[173] Ferris, 120.
[174] Ferris, 120.

continued even after the fall of the Roman Empire in the west. An even later example of the endurance of this standard Eastern costume can be seen in the mosaic depicting the Three Kings of the Bible at the Basilica of Sant'Apollinaire Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy (fig. 12). The Three Kings wear an outfit which looks almost identical to depictions on Greek pottery, despite the fact that the mosaic dates to the 6th century AD: around 300 years later than the Arch of Septimius Severus and almost 1000 years later than Herodotus' descriptions of the clothing of the Persians, Medes, and Parthians. The Three Kings wear ankle length trousers and long-sleeved tunics, both of which are highly patterned, with gold or jeweled trim. They also wear colorful and/or patterned vests and a distinctive red Phrygian cap. The different items of clothing are all done in different color combinations and patterns, including purple, giving a visual indication of their regal status. While other mosaics in the basilica feature elaborate fabric and decoration in the clothing, these three figures stand out against what may be assumed to be Byzantine clothing because of their unique, markedly foreign attire. Even though this example comes from a completely different historical context, it is a remarkable testament to the strength of this generalized depiction of the clothing of the East within the Greco-Roman world.

The standard visual vocabulary for Eastern figures remains remarkably consistent from Classical Greece to late Byzantine antiquity. Foreign warriors can be visually separated immediately from Greek or Roman individuals by their colorful or highly patterned outfits. Additionally, all of these foreign warriors wear long sleeves and long trousers, both of which were garments that were foreign to Greece and Rome. By creating a standard visual representation of foreigners in literature and art, Greek and Roman authors and artists could easily group different foreign cultures into a large,

undifferentiated group which was united only by virtue of its being neither Greek nor Roman.

Clothing and Identity in Palmyra

The city of Palmyra provides a unique window through which to view ancient Syrian identity. Palmyra rose to prominence due to participation in and control of caravan trade routes between the east and west, and there are certainly elements of both in the architecture and art of the city, especially once Palmyra became more firmly established within the Roman geographic sphere.[175] After Syria was annexed to Rome in 64 BC, Roman influence within the city became more and more established from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD.[176] Despite the increasing Roman influence in the city, there also remained an apparently unique identity at Palmyra, created out of this mixture of Eastern and Western elements. Part of the reason for this mixture was the fact that Palmyra was controlled by many different groups throughout its history. The original settlement that would grow into Palmyra, originally known as Tadmor, was established in the 3rd millennium BC as a confederation of four Arabic tribes.[177] The city's culture, dress, and artistic program and practices would have been influenced by the numerous peoples, including Arabic, Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman that held influence in the city at various points in history. While it may be impossible to detect a distinctly "Syrian" identity in the art at Palmyra, the mixture of these different cultures presents a unique local identity.

The art and architecture of Palmyra draw heavily on its connection to the Near

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[175] A.M. Smith, *Roman Palmyra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.
[176] Smith, 32.
[177] Ball, 74.

Eastern tradition. Cities located closer to the Mediterranean, such as Antioch, tended to be more heavily influenced by Greco-Roman artistic and architectural elements and fell more firmly into the Greco-Roman orbit.[178] Cities further inland, further away from Rome, and more difficult to reach often utilized more Near Eastern artistic features in their artistic traditions.[179] Colledge notes that the artistic 'language' of Palmyra had less in common with "the Hellenistic- and Roman-influenced artists of the coastal area of Syria," and instead was more closely related to the artistic styles and practices that fell "within the political boundaries of the empire of Parthia."[180] This can be seen in the formulaic positioning and arrangement of figures within reliefs and in the representations of hair, veils, and even facial features, which seem more formulaic or conventional in contrast to the more naturalistic Greco-Roman portraits.[181] Aside from an artistic similarity with the East, there also seems to have been a strong cultural connection between Palmyra and Parthia. During the frequent battles between Rome and Parthia in the first century BC, a raid on Palmyra by Marc Antony saw the residents fleeing eastward, across the Euphrates, which for some scholars suggests that there may have been an attachment to, or a hope of protection from, the Parthian people and empire.[182] There are further connections to the East at Palmyra, as well, as can be seen in the numerous depictions of what has been identified as Iranian clothing in the artistic legacy from Palmyra and the increasing influence of Iranian court and military procedure in the

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[178] Bernard Goldman, "Graeco-Roman Dress in Syro-Mesopotamia," in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 163.
[179] Goldman, 163.
[180] Malcolm A. R. Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976), 218.
[181] Iain Browning, *Palmyra* (Park Ridge: Noyes Press, 1979), 36-38.
[182] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 16.

third century AD.[183] Similarly, Browning suggests that there may have been some "spiritual link" with cultures in the East that formed "the very base of [Palmyrene] culture."[184]

Despite this connection with the East, however, there were strong connections to the West as well. Although Pompey annexed Syria in 64 BC, there is no documented evidence of Roman-Palmyrene interaction until Antony's raid mentioned above, which occurred in 41 BC.[185] While this may suggest that initial Roman involvement in the area was minimal (or even non-existent), Rome certainly increased its presence in Palmyra during the Imperial period, beginning at least in 18 AD, as attested by statues and inscriptions dating from around this date.[186] Further Roman involvement thereafter seems to have been almost inevitable, given that the interiors and eastern borders of its Near Eastern provinces, especially Syria, became important for protecting the Roman frontier and for staging further actions against Parthia. This increased Roman activity ultimately led Palmyra into a Roman sphere of influence, in contrast to cities such as Dura-Europos which were more firmly in the Parthian sphere.[187] For example, by the early second century AD, Palmyra had many institutions which were "typical of a standard Greek polis."[188] Similarly, many of the sculptural and painting techniques, as well as some of the artistic motifs found in those sculptures and paintings, can be traced to the Hellenistic and Roman artistic tradition.[189] Inscriptions from Palmyra are usually bilingual and feature both Palmyrene Aramaic and Greek, while some even feature Greek, Latin, and

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[183] Ball, 86.
[184] Browning, 23.
[185] Smith, 21.
[186] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra,* 16-7.
[187] Browning, 24-5.
[188] Smith, 58.
[189] Browning, 36.

Aramaic; and in addition to this some Greek and Latin loanwords are found in Aramaic inscriptions.[190] Most of the inscriptions in Palmyra feature Aramaic and either Greek or Latin, even though the different inscriptions may not be strict word for word copies of each other. Beginning around 44 BC it is possible to see elements from the artistic traditions of Mesopotamia, Hellenistic Greece, and Iranian cultures being combined with local Palmyrene artistic elements.[191]

Despite Palmyra's cultural similarity with Parthia and the increasing influence of Rome, Palmyra's cultural identity still was unique; it was neither Parthian nor Greco-Roman, but both. By adopting "specific cultural habits" from both Rome (and Greece) and Parthia, and combining them with whatever local traditions and cultural norms were in place before the involvement of those powers, the inhabitants of Palmyra created a unique, specifically Palmyrene identity.[192] Such a mixture of cultural elements can be seen, for example, in funerary reliefs that show family members wearing both Roman and Parthian attire or wearing specific cultural clothing, such as the standard Parthian outfit, in specific circumstances. The architectural elements of buildings such as the Temple of Bel similarly show a combination of East and West, which mixes Hellenistic design elements with Near Eastern style.[193] Palmyrene architects and designers were not just mindlessly copying "superior" Western artistic styles, but were making a deliberate choice to use these elements. As Ball states, Palmyrene architecture is traditionally viewed as "western, particularly Classical, [and seen as] 'Greek' in terms of character, layout, institutions, and architecture. Even when it is at least (grudgingly?) conceded as

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[190] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 20.
[191] Colledge, "Parthian Elements at Roman Palmyra," *Mesopotamia* 22 (1987): 19-28: 22.
[192] Smith, 18.
[193] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 39.

native, it is merely taken as sophisticated enough to recognize the superiority of Graeco-Roman culture and receive it gratefully. This has obscured the overriding Semitic and other oriental elements of [Palmyrene architecture's] character."[194] Even if it is ultimately impossible to know precisely what use Palmyrene architects intended Classical architectural elements to serve in their temples or other buildings, it seems prudent to keep this point in mind while analyzing the funerary sculpture, religious reliefs, and tomb paintings from Palmyra.

The numerous funerary busts and reliefs that have come out of Palmyra provide some of the most compelling evidence for the creation of a uniquely Palmyrene expression of identity. As discussed above, this identity made use of elements from cultures both east and west of the city, and it is possible to trace some of these elements or developments through the art. Because Palmyra was so well established as a trading and commercial city, in which many different cultures could have passed through or settled, it may seem as if these different elements overshadow any "local" or "native" tradition of clothing or art. These funerary busts began to be produced around 50 AD, and likely were an integral part of Palmyrene funerary belief.[195] Colledge suggests that these reliefs were not intended to be individual portraits, but had a more important role related to the spirit or soul of the deceased, because the relief portraits feature a "notable regularity and stylization" and lack distinguishing characteristics.[196]

Temple reliefs and religious depictions at Palmyra feature many combinations of Eastern and Western elements. The nature of these religious portrayals can perhaps be

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[194] Ball, 83-5.
[195] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 62.
[196] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 62.

explained by the fact that Palmyra had "longstanding status" as a cult site and place of religious association in Syria.[197] There is evidence that over 60 deities were worshiped in the city, which is perhaps unsurprising given Palmyra's role in long-distance trade.[198] In addition to the local deities whose names are evidenced in the city, it also seems the case that many of them were imported from elsewhere, and that many of these imported gods came from places to the East, such as Babylon and Iran.[199] Despite this mixture of gods, during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods Palmyra's pantheon was "overwhelmingly (but not entirely) Semitic."[200] The Roman names that do appear in relation to the gods seem to be used not to invoke the Greco-Roman gods themselves, but rather as additional names for local gods.[201]

Material remains found in both religious and funerary contexts contain elements of both Western and Eastern artistic elements, themes, and clothing. One of the most immediately noticeable features of this Palmyrene statuary is the unique clothing depicted. While this clothing does make use of Greco-Roman elements (more noticeable in female clothing than in male clothing), there are also elements unique to Palmyra or to the wider context of the Near East. While Colledge says that "local garments are unusual" in the art of Palmyra because of the overwhelming presence of "Greek and Iranian dress," I would suggest instead that there is nothing which prevents these Greek or Iranian elements from becoming localized or given a new or special meaning within a Palmyrene context.[202] Colledge does not specify what these "local" Palmyrene garments

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[197] Smith, 55.
[198] Smith, 58.
[199] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 24.
[200] Colledge, *Art of Palmyra*, 24.
[201] Colledge, *Art of Palmyra*, 24.
[202] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 145.

might have been, or provide examples of descriptions of what this clothing might have looked like, but at the same time, we cannot assume that any depiction of visibly non-Greco-Roman clothing was local, and just because someone is depicted as wearing Parthian or Greco-Roman clothing does not mean that they themselves were Parthian, Greek, or Roman.[203] Because of these difficulties, it may ultimately be impossible to pin down what exactly local clothing at Palmyra looked like. Even if Palmyrene portraiture may not have reflected the current styles of the day and instead depicted an idealized form of clothing, they still reflected the elements or qualities of clothing Palmyrenes valued enough to commemorate in art.[204] The combination of Greco-Roman and "local" elements in clothing suggests that Palmyrene citizens had a more complex identity than may have been supposed based on visual representations of the East in Greco-Roman art. As with every item of clothing, Palmyrenes would have made a conscious decision with regards to how they would be depicted in funerary busts and reliefs. It is almost certain that Palmyrene clothing had an equally expansive capacity to convey meaning, and the choice to wear traditionally Eastern or Western clothing would have carried societal meaning, even if as modern scholars we can never get to the bottom of what that meaning really was.

Both male and female funerary portraiture displays this combination of Greco-Roman and Near Eastern elements. In female portraits, the distinctive combination of a diadem and a turban is one of the major non-Greco-Roman items of clothing seen in the art of Palmyra. This diadem and turban combination remained relatively consistent in depictions of Palmyrene women throughout the history of Palmyrene funerary reliefs,

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[203] de Jong, 11.
[204] Goldman, 165.

beginning in around the 50s AD and lasting up until 273 AD.[205] The diadem-with-turban can be seen in wall paintings from the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, dated 161-190 AD (figs. 13 and 14) and in the relief of two veiled women from 217 AD (fig. 15). Veiling the head can be seen in Roman portraiture, and the full-length paintings from the Hypogeum suggest that the veil in Palmyra may have been a similar covering to the palla in Rome, but the diadem and turban combination seem to be a Palmyrene element, although the choice to wear a turban and a veil may have been borrowed from other Eastern cultures.

Another notable element is the presentation and depiction of jewelry. While Roman authors had many anxieties over women wearing jewelry, as we have already seen above, there seem to have been no such concerns in Palmyra. Rather, the amount and kinds of jewelry depicted in funerary sculpture increased over time, beginning in the 150s AD.[206] In many respects, the elaborate depictions of jewelry culminate with those found on an early third century bust sometimes called the 'Beauty of Palmyra' (fig. 16). This funerary portrait features the remains of some of the original pigments used to paint the sculpture. It is striking just how much jewelry with which she is adorned: she wears head and hair ornaments, earrings, and multiple necklaces, and bracelets. Additionally, all these items are rendered with an astounding amount of artistic detail, suggesting that the jewelry itself was elaborate and expensive, and that the deceased wished to convey this to later viewers.

The most visibly different element in depictions of clothing from Palmyra is the prominence of "Parthian costume" in funerary sculpture and relief. The standard image of

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[205] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 70.
[206] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 70.

the Parthian outfit at Palmyra is typified by a long-sleeved, knee-length tunic over trousers. This outfit is seen the statue of a young man in Parthian clothing (fig. 17), which shows a high degree of detailed carving which likely mimics the detailed decorations on the original garments, located at the cuffs and hem of the tunic as well as in a column down the front of the trousers. By the third century AD, these Parthian outfits became even more richly decorated in the carving, mirroring the amount of decoration and detail in the jewelry of female funerary statues.[207] While in the past scholars have argued that Parthian clothing was so popular in Palmyra because it clothing offered more opportunity for decoration and could show the individual in fancier dress, Heyn argues that this argument does not as it stands "account for the power of dress in the creation of self-identity."[208] While it is the case that many of the banqueting scenes from Palmyra date to "early in the third century A.D., at a time when Palmyrene women were wearing more jewelry in their portraits," and so a preference for more ornate forms of clothing may have been present in Palmyra, if the individual depicted on the tomb relief wanted to convey their wealth, the fact that they had commissioned a large, often multi-figure relief carving should have been more than enough to do so.[209] Heyn adds: "In certain cases, such as the Hypogeum of Šalamallat, the quality of the portraits, as well as the quantity of jewelry worn by the women, would seem to indicate a high degree of wealth, and yet the reclining figure in the banquet relief is depicted in the Greco-Roman tunic and cloak."[210] Suggesting that Parthian clothing was favored in large part because it could be more

[207] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 76.
[208] Maura K. Heyn, "Sacerdotal Activity and Parthian Dress in Roman Palmyra," in In *Reading a Dynamic Canvas: Adornment in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Colburn and Heyn (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 170.
[209] Heyn, 177-8.
[210] Heyn, 178.

decorative or elaborate oversimplifies "the local social situation where a variety of factors would have enhanced one's social status and a multiplicity of identities was possible."[211] As in Rome itself, clothing was vital to the creation of identity, perhaps all the more so because in Palmyra there was a "complex social situation in a cross-cultural world" which was influenced not only by the inhabitants of Palmyra itself but also by its Roman conquerors and the many other cultures which had shaped the city in the past.[212] The decision to use one form of clothing or another for the focal figure of these reliefs was more likely based in conveying social status and displaying an individual's connection to the social life and functions of the city rather than in a more simplistic desire to simply appear rich or well-dressed.

Different types of clothing seem to feature in different types of relief. Many men depicted in the funerary portrait busts wear clothing which looks similar to Roman funerary portraits. However, men depicted in banquet-type reliefs, where they are depicted as reclining on couches (as in fig. 18 and 19) are usually shown wearing Parthian dress.[213] Therefore the choice of Parthian dress seems to be linked to the activity of feasting. Heyn suggests that this feasting or banqueting was in some way connected to the ritual or religious life of Palmyra. The presence of the priestly hat, known as the *modius,* either on or near the reclining figure, suggests that perhaps these reclining figures in Parthian attire were either priests or had some religious role in the city.[214] In the material evidence that remains from Palmyra, priests are most commonly distinguished by the *modius*. In addition to this, even individuals in Greco-Roman clothes

[211] Heyn, 172.
[212] Heyn, 171.
[213] Heyn, 170.
[214] Heyn, 183-184.

can be interpreted as priests provided they are accompanied by accessories related to religious life, such as the *modius* or an offering jug or incense bowl.[215] Furthermore, the style of clothing in temple reliefs and on funerary monuments might give evidence as to what group of priests the individual belonged to, or suggest what god they were a devotee of.[216] If these interpretations are correct, "the evidence for dress in the tombs and sanctuaries of the city clearly shows that certain types of dress signaled the participation of the deceased in the ritual activities of the city. By advertising his involvement in these activities, the wealthy Palmyrene was attempting to boost his social status."[217] Therefore it is plausible that the choice to wear the Parthian outfit was connected to the way in which the deceased and/or the family of the deceased wanted to be remembered not simply by foreigners (who may have been impressed with the wealth on display in the medium and depiction of clothing) but also, and more importantly, by fellow Palmyrenes, who may have connected the clothing and banqueting to religious life in the city.

In addition to these more distinctly local elements, there are also a few examples of more Greco-Western clothing to be found at Palmyra. An early instance of more Roman-style clothing can be seen in the funerary paintings of Hairan and (presumably) his wife, found in the Hypogeum of Hairan dated to the first century AD (fig 20). Hairan's outfit looks remarkably Roman, and features a knee-length tunic with a narrow vertical stripe on both sides. He also appears to be wearing a toga, which forms a sling for his right arm and hangs to the knee on the left. His wife, opposite, wears a floor

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[215] Heyn, 183. On the same page, Heyn adds that "priests often (but not always) wear a riding cloak attached on the right shoulder with a fibula. Some priests do wear the Greco-Roman tunic and cloak, but the opposite is rarely seen in the portrait busts—a man wearing the cloak attached with a fibula who is not a priest."
[216] Heyn, 187-8.
[217] Heyn, 171.

length tunic and another garment on top, and her figure is surrounded by a floor length veil which covers her back from the top of her head to her feet. Unlike other Palmyrene funerary art, Hairan's wife does not appear to be wearing any jewelry. It also seems that she is wearing some manner of turban, as the way that the veil drapes over her head looks similar to the wall paintings of the women in the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers (discussed below), though it is admittedly difficult to tell.

There are two female figures which date to the second or third century AD and which exhibit more Greco-Western traits in their poses and dress. One such example is a marble honorific statue of a woman (fig. 21), whose pose looks remarkably similar to Roman female statues in the pose and manner of clothing. This statue looks to be wearing a palla or other wrap-like garment around her body, but further details (such as whether she was depicted as wearing jewelry, are difficult to tell because the head and part of the torso are missing. There are also two marble statues of togate men (fig. 22), which date to around the same time period. It has been suggested that these statues represented the imperial family, as it is known that a family group of the Severans was set up in the agora, but it is unlikely that the statues will ever be conclusively identified.[218] Complicating the question of identity is fact that one of the statues (the left statue in fig.22) is depicted with the *modius*, the Palmyrene priestly hat, placed next to his feet.[219] This suggests that the man depicted connected to the religious life of the city. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that it is common to display the *modius* either on the head or on a pedestal adjacent to the figure of the deceased in Palmyrene funerary

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[218] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 92.
[219] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 91.

art.[220] It is uncertain if this individual was a priest, but it seems that this individual had a rather notable role within Palmyra, given the expensive marble used for the statues.[221] The combination of toga and *modius* suggests a unique mixture of Roman and Palmyrene identity and may give some indication of how these different cultures were navigated by those living in the city, and especially by the elite. While it is not certain, there is some suggestion that priests may have played a leading social role in Palmyra before the Romans became involved with the city, and given that depictions of the priestly hat continues to appear in Palmyrene funerary reliefs from the time when Palmyra was under Roman control, the social importance of priests may have continued even during Roman times.[222] Furthermore, if scholars such as Heyn are correct in saying that Parthian dress denoted participation in religious life, then given the sheer number of funerary reliefs which feature Parthian clothing, these individuals must have not only been wealthy and important enough to commission the carving, but also proud enough of their societal role to choose to display it even when Roman influence meant that Roman clothing became an equally viable means of expressing status.

Beyond these Romanized statues and paintings, there are also depictions of Greco-Roman clothing and elements in some of the remaining artwork in the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, which dates to the 2nd century AD. The few wall paintings that survive seem to depict a mythological episode, such as the painting of the abduction of Ganymede (wearing a characteristically Phrygian cap, fig. 23) and the excedra fresco (fig. 24). This larger fresco has sustained damage and some of the detail is hard to make

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[220] Heyn, 184.
[221] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 92.
[222] Ted Kaizer, "Kingly Priests in the Roman Near East?" in *Imaginary Kings: Royal Images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome* (Munich: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 179.

out, but one interpretation of this painting is that it depicts the story of Achilles being hidden on Scyros to prevent him from going to the Trojan War.[223] The figures are all wearing distinctly Western clothing: many of the women, including the central figure holding a shield and identified as Achilles, are shown wearing a peplos. The male figure standing at the left, identified as Odysseus, wears a short, knee length tunic and cloak without any long sleeves or trousers. There are other instances of Greco-Roman mythology found in the artwork of Palmyra as well. Two such examples are found in a domestic context, in two large houses east of the Temple of Bel. In one house, floor mosaics depict a Gorgon head, as well as pictures of Greek gods such as Asklepios and Greek mythological figures such as Odysseus, whose names are spelled out in Greek in the mosaic, while another mosaic features a depiction of Cassiopeia and Andromeda.[224] Perhaps some of the most intriguing wall paintings from Palmyra are those that display motifs related to Dionysus (Tower Tomb 19) and figures of Nike (Tower Tomb 62), both of which are found in funerary contexts in the tower tombs of the city.[225] The Dionysian motifs found in Tomb 19 include grape leaves and a leaf pattern, along with portraits of faces which have been interpreted as theatrical masks.[226] Furthermore, images of garlands, vines, and other Dionysian imagery, as well as depictions of the goddess Nike, are frequently found in Palmyrene funerary contexts.[227] The finds of these mosaics and wall paintings suggests that the owners had some knowledge of or familiarity with Greek mythology. Beyond simply being well-versed in mythological stories, however, the

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[223] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 85.
[224] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 105-6.
[225] Malcolm A. R. Colledge, "Roman Influence in the Art of Palmyra," *Les Annales archaeologique arabes syriennes* 42, (): 365.
[226] Agnes Henning, "The Tower Tombs of Palmyra: Chronology, Architecture and Decoration," (*Studia Palmyreńskie* 12, 2013), 161-2.
[227] Henning, 162.

presence of gods such as Dionysus in a funerary context presents a very strong argument that the owners of the tomb were familiar with the allegorical meanings that these myths might carry. It is also noteworthy that the figures in Greek myths are depicted in Greek clothing, not in Near Eastern clothing. The use in these Palmyrene tombs of Greco-Roman motifs and mythology, not simply in a surface-level appreciation of the stories themselves but with some inclination of the allegorical implications which these myths can convey, reinforces the idea that there was no stark divide between Greco-Roman and Palmyrene culture in the city, at least among those who could pay for elaborate mosaics and funerary monuments.

Further suggestions of Palmyra's social complexity and cultural exchange can be found in depictions of divinities. Many of these are of local Palmyrene or Eastern gods which feature Greco-Roman elements, particularly in the choice of outfit. For example, a depiction of 'Aglibol date to the first century AD (fig. 25), a Syrian lunar god who seems to have had a cult centered at Palmyra, is depicted wearing a Hellenistic-style cuirass, distinguished by its marked navel, and a conventional military-styled short cloak.[228] However, beneath this armor, 'Aglibol wears a more Eastern-inspired long-sleeved tunic and baggy trousers. Many of the divinities in Palmyra are depicted in Hellenistic or Roman armor, following a trend to militarize divine figures which began around the first century AD.[229] Another example of this trend can be seen in a relief carving of 'Aglibol and Malakbel on an altar dedicated and found in Rome (fig. 26). On the altar, the two Syrian gods are depicted shaking hands, with Malakbel on the left and 'Aglibol on the

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[228] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra,* 36.
[229] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra,* 42.

right.[230] Both feature the stylistically Eastern "snail curl" hair pattern which can be seen in other reliefs from Palmyra. Other artistic choices in the relief blend both East and West. Malakbel is depicted in a typically Eastern outfit, and the line representing the hem of his trousers can clearly be seen. It also appears that he wears a long-sleeved coat over his tunic, an outfit which has parallels in other Eastern cultures. 'Aglibol, on the right, is depicted in a similar manner as he is in the Bel Temple relief. He is again depicted as wearing a Greco-Roman cuirass, although in this instance there is no hint of trousers or long sleeves underneath the armor. Despite the Roman location for this altar, this handshake pose and the divine symbols, costumes, and positions are consistent with other reliefs of the gods found at Palmyra.[231]

The use of more Western elements and clothing in the artwork of Palmyra suggests not simply imitation of Greco-Roman norms, but a reality in which these Greco-Roman norms were understood and, more importantly, had significant meaning for the inhabitants of the city. The increase of Greco-Roman elements in the mosaics and wall paintings was likely due to increased Roman involvement in the life of the city, but it is also important to recognize that Eastern traditions and forms of clothing continued even alongside this increase in Greco-Roman motifs. This suggests that identity at Palmyra was not the general view of the Near East as found in Greek and especially Roman literature, which viewed the values of the Near East as rather dramatically opposed to those of Rome.

The art of Palmyra features 'status symbols' of Greco-Roman and Palmyrene clothing, such as the toga and the priestly hat unique to Palmyra. Even more striking are

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[230] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 231.
[231] Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, 231.

the instances in which these important objects are found in the same relief or statue. If Palmyrene funerary art was concerned with depicting the status of the deceased, then the occasional combination of both forms of dress in the same relief scene or the combination of both the toga and the priestly hat in the same statue suggests that Palmyrene citizens saw these objects and styles of clothing as valid and valuable. It is doubtful that Palmyrenes would have depicted themselves in Greco-Roman clothing if no one who viewed the relief would have understood the connotations of those garments. This suggests that the inhabitants of Palmyra understood the significance and importance of not only Near Eastern clothing but also of Greco-Roman clothing, a fact which is strengthened by the finds of Greco-Roman religious motifs in funerary contexts.

Conclusion

The treatment of Eastern Clothing in Greco-Roman art and literature shows how different items of clothing were given different meanings and therefore came to create different identities. Greek and Roman literary and artistic representations of the clothing of the East follow a standard template, which is largely a product of Greek literary and artistic depiction and which remains largely unchanged in Roman literature and art. The standard visual image of the Near East in Greek and Roman depictions features elements such as long-sleeved tunics and ankle-length trousers, bright colors and elaborate patterns or decorations, and other items like pointed hats or turbans also feature but are not universal. This visual image of the Near East became the standard for depicting non-Greeks and non-Romans because the items of clothing in this depiction were distinctly foreign. While many of the features of the Near Eastern visual standard became somewhat exaggerated in Greco-Roman accounts, there are also some similarities with

existing depictions of clothing from cities in the Near East, such as Palmyra.

The funerary statues and reliefs found in Palmyra present a picture of a very complex and multi-cultural society. Some depictions of clothing do corroborate with Greco-Roman conceptions of Near Eastern clothing; for example, there are multiple depictions of highly ornate long-sleeve tunics and ankle-length trousers. While perhaps not as common, however, there are also depictions of individuals wearing Greco-Roman outfits as well. In certain cases, both types of dress appear together, either in the same multi-figure scene or even on the same individual. While there is undoubtedly a desire to portray wealth and status in these funerary carvings, the choice to be depicted in either Greco-Roman or Parthian clothing did not simply come down to a desire for more decoration. Rather, just as with the presence of Greco-Roman clothing and mythological motifs in some contexts, the choice to be depicted in Parthian clothing held special meaning for the Palmyrenes and probably also to any other foreigners who might have viewed these funerary monuments. Neither Greco-Roman nor Eastern elements were used in a simply imitative way, without understanding of its meaning. Instead, both clothing and architectural motifs spoke to the complex ways that identity was created and displayed at Palmyra.

Chapter Five: Elagabalus and Roman Reactions to Syria

The previous chapters have examined how Roman authors and artists interacted with the province of Syria and its inhabitants. A major form of this interaction was the creation of a Syrian identity largely made up of stereotypes and negative ideas about the characters and values of residents of the province. The Roman idea that Syrians were luxury loving and depraved can be seen in literary descriptions of Syrian individuals and in both literary and artistic descriptions of Syrian and Near Eastern clothing found across almost every ancient literary genre and which remain relatively consistent even though they span a considerable length of time. These images of Syrians served an important function in both Greece and Rome, creating a negative identity against which Rome could clearly define its own values, ideas, and traditions. As more and more Near Eastern peoples, religions, and goods found their way into the city of Rome, anxieties about the decadent East infecting Rome became even more visible, especially as the empire endured rocky political patches. This chapter will examine how Roman images of Syrians influenced the biographical accounts and the subsequent tradition of the Syrian-born emperor Elagabalus, who reigned for four short years during the Severan dynasty (218-222 AD).

Historical Background

The first third of the third century AD makes an interesting case study for the interaction of Rome with the East. Rome continued to expand and strengthen its borders in the East and continued its long-standing series of invasions and battles with their constant enemy, the Parthians. In literature, the Second Sophistic was still going strong and saw a resurgence of Greek literary culture throughout the Roman Empire and

especially in the Near East. Provincial participation in the Senate and other governmental roles increased, paradoxically bringing the periphery into the center of Roman public life on occasion, as can be seen in the rise of the Severan Dynasty, which had connections to the provinces of Syria and North Africa. However, the most distinctive feature of the Severan Dynasty, extensively commented upon by contemporary Roman historians, was the degree of rapid and often violent political change that the regime experienced. The major contemporary historical accounts of the period, those written by Cassius Dio and Herodian, both emphasize the political instability of the day. It was hardly the case that the Roman Empire had never had an emperor who was born in the provinces. The emperors Trajan and Hadrian, who were both born in Spain, were well-regarded by their biographers and admired by later Romans. Additionally, participation by provincial individuals in the Senate or in other government positions was hardly unheard of before the third century, and of course there were Syrians and other foreigners in Rome itself, as evidenced by an altar to Palmyrene or Syrian gods found in Rome, which dates to the first century AD. Furthermore, there is evidence that Greco-Roman culture was integrated into cities and other cultures in the province of Syria, though of course whether this was done willingly or grudgingly is difficult to know. Because of the considerable contact and cultural exchange between Rome and the province of Syria, it is important to keep in mind that Elagabalus' rule was not simply a jarring clash between Roman West and Syrian East.[232] Despite the familiarity, something seems to have changed in the Severan era, and the literary sources, those by Dio, Herodian, and the anonymous author of the *Historia Augusta* almost a century later, take considerable pains to portray

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[232] Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 44.

Elagabalus' time on the throne as an the end of a series of events, the absolute nadir from which Rome could only improve.

The Severan dynasty came to power in the midst of, and as a result of, political instability. The assassination of Commodus in 192 AD resulted in the Year of the Five Emperors, which saw not only short-lived emperors such as Pertinax and Didius Julianus, who ruled for a combined total of five months, but also the establishment of the Severan Dynasty in 193 AD, when Septimius Severus was declared emperor by the Senate following the assassination of Pertinax by the Praetorian Guard. However, Septimius Severus' accession did not stop another claimant, Pescennius Niger, the governor of Syria, from naming himself emperor, resulting in yet another Roman civil war. Septimius Severus finally cemented his positon as emperor when he defeated both Pescennius Niger in 194 and his former ally Clodius Albinus in 197 AD. Perhaps as a result of the political uncertainty, Septimius Severus legitimized his rule by claiming that he had been adopted by Marcus Aurelius, which would make his reign a continuation of the earlier Antonine dynasty rather than a break in Roman history.[233] This sense of continuity and unity was meant to persist with the appointment of Caracalla and Geta, the sons of Septimius Severus, as co-emperors in 211 AD upon their father's death. Instead of ushering a new era of peace and prosperity, however, Caracalla murdered Geta and made a considerable effort to remove him from the historical record – hardly the peaceful continuation of a dynasty which was so sought after by Septimius Severus. Further political upheavals were to follow. Caracalla himself was assassinated in 219 AD in a military coup led by Macrinus, the leader of the Praetorian Guard. This represented another break from the

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[233] Adam M. Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 66.

Severan narrative that their dynasty represented Roman continuity, but Macrinus was assassinated in 218 AD, after ruling for just over a year, in favor of Elagabalus, a young member of the Severan family. This represented, to the Severans at least, a return to legitimate succession and the continuation of a line of emperors reaching back to Marcus Aurelius, and indeed many of the attempts to legitimize Elagabalus as ruler rested on this association. Elagabalus was eventually assassinated in 222 AD by the Praetorian Guard in favor of his cousin Alexander Severus. Alexander had considerably more success in maintaining his position on the throne than practically any other member of his family, managing to rule for thirteen years. Nevertheless, he was assassinated in 235 AD, ushering in a period often called the "Third Century Crisis."

Thus, during the Severan Dynasty, political instability was the rule, not the exception: six members of the Severan family came to the throne, but only one died of natural causes.[234] The dynasty also dealt with civil wars, military coups, and riots, which further undermined the stability of the empire. The problems that plagued the politics of the Severan era were hardly new or unheard-of in the Roman Empire. There had been years with multiple emperors and violent transitions of power in earlier dynasties, but these problems were magnified under the Severan dynasty, and claims that the dynasty continued that of the Antonines were probably seriously undermined not only by this instability but also by questions regarding the paternity of some of the Severan rulers. Many such questions were posed in contemporary biography. In light of the numerous changes in emperors and the often violent ways in which these occurred, it is perhaps unsurprising that the main historians of this period look unfavorably on almost all the

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[234] Kemezis, 1.

members of the dynasty. Septimius Severus is to some extent tolerated by his historians, although he is also portrayed in a rather negative light by Dio, who sees him as a mere usurper. Caracalla is frequently depicted as oppressive, violent, and deranged. Elagabalus is portrayed as even more deranged than Caracalla, and many of the anecdotes which survive in the biographical accounts written shortly after his lifetime and especially those anecdotes found in the *Historia Augusta* focus on more salacious elements of the emperor's life, focusing on his sex life and other scandalous behavior, as we shall see below. Alexander Severus gets some good publicity, throughout Dio and Herodian. In the Epitome of Book 80 of his history, Dio records that Alexander gave him honors and took interest in his well-being, and also adds that Alexander was raised in a manner more fitting for the emperor than his cousin had been. Similarly, Herodian in the first chapter of his book on the reign of Alexander Severus typifies the start of his reign as a return to normalcy, mentioning the return to an aristocracy rather than an autocracy, his moving the statues of the gods which Elagabalus had moved into the temple for his Syrian god to their proper temples, and in general appointing competent individuals to government and military posts.

Severan rulers in particular were very interested in presenting a strong line of continuity between themselves and their dynastic predecessor, and were likely motivated to do so because of this rapidly shifting political landscape and their own claims to be continuing a Roman line of descent. For all Roman emperors, creating a sense of narrative continuity to show how their personal history fit into Rome's wider history was essential and probably expected. However, it seems that it was not necessary that subjects

absolutely believe whatever narrative the emperor might have created.[235] Instead, it was important that these narratives be used by their subjects (and perhaps especially by those subjects who were also historians) to define the Roman world.[236] If the subjects of the empire agreed with the emperor's narrative and repeated the story, for example by writing it into their historical accounts, the emperor's narrative gained legitimacy. The historical and literary works produced under the patronage of Augustus in many ways established the narrative that all other emperors connected to in order to claim their own legitimacy, but Augustus also succeeded in firmly establishing a historical narrative that was assimilated into many subsequent historical accounts. Later dynasties, such as the Severans, would have to work with and within these established and accepted historical narratives. Failing to live up to the expectations of that narrative, as the Severans were seen to do in relation to the rule of Marcus Aurelius, was often a reason for criticism in later historical accounts.

Literary Sources on the Severans

Unlike earlier periods of Roman history, the Severan era is not described in many well regarded historical accounts. Cassius Dio's lengthy *Roman History* and Herodian's *Roman History* are its surviving contemporary literary sources. Shorter historical summaries by Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Festus, and Zosimus, among others, provide only brief glosses about the Severans and their historical context.[237] A much later account, which provides more information and just as many problems and controversies, is the anonymous *Historia Augusta*, which contains biographical accounts of the

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[235] Kemezis, 5
[236] Kemezis, 5
[237] Edward C. Echols, introduction to *Herodian of Antioch's Roman History*, 3.

emperors after Hadrian and which may have heavily borrowed from a lost work by Marius Maximus. Each of these three accounts presents its own challenges to and issues for modern readers. Dio and Herodian's accounts were produced roughly contemporaneously with the Severans and date to the third century CE. Dio's account attempts to relate all of Roman history up to the beginning of the reign of Severus Alexander, while Herodian's account begins with the death of Marcus Aurelius and the rise of Commodus and ends with a discussion of the Year of the Six Emperors. The *Historia Augusta*, which is traditionally dated to the late fourth century AD, begins with the life of Hadrian in 177 and ends with a life of Carinus in 284. The three surviving biographies of Elagabalus' life each create their own narrative about the emperor's life and each emphasize different elements of his rule, but ultimately all three of the surviving biographies are interested in discrediting Elagabalus as a ruler, although to various degrees. This is done through emphasizing Elagabalus' immorality, religious eccentricities, sexual escapades, and clothing choices. These are all largely presented as products of Elagabalus' Syrian background. Much of what is cataloged by Dio and especially the *Historia Augusta* serves to put Elagabalus in the same category as other decadent Eastern rulers, both mythical and historical, who were at odds with the Greco-Roman expectations about how a ruler should live and act, which showed Elagabalus' incompatibility with the office of emperor.

Cassius Dio is perhaps the most traditional in style and scope of the three surviving literary sources on the Severans. His *Roman History* is almost impossibly vast in scope, beginning his account with the story of Aeneas and concluding with the death of Elagabalus and start of the reign of Severus Alexander, describing all of the Republican

past and a substantial part of the Imperial present.[238] Dio attempts to integrate the events of his own day into the wider historical narrative of Roman history in a way that many other ancient historians do not.[239] In doing so, Dio is able to contrast the golden age of the Antonine dynasty (and earlier dynasties as well) with his own time and its dynasty of "iron and rust".[240] Dio's account provides us with considerable biographical detail about himself, or at least for his narrative persona, in a way that is simply lacking for Herodian and the author of the *Historia Augusta*. His father's family came from Nicaea in Bithynia, and though it is not known how much time Dio himself spent there in his childhood, we do know that he returned to the region later in his political career and was there for the duration of Elagabalus' tenure as emperor. He held several important positions within the Roman bureaucracy and constantly stresses his rank as senator within his historical account.

Dio says that "it is [his] desire to write a history of all the memorable achievements of the Romans, as well in time of peace as in war, so that no one, whether Roman or non-Roman, shall look in vain for any of the essential facts."[241] His project spans 80 books, the first 35 of which survive in various degrees of fragmentation, with the rest of the books surviving mostly intact but with some damaged sections. Dio's work is in many ways a project of the Second Sophistic, a third-century text written in an imitation of Attic Greek, and therefore is a Greek-language version of the earlier genre of "senatorial annalistic history."[242] Despite Dio's conscious Atticization, he still finds it

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[238] Kemezis, 92.
[239] Kemezis, 99.
[240] Dio, *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924-1927), 72.[71].36.4[EV].
[241] Dio 1.1.1
[242] Kemezis, 17.

necessary to translate, transcribe, and use equivalents for Roman terms that did not exist in Attic Greek.[243] Dio draws on a variety of sources for his *Roman History*, and for the more ancient parts of his history, claims that he has "read pretty nearly everything about [Roman history] that has been written by anybody," though he has of course not put it all into his account.[244] For the more contemporary parts of his historical project, Dio uses personal observation, eyewitness accounts (including his own) and hearsay or information from others. In regards to Book 80 of the *Roman History*, which covers the rule of Elagabalus, Dio describes how he comes to know about the goings on at Rome, saying, "let no one be incredulous of my statements; for what I have written about … I ascertained from trustworthy men," while he has obtained other information "by accurate investigation" during his time in government.[245]

Dio's history of Elagabalus' reign focuses largely on the political actions of the emperor, although he also makes space for gossip and scandal. Dio's more politically minded view makes sense given his political career, and his *Roman History* at large "represents the knowledge and experience of the senatorial order in his time," and so it is only fitting that even when he does include scandal and gossip, it is sometimes interpreted through a political lens.[246] Dio's politics further complicate his depiction of Elagabalus because he wrote parts of his project during the rule of Severus Alexander, who went to great lengths to distance himself from his predecessor (as is detailed in the accounts of Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*). Dio says that Severus Alexander "honoured [him] in various ways," such as reappointing him to the office of consul and

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[243] Fergus Millar, *Dio*, 40.
[244] Dio 1.1.2.
[245] Dio 80.7.4.
[246] Millar, *Dio*, 122.

taking an interest in Dio's well-being.[247] These two facts should make readers suspicious of the historian's motivations for writing about Elagabalus as he does, given the program of *damnatio memoriae* that Alexander and his supporters carried out on Elagabalus. Adding to this fact is that throughout all the biographies of Elagabalus there is a definite sense of tension, perhaps even hostility, between the emperor and the senate. If so, this would almost certainly cause Dio, the senator, to advance more derogatory views of the emperor.

Despite Dio's political interest, however, his biographical account of Elagabalus also features a large "collection of anecdotes, many of which are profoundly obscene."[248] The scandalous anecdotes which Dio includes are largely "designed as an illustration of character," serving to further discredit Elagabalus on the basis of his assuming the throne.[249] By showing how Elagabalus' personal actions and activities are at odds with the expectations of the emperor, Dio is able to make the case to his fellow Romans that Elagabalus' time on the throne could not have ended any other way. As we have seen in earlier discussions of clothing, one's outward appearance was often viewed as a mirror for one's morality, so Dio's numerous anecdotes maybe have provided a convincing argument for his contemporaries that Elagabalus' personal activities were indicative some deep-seated incompatibility with the office of emperor. In Dio's account, Elagabalus is hardly in accord with this view of the requirements of an imperial persona and instead seems to do everything possible to disrupt the connection between the emperor and masculinity. While Dio does on occasion mention Elagabalus' religious interests and

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[247] Dio 80.5.1
[248] Millar, *Dio*, 168.
[249] Millar, *Dio*, 169.

clothing choices, he mostly does this to present the emperor as the utter failure of Roman masculinity. In much the same way, Dio's lengthy discussions of Elagabalus' sexual activities are at odds with the Roman gender paradigm, which the emperor should be totally in line with. Dio's Elagabalus is an aberration, entirely at odds from everything an emperor should be. As the connection to Sardanapalus shows, Elagabalus' Syrian background is perhaps reason enough to explain this.

For all that we know about Cassius Dio, however, we know next to nothing about Herodian. His history leaves us with "no meaningful knowledge of his geographical origins or social status," and even setting the date of his writing at around the 240s AD is uncertain. Unlike Dio (or Dio's narrative persona), Herodian gives us nothing, deliberately choosing to "avoid any identification" of a historical individual with his narrative persona outside the text.[250] The only suggestion that Herodian gives as to his status or occupation comes in his statement that his history will be concerned with "the events which, after the death of Marcus, [he] saw and heard in [his] lifetime - things of which [he] had personal experience in [his] imperial or civil service."[251] Like Cassius Dio, Herodian claims explicitly to be working from his own eyewitness accounts, stating that he is "unwilling to accept from others hearsay evidence and unsubstantiated information," and is working with "material that is still fresh in the minds" of his audience.[252] Unlike Dio, however, Herodian seems to be uninterested in going into deep explanations of political events or the various fortunes of empire, but instead seems more interested in the "many strange and wonderful events" that took place during the Severan

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[250] Kemezis, 20.
[251] Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire*, translated by Edward C. Echols, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 1.2.5
[252] Herodian 1.1.3.

dynasty, when "Roman imperial power was held by more emperors than would seem possible in so short a time."[253]

The fact that Herodian presents us with very little autobiographical detail has not stopped scholars from making guesses, however. Most scholars have suggested that he came from somewhere in the Roman Near East, and due to his depiction and treatment of Syrians within his text, many have speculated that he came from Roman Syria, specifically Antioch.[254] While it is impossible to claim this for certain, it is certainly an interesting possibility. Whatever the case of Herodian's origins, he simultaneously values the Hellenic cultural heritage of the Second Sophistic, writing in Atticizing Greek, and internalizes the political and social order of the Roman Empire, as indeed Cassius Dio does also.[255] Further issues arise in regards to Herodian's portrayal of Syrians. On one side, Echols argues that Herodian was so involved with the court life of the early Severan dynasty that his outlook is thoroughly Roman, allowing him to "speak of his fellow non-Romans as barbarians [and] offer an analysis of his fellow Syrians that is thoroughly unflattering."[256] On the other side, Kemezis suggests that his portrayal of Syrians may have been more balanced, given Herodian's apparent disinterest in portraying Elagabalus as a sexual deviant (in comparison to Dio and the *Life of Heliogabalus* and his comparatively neutral description of the religious rites at Emesa.[257] Herodian's

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[253] Herodian 1.1.5.

[254] These claims, as presented in Echols' introduction, are based on the end of Herodian's history, which might suggest that he began his career under Septimius Severus as prior emperors would not have been well-disposed towards a Syrian historian (while Severus, who had a Syrian wife, would have been). Echols suggests that the ensuing court culture of the Severan Dynasty would have made a welcoming spot for Syrian writers of all genres.

[255] Kemezis, 21.

[256] Echols, introduction, 5.

[257] Kemezis, 246-7. He adds that while Herodian seems comfortable with these foreign rights taking place in foreign places, when they are brought to Rome they become more of a problem.

Elagabalus is ultimately a failure, and is negatively compared with his cousin Alexander Severus, but this is part of a larger pattern in Herodian, in which no emperor, except Marcus Aurelius, can be considered a complete success.[258] Perhaps these very different views of Herodian's views towards Syrians and history are a product of the lack of autobiographical information which we have about him. Whatever the case, Herodian's biography of Elagabalus is considerably negative, though whether this is a product of a deeper mistrust of Syrians or just dismay at the continuing ineffectual rule of another emperor will likely never be determined.

The narrative which Herodian constructs is also very different from Dio's. Since Herodian provides us with no biological information as to his narrator's status or position within his Roman society, Herodian does not present his account as that of a privileged senator. Herodian thus produces history which consists largely of "dramatic scenes [that alternate] with passages of simple narrative" and speeches made by key figures, leaving little room for authorial analysis or indignation.[259] Dio's narrator is constantly expressing his displeasure with Elagabalus for slighting the Senate or refusing to engage in the traditional pursuits of a Roman emperor. While Herodian's narrator may also accuse Elagabalus of acting in a manner unbecoming to the office of Emperor or of slighting the senate, because we have no context as to Herodian's political or social rank, to some degree these attacks on Elagabalus' character occasionally read more like literary or rhetorical tropes. Perhaps because of the lack of commentary and what may be a use of tropes, Herodian has often been seen by modern historians as a paraphraser of Dio's

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[258] Kemezis, 239. He claims that while Dio sees the emperors in his *History* as a progression from good to bad to worse, Herodian's emperors are all as bad as the next and consist of a recurrent pattern of "reckless young emperors who come to no good and older emperors who are wiser but ultimately no more effective."
[259] Kemezis, 228.

Roman History and as a rather mediocre historian who had to rely heavily on Dio's account to take up space in his own.[260] There are undoubtedly similarities between the accounts of the two authors, but Herodian gives his history its own focus, featuring only brief mentions of Elagabalus' political actions and instead focusing on the emperor's religious interests, almost to the exclusion of everything else; even descriptions of Elagabalus' clothing are typically found in wider discussion of his religious practices. Perhaps for this reason, some modern commentators have viewed Herodian as better disposed towards Elagabalus, although this seems to be at odds with some of his descriptions of the emperor, whom he characterizes as "in every respect an empty-headed young idiot."[261]

Kemezis argues that Herodian creates a narrative world that is "radical and pessimistic," with the neatness and order of the form of his history undermined by the confusing and "profoundly chaotic" content that makes up his historical narrative.[262] Kemezis sees Herodian as portraying this early third century world as a "nightmarish place in which characters good and bad alike are usually powerless to dictate the course of events, and have their expectations and intentions defeated at every turn," and this chaotic and pessimistic world is a "specifically post-Antonine" phenomenon.[263] Just as Dio sees his age as a time of "iron and rust," Herodian's emperors will never bring the empire back to the Antonine golden age, no matter what narratives and claims to legitimacy they may produce. Kemezis' point is interesting, and perhaps Herodian and/or his 'disembodied' narrator is able to accept the chaos and instability of the Severan era in

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[260] Echols, introduction, 6-7. Echols clearly views Dio as the greater of the two contemporary historians.
[261] Herodian, 5.7.1.
[262] Kemezis, 20
[263] Kemezis, 20-1.

a way in which Dio is unable, which would explain the comparative lack of hostility and vitriol directed towards Elagabalus as an individual.

The *Historia Augusta* is the most complicated of the three historical sources of Severan rule. The text is a collection of biographies which span from the time of Hadrian to Carinus, roughly covering the period from 117 to 285 AD. The text itself is damaged and has not survived in its entirety: the manuscript begins immediately with the *Life of Hadrian* with no introduction (although there may have been one that does not survive), and the *Lives* which would cover the time period of 238 to 260 AD are also missing.[264] The lack of an introduction is important, as there is no explanation of what the author(s) may have intended to convey or accomplish with his work. Although the biographies in the *Historia Augusta* are purported to have been written by six different authors, this is almost certainly false, and the hypothesis that the work was really written by a single individual was first proposed in 1889 by Hermann Dessau.[265] While the hypothesis is still somewhat contentious, modern scholarship generally accepts that the text is a work "produced in the late 4th century CE by a single author setting himself up as a whole biographical tradition."[266] To keep up the pretense, the author has his various personae criticize the other authors in the collection.[267] For example, the purported author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* criticizes the author of the *Life of Macrinus*, which comes directly before the *Life of Heliogabalus*, for including too many bits of trivia in his biographic

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[264] Birley, introduction, 9.
[265] Birley, introduction, 7.
[266] Mary Harlow, "Dress in the Historia Augusta," in *The Clothed Body in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 144.
[267] Ibid.

account, before going on to do exactly the same thing in his own biographic account.[268]

Another major question surrounding the *Historia Augusta* was how much it was based on earlier histories. There are certainly signs that the author did use other sources, and it is possible to see how, for example, Herodian's *History* was "quarried extensively…although reworked and adapted in a perverse and idiosyncratic fashion" throughout the *Historia Augusta*.[269] A bigger question surrounds the influence of the now lost historical account of the twelve Caesars from Nerva to Elagabalus written by one Marius Maximus, a Roman of the third century CE who was governor of Africa, Asia and Syria in addition to being consul twice and prefect once.[270] Ammianus Marcellinus says (rather disparagingly) that Marius Maximus was one of the preferred authors for Rome's fourth century aristocracy, and, if his influence shows up as frequently in the *Historia Augusta* as some scholars have claimed, Maximus was incredibly verbose and wrote at inordinate length, "quoting documents copiously" in his own work.[271] It seems that Marius Maximus' historical account was used as a major source for the *Historia Augusta*, as its author names him thirty-one times and credits him with writing eight biographical accounts of the Roman emperors, including seven emperors who appear in the surviving text.[272] Assuming that Marius Maximus was used as a source, the content of the *Historia Augusta*'s life of Elagabalus may provide us with further clues as to how Elagabalus was viewed by his very near contemporaries. The fact that Marius Maximus was interested in mixing gossip that was "anecdotal and scurrilous with the diligent quotation of lengthy

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[268] Gottfried Mader, "History as Carnival, or Method and Madness in the *Vita Heliogabali*." *Classical Antiquity*, 24.1(2005), 133.
[269] Birley, introduction, 15.
[270] C. B. R. Pelling, The *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed., s.v. "Marius Maximus," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[271] Birley, introduction, 14.
[272] Birley, introduction, 14.

documents" suggests that the scandalous rumors attached to Elagabalus in the *Historia Augusta* (with its second chapter entirely given to gossip and tales of luxury) were not just figments of a later writer's imagination, but were a very real response to the political climate around the time of the emperor's death .[273] As Millar points out, scandalous and hostile stories about earlier Roman emperors were not only elaborations written by later authors, and "fiercely hostile and fantastic conception of an emperor's conduct can easily be the accurate reflection of contemporary rumor and belief."[274] This is certainly the case for all the biographies of Elagabalus.

The *Historia Augusta* seems to focus largely on gossip and outrageous activity, although this does not stop the author of the *Life of Heliogabalus*, ostensibly one Aelius Lampridius, from lamenting the fact that his biographical account will contain little more than filth.[275] Similarly, the author makes known his displeasure in the "many obscene anecdotes" that have been committed to history about Elagabalus which are hardly worth remembering, conveniently forgetting that he has done the very same thing in his appraisal of Elagabalus' character and that he is about to add fuel to the fire in his catalog of Elagabalus' decadence and luxuries.[276] The *Life of Heliogabalus* focuses even less on historical action and significance than Herodian's or Dio's histories. Despite its rather considerable drawbacks and problems as a source, it shows just how deep an impression the earlier Roman literary tradition, especially the discussion of Syrians, made on future writers of history.

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[273] C. B. R. Pelling, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. "Marius Maximus."
[274] Fergus Millar, *A Study in Cassius Dio*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 170
[275] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 1.1. All translations from the *Historia Augusta* are from Anthony Birley (London: Penguin Classics, 1976), but citations are based not on page number but on the chapter and sentence of the *Life of Heliogabalus* in the Loeb.
[276] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 18.1

While he first half of the biography is more or less sound and lines up with the more reliable accounts of Dio and Herodian, the second half of the *Life of Heliogabalus* is perhaps the least interested of the three in actually conveying the events of Elagabalus' reign.[277] The second half consists of sixteen chapters of almost certainly fictionalized anecdotes concerning Elagabalus' strange customs, clothing, sexual practices, and other miscellaneous luxuries, especially in the realm of food. While these have often been considered little more than an author's flight of fancy, it has been suggested by Mader that the truly outlandish anecdotes of the second half of the *Life of Heliogabalus* is not a mere collection of titillating anecdotes with no purpose, but in fact provides a deeper commentary. Mader suggests that the Elagabalus as portrayed in the *Life of Heliogabalus* is a "continuation of an ideological trajectory [and] its spectacular climax and summation," that ideological trajectory being the persistent sense that each successive ruler since Commodus was somehow worse than the last, and that Elagabalus represents a culmination of the indulgence, decadence, debauchery, and decay of every previous "bad emperor" that the Romans had endured.[278] If this is the case, and Elagabalus marks the lowest point on the downward spiral of Roman history since the death of Marcus Aurelius, then the portrait of Elagabalus which emerges from the pages of the *Historia Augusta* is entirely negative and there are absolutely no redeeming qualities to be found anywhere. Even Herodian and Dio occasionally mention some minor deed done by Elagabalus which they say is worthy of a better emperor, but this treatment is nowhere to be found in the *Life of Heliogabalus*. Instead, the author takes up the notions of Elagabalus' decadence and indulgences and exaggerates them to new extremes.

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[277] Birley, introduction, 13.
[278] Mader, 133 and 141.

Despite the differences in authorial background and the differences in when the biographies were composed, all of the biographical accounts of Elagabalus studied in this chapter take considerable pains to emphasize the emperor's "otherness." All three emphasize Elagabalus' Syrian ethnicity through detailed descriptions of the emperor's religious practices and clothing. In addition to this, by documenting other aspects of his love of luxury, sexual depravity, and other moral failings, the biographical accounts written by Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta* continue to propagate the existing Roman literary tradition of describing the East and its inhabitants. The image of Elagabalus which emerges from these very different historical accounts is not only perhaps the worst of the bad emperors, but also perhaps the worst of the East in Greco-Roman literature.

Elagabalus: Biographical Fact and Fiction

So far this chapter has examined some of the political impacts of the Severan dynasty on its ancient historians and has looked at some of the issues present in the three main historical accounts of that time. Although each focuses on slightly different aspects of the reigns of the Severan emperors, with the exception of Alexander Severus', almost all of these biographies have negative views of the emperors. The next section of this chapter examines the different accounts of the life of Elagabalus, and focuses on how each author describes his character and personality, clothing, religious practices, and sexual activities. Dio, Herodian, and the *Life of Heliogabalus* all separate Elagabalus from the qualities of a proper Roman emperor and associate him with any number of stereotypically decadent Eastern peoples, including As/Syrians, Persians, and Phoenicians, all of which were groups that were usually depicted negatively in the

Roman literary tradition. The picture of Elagabalus that emerges from these three accounts is one follows the standard Greco-Roman literary image of the effete Eastern tyrant.

Considering that all three accounts are hostile to Elagabalus and were written after his death, it makes sense that a major point of contention in the histories is the question of Elagabalus' legitimacy. As previously mentioned, establishing a sense of continuity between members of the same dynasty, and especially between one dynasty and another, was critical in ancient Rome, and while it was not necessary that everyone believe stories of legitimacy to the letter, it was important that there be some understanding of the new emperor's narrative among his subjects. If the literary record is any indication, it seems that many politically-involved Romans had nothing but contempt and disbelief for the narrative which was created for Elagabalus.

Dio's account especially shows how many different narratives and names Elagabalus was given during his brief rule. Dio says that while Elagabalus' family was attempting to win him the support of the army and place him on the throne, his supporters were already referring to him as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, which attempted to connect him to the Antonine dynasty but also connected him to the previous Severan emperor, Caracalla, who had also used Marcus Aurelius Antoninus as one of his imperial names.[279] At the same time, Dio says that the Severan family presented Elagabalus before the soldiers along with "some likenesses of [Caracalla] when a child as bearing some resemblance to the boy, at the same time declaring that the latter was truly [Caracalla's] son, and the only rightful heir to the throne," which won Elagabalus the support of the

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[279] Dio, 79.32

army, enabled him to defeat Macrinus, and take the throne.[280] However, Dio is highly skeptical of these narratives, calling Caracalla Elagabalus' "pretended father" and referring to Elagabalus throughout the work as the "False Antoninus" in reference to his name while emperor.[281] It should not be surprising that Dio would be unimpressed with Elagabalus' styling himself as Caracalla reborn, as Dio is hardly well-disposed towards Caracalla either, claiming that Caracalla took from the senators to give to the soldiers.[282] Dio's response to the story of Elagabalus' legitimacy, and the associations made between Elagabalus and Caracalla, are not mere acceptance of the narrative of dynasty that the Severans and their supporters put forth. Instead, it seems as if Dio turns these associations on their heads and uses them to condemn Elagabalus rather than to confirm his legitimacy.

Herodian also mentions that Elagabalus came to power through his association with Caracalla, although Herodian's version of events is slightly different than Dio's. Herodian says that Elagabalus, while performing his priestly duties in Emesa, attracted the interest of some of the Roman soldiers stationed there and his grandmother, Julia Maesa, "either inventing the story or telling the truth," told the soldiers that Elagabalus "was really the son of Caracalla, although it might appear that he had another father," a story which quickly spread throughout the army.[283] While Herodian reports that "the entire army saluted [Elagabalus] as "Son of Caracalla," he also suggests that a considerable factor in the loyalty the army expressed towards Elagabalus was due to the

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[280] Dio, 79.32.
[281] Dio 80.2.2
[282] Dio, 78.9.1. Dio describes Caracalla as having all the vices of the various cultures which he belonged to: the "fickleness, cowardice, and recklessness" of the Gauls, the "harshness and cruelty" of the Africans, and the "craftiness" of the Syrians (Dio, 78.6.1).
[283] Herodian 5.3.10.

wealth of his family.[284] Herodian does not seem as worried about whether the claims about Elagabalus' paternity were true, and says the story gained traction because the army saw "what they wanted to see" in regards to any sort of resemblance between Caracalla and Elagabalus.[285] Herodian offers more straightforward explanations for Elagabalus' winning of the army to his cause when he adds that the soldiers, who held Caracalla in high esteem, had a hatred for Macrinus because of his role in Caracalla's assassination, and this esteem, combined with the lure of working for this "new Caracalla" and the promise of a significant paycheck, was enough to convince the army to desert in Elagabalus' favor.[286]

The *Life of Heliogabalus* also discusses Elagabalus' family connections and how important these were for obtaining the throne. The author repeats the story of Elagabalus' really being Caracalla's son without any question of whether this was true or not, instead saying that the affair between Elagabalus' mother and Caracalla was "so notorious" that everyone believed it was true.[287] The author also suggests that Elagabalus took the name Antoninus "either to prove his descent or because he had learned that that name was so dear to mankind," and this author seems relatively accepting of Elagabalus' choice, saying that Elagabalus was "the last of the Antonines to be Roman emperor."[288] While this might have given Dio fits, the *Life of Heliogabalus* author adds that the Roman people were eager to welcome Elagabalus to the throne because he was restoring the name Antoninus "not as a title only … but actually in the blood."[289] Despite the people's

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[284] Herodian, 5.3.11-12.
[285] Herodian, 5.4.4.
[286] Herodian, 5.4.2.
[287] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 2.1
[288] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 5 and 1.7.
[289] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 17.3.1

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enthusiasm for the return of Antoninus, the author is no less adamant that during the course of his rule Elagabalus "defiled this venerated name of the Antonines" beyond all repair.[290]

The importance of Elagabalus' legitimacy was an important one for the dynasty. Although the claim that Elagabalus was in fact Caracalla's son was likely "no more than a ruse," especially as it was repeated of his successor Alexander, it showed how important the connection to the Severan dynasty was.[291] Given Caracalla's reputation as a military emperor who increased the soldiers' wages and engaged in wars, both policies that were stopped by the usurper Macrinus, playing up the connection of Elagabalus to Caracalla would have served the Severan family in Syria well.[292] Although different authors respond to the narrative of legitimacy, throughout all three accounts, there is a definite sense that Elagabalus' legitimacy was not so much proved as it was bought.

All three biographical accounts generally have a negative judgment of Elagabalus' character. Dio's is the most outright in its hostility and presents the young emperor as ignorant of his new office and utterly incompetent. Although Dio says that Elagabalus promised to the Roman population that "he would always and in all things emulate Augustus […] and Marcus Antoninus," Elagabalus' actions could not have been farther from this promise.[293] Almost immediately after taking power, Elagabalus "drifted into all the most shameful, lawless, and cruel practices," some of which had a lasting impact on the traditions of the Roman Empire even at the time of Dio's writing after the

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[290] *Life of Heliogabalus* 17.2.4.
[291] Martijn Icks, "From Priest to Emperor to Priest-Emperor: The Failed Legitimation of Elagabalus," in *Public and Private Lies: The Discourse of Despotism and Deceit in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 333.
[292] Icks, "From Priest to Emperor to Priest-Emperor," 333.
[293] Dio, 80.1.3.

fact.[294]

Herodian's version of the story is much the same, and from the outset Herodian shows that Elagabalus is unfit to rule. Herodian's Elagabalus is luxury-loving, politically inexperienced or even entirely incapable, and governed by the more powerful members of his family. Herodian mentions that Elagabalus allowed all of his political affairs to be handled by his family members, while he chose to plunge into frenzied worship of Elagabal instead.[295] Herodian also reports that the Roman people were "dismayed at the report of these developments, but submitted through necessity because the army had elected to follow this course."[296] When his grandmother attempts to warn him of the danger he is putting himself in, Elagabalus displays nothing but contempt for her warnings and refuses to listen to anyone else on the matter, because as Herodian reports, Elagabalus "would listen only to those who were like him and flattered his faults."[297]

The *Life of Heliogabalus* is similarly ill-disposed to the young emperor. In fact, this biography begins with the author lamenting that he even has to put pen to paper and write about Elagabalus at all: "The life of Heliogabalus Antoninus, who was also called Varius, I should never have committed to writing – in order that no one might know that he had been *princeps* of the Romans – had not this same empire previously had a Caligula, a Nero and a Vitellius."[298] Within the first sentence of the *Life*, the author has firmly established Elagabalus in a canon of bad emperors such as Caligula and Nero, while later in the introduction he contrasts him with well-regarded rulers such as

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[294] Dio, 80.3.3.
[295] Herodian 5.5.3.
[296] Herodian 5.5.2.
[297] Herodian 5.5.6.
[298] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 2.3. Birley uses the word *princeps* rather than emperor throughout his translation.

Augustus, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, among others.[299] The opening paragraph establishes the way Elagabalus will be discussed throughout the *Life*: a focus not so much on political but instead on tales of luxury, decadence, and licentiousness. This fits with the portrayal of Elagabalus elsewhere in the *Life* as a weak, ineffectual emperor, politically incapable and under the control of the more powerful female figures in his family, mentioning that Elagabalus "was so much under the control of his mother … that he would carry out none of the business of the republic without her consent, although she lived like a whore and practiced baseness of all kinds at court."[300] Elsewhere Elagabalus is described as a "public laughing-stock," a "pestilential person [clad] in the imperial name," and "detestable in his life, his character and his depravity."[301]

The idea that Elagabalus was a decadent and depraved ruler is further developed in the tales of luxury which can be found in Dio's account and the second half of the *Life of Heliogabalus*. Although Dio does not specifically create a catalog of decadence in the manner of the *Life of Heliogabalus*, an interesting parallel to these stories can be found in Dio's account. Dio makes the interesting choice of referring to Elagabalus throughout his work as Sardanapalus, who was an Assyrian king whose life was highly mythologized or fabricated by Greek authors. The name Sardanapalus is used for Elagabalus 15 times within Dio's *History*, making this the most commonly used name for the young emperor. By using Sardanapalus as a template by which to describe Elagabalus' own crimes and perversities, Dio is able to draw from a large body of stock stereotypes not only about decadent rulers but also despotic Eastern rulers, a category which Dio certainly believed

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[299] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 1.1.
[300] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 2.1
[301] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 9.2, 10.1, and 18.1.

Elagabalus to fall into. Like his mythological counterpart, Dio's Elagabalus is similarly given over to luxury, sexual indulgences, and typically feminine behavior.

The primary account of Sardanapalus' life comes from Diodorus Siculus's *Library of History*. In Diodorus, Sardanapalus appears as the prototype of the decadent, slothful, self-indulgent Eastern king, and is described as exceeding "all his predecessors in sloth and luxury" in addition to leading a "most effeminate life."[302] Diodorus reports that Sardanapalus "assumed the feminine garb and so covered his face and indeed his entire body with whitening cosmetics and the other unguents used by courtesans, that he rendered it more delicate than that of any luxury-loving woman"[303] in addition to assuming a more feminine voice and pursuing "sexual indulgence[s]" with both men and women "without restraint" or any sign of remorse. In terms of Sardanapalus' political career, we are told that his conduct so displeased the Assyrians that they launched a rebellion, headed by a man named Arbaces who was known for his "bravery and nobility of spirit" rather than his vices and indulgences.[304] When Sardanapalus realizes all is lost, he builds an enormous pyre on which he piles "all his gold and silver as well as every article of the royal wardrobe" before locking himself, his eunuchs, and his concubines inside and consigning them all to the flames.[305] Diodorus adds that Sardanapalus' death "caused the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire, which had endured longer than any other known to history."[306] Given Dio's view of how disastrous Elagabalus' reign was, portraying Elagabalus as a Sardanapalus reborn would only have reinforced Dio's claims

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[302] Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Vol. 1, translated by C. H. Oldfather, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 2.23.1-2.
[303] Diodorus, 2.23.1-2.
[304] Diodorus, 2.24.1.
[305] Diodrus, 2.27.2.
[306] Diodorus, 2.23.4.

that Elagabalus was unsuited to his role as emperor.

Many elements of the life of Sardanapalus have an echo in the anecdotes of Elagabalus' life in Dio's *History*, but they sound even more remarkably like some of the anecdotes from the second half of the *Life of Heliogabalus*. Barnes argues that the textual differences between the account in the *Life of Heliogabalus* and Dio's account suggest that the *Life* author did not consult Dio's work as a source for his own.[307] It is entirely possible that the *Historia Augusta*'s author could have come to the association of Elagabalus with Eastern tyrants on his own, which seems all the more plausible given the considerable detail given to what sort of food Elagabalus enjoyed – after all, food and sex are standard *topoi* for literary tyrants.[308] All of the food items which Elagabalus enjoys are prohibitively expensive and likely did not constitute what typical Romans, even the elite with considerable wealth, actually ate. In one instance, Elagabalus is said to eat ostrich, but the only other gastronomic mention of ostrich in ancient literature is in reference to a Persian king, which suggests that the author is attempting to connect Elagabalus to "the paradigm of all extravagant luxury, the Persian king," and not to reflect reality.[309] In another similar instance, the *Life* author mentions that Elagabalus ate parrot, which seems not to have been standard fare – except in "the stereotyped concept of the table luxury of a tyrant."[310] Aside from mentions of food and sex, the descriptions

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[307] Timothy D. Barnes, "Ultimus Antoninorum," in *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium 1970* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag GmH, 1972), 53.
[308] Mader, 135.
[309] Elizabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum, "Apicius, *De re coquinaria* and the *Vita Heliogabali*," in *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium 1970* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag GmH, 1972), 14. There is also a possible reference to Xenophon's *Anabasis* at Book 1, Chapter 5. Xenophon tells his readers that although the soldiers hunted the ostriches, no one could catch one to eat. If the *Life* author had this Xenophon reference in mind, then Elagabalus' eating ostrich seems even more decadent, as they were both exotic and difficult to attain.
[310] Alfoldi-Rosenbaum, 15.

of Elagabalus' antics in the *Life* fit very closely with the idea of the capricious tyrant: he is reported to have enjoyed swimming in sea water pools in places far from the coast, building mountains of snow in summer, using golden bedding and numerous fresh flowers on his silver couches, and sitting among flowers or perfumes of great value, even burning Indian perfumes without coals to scent his rooms. In a remarkable echo of the Sardanapalus story, Elagabalus attempts to make even his death a luxury, acquiring a noose made of purple and scarlet silk as well as golden swords, poisons concealed within gems, and a tall tower which was gilded and covered in jewels off which he might throw himself, so that his death might "be costly and marked by luxury."[311] In both the *Life of Heliogabalus* and Dio's *History*, the long tradition of "othering" the East and its rulers can be seen in full force. Both authors are able to present Elagabalus not as a Roman but instead as a Syrian, and by highlighting Elagabalus' sexual indulgences and excesses, both authors are able to show that he is fundamentally incompatible with his role as Roman emperor, both in terms of his actions and in the very fact of his name, permanently associates him with the role of the tyrannical, self-indulgent Assyrian king.

Another topic which all the biographies mention is Elagabalus' choices in clothing. In almost every account, even beyond character and a literary connection to Eastern tyrants, it is clothing which emphasizes how distinctly non-Roman Elagabalus is. These descriptions of clothing make sense given the prevailing ideology in ancient Rome that clothing was an outward indication of morality and political ability. There is some sense throughout Roman historical writing that the emperor should be the ultimate example of masculinity and power, and through his personal image he was expected to

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[311] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 17.33.3-6.

convey the "associations between authority, seniority, masculinity and *Romanitas*."[312] A sense of the importance of this association can be seen in historical biographies of "bad emperors," including Elagabalus, which contain anecdotes about their elaborate beauty regimes and attempts to appear younger, as well as other effeminate qualities such as a fondness for "dance, luxuriousness, sexual excess of all kinds, including adultery, as well as [a tendency towards] cowardice, timidity, laziness and self-indulgence."[313] The emphasis on Elagabalus' clothing and beauty regime, which largely conform to Roman conceptions of femininity and effeminacy, also conforms in certain ways to conceptions of Syrians as expressed in earlier Roman textual sources.

This is certainly the case in Dio, although he is relatively silent about Elagabalus' clothing. When it is mentioned, it is usually in the context of discussing Elagabalus' religion: thus Dio mentions that Elagabalus "was frequently seen even in public clad in the barbaric dress which the Syrian priests use." This consequently earned the emperor the nickname "The Assyrian," used frequently in Dio's own account.[314] Admittedly this does not tell us much about what the outfit looked like, but presumably it was elaborate and probably richly colored in order to give it special "barbaric" status. Dio also adds that Elagabalus wore "innumerable amulets" while carrying out these utterly foreign religious rites (on which, more below).[315] Other descriptions of Elagabalus' fashion sense serve to associate the emperor with feminine qualities, and further emphasize the sense of incompatibility between Elagabalus' character and the role of emperor. Dio reports that "when trying someone in court [Elagabalus] really had more or less the appearance of a

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[312] Edwards, 70.
[313] Maria Beatrice Bitarello, "Otho, Elagabalus, and the Judgement of Paris: The Literary Construction of the Unmanly Emperor," in *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 2011/1 37/1: 97-8.
[314] Dio, 79.11.2.
[315] Dio, 80.11.1

man, but everywhere else he showed [feminine] affectations in his actions and in the quality of his voice," sometimes wearing a hairnet, painting his eyes with "white lead and alkanet," and shaving his chin "so as to look more like a woman."[316] This sounds remarkably similar to Diodorus' Sardanapalus, which is surely intentional. Elagabalus' manner of dress in Dio is not only barbaric, but entirely predictable given Elagabalus' role as a Syrian priest. Much of it is feminine and/or effeminate, from the wearing of innumerable amulets to the use of makeup. Dio's Elagabalus not only breaks his promise to act like a good emperor, in Dio's view perhaps his very way of dressing and acting prevents him from fulfilling his role of emperor.

While Dio does not really give us much in the way of descriptions of Elagabalus' clothing, in contrast, Herodian has a great deal to say about it and similarly emphasizes its foreign characteristics through much more detailed descriptions than are found in Dio's account. Herodian says that even before Elagabalus became emperor, "he went about in barbarian dress (σχήματι βαρβάρῳ), wearing long-sleeved purple tunics embroidered with gold (χιτῶνας χρυσοϋφεῖς καὶ ἁλουργεῖς χειριδωτοὺς) which hung to his feet; robes similarly decorated with gold and purple covered his legs from hip to toe, and he wore a diadem of varicolored precious gems (στέφανος λίθων πολυτελῶν χροιᾷ διηνθισμένος)."[317] Once Elagabalus becomes emperor, he spends a winter in Nicomedia where his clothing (once again described in the context of his religious practice) gets even more elaborate:

He wore the richest clothing, draping himself in purple robes embroidered in gold (ἐσθῆτος πολυτελεστάτοις χρώμενος, διά τε πορφύρας <καὶ> χρυσοῦ); to

[316] Dio, 80.14.3-4.
[317] Herodian, 5.3.6.

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his necklaces and bracelets he added a crown, a tiara (τιάρας) glittering with gold and jewels. His dress showed the influence of the sacred robe of the Phoenicians (Φοινίσσης ἱερᾶς στολῆς) and the luxurious garb of the Medes (χλιδῆς Μηδικῆς). He loathed Greek and Roman garments because they were made of wool, in his opinion an inferior material; only the Serian cloth [silk] met with his approval.[318]

Additionally, Elagabalus is mentioned as "appearing in public with eyes painted and cheeks rouged," and in another instance, Herodian describes Elagabalus as appearing with "his face painted more elaborately than that of any modest woman, dancing in luxurious robes and effeminately adorned with gold necklaces."[319] Herodian's description immediately sets up a contrast between this richly dressed Syrian boy-priest and what readers, both ancient and modern, would have recognized as appropriate for a Roman emperor. Herodian even records that Elagabalus' grandmother tried on multiple occasions to get Elagabalus to wear Roman dress when he went to the Senate so that he did not disturb the Roman people who "considered his ornaments suitable only for women," but Elagabalus made no effort to change his manner of dress.[320] We can see in Herodian many of the same criticisms of Elagabalus' clothing that we see in Dio. Interesting, Herodian's Elagabalus is hardly interested in looking even remotely like a Roman emperor (as in Dio's mention that Elagabalus generally dressed properly while carrying out public duties), but is instead most interested in constantly resembling an Eastern priest.

The author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* is very specific in his detailing Elagabalus' clothing, and this account most of all depicts Elagabalus as little more than an effeminate foreigner completely at odds with his office as Roman emperor. The *Life* evokes many of

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[318] Herodian, 5.5.3-4.
[319] Herodian, 5.6.10 and 5.8.1.
[320] Herodian, 5.5.5.

the stereotypes of Eastern clothing found throughout earlier Greek and Roman accounts. The author mentions that Elagabalus "would wear a tunic made wholly of cloth of gold, or one made of purple, or a Persian one studded with jewels," and also reports that Elagabalus was the first Roman to wear pure silk garments.[321] Such accounts serve not only to paint Elagabalus' wardrobe as wholly Eastern (it doesn't matter whether his clothing is Syrian, Median, or Persian) and wholly at odds with what Roman men could wear. Furthermore, Elagabalus is said to have worn jewel-encrusted shoes and a jeweled diadem.[322] As we have seen earlier, jewelry was viewed with particular suspicion in Rome, and was seen to be wasteful and foreign; it was also thought to be an exclusively female form of adornment and so was at odds with Elagabalus' role as emperor.[323] But as we have seen, the Elagabalus of the *Historia Augusta* is hardly interested in performing any of the functions of a good Roman emperor.

Other interesting mentions of clothing in the *Life of Heliogabalus* concern the emperor's obsession with dressing up and assuming roles. The author reports that Elagabalus met with an assembly of prostitutes and then later an assembly of pimps and catamites, and that at each meeting he had dressed for the occasion: "whereas he had appeared in front of the prostitutes in women's dress, with protruding breasts, he met the catamites in the costume of boys that are prostituted."[324] Hardly the activity one would expect of the emperor, but through this mention of Elagabalus' dress, the author highlights Elagabalus' lack of sexual restraint in dressing up as both a male and female prostitute (and, as we shall see below, for acting like a prostitute as well). The author of

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[321] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 23.3 and 26.1.
[322] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 23.3 and 23.5.
[323] Harlow, 149.
[324] *Life of Heliogabalus* 17.26.5.

the *Life of Heliogabalus* also mentions that Elagabalus had a penchant for dressing up like various gods, and specifically lists the Great Mother and Dionysus at 28.2[325], and Venus at 5.4—although, as we are told, this costume used very little in the way of clothing. While Elagabalus' imitation of Venus is listed as an instance of bedroom roleplay, it is interesting that the other gods which Elagabalus is supposed to have impersonated both originated in the East and, furthermore, were associated with religious madness, sexual frenzy, and a non-paradigmatic approach to gender and sexuality. These attributes typically associated with Magna Mater and Dionysus further underscore Elagabalus' Eastern identity and the strange rituals of his god.

Elagabalus' clothing, whether depicted by Herodian, Dio, or the *Historia Augusta*, is presented as "a Roman adjustment of the oriental costume or a Roman innovation" of the Eastern clothing, especially those of Eastern religious clothing.[326] In Herodian, Elagabalus' clothing seems to be a collection of multiple foreign elements, as revealed by the discussion that it borrowed from the clothing of both the Phoenicians and the Medes. Scholars such as Lucinda Dirven have already illustrated the difference and discrepancies between Herodian's description of Elagabalus' clothing, especially his priestly garments, and the reality of his clothing as depicted on coins. Dirven points out that not only is Herodian's description of Elagabalus' clothing at odds with the depiction of Elagabalus in his role as a priest as found on existing coins, but also that these depictions of Elagabalus as priest "are not identical with any of the priestly garments from Syria

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[325] The *Life* author's mention of Elagabalus dressing up like Dionysus is interesting as Herodian says that with Elagabalus' "combination of good looks, youth and splendid dress there was a possible resemblance between the young man and the magnificent statues of Dionysus" at 5.3.7.

[326] Lucinda Dirven, "The Emperor's New Clothes: A Note on Elagabalus' Priestly Dress," in *Der Christliche Orient und Seine Umwelt* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2007), 29.

known to date."[327] Dirven also notes that depictions of Elagabalus on coins present the emperor in a way that would have made him most appealing to the army whose support was fundamental in gaining him the throne:

> The personality of Elagabalus' god – the invincible sun – also accords well with the religious practices at the time. It follows from inscriptions that there was a close connection between the Roman legionaries and Sol Invictus. [...] The fact that the emperor's new priestly dress is very similar to the costume of Mithras, another Sol Invictus that was very popular among Roman soldiers, may very well have contributed to [the] costume's attraction among the soldiers.[328]

The depiction of Elagabalus' priestly clothing on coinage depicts not cultural division, as is frequently supposed due to the hostile accounts of Elagabalus' religious practice in the histories, but rather cultural and perhaps religious interaction.[329] Dirven's point is also very intriguing when taken into account with a rather curious description found in Herodian's *History*. This anecdote suggests that Elagabalus himself was well aware of how his clothing might be received in the city of Rome. Herodian reports:

> Since, however, he wished the Senate and the Roman people to grow accustomed to seeing him in this costume and wished to test their reaction to this exotic sight, before he returned to Rome he had a full-length portrait painted, showing him performing his priestly duties in public. … [Elagabalus] sent this picture to Rome to be hung in the center of the Senate house, [and when] the emperor came to Rome presenting the appearance described above, the Romans saw nothing unusual in it, for the painting had prepared them for what to expect.[330]

If the Roman people were used to Elagabalus' clothing by the time of his arrival in Rome, and if Dirven is correct in suggestion that Elagabalus' priestly clothing as represented on coinage might have found him some support with the army, then why are later accounts so hostile in their description of his clothing? The answer seems to be that there was less of a concern with the actual clothes (although they were no doubt shocking

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[327] Dirven, 28.
[328] Dirven, 30.
[329] Dirven, 30.
[330] Herodian, 5.5.6-7.

to more traditionalist Romans) but instead a concern with Elagabalus' use of makeup and other feminine accessories, like excessive jewelry, and perhaps even the influence of Elagabalus' religious practices which undeniably feature strange and non-Roman elements (as we will see below). Ultimately, Dio, Herodian, and the *Life of Heliogabalus* all link the emperor's clothing to traditional, stereotypical ideas of Eastern clothing. While Dio may specifically link the clothing to Syria, Herodian's depiction encompasses all of the Near East from Phoenicia to Media, a trend continued in the *Life of Heliogabalus* which says that one form of tunic Elagabalus favored was Persian. All the biographical accounts depict an emperor who was much more interested in playing dress up and wearing expensive clothing than actually ruling, further emphasizing the disorder and unnatural qualities of Elagabalus and his reign.

As with discussion of the emperor's clothing, mentions of Elagabalus' religious practices within the biographies serve largely to emphasize how distinctly non-Roman they are. In many cases, the characteristics of Elagabalus' religion that are at odds with Roman religion are not only shown to be foreign, but are shown to be actively harmful to Rome. Dio's account illustrates how the practices of Elagabalus' religion deviated from those of Rome. Dio mentions that Elagabalus both was circumcised (though he does not mention of this happened before in his youth or whether it was done while he was emperor) and abstained from eating swine, "on the ground that his devotion would thereby be purer," adding that Elagabalus' act of being circumcised was "part of the priestly requirements of [Elagabal], and he accordingly mutilated many of his companions in like manner."[331] Other features of Elagabalus' religion include barbaric

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[331] Dio 80.11.1.

chanting, secret sacrifices (including sacrificing children) and using magic, and shutting

live animals into the god's temple and "throwing in among them human genitals," among

"other unholy rites."[332] All these mentions of strange religious mandates serve to show

how radically and violently different it was from what was typical in Rome.

Herodian's account similarly emphasizes the foreign aspects of Elagabalus'

religious practice, making it clear from the outset that Elagabalus' religion is strange and

distinctly non-Roman. Herodian says that unlike the Roman and Greek gods, "no statue

made by man in the likeness of [Elagabal]" stands in the god's temple, which is "lavishly

decorated with gold, silver, and costly gems;" instead the temple contains "a huge black

stone with a pointed end and round base in the shape of a cone."[333] Elagabalus' duties as

priest supposedly included "dancing about the altars in barbarian fashion to the music of

flutes, pipes, and every kind of instrument," and accompanied by these instruments

Elagabalus "went about performing, as it appeared, orgiastic service to his god."[334]

Herodian's descriptions of Elagabalus' religion evokes ideas of a lack of self-control and

modesty, as seen in further descriptions of Elagabalus personally offering his god

"hecatombs of bulls and a vast number of sheep [which] he placed upon the altars and

heaped up spices of every kind [... along with] many jars of the oldest and finest wines"

every morning.[335] As expected, after these outlandish sacrifices Elagabalus and women

from "his own country" would dance around the altar to music played on instruments

such as cymbals and drums, while the men in attendance at these sacrifices were outfitted

in "long-sleeved robes with a broad purple stripe in the center, robes which hung to their

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[332] Dio 80.11.1.
[333] Herodian 5.3.4-5.
[334] Herodian, 5.3.8 and.5.5.4.
[335] Herodian, 5.5.8.

feet in the Phoenician style. On their feet were the linen shoes customarily worn by the Eastern prophets (χιτῶνας ποδήρεις καὶ χειριδωτοὺς νόμῳ Φοινίκων)."[336] Herodian's version of Elagabalus' religion may be less disparaging than Dio's account, but it still paints a picture which emphasizes the foreign elements and perhaps even portrays the religion as offensive to Roman sensibilities.

The author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* similarly focuses on the strange Eastern rites. In addition to the cult of Elagabal, the author tells us that Elagabalus also participated in the rites of the Great Mother and the Near Eastern (perhaps even Syrian) goddess Salambo, rites which both featured conspicuously Eastern elements such as eunuch priests and typically Eastern "wailing and frenzy."[337] Elagabalus' practices also included the sacrifice of especially handsome Italian boys, who would be tortured and sacrificed "according to his own native ritual" and whose innards were then inspected (presumably read for omens) by the emperor himself.[338] The author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* presents these more startling anecdotes about Elagabalus' religion as distinctly Syrian and deeply at odds with the practices of Elagabalus' Roman subjects, to the point that his religious practice specifically targeted Italian children for sacrifice.

The notion of Elagabalus targeting Roman religion is felt across all three major biographical accounts. Dio tells us that Elagabalus caused offense not because he brought his god to Rome but because he attempted to place this god "even before Jupiter himself."[339] Herodian likewise says that Elagabalus sought to subsume some of the most important objects of Roman religion, such as the Palladium, to the god Elagabal;

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[336] Herodian, 5.5.9-10.
[337] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 7.1.-3.
[338] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 17.8.1-2.
[339] Dio 80.11.1.

although Elagabalus did not carry through with this plan, Herodian does describe a procession in which the cavalry and Praetorian guard carry off "the statues of all the gods, the costly or sacred offerings in the temples, the imperial ornaments, and valuable heirlooms" to the new temple of Elagabal which was constructed in Rome.[340] The *Life of Heliogabalus* similarly reports that Elagabalus quickly built a huge temple to Elagabal on the Palatine hill to which he "desired to transfer the emblem of the Great Mother, the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of the Salii, and all that the Romans held sacred."[341] Elagabalus' actions towards the cult of the Vestal Virgins, specifically attempting to remove a particulary sacred object from the temple of Vesta, profanes "the sacred rites of the Roman nation" just as Elagabalus' political rule profanes the office of emperor.[342] As the *Life of Heliogabalus* author tells us, Elagabalus desired "to abolish not only the religious ceremonies of the Romans but also those of the whole world, his one wish being that the god [Elagabal] should be worshipped everywhere."[343]

Descriptions of Elagabalus' religious practice suggest not only that they are eccentric and obviously foreign but also that they are actively harmful to Roman religion and its adherents. Just as with descriptions of Elagabalus' clothing, descriptions of Elagabalus' religious rituals may preserve some grain of truth, but they also seem to draw from a collection of different Near Eastern religions (such as the cult of Salambo, Cybele/Magna Mater, and perhaps even Judaism), picking out the most un-Roman qualities of each and combining them in descriptions of Elagabalus' cult in order to show how opposed this religion was to Roman religion.

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[340] Herodian, .5.6.3-4 and 5.6.6-8.
[341] *Life of Heliogabalus,* 3.4.
[342] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 6.6.
[343] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 6.7.

Another area that all Elagabalus' biographers discuss is his sex life, and both Dio and the *Life of Heliogabalus* feature numerous anecdotes about who Elagabalus married and slept with, the purpose of which seems to be to show just how deeply Elagabalus lived for his own pleasure and how unsuitable he was as an emperor. This would accord with earlier examples of Elagabalus as the archetypal Eastern tyrant, especially as there seems to be a suggestion that Elagabalus prioritized bedroom activities over political ones.

Dio claims that Elagabalus "lived most licentiously…from first to last," using his body "both for doing and allowing many strange things, which no one could endure to tell or hear of," although that certainly isn't going to stop Dio from telling his readers all about those strange things.[344] Both Dio and the author of the *Life* are especially keen to depict Elagabalus as depraved, and both biographical accounts inform readers that Elagabalus specifically sought out male partners who were particularly well endowed.[345] In contrast to Dio and the *Life* author, Herodian has very little to say about Elagabalus' sex life. What he does mention is also found in the other two biographical accounts and is nowhere near as salacious as what Dio or the *Life* report in addition. Herodian merely summarizes who Elagabalus married and then quickly divorced, and is largely silent on the nature of Elagabalus' relationships with men (as opposed to Dio, who devotes considerable space to this). Herodian does report that Elagabalus married a Vestal Virgin, although while he claims it was so that "he might seem to be doing something manly," Dio claims that this marriage was to produce "godlike children," while the *Life of*

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[344] Dio, 80.13.2.
[345] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 5.3, 8.6-7, and 31.6; and Dio,80.16.2.

Heliogabalus does not even say that Elagabalus married a Vestal Virgin, only that he "violated [her] chastity."[346] This act would have been especially shocking and shows a further sense of Elagabalus' disregard for traditional Roman religion.[347] In combination with other stories of his sexual indulgences, these anecdotes further establish Elagabalus as operating outside of and beyond the acceptable limit of actions and concerns for a Roman emperor.

A significant portion of Dio's account of Elagabalus details his effeminacy in the bedroom. For example, Dio tells his readers that, although the young emperor married and slept with many women, this was done not because Elagabalus "had any need of them himself, but simply [because] he wanted to imitate their actions when he should lie with his [male] lovers."[348] Furthermore, Dio claims that Elagabalus would frequently go to taverns and brothels, wearing a wig and acting out the role of a female prostitute.[349] In addition to this, Dio adds that Elagabalus was not content with merely acting like a woman, but wanted to be regarded (or even become) a woman.[350] Dio shows the dangers of having such a feminine emperor when he says that Hierocles (whom Elagabalus had reportedly married, as told in Dio, 80.15.1) was so beautiful and had considerable skill in other "nocturnal feats" so won over Elagabalus that the slave soon became "exceedingly

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[346] Herodian, 5.6.2, Dio, 80.9.3, and *Life of Heliogabalus*, 6.6.

[347] For Mader, the way in which the author of the *Life of Heliogabalus* discusses Elagabalus' marriage to the Vestal Virgin in terms that leave out the religious significance of the marriage is typical of the second half of the biographical account. He suggests that the author "ignores or misconstrues the possible *religious* dimensions of the emperor's exotic practices and offers instead a highly entertaining 'secularized' take on his profligacy," viewing what were once ritually significant actions (like the marriage to a Vestal virgin) through a Roman lens, with the result that the actions lost their significance and became entertaining and outlandish stories (135).

[348] Dio, 80.13.1.

[349] Dio, 80.13.2.

[350] Dio constantly stresses that Elagabalus "could not even be a man" in terms of siring children at 80.9.1 and at relates that Elagabalus wanted to undergo surgery to change his genitalia; he also refers to Elagabalus as a woman at 80.15.1 and has Elagabalus tell his male lovers, "Call me not a Lord, for I am a Lady" at 80.16.4.

powerful" in the court, even going so far as to want to name Hierocles Caesar, which put Elagabalus at considerable odds with the soldiers who supported him and indeed with the rest of the imperial court.[351]

Almost from the start of the *Life of Heliogabalus* we are informed of his sexual excesses. Even before he became emperor he was spending the winter at Nicomedia, taking both the active receptive role in the proceedings and in general being a "recipient of lust in every orifice of his body," living quite a debauched life.[352] Furthermore, the *Life* claims that the emperor "invented certain kinds of lust, surpassing the spintrians of the emperors of old, and he knew well all the arrangements of Tiberius and Caligula and Nero."[353] The author also claims that Elagabalus specifically used the palace baths in order to procure well-endowed men and sought them out throughout Rome.[354] As if seeking out new vices were not enough, the author also claims that Elagabalus never slept with the same woman twice, and opened up brothels in the palace for his own and his friends' use.[355] Beyond these anecdotes documenting his sexual appetite, there are also anecdotes which exhibit Elagabalus' effeminate/feminine behavior. Among these are the claims that Elagabalus took on the role of Venus with his lovers, bathed with the women while at the public baths, and depilated his entire body because he wanted to "appear worthy and suited for the lusts of the greatest number."[356] Elsewhere we are told that Elagabalus had a relationship with the athlete Zoticus, even entering into a wedding

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[351] Dio, 80.15.2-4.
[352] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 5.1.
[353] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 33.1.
[354] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 8.6-7.
[355] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 24.2.
[356] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 5.4-5.

ceremony with him and consummating the marriage in the role of the bride.[357] We are also told that Elagabalus had a relationship with Hierocles, although there is no mention of a marriage as in Dio.

The mentions of Elagabalus' sex life in the biographies of Dio, Herodian, and the *Life of Heliogabalus* primarily function as demonstrations of how unsuitable Elagabalus is with his imperial position, to the point of being fundamentally at odd with it. By emphasizing that Elagabalus not only acted like a woman in terms of his sexual appetite and the roles or actions which he took up while in the bedroom, but also that Elagabalus wanted to physically make himself a woman, Dio highlights the essential gap between how the emperor should act, as a paragon of masculinity and perhaps even of virtue, and how the emperor reportedly acted, as perhaps the most repulsive and morally corrupt creature in Roman society. While it might seem paradoxical that Elagabalus was charged with both effeminacy and adultery (or at least, sleeping with a considerable number of women), to charge an opponent with both was a relatively common tactic in Roman political discourse.[358] Furthermore, the claim feeds into ideas that effeminate men were said to have insatiable sexual appetites, which would certainly make some sense of Elagabalus' frequent visits to brothels and the number of his sexual partners.[359] The portrayal of Elagabalus as sexually insatiable and effeminate speaks to a sense of the upending of power within the Roman political sphere: men who were accused of effeminacy or of enjoying being penetrated during sex were identified with the female, and to suggest that a man was like a woman was to suggest that he was inferior to other

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[357] *Life of Heliogabalus*, 10.5.
[358] Edwards, 65.
[359] Edwards, 81.

men.[360] On the contrary, the emperor of all people should have been superior to Roman men. When an emperor was not, that usually boded ill for the state, as can be seen in earlier biographies of bad emperors who are all usually depicted as sexually insatiable and in literary discussions of Eastern kings, who served as the model for many an overly-decadent Roman. When the two roles, Roman Emperor and Eastern Tyrant, finally met in the figure of Elagabalus, it is unsurprising that the sense of chaos and disorder of the Severan dynasty and Elagabalus' rule in general should apply to sex as well as state.

Reports on Elagabalus' personality and morals, religious fanaticism, fashion choices, and sex life all have their roots in Roman fears about the influence of the East. These in turn have a basis in earlier Greco-Roman views of Easterners in general. An especially concerning question for Roman authors in particular was what might happen when the East was brought to Rome. Roman authors imagined that prolonged contact between Rome and the Near East would lead to moral decay and a loss of traditional values, and the biographical accounts of Elagabalus can be seen as the culmination of all these fears and concerns.

Conclusion

The early third century was a time of considerable political instability in the Roman world, seeing almost no peaceful transitions of power but instead multiple emperors murdered and assassinated. The Severan dynasty emerged from such political chaos, but continued to be at the center of it until the end. The surviving historical accounts of this time period come with their own considerable historiographical issues, and there is really concrete biographical information for only one of our major writers,

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[360] Edwards, 75 and 78.

Cassius Dio, who, with his senatorial background and reverence for Marcus Aurelius and Augustus, likely had a very grim view of the history he was living through. Other writers, such as Herodian and the author of the *Historia Augusta*, leave us with little to no biographical information, but present the same history in different ways: Herodian focuses on the religious tumult of Elagabalus' life while the *Historia Augusta* presents him as a fanatic in almost every aspect of his life and the greatest hedonist Rome ever knew. In spite of these differences, however, all three historical accounts focus on making explicit parallels between Elagabalus' actions and his Eastern origins. Dio compares him with Sardanapalus, a legendary Assyrian king known for his decadence, and the *Historia Augusta* places Elagabalus in the literary tradition of all decadent Eastern rulers; Herodian constantly emphasizes that Elagabalus was Phoenician. Bitarello suggests this is no coincidence, but rather that by linking Elagabalus with Phoenicia, Elagabalus' rule was not just the product of Eastern decadence but was also a threat to Rome.[361] Bitarello's reading makes Herodian's image of Elagabalus's rule an anti-image of Roman history, and the luxury, decadence, and effeminacy of Elagabalus and his time on the throne is not just a reflection of Elagabalus himself, but also the inevitable result of Phoenician rule.[362] The connection of Elagabalus with the East, especially with tyrants and rulers hostile to Rome, in the description of his reign was not just the product of the political situation of the Severan era but was also the product of several hundred years of Greco-Roman beliefs, fears, and anxieties about the relation of Rome to the East and the impact which the East could have on Rome itself.

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[361] Bitarello, 112.
[362] Bitarello, 112-13.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In all three accounts of Elagabalus' life, there is a sense that it presents something of a breaking point: the Severans and perhaps even the Roman Empire itself cannot continue in this manner. The biographical accounts of Alexander Severus, Elagabalus' successor, reflect the necessary changes: Herodian claims that Alexander was raised entirely differently than his cousin, so that he was educated in a proper Greek and Roman system, even going so far as to suggest that Alexander was kept at a considerable distance from all things Syrian.[363] Thus Alexander Severus represented a return to normalcy and proper Roman values, at least for the biographers. Order and proper education was restored, and there was no place in this re-ordered Rome for decadent foreign priest-rulers. The dangers of the East had infected Rome, but in this case at least, they had been dealt with in typical Roman fashion.

Syria and Rome had a long and complex history. The provinces' borders were constantly being drawn as more land was added or lost in war, and unlike other provinces, it contained many different cultural groups. One of the major results of Rome's bringing Syria into the empire was a creation of a Syrian identity which might have been based on some elements of local identity but which came to be seen through a Roman lens. Conveniently, these aspects of identity were almost always cast as opposite to the corresponding Roman aspects, and foreign practices were depicted as strange or even hostile to Roman practices. When such strange or unusual practices and qualities were seen as the defining characteristics around which identity was created, the Syrian identity that Rome created ultimately came to be made up predominantly of stereotypes

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[363] Herodian, 5.7.5 and 5.8.2.

and preconceived notions.

In some regards, this identity was reinforced through its continued appearance in literature and art. These Roman ideas, which find considerable expression in the biographical accounts of Elagabalus, all have their roots in Greek ideas and art. Near Easterners, no matter their actual cultural background or where they came from geographically, were all painted with a similar brush that rendered their literary representations decadent, luxury loving, servile, and deviant, among other less than flattering qualities. They wore strange, expensive clothing and were usually perfumed. In artistic portrayals, Near Easterners tended to wear clothing which consisted of long-sleeved tunics and ankle-length trousers, both of which were colorful and/or highly ornamented with embroidery or other decoration. They also tended to have distinctive headgear, such as turbans, diadems, or pointed hats. It did not matter whether an artist or author was describing a fictive peoples or a very real culture, all Near Easterners looked and acted the same. Roman authors contrasted the Near Eastern manner of living with the manner of living in Rome and drew stark lines of division, especially when it came to clothing. While Easterners wore multiple colors, Romans wore neutral colors, especially Roman men. Easterners wore jewelry and perfume with abandon, but Romans were more restrained in their tastes. Easterners preferred to live decadently, but Romans were simple farmers content to plow the fields—or so the popular narrative suggested. Obviously most of these comparisons were exaggerated and, in many cases, not even true, but it was the contrast that mattered. Associating a political enemy with the East could cast serious doubts on the enemy's morals, aspirations, and even identity as a Roman. It was a useful shorthand by which to paint a political opponent or a particularly out-of-favor emperor as

dangerous, possibly even deranged, given over to luxury, and even a tyrant who had no interests at heart but his own.

The real picture, of course, is not as black and white. After all, by the third century, Greco-Roman culture had become an integral component of identity and culture in the Near East; it was no longer simply something that had to be assimilated or adopted but instead something which contained very real meaning and significance.[364] While the West and the East were still conceived of as distinct spaces, by the time of the Severans, crucial markers of status and identity, such as social hierarchy and the prestige given to certain literatures and languages, were the same throughout Rome and the provinces, which meant that there a common ground for the spread of ideas, art, and culture.[365] Additionally, Roman and Greek authors were not universally hostile towards Eastern provincials, and there was opportunity for Eastern individuals to participate in government and politics.[366] The expansion of Roman citizenship throughout the East over time also must have had a significant impact in how Romans eventually came to view the provinces, and while some Romans likely viewed it as a negative, there must equally have been others who viewed it in a positive light. Furthermore, the contribution which the East made to Rome cannot be overlooked: the East provided Rome with wealth, different forms of religion (many of which were quite successful in Rome), architectural elements, clothing (however contentious that might have been), and, perhaps most critically, Rome's own mythological origin.[367] Even the idea of the Emperor was influenced by the political situation that Rome encountered while becoming involved in

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[364] Kemezis, 27.
[365] Kemezis, 28.
[366] Andrade, 245. Of course, one's success often depended upon cultivating certain highly regarded cultural systems, such as Classical Greek *paideia*.
[367] Ball, 1.

Near Eastern affairs – although as we have seen, looking too much like a Hellenistic King was never a good thing.[368] Even as Rome was influenced by the East, this influence was often viewed with some suspicion, and as we have seen from the literary record, the influence of the East made some Romans uncomfortable. There were constant concerns that Rome's involvement with the East could only have a negative result, and many authors viewed increasing political participation in the East as one of the reasons that all kinds of vices, such as decadence, art, and fine food, made their way into Rome. These Eastern pleasures were seen as capable of weakening of Roman virtues such as frugality, simplicity of life, and military might. Another threat was of course the constant presence of the Parthian kingdom, which always seemed ready to sweep in and take territory and power away from the Romans. Despite what Roman satirists, politicians, and hostile biographers might suggest, Rome's relationship to its provinces was multilayered and complex, and was obviously a two-way exchange.

Just as complex as Rome's relationship to the East was the East's relationship with Rome. This can be seen in cities of the Roman Near East, which often combined local traditions with Greco-Roman culture to create a unique iteration of Greco-Roman culture. This thesis has examined the creation of that identity in Palmyra. Although Palmyra claimed no Greco-Roman ancestry or origin for the founding of the city, elements of Greco-Roman architecture, clothing, mythology and artistic styles found their way into the city, sometimes within very distinctly Near Eastern contexts, such as temples dedicated to Near Eastern gods, funerary reliefs (especially the significant banquet-scene reliefs) and tomb wall painting. While these Greek elements increased

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[368] Ball, 21.

over time during Roman control of Palmyra, at the same time, Near Eastern language, religion, and culture continued to thrive in the city, as can be seen in the inclusion of the *modius*, or Palmyrene priestly hat, the continued usage of Parthian clothing, and the continued use of Aramaic in inscriptions even after Greek and Latin appeared alongside it. Evidently, both Greco-Roman and Near Eastern elements were understood and valued in Palmyra, and it appears that its residents were comfortable with both the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern sides of their civic identity. The identity that Palmyrenes created for themselves differed sharply from the images of Syrian identity which Greco-Roman authors created.

Equally as complex as Roman-Near Eastern relations is the surviving portrait of Elagabalus in the historical sources. The picture is unvaryingly negative, but is the result of more than a product of a senator's disagreement with or disapproval of an emperor or the product of a rather imaginative author exaggerating for comic effect. Rather, the biographical accounts of Elagabalus act not only as the logical end of the biographies of Severans and Antonines, as in the *Historia Augusta*, but also as the logical culmination of tropes of the decadent east throughout Roman literature. The biographical accounts were undoubtedly influenced by existing Greco-Roman literature on the East, and the accusations and anxieties about tyrants and decadence had already been applied to numerous Roman individuals throughout Rome's history. The accusations and anecdotes read more like a list of tropes than a list of meaningful history or critique. What made Roman authors pull out all the stops? Andrade suggests that Elagabalus may have brought to Rome a version of Romanness which was the norm in his home city,

Emesa.[369] As we have seen in cities like Palmyra, there was nothing which stopped Roman culture from being interwoven with Near Eastern cultural idioms or expressions, and so the combination of priest and ruler likely made sense and was a valid identity. The same held true in Rome, where the emperor was often *pontifex maximus*. The problem emerged when the Near Eastern elements were seen as taking priority over the Roman ones. Furthermore, the way that Roman authors had written about Near Eastern practices meant that Elagabalus' clothing and religion would immediately be rendered foreign and viewed through a Roman lens, or practiced in a Roman context, in which these practices had no significance and made no sense. The gulf between actuality and ideology of how Romanness ought to be expressed may have been incredibly significant in how Roman authors responded to Elagabalus' actions while in Rome.

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[369] Andrade, 323.

Appendix A: Greek and Roman Images of Eastern Dress

Figure 1. Scythian archer plate, by Epiktetos, Greek, 520-500 BC. Museum number 1837,0609.59, British Museum.

Figure 2. Kylix attributed to Douris, showing a Scythian archer and warrior with a *hoplon*, Greek, 500-490 BC. JHUAM B8, The Baltimore Chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America.

Figure 3. Trojan archer from the west pediment of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina, color reconstruction
Photo courtesy Stiftung Archäologie, Munich. From Eti Bonn-Muller, "Carved in Living Color,"
Archaeology 61.1 (2008).

Figure 4. Terracotta lekythos with Amazons, attributed to the Eretria Painter, Greek, ca. 420 BC. 31.11.13, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 5. The Nolan Amphora, showing Greek and Persian warrior, Greek, ca. 480-70 BC. 06.1021.117. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 6. Kylix showing fighting Greek (right) and Persian (left) warriors, by the Triptolemos Painter, Greek, ca. 480 BC. A.1887.213. National Museum of Scotland.

Figure 7. Detail of Persians in the Alexander Mosaic, from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, Roman (possibly a reproduction of a Greek painting), ca. 100 BC. 10-04-03/20. Erich Lessing Culture and Fine Arts Archive, ARTstor.

Figure 8. Modern colorized reconstruction and original of the Augustus of Prima Porta, with detail on Parthian in center right, Roman, 1st century AD. Color proposal presented by Jesús Mendiola y Emma Zahonero at Tarracoviva 2014, photograph by Rodrigo Riva

Figure 9. Silver Denarius of Augustus, reverse, with kneeling Parthian offering standard, c. 19 BC. 91115, Wriston Art Center Galleries. ARTstor.

Figure 10. Dacians on Trajan's Column, dedicated in 113 AD. SCALA archive, ARTstor.

Figure 11. Captive Parthian (right), the Arch of Septimius Severus, Roman, ca. 203 AD. SCALA Archives,
ARTstor.

Figure 12. Mosaic of the Three Wise Men in the Basilica of Sant' Apollinaire Nuovo, Ravenna, 6th century AD. SCALA Archives, ARTstor.

Appendix B: Palmyrene Art

Figure 13. Wall paintings of women showing the turban and veil, from the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, Palmyra, 160-191 CE. University of California, San Diego. ARTstor Slide Gallery.

Figure 14. Wall paintings of women showing the turban and veil, from the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, Palmyra, 160-191 CE. University of California, San Diego. ARTstor Slide Gallery.

Figure 15. Funerary bust of two women holding their veils, with turban and diadem also visible, Palmyra, ca. 217 AD. 125717. The British Museum.

Figure 16. The 'Beauty of Palmyra,' featuring lavish jewelry, head ornament, turban, and veil, funerary relief bust, Palmyra, early 3rd century AD. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotekt, Copenhagen.

Figure 17. Young man in a Parthian costume, holding a rhyton (funeral relief from the side of a sarcophagus), Palmyra, early 3rd Century AD. AO 4084, Musée du Louvre, ARTstor.

Figure 18. Hypogeum of Yarhai, showing cylindrical hat and Parthian clothing on many male figures. Palmyra, 2nd century CE. BB-2050, Damascus Museum, provided by Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom.. ARTstor.

Figure 19. Funeral banquet, with deceased shown reclining, attended by members of his family, note priestly hat and Parthian clothing of the deceased; Palmyra, first half of 2nd century CE. 08-02-09/63, National Museum of Damascus, ARTstor.
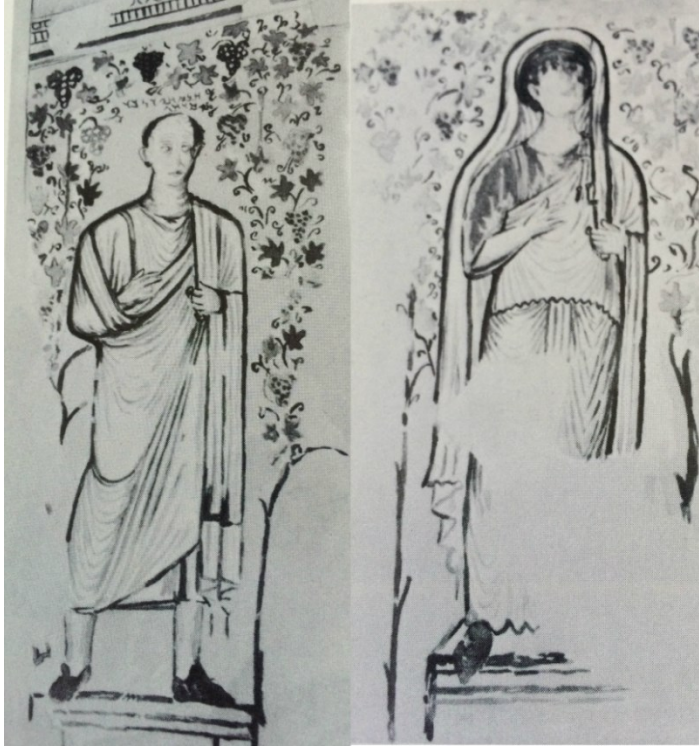
Figure 20. Wall painting of Hairan (left) and wife, Palmyra, ca. 149-150 CE. Scanned from Malcom Colledge, The Art of Palmyra.

Figure 21. Honorary statue of a woman, wearing Western-looking clothing, Palmyra, ca. 200 CE. Scanned from Malcom Colledge, The Art of Palmyra.

Figure 22. Honorific statues of men in togas, Palmyra, ca. 200 CE. Scanned from Michael Colledge, The Art of Palmyra.

Figure 23. Abduction of Ganymede from the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, Palmyra, 160-191 CE. From the website, "Palmyra Tombs," constructed by Prof. Michael Fuller, revised 21 May 2015.

Figure 24. Painted excedra showing myth of Achilles on Scyros, from the Hypogeum of the Three Brothers, Palmyra, 160-191 CE. From the website, "Palmyra Tombs," constructed by Prof. Michael Fuller, revised 21 May 2015.

Figure 25. Detail of relief from a beam in the Temple of Bel depicting 'Aglibol, note long sleeves and baggy trousers under armor. Palmyra, ca. 32 CE. University of California, San Diego, ARTstor Slide Gallery.

Figure 26. Altar decorated with a relief of the gods Aglibol (right) and Malakbel (left), 3rd century AD. Capitoline Museum, NCE2406. Photo by Jean-Pol Grandmont.

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