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History in Transition: a Gender-Variant Interpretation of the Galli

Social factors throughout the twentieth century have affected scholarship on the galli, the priests of Cybele. Orthodox interpretations such as those expressed by Nock, Vermaseren, and others, have established the castration practices of the galli as part of ancient religion.¹ The advent of gay liberation politics in the second half of the twentieth century coincided with revisionist views on Roman homosexuality, leading to interpretations of the galli as part of a Roman homosexual subculture.² By the end of the twentieth century, the wheel of social discourse had begun to turn once more, with transgender politics affecting anthropology and casting new light on the “eunuchs” of the ancient world.

The rapid social change in the Western world regarding gender and sexuality poses an obstacle for anthropologists who make comparisons between ancient groups and their approximate contemporary counterparts: the writer who calls a gallus a *transvestite* or *transsexual* will find that their choice of language has grown archaic rather quickly. Gleaning some more general concepts from the transgender movement will help to avoid these minor inconveniences, and it may hopefully prevent modern writers from projecting contemporary ideas onto the past in inappropriate ways. With this caveat in mind, it is valuable to address the galli in light of the idea that gender-diverse people exist in different forms in cultures across the

¹ See Södergard (1993) for a wide variety of these “orthodox” interpretations

² Taylor (1997), p. 331. See also Boswell (1980), pp. 61-87.

world. This paper will test the hypothesis that the galli are part of a global continuum of culturally-specific gender variant identities, and that their behavior can be understood as part of this gender phenomenon.

In *Neither Man nor Woman: the Hijras of India*, Serena Nanda devotes a chapter to placing the hijras in the context of a cross-cultural grouping of “gender-divergent” populations, such as the xanith in Oman, two-spirit people in Native American tribes, various Polynesian groups, and transgender/transsexual people in the “West.”³ Nanda only includes groups that currently exist in some form, and the galli are not on the list. However, the galli are commonly compared to the hijra in academic literature on the basis of the descriptions in Nanda’s book.⁴ This indicates that the galli could belong to a grouping such as the one that Nanda describes.

I stress the need for specific language in describing these types of persons, which Nanda calls “gender variant” or “gender-diverse.” Hereafter, I will be primarily using the term “gender variant.” As aforementioned, it is also necessary to avoid using the terms *transgender*, *transsexual*, or *transvestite* to describe the “eunuchs” of the ancient world and of other cultures, despite the frequent usage of these words in literature about the subject.⁵ It is more accurate to confine those terms to the gender-variant people of “the West,” lest we leave Euro-American gender variant people without a term of their own. However, I have chosen to employ a select vocabulary from transgender terminology, namely the phrases “gender identity” and “gender presentation,” which usefully encapsulate the difference between how gender variance is verbally defined in a society, and the non-verbal signifiers by which gender identity is expressed.

³ Nanda (1999), pp. 129-137.

⁴ Roscoe (1996), pp. 206; Sodergard (1993), p. 184; Taylor (1997), p. 332.

⁵ Cronn-Mills (2015), p. 39; Nanda (1999) p. 34; Roscoe (1996); p. 196, Sodergard (1993); p. 186, Taylor (2000) p. 179; Taylor (1997), p. 336)

I hope to use these terms in a way which upholds the multiplicity of human experience across cultures.

Nanda does not specify any criteria for what sorts of groups she includes in her book. However I have determined that all the gender variant peoples in Nanda's grouping have these three characteristics: (1) sexual relations with non-gender-variant men, (2) verbal evidence of a non-male gender identity, and (3) gender presentation that differs from men in their culture.⁶ Body modification and religious function, two more commonly explored aspects of the galli, are not as universal among gender-variant people, so I will not be detailing them in depth. There is already an abundance of literature which considers the galli's castration in the context of ancient religion, and it is likely that the ritual and etiology surrounding these practices were influenced by the religious background of the region. However, for the purpose of this paper it is enough to note that there are distinct similarities between the practices of the hijra and the galli, especially in regards to genital modification, worship of a Mother Goddess, and performative feminine behavior.⁷

I now will test the galli against the first criterion from earlier, which is that these gender variant people have men as romantic or sexual partners, contrary to what is expected for male-assigned individuals. The sexual orientation of the galli is a matter of dispute, but the nuances in their sexual behavior demonstrate their similarity to other gender variant groups in this regard. Nock argues that the galli were chaste, as "[t]he ancients believed that numerous sacred functions could only be performed properly by one who was qualified for them by perfect

⁶ Nanda (1999), pp. 128-149. Note that Nanda's essay, as well as this paper, focuses on gender-variant people who were assigned male at birth. There are also gender-variant people in many cultures who are assigned female at birth and transition to a masculine gender role. See Cronn-Mills (2015), p. 44.

⁷ Nanda (1999), p. 162; Taylor (1997), p. 332.

continence”.⁸ In presenting castration as an assurance of purity, Nock implies that the galli’s asexuality is a result of their castration and subsequent loss of sex drive, rather than being a matter of sexual orientation proper. Catullus, however, says that the galli “*corpus evirastis Veneris nimio odio*”.⁹ The Catullan galli therefore had a “hatred of Venus” even before their castration, but the meaning of this phrase is unclear. “Hating” the goddess of sexuality could be a metaphor for aversion to all sexual desire, or it could alternatively mean that the galli were not sexually attracted to the female form, as represented by Venus. The two options implied by Catullus are that the galli were attracted to men only, or that they were completely asexual.¹⁰

However, it is almost certainly true that many galli had sexual relations. Apuleius satirizes the galli as aggressively androphilic, owning a “*iuvenus satis corpulentus*” as a sex slave and attempting to gang-rape a “*fortissimum rusticandum*”.¹¹ The galli’s would-be victim is rescued by men who chase off the galli, mocking them for their lack of chastity: “*insuper ridicule sacerdotum purissimam [laudant] castimoniam*”.¹² Judging from this passage, it is likely that the galli ostensibly claimed to be chaste, but this standard was not well-enforced and the general public understood them to be androphilic.

This situation is similar to the hijras, and Nanda quotes an androphilic hijra as saying, “Older hijras ... now they say they don’t have the sexual desires at all, they have become very religious minded and don’t do all that. But when they were young, I can tell you, they were just

⁸ Nock (1972), p. 9.

⁹ Cat. 63.17. Catullus uses “*gallae*.” For consistency, I have chosen to refer to the galli as grammatically masculine throughout this section.

¹⁰ Another possibility, of course, is that the galli were attracted to each other, but I have found no ancient or modern sources which consider this, so it is pure speculation on my part.

¹¹ Apul. *Met.* 8.26, 8.29.

¹² Apul. *Met.* 8.29. Poking fun at their claims to chastity is a very, very old joke. A Sumerian epigram about the *gala/kalûm*, the more ancient predecessors of the galli, has a *gala* professing, post-coitus, “I must not excite that which belongs to my lady Inanna!” Gordon (1959), p. 248.

like me”.¹³ The situation of the hijra is similar to Nock’s view of the galli, in which their chastity is important to their religiosity. Though, many hijras have sex with men as prostitutes,¹⁴ and many hijra eventually marry men or hope to do so one day, as “[h]aving a husband is an important source of hijra self-esteem”.¹⁵ Nanda interprets the pride hijras take in their marital relationships as stemming from a desire “to present themselves ... as normal and belonging to the mainstream rather than the margins of their society”.¹⁶

The desire for respectability can also explain why some gurus deny the existence of androphilic hijras altogether. The hijras exist among a context of other groups such as the zenana, who are referred to as “transvestite” prostitutes similar to the hijras, but who do not undergo castration or enjoy the benefit of religious auspice. Also, Nanda reports of some hijras speaking disparagingly of the zenana as homosexual males, seeking to emphasize the difference between two groups.¹⁷ There is a similar dichotomy in Tahitian culture between the *mahu*, a more traditionalist, spiritualist “third-gender” population like the hijras, and the *rae-rae*, a more recent “transgender”¹⁸ phenomenon with sexualized connotations. A mahu explains:

Mahu are effeminates in a man’s body. I hate the term rae-rae, which appeared in the 1960s, because it makes all that we are turn on the idea of sexuality [*sic*]. For mahu, sexuality is by no means the most important thing. Our role is another: we bring a little sweetness around us, as a woman would do.¹⁹

¹³ Nanda (1999) p. 16.

¹⁴ Some sources suggest that the galli practiced prostitution as well. See Taylor (1997), p. 336.

¹⁵ Nanda (1999), p. 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹⁸ I use the term “transgender” here to emphasize that this is seen as a Westernized phenomenon in Tahiti.

¹⁹ Zanghellini (2013), p. 63.

Therefore, there exists a phenomenon in various parts of the world, in which gender variant individuals emphasize a distinction between their own subculture and a sexualized androphilic subculture. The rhetoric of the hijra and the mahu involves a rejection the zenara and the rae-rae in favor of cultivating a more sexually conservative image. This provides context for the galli's denial of androphilic behavior: the galli existed in a Roman culture in which, traditionally, "[t]hose who most commonly played the passive role in intercourse were boys, women, and slaves—all persons excluded from the power structure".²⁰ However, by the time of the Empire there was a rising subculture of adult *pathici* who openly enjoyed being penetrated by other men. This new form of homosexuality was stigmatized by the Roman "moralists," and, according to Taylor, "[t]he theme of the aggressive adult pathic began to appear frequently in the theater and in literature".²¹ It is apparent from Apuleius that the galli were subject to the same slander as the *barbati cinaedi*, providing a motivation for the galli to distance themselves from this phenomenon.

Therefore, the denial of androphilic behavior among gender variant institutions is twofold. (1) as stated by Nock, it allows them to be seen as holy individuals, bettering their claim to mainstream respectability, and (2) it distances them from stigmatized "homosexual" groups, also bolstering their claim to mainstream respectability. In practice, this is not a very effective strategy, as both the galli and hijras are still marginalized by their respective societies, and they are unsuccessful as a group at concealing their relations with men from the general public.

However, a point of divergence between the galli and hijras is the matter of gynephilia. Nanda portrays hijra identity as completely incompatible with attraction to women. As recounted

²⁰ Boswell (1980), p. 74.

²¹ Taylor (1997), p. 346.

in Nanda's book, one hijra calls another hijra "a real man" for having been married to a woman prior to becoming a hijra. She continues, in no unclear terms, "[t]o be a hijra you should not have any relations with a woman".²² However, in the relatively more "bi-normative" society of ancient Rome, galli were known to have sexual relations with women: "γυναῖκες Γάλλων ἐπιθυμέουσι καὶ γυναιξὶ Γάλλοι ἐπιμαίνονται, ζηλοτυπέει δὲ οὐδεὶς, ἀλλὰ σφίσι τὸ χρῆμα κάρτα ἰρὸν νομίζουσιν".²³ Though Lucian would have us believe that the galli's sexuality was sacred, regardless of the gender of their partner, Martial nonetheless was baffled by gynephilic galli, and wrote of them in derogatory tone: "Quid cum femenco tibi, Baetice Galle, barathro? / haec debet medios lambere lingua viros. / abscissa est quare Samia tibi mentula testa, / si tibi tam gratus, Baetice, cunnus erat?".²⁴

This epigram demonstrates the ancient misconception that the identity of the gallus was fundamentally based on sexual orientation. Combined with Catullus' "*odio veneris*," Martial's text indicates that the Romans held the galli to be a kind of *pathicus*, or male homosexual. Apuleius, in fact, does not refer to the galli as *spadones* or *eunuchi*, but "*cinaedi*," and he does not mention castration at all, instead considering androphilia to be their defining characteristic.²⁵ The model of the galli as basically homosexual males recurs in more recent time as well; Taylor wistfully says that the castration of the galli "is remarkable evidence of the lengths to which some homosexually oriented men will go to seek acceptance of and outlet for their sexuality".²⁶ However, the classical accounts which ascribe gynephilic sexual behavior to the galli make it implausible that androphilia was the core motivating factor in the galli's behavior. The idea that

²² Nanda (1999), p. 63.

²³ Luc. *Dea Syr.* 22.

²⁴ Mart. 3.81.

²⁵ Apul. *Met.* 8.26.

²⁶ Taylor (1997), p. 337.

gender variance is an outgrowth of sexual orientation is inconsistent with the anthropological evidence, necessitating the discussion of gender identity as a separate topic.

A common trait among all of Nanda's gender variant groups is a non-male gender identity. Gender identity is a personal "sense of being male or female, or both or neither".²⁷ Cronn-Mills indicates that the most reliable way to determine someone's gender identity is to ask them, so the ideal form of evidence would be a text which makes reference to the gender variant people's verbalizations of their own gender identity. These verbalizations take the form of gender nouns like "man" or "woman," as well as use of grammatical gender. Additionally, people from gender variant groups can use these terms in idiosyncratic and unexpected ways.

For example, Nanda says that the hijra alternate between all three linguistic genders "in variable though patterned ways," though, "they insist that people outside their community refer to hijras in the feminine gender".²⁸ This statement suggests a primacy of the feminine gender to their overall gender identity. Nanda lists several ways in which hijras communicate a female/feminine identity:

Hijras also take female names when they join the community, and they use female kinship terms for each other, such as 'sister,' 'aunty' and 'grandmother' (mother's mother). In some parts of India they also have a special, feminized language, which consists of the use of feminine expressions and intonations. In public transport or other public accommodations hijras request 'ladies only' seating, and they periodically demand to be counted as females in the census (Nanda 17).²⁹

²⁷ Cronn-Mills (2015), p. 16.

²⁸ Nanda (1999), xiv.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 17.

Despite this, hijras do not identify as “women.” A 2011 survey showed that eighty-seven percent of hijras identified as neither male nor female.³⁰ Nanda explains that many hijras believe that they are *like* women, but not actually women (Nanda xix). Aside from personal claims of gender identity, another important piece of anthropological evidence is the legal status of gender variant individuals. In India, hijras may be classified as a third-gender, which has been affirmed most recently in 2014.³¹

This contrasts sharply with the xanith. These Omani gender variant people “speak of themselves with emphasis and pride as women. They are socially classified as women with respect to the strict [Islamic] rules of segregation”.³² Despite this, the xanith use masculine grammatical gender, and the law treats them as male.³³ Therefore, there are cultures where it is possible to be a grammatically male “woman,” and there are also cultures that have grammatically female “not-women.” Also, there are people like kathoeyes in Thailand and transgender women in the West who are grammatically female and consider themselves an alternate type of woman.³⁴

Therefore, there are many possibilities for what gender identity the galli may have had. There are no known texts that were written by a gallus, so it is impossible to know firsthand whether they identified as male or female or other. However, we can infer some information from the few texts which have dialogue spoken by fictionalized gallus characters. Catullus 63 is

³⁰ Azhar (2017). In recent years, many younger hijras consider themselves to be women, in accordance with the terminology of the western transgender movement. Still, the idea that hijras can legitimately be women is rejected by many in the hijra communities. See also Nanda (1999), p. 19, and de Piccolini (2018). In this paper I prefer to consider the hijras as they were, prior to the admixture of transgender concepts of gender identity.

³¹ "India recognises transgender people as third gender" (2014). Also note that some hijras also claim to have been successfully counted as females in the census. Nanda (1999), p. 163.

³² Wikan (2012).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cronn-Mills (2015), pp. 17, 43; Nanda (1999), p. 142.

a useful example, since it deals with the transformation of Attis from a psychological perspective. Though, the poem is not a historiographical account, and it may have figurative or metaphorical meaning. The poem is sometimes considered an allegorical part of the Lesbia cycle, with Attis and Cybele standing in for Catullus and Lesbia.³⁵ Additionally, Skinner views Catullus 63 as part of a larger literary trend in which Roman (male) authors were interested in psychological depictions of mythological women; in this context Attis makes a convenient avatar for a “man identifying with a woman”.³⁶ Catullus’ depiction of the galli may therefore be subject to the poet’s own psychological projection, or otherwise contaminated by contemporary literary tropes, or affected by the use of artistic license to improve the applicability of the metaphor. Despite any ulterior meaning, the text still represents a contemporary perspective on the galli that merits investigation, since it is unique in writing about the galli on the subject of self-identity.

Within the poem, Catullus alternates between masculine and feminine grammatical gender for the galli. Immediately after castration, Attis becomes a “she:” “*niveis citata cepit manibus leve typanum*”.³⁷ When she begins speaking to her followers, she addresses them as “gallae,” in the feminine gender as well.³⁸ However, the next line after Attis’ speech refers to her as “*notha mulier*”.³⁹ Thus far in the poem, we see a gender transformation on the basis of genital modification alone: Catullus does not mention a change of dress or gender presentation anywhere in the poem, yet the poet refers to Attis as grammatically feminine, even as *mulier*.⁴⁰ Though, Attis is only a *notha mulier*; Catullus portrays the galla’s gender transition as either

³⁵ Skinner (1997), p. 131; Lockyear (1995), p. 172.

³⁶ Skinner (1997), p. 130.

³⁷ Cat. 63.8.

³⁸ Ibid, line 12.

³⁹ Ibid, line 27.

⁴⁰ Ibid, lines 27, 63.

incomplete or illegitimate. In Attis' second speech she/he contemplates her/his self-identity as a sequence of gender categories in reverse chronology: "*ego mulier, ego adulescens, ego ephebus, ego puer*".⁴¹ Furthermore, she/he explores the contradictory nature of her/his present state: "*ego Maenas, ego mei pars, ego vir sterilis ero*".⁴² The conclusion of the narrative leaves Attis' gender vague: Catullus uses the masculine pronoun *ille*, but the feminine noun *famula*.⁴³

Skinner views the use of the masculine gender for the castrated Attis as facetious. She writes that "[i]f masculine terminations finally prevail, it is only to emphasize that Attis is no longer an authentic male: in awarding her apostate the courtesy of his/her former sex (*hunc*, 78; *qui*, 80), Cybele is being sardonic".⁴⁴ This argument is cogent but reversible: perhaps Catullus is being sardonic when he uses the feminine gender, and he considers the masculine to be Attis's legitimate sex. Either way, the poem reflects an ambiguousness in the public consciousness of what a gallus/galla's true gender ought to be.⁴⁵

The next source which deals with the galli in a sustained narrative is the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. The author introduces a gallus 'guru' as "*senem cinaedum*," in the masculine gender.⁴⁶ In this scene, the gallus refers to himself as grammatically masculine,⁴⁷ but when he

⁴¹ Ibid, line 63.

⁴² Ibid, line 69.

⁴³ Ibid, line 90.

⁴⁴ Skinner (1997), p. 138.

⁴⁵ Like the hijras, the galli may have been considered a third legal sex. Valerius Maximus writes, "Genucius quidam Matris magnae Gallus a Cn. Oreste praetore urbis impetraverat ut restitui se in bona Naevi Ani iuberet, quorum possessionem secundum tabulas testamenti ab ipso acceperat. appellatus Mamercus a Surdino, cuius libertus Genucium heredem fecerat, praetoriam iurisdictionem abrogavit, quod diceret Genucium amputatis sui ipsius sponte genitalibus corporis partibus neque virorum neque mulierum numero haberi debere. conveniens Mamercus, conveniens principi senatus decretum, quo provisum est ne obscena Genucii praesentia inquinataque voce tribunalia magistratuum sub specie petiti iuris polluerentur" (7.7.6). It is unknown if this was a widespread legal opinion. As the gallus was barred from receiving his inheritance, this can also be considered a case of discrimination by a reactionary clerical official.

⁴⁶ Apul. *Met.* 8.24.

⁴⁷ Ibid, "*miser*," chapter 27.

returns home to his group, the galli address each other as “*puellae*”.⁴⁸ After that point, the galli’s grammatical gender does not come up in spoken dialogue, and the narrator continues to gender them as masculine. Though a fleeting moment in the text, the “*puellae*” bit is significant because it corroborates the notion in Catullus that the galli referred to each other as female.⁴⁹

These galli characters in these two sources appear to have a situation similar to the hijras in regards to grammatical gender: they alternate between masculine and feminine in “variable though patterned ways.” They also may have self-identified as “girls” or “women,” though there are few sources which suggest that this is the case. Moreover, keeping in mind Skinner’s idea of the “sardonic,” it is possible that the galli, or the authors who record them, were using the feminine gender in some sort of ironic sense. However, if we take these accounts at face value and note their similarities, it is possible that the galli have some sort of gender identity that fits in with gender variant groups in other cultures.

Gender presentation is a concept that is related to, but distinct from gender identity.

According to Cronn-Mills:

A person’s gender identity (or gender expression) is the way in which that person chooses to represent their gender identity in the world, regardless of that person’s biological sex.

Gender can be expressed through clothing choices, possessions, physical actions, and the kinds of jobs a person chooses, among other things.⁵⁰

So while the gender identity of the galli is not known, it is still possible to determine whether their gender expression is comparable to other gender variant groups.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 8.26

⁴⁹ Christian apologist Firmicus Maternus also claims that the galli “*negant se viros esse ... mulieres se volunt credi*” (*de errore prof. rel.* IV.2). It is unclear whether Maternus’ claim is based on the stated beliefs of the galli, or whether he is simply inferring this based on the galli’s gender presentation and castration practices.

⁵⁰ Cronn-Mills (2015), pp. 16-17.

Clothing is an obvious example. Many ancient sources agree that the galli wore “women’s” clothing and had female hairstyles.⁵¹ Apuleius gives a more elaborate description of their clothing:

*Die sequenti variis coloribus indusiati et deformiter quisque formati, facie caenoso pigmento delita et oculis obunctis graphice prodeunt; mitellis et crocotis et carbasinis et bombycinis iniecti, quidam tunicas albas in modum lanciolarum quoquoersum fluente purpura depictas cingulo subligati, pedes luteis induti calceis.*⁵²

This passage raises two questions. The first question regards the fact that the galli took up this garment “on the following day” when they went to perform for donations. What were they wearing before? Their hair, of course, must have been permanent, but is unclear whether the galli wore female clothing all the time, or only for their public performances. The situation may have been similar to the hijras, who were “absolutely required” to wear female clothing when performing, begging, or worshipping.⁵³ However, some hijras present as male outside of these “important social occasions,” while for others their female dress is part of a full-time gender expression.⁵⁴ The galli could have inhabited either end of this spectrum, or their individual members could have varied on this matter like the hijras do.

The second question raised from Apuleius regards the phrase “*deformiter formati*.” What does it mean that the galli “beautified” themselves “unbeautifully”? This turn of phrase could

⁵¹ Varro, *Saturae Menippeae*, CXLVI. 537, 24: “*muliebri ornati stola*.” *Greek Anthology*, I.6.219: “*θηλυχίτων, ἀσκητὸς εὐσπείροισι κορύμβοις, ἀβρῶ τε στρεπτῶν ἄμματι κεκρυφάλων*.” Firmicus Maternus, *de errore prof. rel.*, IV.2: “*exornant muliebriter nutritos crines*.” Lucian, *Dea Syr.* 51: “*ἔσθητά τε θηλέην καὶ κόσμον τὸν γυναικίῳ λαμβάνει*.”

⁵² Apul. *Met.* 8.27.

⁵³ Nanda (1999), p. 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

either indicate a general scorn for the galli's physical appearance on the part of the author, or it could mean that the galli's version of femininity was deliberately stylized, even grotesque.

Nanda describes the hijras' performance costume as an exaggeration of normal female appearance, "almost to the point of caricature".⁵⁵ Therefore, the galli's "formal attire" may have been either earnestly gynomimic, or stylized and drag-like, similar to the hijras. The sources are unclear on this matter, though any position on this continuum is consistent with gender variant behavior in different cultures.

Gender presentation goes beyond physical appearance, though: it extends to behaviors and activities which are coded as either male or female. For instance, Augustine describes the galli as having a feminine gait: "*fluentibus membris incessu femineo*".⁵⁶ Apuleius indicates high-pitched voices as well: "*fracta et rauca et effeminata voce*".⁵⁷ Their rituals also may have been intended as expressing female-coded behavior, or a certain version of it. The galli's performances involved wild musicality: "*πολλοὶ δὲ σφίσι παρεστεῶτες ἐπαυλέουσι, πολλοὶ δὲ τύμπανα παταγέουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ αἰείδουσιν ἔνθεα καὶ ἰρὰ ἄσματα*".⁵⁸ Catullus' Attis calls herself a *Maenas*, equating these ecstatic rituals of the galli with those of female devotees of Bacchus.⁵⁹

The galli also practiced flagellation, which may itself have had female-coded connotations in Roman religion.⁶⁰ However, the galli's flagellation practices may have had a special emphasis on bloodshed; Apuleius says "*Cernerer prosectu gladiatorum ictuque flagrorum*

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

⁵⁶ August. *de civitate Dei* 7.26.

⁵⁷ Apul. *Met.* 8.26.

⁵⁸ Luc. *Dea Syr.* 50.

⁵⁹ Cat. 63.69.

⁶⁰ Compare the playful whipping of women during the Lupercalia (Plut. Caes. 61), and the depiction of a female initiate in a mystery cult being whipped in a mural in the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii. Donovan (2012).

solum spurcitia sanguinis effeminati madescere.⁶¹ Moreover, the galli's festival day was also called the *dies sanguinis*.⁶² The ritual focus on blood is similar to the hijras, whose castration practices encourage the maximization of bloodshed, as the bloodflow is considered to be the maleness leaving the body.⁶³ Therefore there are two routes by which the galli's flagellation may have supported a female presentation: either through the female sexual connotations of the whip in local Roman tradition, or through the ritual gender transformation enacted by the bloodshed in shared gallo-hijra tradition.

The evidence for female gender presentation in the galli is therefore mostly confined to descriptions of their rites, and the clothing and other practices involved therein. This is enough evidence to further demonstrate similarity to the hijras, but to make a definitive claim about full-time gender presentation, we would need to have a source that describes the galli in their lives beyond their ritual functions. However, descriptions of their ritual are at least consistent with a form of gender presentation that would be consistent with other gender variant groups.

In this paper I have investigated the possibility that the galli were gender-variant people. In this regard, the primary sources are vague and do not deal with the psychology of the galli as individuals enough to make definitive claims. Moreover, as a group they do not always exhibit consistent features across the many contemporary accounts which attempt to describe them. This ambiguity is ultimately not a problem. Consider this passage from Nanda's introduction to the hijras:

What is noteworthy about the hijras is that the role is so deeply rooted in Indian culture that it can accommodate a wide variety of temperaments, personalities, sexual needs,

⁶¹ Apul. *Met.* 8.28.

⁶² Vermaseren (1997), p. 97.

⁶³ Nanda (1999), p. 28.

gender identities, cross-gender behaviours, and levels of commitment without losing its cultural meaning.⁶⁴

Based on the classical evidence, the galli likely functioned in the same way. The galli may have variously fit the role of *sacerdos*, *pathicus*, or *notha mulier* from individual to individual. What is definitely true is that contemporary anthropological discourse on gender variance has shed light on a new dimension of the galli's identities and behaviors.

⁶⁴ Nanda (199), pp. 19-20.

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