Foucault, Early Christian Ideas of Genitalia, and the History of Sexuality

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This article is a combination of historiographic theoretical revision and a close reading of medical, philosophical, and theological texts referring to the genitalia between 50 BCE and 450 CE. The Latin noun *pudenda*, which became a common term in the theological and medical writing of antiquity, innovated the localization of sexual shame in a specific part of the external generative organs: the *genitalia*. The adjectival form of *genitalia*—*genital*—first appeared only around the mid-first century CE.[1] But Roman uses of "genital" differed in a fundamental way from the reconstruction of the nominal form in early Christian theology between the first and fifth centuries. This article is about that important conceptual transformation, which helped to externalize sexual matters by focusing on the external genitalia as the locus of concupiscence. A focus on the localization of shame and externality in relation to sexual urges in early Christian theology formed just one part of Michel Foucault's unfinished fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*, which was only released "unedited" by the French publisher Gallimard in 2018, some thirty-four years after it was written.[2] This text, on which Foucault was working when he died in 1984, promised to show how early medieval Christian ideas about sexual pollution, sin, and renunciation contributed to the long historical emergence of the modern sexual self. Despite the unfinished nature of the volume, the fragments of it that have been available to readers over the past thirty-four years have played an important role in stimulating historical scholarship on sexual matters in antiquity and the Middle Ages; but they have also polarized critics and left many questions unanswered.[3] Foucault's central argument

[1] J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 55.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair*, vol. 4 of *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

[3] See Ross Balzaretti, "Michel Foucault, Homosexuality and the Middle Ages," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 37, no. 1 (1994): 1–12; Daniel Boyarin and Elizabeth Castelli,

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about confession and subjectivity found in this volume amounted to a directional claim about the movement of sexual desire inward; he described it as a matter of conscience and self-monitoring.[4] But in other parts of the book, he discussed the ideas about genitalia in the writing of Clement of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo, paying close attention to the new forms of externalized agency attributed to these organs. There is little indication that Foucault planned to do more work on the history of ideas about genitalia specifically. This article elaborates on his discussion of early Christian thought about genitals, proposing a ground for historiographic reconsideration of the conceptual changes occurring in late antiquity in relation to sexual anatomy. The first part considers uses of the term *genitalia* in Aristotle and in Roman sources; the second part focuses on descriptions of hyena genitalia in Greek and Latin medical sources and in the writing of Clement of Alexandria; while the third section examines Saint Augustine's description of genitalia in the Fall and the novel attribution of concupiscence in this new vision of genital urges.

The history of genitalia is an unacknowledged field in the historiography of sexuality, but it is found in the work not only of Foucault but also of Thomas Laqueur, Pierre Payer, John Baldwin, Helen King, Sarah Rodriguez, Robert Darby, Camille Nurka, and myself.[5] It provides a potentially valuable focus for studies of medical, anatomical, theological, and legal texts that predate the nineteenth-century formation of the concept of sexuality. As Arnold Davidson has observed, there is a basic

"Introduction: Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*: The Fourth Volume, or, A Field Left Fallow for Others to Till," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 3–4 (2001): 357–74; David Halperin, "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality," *Representations,* Summer 1998, 93–120; Karma Lochrie, "Desiring Foucault," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 3–16; and Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz, eds., *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[4] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 78–145.

[5] John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 108–18, 200–236; Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 35–58, 145–66; Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1998); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Sarah B. Rodriguez, *Female Circumcision and Clitoridectomy in the United States: A History of a Medical Treatment* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014); Robert Darby, *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Camille Nurka, *Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery: Deviance, Desire and the Pursuit of Perfection* (New York: Palgrave, 2019); Alison M. Moore, "Victorian Medicine Was Not Responsible for Repressing the Clitoris: Rethinking Homology in the Long History of Women's Genital Anatomy," *Signs: The Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 1 (August 2018): 53–81; and Moore, "Relocating Marie Bonaparte's Clitoris," *Australian Feminist Studies* 24, no. 60 (April 2009): 149–65.

theoretical problem that we all face of knowing "what one is writing a history of when one writes a history of sexuality," a problem that Amy Richlin notes has been most troubling for historians of premodern sexual questions.[6] It would, in a strictly nominalist sense, be anachronistic to refer to the early Christian "history of sexuality," but a focus on genitalia and pudenda both is linguistically consistent with the sexual concepts of antiquity and provides traction on the way bodily experiences and anatomical parts were reconfigured in this period in ways that produced lasting historical impacts on the instrumentalization of sexual matters in moral and political terms. While it is beyond the scope of this article to account for these impacts, I gesture to the work of John Boswell, Norman Cohn, John Baldwin, Michael Barbazat, and Maryse Simon, who have all considered the important instrumentalization of sexual matters—often explicitly referencing genitalia—in heresy and witchcraft accusations from the eleventh to the seventeenth century.[7] Without a preformed concept of external genitalia as agents of sinful will, it is hard to imagine how these forms of sexual accusation could have emerged.

Genital Origins

Etymologists agree on the origin of the word "genital" in English and other Latin-based languages, claiming that it derives from the classical Latin verb *gignere* (to beget), which produces the past participle *genitus* and the noun *genitalis*.[8] Used by Seneca, Ovid, Vergil, Tacitus, Lucretius, Pliny the Elder, Quintilian, and Columella, this word had an accepted classical meaning in referring to all things relating to generation or birth and was often used metaphorically to describe "fruitful activities." But in the early Christian period (from the first to the fifth

[6] Arnold Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 30; Amy Richlin, "Sexuality and History," in *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory*, ed. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 300–302. See also Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, eds., *Sex before Sexuality: A Premodern Reader* (London: Polity, 2011); and Lochrie, McCracken, and Schultz, *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*.

[7] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 138–40; Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 110–12; Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 108–18; Michal D. Barbazat, "Bodies of Spirit and Bodies of Flesh: The Significance of the Sexual Practices Attributed to Heretics from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 3 (2016): 387–419; Maryse Simon, "Sexual Crimes in the Early Modern Witch Hunts," in *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France*, ed. Alison M. Moore (New York: Cambria, 2012), 27–42.

[8] T. F. Hoad, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), "genital"; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1966), 648.

century CE), this word took on a more specific meaning, referring to the external, visible organs of reproduction, which were now viewed as the originary source of lust. This both was a more anatomical meaning and reflected the movement toward localizing the origin of sexual urges within specific body parts. The word appeared in Old French in the fourteenth century as *génitalis*.[9] But another word with a similar meaning also made its appearance in Latin in the first century of the Common Era: *pudenda*, from the Latin verb *pudēre* (to shame), giving rise also to *pudor* (chastity). *Pudenda* was the word used by Galen, by Clement of Alexandria, and by Augustine to designate the genitalia, and its early uses spanned both medical and theological modes of description. The adjectival form only appeared in the fifteenth century as *pudibundus* (shameful), which in turn gave rise to the Old French *pudibond* around the mid-sixteenth century.[10]

It is not surprising that distinct adjectives both for classifying the genital organs as the origin point of lust (genitalia) and for attributing shame to them (pudenda) became part of the vocabulary of classical Latin scholars both medical and theological, since in the period between the first and fourth centuries, the genitals indeed took on a life of their own in cultural expressions of multiple genres. The remarkable featuring of genitals in the work of several important early Christian thinkers and the emerging medical neologistic classification of them as a generic variety of bodily organ reveal a significant turning point in the long historical development of sexual concepts. Naming the genitalia as something placed apart from the rest of the body indicated the separation of sexual matters as a distinct category of experience. While the early Christian figurations of sexual sin and renunciation imbued the genitalia with much of their shameful character and significance, the category designation was Roman in origin. Certainly, some Romans inferred shame to genitalia.[11] To understand precisely what the church fathers crafted de novo, then, we need to look closely at how the genitals and sexual urges were described in texts that discussed them just prior to the emergence of a distinct Christian theology of sexual sin.

Ancient and classical medical descriptions of the organs of generation in all sexes (men, women, and hermaphrodites) and of the mechanisms of reproduction were mechanistically detailed, as several significant works of scholarship on ancient and classical medicine have demonstrated.[12] Galen of Pergamon (130–210 CE) based many of his anatomical observations on the dissection and vivisection of monkeys and pigs not because

[9] *Dictionnaire le Petit Robert* (Paris: Les Dictionnaires Robert, 1984), 860.

[10] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, "pudendum"; *Dictionnaire le Petit Robert*, 1564.

[11] Adams, *Latin Sexual Vocabulary,* 51–57.

[12] King, *Hippocrates' Woman*; and Laqueur, *Making Sex.*

human cadaver dissection was forbidden by Roman law but because it was subject to a certain, though not omnipresent, cultural stigma. Human dissection had similarly been stigmatized in ancient Greece but was conducted in the pursuit of medical knowledge by physicians such as Herophilus of Chalcedon and possibly also Eriastratus of Chios in the early third century BCE, though not by either Aristotle or Hippocrates, who, like Galen, dissected only animals.[13] Galen's second-century CE *De usu partium* (*On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*) and his *De semine* (*On Semen*), along with Aristotle's fifth-century BCE Τῶν περὶ τὰ ζῷα ἱστοριῶν (*History of Animals*) and Περὶ ζῴων γενέσεως (*On the Generation of Animals*), were among the most important reference works on genitalia in classical medical curriculum and were not subject to any explicit major revision until the sixteenth century. This was not for lack of empirical anatomical inquiries prior to this time; instead, it was because the views of historical progress in knowledge that predominated throughout the Middle Ages tended to value intellectual tradition as higher in authority than any apparent innovation.[14]

Nonetheless, an important though largely unheralded change occurred in the early Christian descriptions of the genitals. The word *genitalia* had existed since late antiquity but had not carried the same connotation now attributed to it as the place where sexual urges derived. Roman anatomical descriptions did not distinguish the external genitalia from the internal parts of the reproductive system by classifying them as having any special or originary significance either in the generative mechanism or in the production of pleasure. As Peter Brown explained, classical views of sex described "the same heat and vital spirit as glowed in the stars" as animating humans, with sexual pleasure produced by the whole body "as the fiery vital spirit swept through the veins, turning the blood into the whitened foam of semen."[15] *Semen* in antique Latin referred to the generative seed that the ancients believed was produced in both men's and women's bodies and was then combined in the moment of conception to produce new life. It did not carry the specifically masculine sexed connotation that the word "semen" has in modern English. Numerous philosophers and medical scholars referred to the idea that the sensation of pleasure in sex was the very sensation of the generative seed coursing through the body. As Brown also remarked, the classical view of generation and pleasure tended to implicate the whole body in the mechanism of seminal emission: "The genital regions were mere points of passage."[16]

[13] Geoffrey Lloyd, "Alcamaeon and the Early History of Dissection," *Sudhoffs Archiv* 59, no. 2 (1975): 113–17.

[14] J. G. A. Pocock, "Perceptions of Modernity in Early Modern Historical Thinking," *Intellectual History Review* 17, no. 1 (2007): 55–63.

[15] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 17.

[16] Brown, 17.

One of the earliest recorded uses of the Latin adjective *genitālis* appears to have been in the work of the Roman philosopher and poet Lucretius, in *De rerum natura* (On the nature of things), produced around 50 BCE. Here, as in Galen's later usage, the "genital parts" (*partis genitalis*) refer to a point of exit, where the seed of generation produced by the whole body meets at an apex; being bottled-up and unable to release any other way, it creates concentrated local stirrings that prompt the body to emit it:

> Sollicitatur id in nobis, quod diximus ante,
> semen, adulta aetas cum primum roborat artus.
> namque alias aliud res commovet atque lacessit;
> ex homine humanum semen ciet una hominis vis.
> quod simul atque suis eiectum sedibus exit,
> per membra atque artus decedit corpore toto,
> in loca conveniens nervorum certa cietque
> continuo partis genitalis corporis ipsas.[17]

Indeed, repeatedly throughout this poem, Lucretius referred to the effects of Venus and Cupid on man as originating from the "corpore toto" (whole body) and not from the genital parts themselves—though these parts were now specifically named. English translations of Lucretius produced throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically omitted reference to the genitals in this passage,[18] though it is rendered both accurately and poetically in the William Ellery Leonard translation of 1916:

> That seed is roused in us when once ripe age
> Has made our body strong
> As divers causes give to divers things
> Impulse and irritation, so one force
> In human kind rouses the human seed
> To spurt from man. As soon as ever it issues,
> Forced from its first abodes, it passes down
> In the whole body through the limbs and frame,
> Meeting in certain regions of our thews [sinews],
> And stirs amain the genitals of man.[19]

Aristotle had previously addressed the question of whence the generative seed / pleasure originates, noting, as Lucretius later evoked,

[17] Carus Titus Lucretius, *De rerum natura,* Perseus Digital Library, bk. 4, lines 1037–44.

[18] See, for instance, Cyril Bailey's translation, Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 178.

[19] Lucretius, *Of the Nature of Things*, trans. William Ellery Leonard (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1916), 115. A more recent though less elegant translation of this verse can be found in Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things: De rerum natura,* trans. Walter Englert (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2003), 119.

that others in his time claimed it to gather from the "whole body."[20] They claimed this, he said, on the grounds of the tremendous pleasure of coitus, which suggested that many parts of the body must contribute to it, since the greater the sum of contributing parts, the greater the pleasure.[21] But Aristotle doubted the whole-body thesis of seminal origination, arguing instead that the seed must come from some specific place, which he thought would be the heart. "The seminal purgations are from the regions of the diaphragm," which he considered apparent, since "the first principle of nature is there."[22] He insisted that the sexes were not distinguished merely by their differing generative apparatus; instead, "the whole animal differs greatly in form along with it." He cited the example of eunuchs, who though they were men "mutilated in one part alone, depart so much from their original appearance and approximate closely to the female form."[23] He also established a hierarchy of the body in which the head and upper torso were deemed to develop first, while the lower body was secondary. From the upper the lower could be made, but the reverse would not be true.[24] This was because the development of the animal required heat generated by the heart, from which the head would next form, and only lastly the lower body.[25] Nonetheless, the generative parts could impact the rest of the body, as evidenced by the example of the eunuch and by the example of those who indulged in too much intercourse and who "are seen to have their eyes sunken in."[26]

Hippocrates too had indicated something of a "whole body" thesis of semen and sexual pleasure production toward the end of the fourth century BCE. Hippocratic descriptions of the genital sensations were indeed so dispersed as to be found in the writings on bones. Following the vasculature of the body, the text on the nature of bones proposed that vessels connecting the bone marrow to the lower abdomen fed into the uterus in women and into the testicles in men, where the blood was nourished by "the most copious and purest components of the body." The vessels then compressed, secreting a concentrated substance into the vessels of the penis and vagina: "The pleasure felt at this time arises from the vessels—used at other times to contain some blood and breath-like material—being filled with seed. When the vessel becomes full and warm, as the semen flows down and collects together in it compressing its contents, the breath in it, being subjected to the force present, the

[20] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, bk. 1, trans. Arthur Platt, in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, Loc26552–640.
[21] Aristotle, bk. 1, Loc26566.
[22] Aristotle, bk. 2, Loc27492–93.
[23] Aristotle, bk. 4, Loc28150.
[24] Aristotle, bk. 4, Loc27327.
[25] Aristotle, bk. 4, Loc27372.
[26] Aristotle, bk. 4, Loc27478.

warmth, and the tension of the small vessels on all sides, produces a titillation."[27]

Writing sometime in the second century CE, Galen referred to both Hippocrates and Aristotle but described the locus of pleasure as originating in a specific part of the reproductive anatomy, though this was still not the genitals. "Aristotle did not know the power of the testicles," Galen wrote in *De semine*, explaining his gentle divergence from the master.[28] In his discussions of the part played by men and women in generation, he refuted those who, like Aristotle, claimed that only the male semen was generative. Women also had semen, he insisted, and it too contributed to the generation of new life.[29] In the course of arguing his case along these lines, Galen elaborated an account of sexual urges as originating from the testes—the term he used to describe both male testicles and female ovaries. As Thomas Laqueur famously demonstrated in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Galen was exemplary of the classical tendency to describe female genital structures as formally inverted and diminished male structures, or what Laqueur called "homology" (using a modern developmental biological expression—not Galen's).[30] But the question of whether Galen considered the sexes to have merely different versions of much the same parts is less clear than it may at first seem. Certainly, Galen used the Greek term "testes" or "testicle" (ὄρχις), from which we derive the English name for the orchid, and the word "semen" (σπέρματος), meaning "seed," from which we derive the English word "sperm." But these were terms in ancient Greek that were customarily used in this non-sex-specific way. This usage strikes us as odd today because of our highly sex-specific designations for all the parts of the reproductive anatomy of animals, including humans. But it is worth remembering that our conventions here only arose in Latin during the mid-seventeenth century, when the word "ovum" (ovary), meaning "egg," first began appearing as the female-specific term, initially only in reference to plants.[31]

For Galen, it seemed clear that the testes produced sexual desire in both men and women and that their differing form determined the divergent expression of either masculinity or femininity. It was in the vessels of the testes that blood was concentrated, concocted, and transformed into semen in both sexes, and it was here that new life formed when they mixed together during coitus. He took as evidence of this the fact that both men

[27] Hippocrates, *Nature of Bones*, vol. 9, trans. Paul Potter, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 41.

[28] Galen, *On Semen*, ed. and trans. Phillip de Lacy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), bk. 1, 113–14.

[29] Galen, bk. 2, 157–61.

[30] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 4.

[31] Victor C. Medvei, *The History of Clinical Endocrinology: A Comprehensive Account of Endocrinology from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Carnforth: Parthenon Publishing, 1993), 72.

and women could have wet dreams, "females experiencing effusions in sleep as males do," indicating that sexual pleasure must follow semen production.[32] In this context, he referenced the case of a sick widow whose story he had told (rather coyly, as Helen King notes) in *On the Affected Places*. The long-widowed woman was treated by a midwife, whose remedies caused the widow to expel copious semen, provoking in her the same pleasure and pain as a woman feels in coitus, after which the widow was cured.[33] To retain the semen without pleasure, Galen implied, was a health risk.

Removing the testes in a man would take away both his desire and his masculinity, which would surely be seen as "a godsend to those who wished to abstain from sexual acts," Galen remarked wryly, alluding to the emergent fashion of mystical sects that began celebrating sexual renunciation as a spiritual virtue. Similarly, he insisted, "If you excise the testicles of the female, in that state it never feels sexual desire, nor does it admit the male for sexual congress, and it loses, as one might say, its femininity."[34] So it was only on account of their respective testes that men and women were fully man and woman: "This power is in males the cause of strength and masculinity; in females it is the cause of their very femininity."[35] Here we follow Joan Cadden and Helen King in doubting Laqueur's interpretation of Galenic genital anatomy as evincing a "one-sex model."[36] Galen believed that although men and women both had testes and semen, their character was so specific to each that it would fully determine the qualities of masculinity and femininity in the bodies of men and women.

So it is neither in Aristotle, nor in Hippocrates, nor in Galen that we find the concept of genitalia as the originating organs of sexual pleasure. Perhaps it is significant that for Aristotle pleasure originated in the diaphragm, whereas for Galen it had moved farther down to the testes. But these accounts still portrayed the genitals as mere conduits for a seminal energy that was generated elsewhere—deep inside bodies, in our bones, in our hearts, through our veins, but not in those surface structures that are visible from the outside. Emergent discussions of genitalia as the originating organ of sexual urges appeared between the second and fifth centuries CE in the writing of the early Christian theologians Clement of Alexandria (150–215) and Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) in the context of the shifting meaning of sexual renunciation from the desert father traditions as they were transmitted into both the eastern

[32] Galen, *On Semen*, bk. 2, 153.

[33] Helen King, "Galen and the Widow: Towards a History of Therapeutic Masturbation in Ancient Gynaecology," *EuGeStA: Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 1 (2011): 218.

[34] Galen, *On Semen*, bk. 2, 121–23.

[35] Galen, bk. 2, 137.

[36] King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 7–11; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3. See also Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

and western Roman Empire. This transmission entailed an important transformation, as both Peter Brown and Foucault (in the fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*) have argued.[37] Aristotle remained an important influence on the work of both Clement and Augustine, who, in turn, remained important figures of recurrent Catholic theological citation throughout the Middle Ages. But a major anatomical revision had nonetheless occurred; by localizing sexual urges in the visible organs of the genitals, early Christian theology made sexual questions matter as never before by separating those parts of the reproductive anatomy that contained the seed of generation from those shameful parts (*pudenda*) in which lust stirred.

Clement of Alexandria, like Aristotle, Galen, and many others before him, compared the sex organs of humans with those of other animals, especially hyenas and hares. Hyenas were viewed as the quintessential example of how animals lacked the human capacity for rational moral management of genital urges and so might copulate to extreme excess and in ways superfluous to reproduction. Augustine had nothing to say about hyenas but much to say about genitals, lust, and material animality, as I consider in the final part of this article. Unlike either Aristotle and Galen, Clement and Augustine engaged in considerable exegesis on the location of sexual urges in the newly designated *pudenda* and drew important distinctions between the state of the genitals before and after the Fall. They insisted that it was in the "nature" of our genital organs to urge us toward both fulfillment of God's plan (generation) and sinful pollution.[38] The genitals now mattered crucially in salvation, and their material urges had to be constantly resisted to make sure that the flesh followed the path of light.

Of Hyena Genitals

Hyenas, more than any other animal throughout history, have been and continue to be used as pedagogic examples of how we should or should not behave sexually, what to fear in ourselves, or to celebrate about our ambiguity.[39] They have only been partially displaced in that role by apes following the nineteenth-century emergence of Darwinian evolutionary thought.[40] My discussion of hyenas here mainly focuses on just a few of the long-dead people whose ideas about them were the

[37] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 362; Foucault, *Les aveux*, 295–361.

[38] Foucault, *Les aveux,* 29–35.

[39] Anna Wilson, "Sexing the Hyena: Intraspecies Readings of the Female Phallus," *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 755–90; Marianna Szczygielska, "Hyenas and Hormones," *Angelaki* 22, no. 2 (2017): 61–84.

[40] Londa Schiebinger, "Mammals, Primatology and Sexology," in *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184–209.

first to be recorded—namely, Aristotle and Clement of Alexandria—and on just one thinker who commented on these long-dead ideas: Michel Foucault. Foucault appears to have been one the first scholars to examine the importance of hyena sex in the thought of Clement of Alexandria, possibly following John Boswell's brief discussion of the question in his 1980 book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*.[41] The unfinished fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* includes a lengthy discussion of how the hyena figured in Clement's conception of sexual sin.[42] Clement had much to say about the hyena as a symbol of the danger to act lasciviously that threatened humans' connection to God. Humans and animals shared the same anatomical urges, he argued, which must be stringently resisted for humans to move closer to God. Why did hyenas more than other animals symbolize this problem for Clement? Spotted hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) have a pattern of sexual dimorphism that is puzzling to casual human visual observation. Females are generally slightly larger than males, and hyena social hierarchy is matrilineal, with females dominating the pack. Females have a clitoris as large as the male's penis, which is licked by other pack members in subordination to the alpha female. The clitoris is capable of erection but also dilates to become the birth canal—a trait found in no other animal.[43] All this has resulted in a fantastic array of misunderstandings of hyena sexual nature throughout history. Captured females have probably often been thought to be males on account of their large clitorises, with their vaginas described as additional and unnecessary faux-vaginal pouches. As Holger Funk shows, the female hyena's genitalia were only fully described and understood for the first time at the end of the eighteenth century by the Dutch amateur zoologist Robert Jacob Gordon, though the discovery is most often falsely attributed to the English anatomist Morrison Watson in the 1870s.[44]

Literary scholar Anna Wilson has described the spotted hyena's genitals as causing "productive trouble for a gendering system based on visible difference because both males and females appear to have a penis."[45] At the turn of the second century, however, the hyena's sexual nature became productively troubling for another reason—because it could be taken to represent sexual excess and unbridled lust. The

[41] Boswell, *Christianity*, 138–40.

[42] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 9–51.

[43] L. G. Frank and S. E. Glickman, "Giving Birth through a Penile Clitoris: Parturition and Dystocia in the Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)," *Journal of the Zoological Society of London* 234 (1999): 659–90; Gerald R. Cunha et al., "Development of the External Genitals: Perspectives from the Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)," *Differentiation* 87, no. 1–2 (2014): 4–22.

[44] Holger Funk, "R. J. Gordon's Discovery of the Spotted Hyena's Extraordinary Genitalia in 1777," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 2 (2012): 303–28.

[45] Wilson, "Sexing the Hyena," 756.

hyena became a unique object of Christian moral attachment through the Church Fathers' engagement with both Aristotelian and Platonic thought, an obsession that was apparent, as Foucault remarked, in the writing of Clement of Alexandria. Clement's interpretation of zoology in the *Pedagogus*—a work written around 198 CE—inserted the hyena into an emerging new definition of the genitals (now called *pudenda*) as the specific organs of concupiscence. But myths about the hyena's genitalia were older even than this. Aristotle referred to other thinkers before him, namely, Herodorus of Heraclea, who authored a work of history around 400 BCE and who claimed that hyenas have the genitalia of both sexes at once and were capable of self-impregnation by switching their sex at will.[46] The claim had appeared also in the sixth-century Greek oral tales collated three centuries later and known as *Aesopica*, or *Aesop's Fables*.[47] In fact, Aristotle appeared to find the question barely interesting, and he dismissed the sex-change claim as unlikely, referring to a nonfunctional pouch in male hyenas that others may have mistaken for a vaginal canal.[48] He also noted that the female hyena "has the part that resembles the organ of the male," but he figured that much confusion and little exact knowledge prevailed on the matter of hyena sex differences because females had rarely been caught. He said he knew one hunter who told him that of eleven hyenas he had caught, only one had been female.[49] It seems likely that the "failure" of people in the ancient world to catch female hyenas was probably due to the similarity of the males and females both in body size and in their external sexual structures, such that the female hyenas that were caught were presumed to be male. But for this same reason it is also not surprising that hyenas have been commonly thought to change sex or to be hermaphroditic. As Foucault noted, Herodorus's reported claim should probably be contextualized in relation to the tendencies of Epicurean thought in ancient Greece, which presented examples of sex change as a sign that the world was not divinely created. Considering this context, Aristotle's rejection of the sex-changing hyena hypothesis may have represented a larger denial of the Epicurean claim to nondivinity, which in turn made his arguments assimilable to early Christian cosmology.[50]

The widespread reading of Aristotle in Roman antiquity certainly did nothing to overturn the sex-change myth in non-Christian texts

[46] Fritz Graf, "Herodorus," in *Brill's New Pauly*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, trans. Christine F. Salazar, Brill Online Reference Works, 2006, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e511310.

[47] *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 366.

[48] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, trans. Arthur Platt, in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, bk. 3, sec. 6, p. 48.

[49] Aristotle, *The History of Animals,* trans. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, bk. 6, sec. 32, p. 116.

[50] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 29.

of that time. In the first century, both the poet Ovid and the natural philosopher Pliny the Elder reiterated the account of hyena sex-changing capacity. Ovid expressed this view in the context of marveling at animals that can self-camouflage and change their form: "And if there is any wondrous novelty in these things, *still more* may we be surprised that the hyena changes its sex, and that the one which has just now, as a female, submitted to the embrace of the male, is now become a male itself."[51] Pliny the Elder reported both the sex-change myth and Aristotle's objection to it: "The common people believe that hyenas possess a double nature, and that every second year they change sex, from males to females, and that the latter bear without the male; but Aristotle denieth it."[52] Pliny claimed, like Aristotle, that females have rarely been captured. But alongside the array of spectacular popular beliefs about hyenas that Pliny cited (they are the only animals to dig up graves and eat corpses; their eyes can change color; any dog that walks within a hyena's shadow becomes mute), his neutral reportage of Aristotle's objection to the sex-change thesis is given negligible force.[53] The second-century work on hunting by Oppian of Cilicia (also known as Oppian of Ananazarbus), which was dedicated to Marcus Aurelius, reiterated similar views about hyenas to those of Pliny, adding that its pelt was celebrated by minstrels: "If thou wert to cut off a piece of hide of the Hyena and wear it on thy feet, thou wouldst wear a great terror of mighty Dogs, and Dogs bark not at thee wearing those shoes, even if they barked before." Oppian also reported having heard that the "male and female [spotted hyena] change year by year, and one is now a weak-eyed bridegroom all eager to mate and anon appears as a lady bride, a bearer of children, and a goodly mother."[54]

The Epistle of Barnabas or *Letter of Bar Naba* (Επιστολή Βαρνάβα) was an early second-century Greek text cited by several of the church fathers that claimed to find a dietary prohibition in the writings of Moses (though no such prohibition appears there).[55] It claimed that hyena meat was forbidden because of the hyena's sex-changing nature: "Nor will you eat the hyena, meaning you will not be an effeminate-seducer-of-children or a wanton-abortive-fornicator or any such person, because the hyena's traits change each year, becoming like a male one year and

[51] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: Bell & Sons, 1893), bk. 15, verses 412–13, p. 533.

[52] Pliny the Elder, *Pliny's Natural History in Thirty-Seven Books*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: George Barclay, 1847), vol. 1, bk. 8, chap. 30, p. 54.

[53] Pliny the Elder, 55.

[54] Oppian of Cilicia, *Cynegetica, or The Chase*, in *Oppian, Colluthus, Tryphiodorus,* trans. A. W. Mair, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), bk. 3, p. 137.

[55] Robert M. Grant, *Early Christians and Animals* (London: Routledge, 1999), 45.

like a female the next."[56] Another source of the myth was an anonymous Greek Christian text produced in the second or third century, the *Physiologus*, which had an enduring influence on medieval medical thought following its translation into Latin just before 400 CE.[57] It became one of the most widely copied and read texts of the Middle Ages.[58] It recounted a fable entitled "On the Hyena or the Brute," which falsely attributed a dietary prohibition to the Old Testament. The hyena was an "*arenotelicon*" (referring to a mythical beast that was common in medieval bestiaries), "that is, an alternating male-female. . . . [I]t is unclean because it has two natures." This was the reason why it was forbidden to eat it, according to the book of Jeremiah, the author claimed, referring to a specific verse (12:9) that says no such thing.[59] The *Physiologus* was also one of several medieval bestiaries making an analogy between supposedly duplicitous Jews and sexually changeable hyenas.[60] Several scholars have focused on the accusations of sexual monstrosity that were used to reinforce arguments about Christian heresy and about other religions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[61] In *Slandering the Jew*, Susanna Drake argues that the underlying groundwork for this medieval conceptual nexus was clearly prepared in the early Christian period.[62]

But by far the most elaborate explanation of why hyena sex mattered for human morality appeared in the work of second-century theologian and church father Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens).[63] Foucault's unpublished fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*, *Les aveux de la chair* (The confessions of the flesh), begins with a lengthy analysis of Clement's *Paedagogus*.[64] This text is not commonly discussed by scholars of early Christian sexual ethics, and Foucault's consideration of it might

[56] *The Epistle of Barnabas*, ed. Jackson Snyder and Theodore Dornan, trans. J. B. Lightfoot (Jackson H. Snyder.com, 2010), 54–55.

[57] Emil Peters, *Der griechische Physiologus und seine orientalischen Übersetzungen* (Berlin: Verlag von S. Clavary und Co., 1898).

[58] Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2005), 21.

[59] *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 52–53.

[60] On Ethiopian traditions relating to the view of Jews as hyenas, see Hagar Salamon, *The Hyena People: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[61] See Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Norman Roth, "A Note on Research into Jewish Sexuality in the Medieval Period" and "A Note on Sexuality and Muslim Civilization," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 309–28; and Barbazat, "Bodies of Spirit."

[62] Susanna Drake, *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[63] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 122–39.

[64] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 18–29.

therefore be of great interest to historians of sexuality of this period. The ancient Greek original was preserved in a single damaged parchment, which was lost after being copied in the tenth century CE by Baanes for Arethas, archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and all later translations derive from this version (Codex Arethae or *Parisinus* gr.451).[65] Foucault's consideration of the *Paedogogus* refers to a French edition by the classicist Henri Marrou of the *Parisinus* ancient Greek manuscript, while my own refers to both the 2002 Brill edition of the *Parisinus* manuscript and a recent English translation.[66]

Clement was a figure of deep fascination for Foucault because Clement straddled the two worlds that Foucault sought to compare in order to elaborate his broader history of sexuality: the world of ancient Greek philosophy, with its conception of the human as a uniquely self-making animal, with sex as just one of the desires to be managed and regulated for one's betterment; and the world of early Christianity, with its depiction of how the spirit and body are at odds with one another, meaning that sex was to be regarded as the special gateway of the devil on earth. Indeed, Clement grounded many of his Christian moral admonitions in Platonic and Stoic terms that referred to the spirit as essentially androgynous. In this respect he appeared consistent with pre-Christian views of the sexes.[67] But the *Pedagogus* was also the first major work of Christian theology to elaborate the specific forms of sexual relation that were now to be viewed as sinful: same-sex practices, sex with children, prostitution, polygamy, adultery, and all sexual acts that could not result in procreation, grounding his discussion in a new model of the sexes as binary and unalterable.[68] This way of defining concupiscence persisted as an essential template in Christian theology for many centuries thereafter. In some respects, Clement was very unlike later theologians in his implicit sympathy with the Gnostic concept of equality of the sexes before God.[69] But his elaboration of how our genitals make us sin was a crucial conceptual step in the movement to viewing sexual urges as localized in external parts—as an expression of the conflict between spirit and matter created by the Fall. It was this that made it possible for sex to matter in medieval Christianity such that it could be brought into the domain of power and the policing of belief.

[65] Clementis Alexandrini, *Paedogogus*, ed. M. Marcovich (Leiden: Brill, 2002), ix.

[66] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 13n2; Clément d'Alexandrie, *Le pédagogue*, ed. Henri-Irénée Marrou (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965); Clementis Alexandrini, *Paedogogus*, Clement, *The Instructor*, ed. and trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Fathers of the Second Century*, vol. 2 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2015).

[67] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 35–36.

[68] Boswell, *Christianity*, 138–40.

[69] Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, bk. 3, *Alexandrian Christianity*, ed. Henry Chadwick, vol. 2 of *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 40–92.

While other second-century works that referred to hyena sex suggested that it could teach us something about human relations (such as the claim in the *Physiologus* that hyenas were like Jews, who therefore should not be trusted), Clement offered a far more substantial reasoning of the hyena as an animal provided by God to teach us something about our own sexual nature. Men and women were alike before God, he insisted; in this world we are men and women, but in the other world above, it was no longer so, he claimed, citing the gospel of Luke (20:34).[70] The spirit was androgynous, but all embodied beings were sexed male and female. Hence the hyena could not be a hermaphrodite, as others had claimed. For Clement, the hyena signified the iniquity of adultery, which had motivated Moses to forbid the eating of hyenas and hares (the other libidinous animal).[71] In fact, hyena meat is not forbidden in the Pentateuch (the oldest books of the Bible) at all, so Clement's mention of this indicates that he probably derived the assertion from *The Epistle of Barnabas*, which appears to have been the first text to make the claim.[72] But while agreeing with the purported prohibition, Clement did not accept the common explanation that hyena sex was changeable: "For nature never can be forced to change. What once has been impressed upon, may not be transformed into the opposite by passion. For passion is not nature, and passion is wont to deface the form, not to cast it into a new shape."[73] The claim, Clement thought, was simply a means of justifying imagined visions about hermaphrodites, by which he implied that hermaphroditism was only a fantasy. This rejection differed from the modern sexological reform of ideas about the sexes, which proposed that only pseudohermaphrodism (genital variation without dual reproductive function) was possible, which is continuous with the late twentieth-century replacement of the term with the concept of intersex. Needless to say, intersex individuals (by late twentieth-century definition) have existed throughout human history, and third sexes are referenced in numerous cultural contexts across time and place.[74] Clement was actually rejecting wholesale the notion that any mixing of sexes in earthly bodies could be permitted

[70] Clement, *The Instructor*, bk. 1, chap. 4, p. 458.

[71] Clement, bk. 2, chap. 10, p. 554.

[72] Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 431; Boswell, *Christianity*, 138.

[73] Clement, *The Instructor*, bk. 2, chap. 10, 554.

[74] Alice Dormurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Cary J. Nederman and Jacqui Tru, "The Third Sex: The Idea of the Hermaphrodite in Twelfth-Century Europe," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 4 (April 1996): 497–517. See also Alison M. Moore, "Historical Sexes," in *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) History*, ed. Howard Chiang (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019), 671–77.

at all by God, except in this one special case where it had been created for a specific pedagogic purpose. Clement reiterated what Aristotle had said about hyenas, though without mentioning him: that there was an extra pouch that the male bore between his tail and his anus and that was similar to the female pudendum. But he departed from Aristotle in interpreting the meaning of this faux vagina. Like Aristotle, he thought that it was not to be taken as an indication of the dual-sex or sex-changing capacity of the hyena. And he added an important conceptual layer to demonstrate the pedagogic nature of God's creations: the pouch indicated the hyena's excessively lustful nature, since these additional genital parts enabled "superfluo coitui superfluam" (superfluous and unnecessary coitus) that did not serve the procreative purpose of God.[75] The purported prohibition on eating the hyena's flesh symbolized that we should avoid developing a taste for lust; the hyena was God's example of sex-crazed fury, as indicated by its abnormal additional genitalia.[76]

As Foucault explored, Clement's account of hyena sex worked on several different levels at once, distinguishing an androgynous basis of the soul before God (a view influenced by Platonic thought) and a new Christian assertion of the earthly impossibility of anything clearly neither male nor female, which absorbed Aristotle's resistance to Epicurean thought.[77] For Foucault, then, these passages implicitly formed part of an emergent doctrine of the impossibility of third sexes, permitting the later medical pathologization of hermaphrodites that he described in his lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s. This reading of Clement led to his work on the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin.[78] At the same time, Foucault also discussed how Clement defined the essentially lustful nature of the genitals, which must strictly be controlled for reproductive purposes only—a concept essential to the Christian regulation of sexual sin from the time of the church fathers to the end of the medieval period. This too intrigued Foucault because it both informed the medieval Penitential codes on sexual sin and carried over even into nineteenth-century medical inventions of sexual pathologies, which continued to define "perversion" as anything nonreproductive.[79] Clement's synthesis of Platonic and Stoic thought

[75] Clement, *The Instructor*, bk. 2, chap. 10, pp. 555–56. This passage remains in medieval Latin in most modern English translations of the *Paedogogus.* Discussed also by Douglas R. McGaughey and Cornelia Cyss Crocker, *From Biblical Interpretation to Human Transformation: Reopening the Past to Actualize New Possibilities for the Future; Essays Honoring Herman C. Waetjan* (Salem, OR: Chora Strangers, 2006), 33.

[76] Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 249.

[77] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 30–31.

[78] Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin dite Alexina B.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

[79] Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, vol. 3 of *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

toward a naturalization of sexual morality differed dramatically from the later austerity of Augustine, as Foucault himself acknowledged.[80] Still, there is no doubt that Foucault was reading Clement through Augustine and through the history of medieval sexual sin, and he was framing his interpretation through an even longer history of how the sexes have been distinguished and of how genital abnormality has been historically defined. All of Foucault's engagements with antiquity are essentially of this character; they trace the specific threads of sexual discourses back as far as possible in order to explain why they appear as "givens" of modern sexual pathologization.

What Foucault did not appear to notice was that Clement's account of hyena genitalia was fundamentally different from Aristotle's in another crucial respect: the genitals could be read with this additional level of moral pedagogic meaning because, for Clement, they were the very organs that produced lust in the first place. For Aristotle, as we saw, the genitals were merely the exit point for the semen, which gathered elsewhere in the body, probably the heart or, for Hippocrates, from the bone marrow. For Lucretius it was the *corpore toto* (whole body) that formed both the pleasure and the seed, which was merely banked within the genitals, stirring them to release it. For Galen, the semen was concocted in the vessels of the testes of both sexes and could cause illness if it was not released through genital pleasure. Clement's engagement with Aristotelian ideas about animals not only added the moral lesson of sexual sin to the hyena's body for the instruction of humans but also articulated a new locus of sexual urges in those very genital structures. The hyena's genitals and ours were of the same stuff, only theirs were extreme and excessive, while ours were deeply troubling but manageable. Should we fail to manage them, though, we would throw our lot in with the hyenas and become slaves to our lust and estranged from God.

Augustine's "Theory of Libido"

The fascination of scholars with the complex sexual concepts of Augustine of Hippo, not least in the work of both Peter Brown and Michel Foucault but also of John Baldwin and Pierre Payer, is not difficult to understand, though as Margaret Miles notes, "lust" (*libidine*) for Augustine referred to many different drives and wants, not merely sexual ones.[81] Much of the excellent scholarly attention to Augustine's view of

[80] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 49.

[81] Brown, *The Body and Society*; Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 174; Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, 26–28; Margaret R. Miles, "From Rape to Resurrection: Sin, Sexual Difference and Politics," in *Augustine's "City of God": A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 75–92.

sex has focused on its role in generating the enduring Catholic legacy of sexual renunciation, based on the elaboration of the essentially sinful nature of concupiscence.[82] As Peter Brown noted, Augustine's exegesis of the Fall produced something "markedly different" from any Eastern Christian texts prior to this time.[83] For Augustine, the instructive significance of the Fall was that it remained embedded in every moment of sexual pleasure—every orgasm becomes the very reenactment of Adam and Eve's transgression as we each choose again to embrace carnal pleasure over our connection to God. As Brown notes in his discussion of the letters of Ambrose, this same concept implied an "ever-present possibility for 'unchastity' connected with the pleasure that accompanied the act of intercourse," problematizing even those sexual acts necessary for procreation.[84] But as Foucault's unfinished work demonstrates, Augustine's view of sex provided an innovative interpretation of other theological views of the Fall, producing what Foucault called an entire "théorie de la libido" (theory of libido) based on "une conception générale de l'homme de désir" (a general conception of desiring man).[85] As several scholars have also shown, Augustine's intricate ruminations on the nature of sex, marriage, virginity, chastity, and the meaning of sexual pleasure were part of a crucial mediation between, on the one hand, the austerity of Eastern monastic life, which taught strict sexual renunciation (or what Elizabeth Clark has called "the anti-familial tendencies" of ancient Christianity), and, on the other hand, a necessary benediction of the sanctity of marriage from the perspective of spreading Christian doctrine among ordinary people.[86] Augustine sought a middle position that upheld the purity of renunciation while accommodating the necessity of reproductive sex in marriage.[87] It could not be expected that married Christians would rid themselves of all pleasure in sex; nonetheless, the sinful nature of this pleasure was the very message of the Genesis tale that Augustine wished to make more widely known, mediating between the need to make Christianity appealing to married people while also honoring ascetic ideals.

But something else was also happening in Augustine's refiguration of the Fall and its function as a moral work on the self, which was the focus

[82] See, for example, Brown, *The Body and Society*; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. with epilogue (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 80–92; and Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversion and Confessions* (London: Penguin, 2015).

[83] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 338.

[84] Brown, 362.

[85] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 324.

[86] Elizabeth A. Clark, "Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 3 (1995): 356–80.

[87] Philipps and Reay, *Sex before Sexuality*, 710.

of Foucault's inquiries. In his 426 work, *De civitate Dei contra paganos* (The city of God against the pagans), Augustine speculated at length about the implication of the book of Genesis for human sexual physiology.[88] In disobeying God and tasting the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve had changed the nature of their genitals. Before the Fall, genitals could be controlled like any other part of the body: the original humans could summon them at will just as we can move our fingers, and they were not troubled by any urges stirring in their genitals. After the Fall, the genitals became pudenda—shameful volitional agents.[89] They were the organs that tempted us and drove us to distraction and sin. They were now both the originating locus of sexual urges and the experiential locus of sexual pleasure: "For after their disobedience to God's instruction, the first human beings were deprived of God's favor; and immediately they were embarrassed by the nakedness of their bodies. They even used fig leaves, which were perhaps the first things they could lay hands on in their confusion, to cover their pudenda, the 'organs of shame.' These organs were the same as they were before, but previously there was no shame attaching to them. Thus they felt a novel disturbance in their disobedient flesh, as a punishment which answered to their own disobedience."[90] The Fall had fundamentally altered the genitalia, not in their substance but in our capacity to control them. They now had a will unto themselves that mirrored the hubristic disobedience of Adam and Eve—the genitals became to us what we had been to God. Here, as in Clement's pedagogic account of the hyena, the postlapsarian genitals appeared as unique agential organs with a powerful will of their own. They were the parts generating lust and driving us toward sin. We must avail ourselves of them in order to reproduce, but we do so ever at our peril, since no longer are they the perfect generative tools of prelapsarian holiness; instead, they are corrupted pudenda parodying our own disobedience from God.

Nonetheless, the functioning of the prelapsarian genitalia troubled Augustine. If the pudenda only disobeyed our will now because of Adam and Eve's transgression, then how indeed did their genitals behave in the Garden of Eden before the Fall? Was there ever truly nonsinful sexual pleasure? Foucault tracked this aspect of Augustine's thought about sex across numerous different texts, demonstrating the intricacies, subtleties, and ambiguities of this complex philosophical theologian of antiquity, perhaps the first ever true theorist of libido. In addition to the fourteenth book of

[88] Aurelius Augustus, *De civitate Dei*, bk. 1, ed. Bernardus Dombart and Alfonsus Kalb (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1981). All subsequent citations of this work are from the modern English translation: Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. John O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1984).

[89] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 512.

[90] Augustine, 522.

De civitate Dei, where Augustine expounds the problem at greatest length, Foucault also found aspects of the theory in *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (Of marriage and concupiscence), *De bono conjugali* (On the good of marriage), *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (On Genesis against the Manichaeans), and in a number of other works.[91] By Foucault's account, Augustine consistently dismissed the question by saying that there simply was no sex before the Fall; God had yet to command Adam and Eve to do it. But he ended book 13 of *De civitate Dei* by reopening the problem and considering that Adam and Eve did indeed have fully completed genitalia and were ready to begin reproducing in paradise. If this was so, how would their genitals have worked without lust? "If sensual desire arose in the disobedient bodies of the first human beings as a result of the sin of disobedience, when they had been forsaken by divine grace, if, in the consequence, they opened their eyes to their own nakedness, that is, they observed it with anxious curiosity, and if they covered up their shameful parts because an excitement, which resisted voluntary control, made them shamed—if this is true, how would they have produced children if they had remained without sin, in the state in which they were created?"[92]

In book 14 of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine suggested that before the Fall Adam and Eve did indeed have fully functioning genitalia and might even have experienced pleasure in their activation, though they would also have been able to control this.[93] As Peter Brown notes, Augustine's later-life views on this matter were transformed by the pressures on his career following his appointment as bishop of Hippo in the early 400s. This was a context in which the contradictions between the chastity ideal of asceticism and the church blessing of marriage among the ordinary congregation appeared most acute.[94] This accounts for Augustine's emphasis on the fully endowed nature of Adam and Eve before the Fall and his evocation of the possibility of an unsullied sexual pleasure. Why else had God created two differently sexed humans if not that they should merge in coitus to reproduce? But the consequences of the Fall could also not be denied: every one of us carried its stain through the "hot act by which each new human being was conceived."[95]

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to locate the precise conceptual changes that occurred between classical and early Christian configurations of genitalia while also drawing attention to the unrecognized historiographic

[91] Foucault, *Les aveux*, 325–51.
[92] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 546.
[93] Augustine, 585–89.
[94] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 400–402.
[95] Brown, 417.

contribution of scholars who have located this peculiar historical object. The conceptual transformation described here most certainly had long-range historical impacts worthy of further investigation and beyond the scope of this article. As both Payer and Baldwin have shown, Augustine's speculations about prelapsarian genitalia were frequently cited by theologians from the early twelfth to the late thirteenth century. Pierre the Chanter, Pierre Lombard, Robert de Courçon, Thomas of Chobham, Pierre de Tarentaise, Albert of Cologne, and Thomas Aquinas all largely accepted the Augustinian account of how the Fall had produced sexual urges and of how our incapacity to control our genitals was a product of the disobedience against God that we had inherited from Adam and Eve.[96] Medieval medical texts generally remained consistent with Aristotelian and Galenic models of semen/pleasure forming elsewhere in the body and merely exiting through the genitals, and such accounts were still to be found in the English *Prose Salernitan Questions* as late as 1200.[97] But the authors of theological descriptions of desire had also adopted wholesale the new model of genitalia as pudenda: the source of lust and a gateway for the devil's interventions in earthly life. This was important, because the question of marriage and sexual sin in thirteenth-century theology became a pivotal matter of doctrine that helped to define heretics who were branded as Manichaean (dividing the cosmos between two gods).[98] Certainly, many of the apostolic sects that came under suspicion in that time preached strict celibacy in contrast to the attempts of the church to mediate between conflicting theological positions on the inherently sinful nature of sex and the sanctity of marriage.[99]

The notion of genitalia as the site of the corruption of human beings in the Fall also formed the ongoing substrate for associations of sexual depravity with all the church's invented enemies of the Middle Ages and early modern period: heretics, Muslims, witches, and lepers, whose supposed genital crimes were often described in explicit detail.[100] Sexual matters were only one component of these accusations in most cases, but they were remarkably adaptable to multiple targets, providing in each instance triggers for fear, disgust, and horror toward the "other," whoever that might be. Several historians, particularly Ruth Mazo Karras, Kim Phillips, and Barry Reay, have made important correctives to the view, implied in the work of Foucault and Payer, that medieval power

[96] Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 174; Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, 26–28.

[97] Anon., *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, ed. Brian Lawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press / British Academy, 1979).

[98] Robert I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 170.

[99] Baldwin, *The Language of Sex*, 119.

[100] Barbazat, "Bodies of Spirit"; and Simon, "Sexual Crimes"; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 110–12, 130–204.

was purely theologically driven.[101] But as both Robert Moore and Mark Pegg have demonstrated, there is also no doubt that theological texts from the early Christian period became suddenly important in new ways in the Inquisitorial construction of a threat of "eternal heresy" in the thirteenth-century Paris theological pedagogy.[102] The early Christian layers of theological representation acted to localize and externalize sexual shame as pudenda, and these configurations of genitalia helped to make sex matter for political power for centuries to come. With the long-awaited publication of Foucault's inquiries into early Christian genitalia in volume 4 of the *History of Sexuality*, there is now the opportunity for many more scholars to consider the importance of genital concepts and their role in how the sexes have been counted and characterized both in the long history of sexuality and in its historiography.

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[101] Mazo Karras, *Sexuality*, 1–4; Phillips and Reay, *Sex before Sexuality*, 17–18; and Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

[102] Moore, *The War on Heresy*, 56; Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–22.