Race, Gender, and the Male Body in Hellenistic and Roman Images of Africans

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the construction of male gender in images of Africans from the Hellenistic and early imperial Roman periods. While many of the relevant images have been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis for almost a century, previous research has primarily centred on the race of the figures and the iconographic construction of race. An intersectional framework will be applied to images of African males from approximately the second century BC to the second century AD to provide a novel perspective on the intertwined constructions of race and gender in these artworks. The material used as evidence for this study is diverse in both geography and medium, using sculptures, mosaics, paintings, and lamps from the widest stretches of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds in order to develop the fullest possible understanding of the various constructions of male gender. Evidence is thematically linked based on recurring image types and iconographic trends, and are categorised into the following: athletes, 'thaumatopoietic' performers, young, enslaved boys, and non-ideal genitalia. Ultimately, this thesis will show that the construction of African male gender in art was not grounded in reality but rather reflects a fantastical conception of African males in the Graeco-Roman imagination. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that there was not one consistent construction of African male gender, but that it was instead fluid and malleable depending on the intent of the artist and desires of the viewer. Finally, this thesis provides a justification for the application of an intersectional framework to ancient artistic material, proves the importance of reflecting upon prejudices in

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Figure 72: Statuette. Young African male, nude, dancing (?). Bronze with silver inlays. C. Early Imperial period. From Chalon-sur-Saône. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, inv. Bronze.1009. Source: BnF Médailles et Antiques catalogue https://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/1181?vc=ePkH4LF7w1I9geonpBCEJuSkovy8qlQ9oLQluGqFeQUAyHcVMg$$ (accessed 29/12/24). © Serge Oboukhoff. © BnF-CNRS-Maison Archéologie & Ethnologie, René-Ginouvès.

Figure 73: Painting. A banquet scene. C. first century AD. From the Casa del Triclinio, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 120030. Source: PompeiiinPictures https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R5/5%2002%2004%20p4.htm 29/08/24. © Johannes Eber, courtesy of Jackie and Bob Dunn.

Figure 74: Painting. Banquet scene. C. first century AD. From the Casa del Triclinio, Pompeii, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 120029. Source: Pompeii in Color, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/pompeii-in-color/objects/banquet-scene (accessed 29/08/24).

Figure 75: Balsamarium. Head of an African child. Bronze. C. second-first century BC (?). Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1955,1008.1. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1955-1008-1 (accessed 28/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Figure 76: Painting. An erotic scene between a man and a woman; an enslaved boy holding a cup. C. first century BC. From the Villa della Farnesina, Rome. Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 1188. Source: Beckmann 2023: fig. 12.

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Figure 79: Sculpture. Lampadarus or tray-bearing youth. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Casa dell'Efebo, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 143753. Source: Bielfeldt 2018: pl. 8.

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Figure 98: Wall painting. Nilotic scene: musician playing an aulos (left); macrophallic figures (centre); crocodile (right). C. AD 70. From the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Maiuri 1955: tav. I, 2. Cf. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2007%2024%20p7.htm (accessed 12/09/24).

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Figure 104: Sculpture. Elderly male. Black marble. C. AD 125-175. From the Esquiline area of Rome, Italy. Louvre, Paris, inv. Ma 1354. Source: Louvre online collections https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010275490 (accessed 22/09/25). © 2010 Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Thierry Ollivier.

Abbreviations

Ancient texts and resources have been abbreviated according to the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition.

Introduction

The iconography of Africans in ancient Graeco-Roman art is hardly an untouched subject. For almost a century, discussions about race and ethnicity in the ancient world have included the material evidence, and as a result such images have become increasingly integrated into the general discourse about art from antiquity. The images concerned span a very broad chronological and geographical range, from Minoan Crete to Classical Athens, from Hellenistic Asia Minor to Roman Britain. They are found in every medium, including small terracottas, large marble sculptures, jewellery in precious metals, and grand floor mosaics. Consequently, the relevant literature is large. Yet, until now there has been no fully intersectional approach to the imagery, undertaken with the aim of moving the focus of study beyond that of race or ethnicity in isolation, embracing other equally relevant elements of identity. That is the purpose of the present thesis.

Across four thematic case studies, an iconographic mode of analysis will be applied to investigate the external construction of male gender in representations of Africans, concentrating specifically on evidence from the Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman periods. In doing so, the aim of this thesis is to progress our understanding of the iconography of Africans, specifically African males, in this period of antiquity and the place of African males in the Graeco-Roman imagination beyond that of an understanding of racial construction. Further, the value of an intersectional framework will be proven.

Previous studies

Grace Hadley Beardsley's *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type* (1929) was the first significant study of Africans in Graeco-Roman art,[1] and has remained useful to research since its publication almost a century ago. Though not a comprehensive catalogue,[2] the work gives 289 artistic examples which, according to Beardsley, cover the 'principal types'.[3] Examples are grouped primarily by chronology, though artefacts from the fifth century and the Hellenistic period are also arranged according to medium given the large volume of evidence attributed to each of these eras. Conversely, depictions of Africans dating to after the Hellenistic period are placed under the loosely defined umbrella term 'Roman art', with little consideration for the enormous chronological or geographical span which is included in such a definition. Interspersed are brief literary interludes, considering 'Ethiopians' in Greek mythological texts and the characterisation of Africans by Roman authors. Beardsley also dedicates a short chapter to a

[1] Beardsley 1929, based on her PhD thesis of 1922 (Ako-Adounvo 1999: 5). Cf. a letter from Frank Snowden Jr, a scholar whose work will be discussed below, to civil rights activist W. E. B. DuBois, which explains that, at the time of writing in 1945, Beardsley's work was the 'only book which contains even a minimum of references to the Negro' (letter from Frank M. Snowden to W. E. B. DuBois, 28th May 1945, W. E. B. DuBois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b108-i204 accessed 07/11/24).

[2] Beardsley 1929: x acknowledges the near impossibility of such a task. Almost a century later, such a catalogue still does not exist. A recent (currently unpublished) PhD thesis by Najee Olya (2023) investigated the portrayal of Africans in Archaic and Classical Greek vase paintings and, according to the abstract, catalogued over 350 vases as part of the study, 'the first of its kind' in terms of breadth and depth of examples and information. The abstract can be found at https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public_view/jw827d14g (accessed 22/10/24). Bell 2022: 450 emphasises the importance of the creation of such a 'comprehensive corpus…that is robust, precise, and grounded', and highlights that such databases exist for images of 'other foreign peoples in the Roman empire (such as Celts and Germans), [which] speaks to the long-standing conceptual segregation of these images within the field of Roman art.'

[3] Beardsley 1929: xi.

discussion of 'the character of the Ethiopian',[4] which focuses on the, in her eyes, inherently low status held by Africans in the Graeco-Roman imagination.[5]

Despite its enduring usefulness as a scholarly resource, Beardsley's work has fundamental flaws. Some are problems with the material; not only does she generalise about 'Roman art', but she also presumes Hellenistic (and, therefore, Alexandrian)[6] origin for many artefacts generally considered to be Roman, such as a bronze sculpture of a young African servant from Tarragona (figure 62).[7] The author is also inconsistent in her identification of Ethiopian ethnicity,[8] despite having set out certain iconographic features that she sees as indications of Ethiopian heritage such as 'woolly hair and thick lips'.[9] In one instance, she includes a bronze head, identified by Beardsley herself as 'a North African of Libya' whose features are 'quite regular' (i.e., non-Black).[10] She insists, however, that the male must have 'negro blood'.[11]

Another more prevalent problem is the pervasive stream of racism flowing through this work. Beardsley herself admits that the USA had 'a delicate race problem on her hands',[12] and the anti-Black prejudice permeating all levels of

[4] Beardsley 1929: 111-114.
[5] Brewer 1929: 532 disputes this, stating that such a premise has 'never been proved'.
[6] Beardsley 1929: 78-79.
[7] Beardsley 1929: 100 no. 222.
[8] Beardsley 1929: xii claims that the study is limited to 'Ethiopians in Greece and Rome and is not concerned with their original African homes.'
[9] Such disparaging references to physical stereotypes emerge throughout the work, and therefore cannot be listed here, but these physical features are said in her introduction to have been 'delineated with marked realism' by vase painters.
[10] Beardsley 1929: 75-76 no. 156, fig. 13. For criticism of its inclusion, see Fraser 1929: 427. Cf. Beardsley 1929: 82 no. 158 for another example which the author has included despite her acknowledgement that 'there is nothing in his physiognomy especially to indicate an Ethiopian.'
[11] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 6 also rightly points issues with Beardsley's terminology, using 'Negro' and 'Ethiopian' interchangeably, despite her own criticism of such use by other scholars.
[12] Beardsley 1929: ix. The author does not specify further.

society at the time of writing is evident in Beardsley's work.[13] Throughout the work, she implies that Africans held an inherently 'humble position' in antiquity,[14] and subsequently disregards images that could disprove her generalisation as parody or caricature,[15] underscoring her prejudice regarding Black social status. She uses derogatory language to describe the appearance of those she perceives as Black, even claiming that Memnon, mythological king of Aethiopia, must have been white 'because of his great beauty'.[16] As outlined in the preface to her work, Beardsley also collaborated with Tenney Frank, an eminent Classicist who tried to argue that the collapse of the Roman Empire was caused by 'racial fusion'[17] and the displacement of the native Roman population by non-Roman slaves.[18]

Furthermore, Beardsley also displays misogynoir in her description of female figures. Misogynoir, a term first used by Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey in 2010,[19] was coined 'to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience…Misogynoir is not simply the racism that Black women encounter, nor is it the misogyny Black women negotiate. Misogynoir describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and

[13] On racism in Beardsley's work, see Ako-Adounvo 1999: 5-7; Derbew 2022: 23-25.
[14] Beardsley 1929: ix. Beardsley also suggests that 'the great sculptors did not consider [the Ethiopian] a sufficiently dignified or important subject' due to this false claim of inherent low status.
[15] E.g., Beardsley 1929: 111-114.
[16] Beardsley 1929: 8.
[17] Frank 1923: 566 (cf. pages 565-574).
[18] Frank 1923: 574. On Frank's racist beliefs, see McCoskey 2012: 6; Parmenter 2021: 498.
[19] moyazb, 'They aren't talking about me…' *Crunk Feminist Collective Blog* 14/03/10 https://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/ (05/11/24).

gender marginalization.'[20] The term has since been widely adopted to describe the discrimination uniquely faced by Black women.[21]

Beardsley's misogynoir is perhaps most evident in her description of a terracotta head from Priene (figure 25). In her entry for this figure, she explains that 'an authority on African tribes to whom is was shown stated without hesitation that a woman was meant'.[22] This assumption is not based on any iconographic analysis, nor the expertise of a scholar of Hellenistic art. Rather, its source was Kurt von Morgen, an army official active in the German colonisation of Cameroon in the late nineteenth century.[23] Earlier accounts contain further details of Morgen's interaction with the artefact, which was notably brief.[24] Yet, he was apparently able to quickly identify features which he found unattractive, such as the gloomy mood, wrinkled forehead, and drooping lower lip.[25] The critical language of the figure's appearance is notably found in conjunction with the identification of female gender. Beardsley uncritically reiterates this remark, along with Morgen's idea that 'it might easily be the picture of a present day member of one of the least civilized Central African tribes.'[26] She also adds her own suggestion that the image 'is not a caricature but an extremely naturalistic portrait of an African of the lowest type of intelligence.'[27] The flow between female, Black, uncivilised, and unintelligent is

[20] Bailey 2021: 1.
[21] E.g., A. Anyangwe, 'Misogynoir: where racism and sexism meet' *The Guardian* 05/11/15 https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/oct/05/what-is-misogynoir (07/11/24).
[22] Beardsley 1929: 83 no. 161. Cf. Schrader 1900: 25; Wiegand and Schrader 1904: 327.
[23] Schrader 1900: 25 describes Morgen as 'ein Kenner afrikanischer Völker', or a connoisseur of the African peoples.
[24] Schrader 1900: 25.
[25] Schrader 1900: 25.
[26] Beardsley 1929: 83.
[27] Beardsley 1929: 83 no. 161.

seamless, an indication that these qualities were seen to go hand-in-hand by the author.

Obviously, Beardsley's work predates by decades the influence of Second Wave Feminism on Classical studies, which resulted in gender being discussed on a wide scale for the first time particularly from the 1980s, and so one would not expect to find a great deal of discussion about gender in this text. Nevertheless, allowing for the perspectives of her time, an analysis of how gendered language is used by Beardsley is revealing. The term 'male' appears only twice in her catalogue entries, each instance used to describe a bearded (Greek) male juxtaposed against an Ethiopian male or female on Janiform cups. The term man appears more often, though, again, all but four instances are used to denote the Graeco-Roman ethnicity of a figure juxtaposed to an Ethiopian counterpart. Of the four instances where this is not the case, half are argued by Beardsley to be falsely identified as Ethiopian.[28] 'Boy' is used more frequently again but is largely used to indicate age rather than gender. Ethiopian males were clearly largely ungendered in the eyes of the author,[29] with male gendered language generally reserved for those she perceives as white.[30] Though this bias may have been unconscious rather than deliberate, it highlights the author's fundamental prejudices and the view of African masculinity assumed in the reader. In contrast, the terms 'female', 'girl', and 'woman' in descriptions of

[28] Beardsley 1929: 82 no. 158, 131 no. 283. For the other two instances, see Beardsley 1929: 75, 132 no. 289.
[29] Compare Bell 2025, who consistently uses gendered language.
[30] Beardsley uses this term to describe Greek ethnicity on multiple occasions (e.g., Beardsley 1929: 36).

Ethiopian figures are far more frequent, despite the images themselves being far fewer in number.[31]

The conflicting legacy of Beardsley's work, which is seen as a valuable but deeply problematic resource, was predicted by William M. Brewer in his 1929 review:[32] 'For the facts obtained in this research the public will find itself indebted to the author. Science, however, will not accept her conclusions which evidently grow out of the unfortunate manner in which biased writers treat anything which has to do with persons of African blood.'[33] In 1946, W. E. B. Du Bois gave a similarly scathing review of Beardsley's work, which he described as a 'stupid combination of scholarship and race prejudice'.[34]

The subject of Africans in Graeco-Roman art remained at the periphery of Classical scholarship until 1970,[35] when Frank M. Snowden Jr's publication *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* brought 'Ethiopians' to the forefront of the ancient Mediterranean studies.[36] Although Snowden had previously published on the presence of Africans in the Graeco-Roman world,[37] this was his first full-length study to place significant value on the material evidence as well as the literary, including 120 illustrated artworks and references to many more. The

[31] This is likely also a side-effect of the widespread societal bias which sees male as the default, neutral, and even ungendered, while females are seen as having a gender. For more on this subject, see de Beauvoir 2011, esp. introduction.
[32] William M. Brewer was a close friend of the founder of *The Journal of Negro History* and so-called 'father of Black history', Carter G. Woodson, and became the journal's editor in 1952. In a 2011 interview, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, daughter of another of Woodson's close friends, stated that 'William Brewer looked like a white man but he was a Black man, very race conscious…he was the editor of the Journal of Negro History for many years' (Dagbovie 2012: 191).
[33] Brewer 1929: 531.
[34] Du Bois 2007: xxxiii. For a similarly critical view of Beardsley's work, see Thompson 1993: 21-22.
[35] Snowden notes this for himself (Snowden 1997: 29).
[36] Snowden 1970.
[37] Snowden 1947; Snowden 1948; Snowden 1956; Snowden 1960.

author investigates the ways in which Africans interacted with and acted within the Graeco-Roman populations and the roles in which they appear in literature and art, such as warriors,[38] performers,[39] and mythological figures.[40] The analysis culminates in the argument that there was an 'absence of color [*sic*] prejudice in the Greco-Roman world',[41] a sentiment which was later developed into his book *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (1983).[42] His interpretation contrasts that of his predecessor Beardsley, favouring a more positive view which sees the Graeco-Romans as unbiased against (those Snowden refers to as) black Ethiopians.[43] As an African American male, one of few Black scholars in the field of Classics at that time,[44] Snowden's work was greatly inspired by his own experience, having previously been restricted by the American academy because, according to Du Bois, it 'favored [*sic*] the Negro too much'.[45] However, Snowden was also notably critical of the Afrocentric approach to the ancient world,[46] deliberately positioning himself apart from many other scholars who, in his eyes, were guilty of 'mythologizing and falsifying the past,'[47] exposing himself to accusations of race traitorship.[48]

[38] Snowden 1970: 121-143.
[39] Snowden 1970: 156-168.
[40] Snowden 1970: 144-155.
[41] Snowden 1970: 169, cf. 169-195. Cf. Snowden 2001.
[42] Snowden 1983.
[43] Snowden 1970: 216-218.
[44] Bilger 1997: 16 states that Snowden was the first Black person to be awarded a PhD in Classics at Harvard. On the history of Black Classicists prior to Snowden, see 'Black Classicists: A Mural Mosaic', a permanent exhibition held at the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University (https://chs.harvard.edu/permanent-collection/black-classicists/ accessed 25/11/24).
[45] Du Bois 2007: xxxiii. Parmenter 2021 investigates the other motivations behind Snowden's work.
[46] E.g., Snowden 1996; Snowden 1997.
[47] Snowden 1997: 46. Cf. Snowden 1996: 127.
[48] Snowden 1997: 28 refers broadly to such accusations.

Fundamental problems arise throughout Snowden's research just as they had in Beardsley's over forty years previously. As Ako-Adounvo notes, despite their contrasting conclusions, Snowden's work similarly perpetuates the anachronistic ethnic characterisation of Greeks and Romans as 'white', in opposition to 'black' Ethiopians,[49] approaching the subject through the lens of 'race relations…located…within the context of modern American racial problematics'.[50] Snowden himself acknowledges this modern influence, stating that '[t]he relationship of blacks and whites continues to be a critical problem of the twentieth century'.[51] Rather than criticising Beardsley's analytical approach, which sees 'Ethiopians' as fundamentally opposed to their 'white' counterparts, Snowden adopts the same approach in order to ultimately reach a conclusion opposite to Beardsley's.

Snowden also shows an aversion to acknowledging representations of slavery throughout *Blacks in Antiquity*. Many examples of enslaved Africans can be found in the literary and artistic evidence, and several examples appear in Snowden's analysis. The author even proposes that '[a] large, doubtlessly the largest, portion of the Ethiopians in Greece and Italy arrived as prisoners of war or

[49] Snowden refers to Greeks and Romans as white numerous times throughout the work, including throughout his concluding chapter which is titled 'Blacks in a White society' (Snowden 1970: 216-218). Cf. Parmenter 2021: 486. Snowden believed that Greece and Rome were 'white' societies, writing numerous articles to dispute the Afrocentrist claims of Martin Bernal in his multi-volume series *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987-2006), e.g., Snowden 1996. Furthermore, as Parmenter 2021: 496 notes, 'Snowden would never quite answer whether Black people could be Greeks or Romans themselves.' Against the categorisation of Romans as white, see Thompson 1989: 10-11. On the same subject for Greeks, see Derbew 2022: 31-34.
[50] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 8. On the problems of applying modern racial constructions to the ancient world, specifically Rome, see Haley 2009: 29-34.
[51] Snowden 1970: 218. Parmenter 2021 provides an insight into the historiography of Snowden's work and his essentialist stance, which Parmenter suggests was greatly influenced by the contemporary political milieu.

as slaves.'[52] Despite this, he does not dedicate any significant portion of his work to consider how these Ethiopians were portrayed as enslaved and what this can tell us about the position that they held in Graeco-Roman society, instead treating depictions of enslaved Africans as an afterthought, hardly acknowledged throughout the work. For instance, in a discussion of the Graeco-Roman attitude toward Ethiopians, Snowden lists the roles and activities seen as suitable for Ethiopians by artists.[53] He suggests that '[i]n the entertainment world Negroes found opportunities for employment as actors, *mimologi*, dancers, jugglers, boxers, acrobats, animal tamers, *venatores*, gladiators, and charioteers.' So prominent were these roles in the eyes of Snowden that he dedicated a chapter to their discussion earlier in the work.[54] The author then goes on to acknowledge the serving roles given to Ethiopians in art, such as 'bath attendants…lamp-bearers, and personal attendants of their masters.'[55] Unlike the depictions of Ethiopians in the sphere of entertainment, which are discussed at great length, this is the only discussion afforded to these depictions of enslaved Ethiopians. Similarly, he uses the character of an enslaved Ethiopian girl in Terence's *Eunuchus* not as a gateway to discuss Ethiopians as slaves but rather as evidence for the creation of roles for Black actors in the theatre after the invasion of Carthage by Hannibal.[56] In his attempt to convey his notion of racial equality in antiquity, Snowden avoids any significant discussion of evidence which may complicate this view, particularly given the scholar's uncritical application of the ideas of race which operated in his

[52] Snowden 1970: 186.
[53] Snowden 1970: 187.
[54] Snowden 1970: chapter VII, 156-168.
[55] Snowden 1970: 187.
[56] Snowden 1970: 163.

own era to the ancient world.[57] While this thesis benefits greatly from Snowden's compilation of evidence, it attempts to reframe some of the depictions through a more objective lens, including the identification of Africans in different roles under slavery.[58]

The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume I: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire (1976, republished in 2010 with a new introduction) was the first part of an ambitious, multi-volume project documenting the appearance of Black people in 'Western' art, both as subjects and as artists, from antiquity to the twentieth century. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, this project was proposed by Dominique de Menil 'as a way to counter, implicitly, the legion of all-too-familiar racist and stereotypical images of black people in American and European popular art'.[59] This particular volume is separated into five chapters, each treating a different chronological, geographical, or thematic segment of antiquity and its relevant material. Snowden, as the leading expert on Africans in antiquity,[60] contributed the most substantial (and, to this thesis, relevant) chapter which investigated 'Iconographical evidence on the black populations in Greco-Roman antiquity'.[61] This chapter surpassed even Beardsley's work in its scope, containing almost 200 illustrations of artefacts in every medium dating from the Minoan period

[57] Parmenter 2021: 495, 'Denying racism any historical basis steered Snowden away from questioning whether *race* itself had one.'
[58] On the use of material evidence to look at the role of slavery in images of Africans, see Bell 2022: 441-443.
[59] Bindman and Gates 2010: vii. On the history of the de Menil collection itself, see Gates-Foster 2021: 107-108. Thompson 1993: 21 described the title of the project as 'bogus' and 'an obvious nonsense': '[t]o speak of *the image* of the black in such a context is to make the ridiculous assumption of the monolithic and ever-constant social object ('the black'), perceived in the same way everywhere and at all times by artists and craftsmen of the various lands which count as Western.'
[60] A sentiment echoed by Tanner 2010: 12.
[61] Snowden 2010.

to the third century AD and reference to countless more. Unlike Beardsley, Snowden dedicates equal attention across the chronological scope of the chapter, including, crucially, the 'Roman period' which sees a wealth of additional material unseen in Beardsley's work. The scope and detail of the chapter make it the most significant publication on the iconography of Africans in antiquity even fifty years after its original publication.[62]

Snowden criticises the anti-Black prejudices which have pervaded earlier analyses of the material, such as the assumption that African features were seen as inherently ugly or grotesque.[63] However, the author once again applies modern racial constructs to the ancient world in an uncritical way,[64] arguing that Greeks and Romans were unprejudiced against Black Ethiopians on the basis of race. On the Hellenistic evidence, he concludes that the popularity of Ethiopian subjects reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the era and suggests that the 'care and skill with which blacks are portrayed' demonstrates a 'kinship of all men as expressed by Menander and later adapted by Terence – "I am a man; I consider nothing human foreign to me".'[65] This sentiment is reiterated in the chapter's concluding remarks, where Snowden once again expresses that 'Greek and Roman artists…attached no great importance to the color [*sic*] of a man's skin,'[66] not because they did not have a

[62] Boardman 1980 describes this as 'the fullest scholarly account of the subject available to classicists', a comment still applicable today.
[63] Snowden 2010: 248, 250.
[64] Cf. Ako-Adounvo 1999: 10-11; Tanner 2010.
[65] Snowden 2010: 215, quoting Ter. *Haut*. 77.
[66] Snowden 2010: 250.

concept of racial categorisation, but rather because '[w]hites of many races' were depicted in similar ways, such as 'comic or satirical scenes'.[67]

A significant addition to Snowden's research here is the discussion of 'Negroid types',[68] defined by the author as 'the so-called proper, true, or pure African Negro' and 'the Nilotic',[69] as well as 'mixed black-white types',[70] which are discussed only briefly in *Blacks in Antiquity*.[71] The identification of 'types' of Ethiopian functions based on the author's preconceived notions of physical stereotypes and the extent to which a representation fits these characteristics of stereotypical 'Blackness'. Ako-Adounvo has also noted the problem with applying modern notions of 'racial mixture' to the ancient world where constructions of race did not conform to modern beliefs.[72] She discusses Snowden's use of problematic and outdated terms such as 'mulatto or quadroon' to describe the apparently 'mixed' racial heritage of figures, and questions whether the artists would have had any concept of mixed racial heritage in order to deliberately make this iconographic choice. She also notes Snowden's lack of consideration as to the perceived identity of these apparently 'mixed' types in the Graeco-Roman imagination: '[d]id the Greeks and Romans consider persons of mixed ancestry to be Aethiopians?'[73] Pliny's description of the boxer Nicaeus and his mother seems to indicate that this would not have been the case.[74] His mother, despite having an Ethiopian father, is described by Pliny as

[67] Snowden 2010: 250.
[68] Snowden uses such terms throughout the chapter, but it first appears alongside an explanation of what this means at Snowden 2010: 141.
[69] Snowden 2010: 141.
[70] Snowden 2010: 141.
[71] Snowden 1970: 192-195.
[72] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 10-11.
[73] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 11.
[74] Note that Snowden uses the same passage to explain the contrary (Snowden 1970: 20, 165, 194).

having ‘skin pigmentation…no different from that of the rest of the family’, while Nicaeus closely resembled his Ethiopian grandfather.[75] Neither is described as being Ethiopian themselves, rather Pliny is interested in physical characteristics carried through a person’s genetics.

The new introduction to the 2010 edition of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* provides an in-depth critique of Snowden’s approach, reframing the appropriation of the Classical world within the white supremacist constructions of race emerging in the eighteenth century and the subsequent misapplication of racial constructs to the ancient world.[76] The concentration on race has meant that other elements of identity, such as gender, have been completely excluded from any of Snowden’s work.

The next significant piece of work to address depictions of Africans in antiquity was Gifty Ako-Adounvo’s 1999 PhD thesis entitled ‘Studies in the Iconography of Blacks in Roman Art’. As specified in the title, this work focuses entirely on Roman images of Africans, from the first century BC to the sixth/seventh century AD.[77] While acknowledging that the material selected for the thesis is not comprehensive, Ako-Adounvo provides a range of examples from a broad chronological and geographic scope. The material is primarily separated by visual theme, including ‘representations in baths’, ‘representations of domestic activity’, and ‘representations in spectacle’.[78] The material within each of these chapters is

[75] Plin. *HN* 7.12.51: indubitatum exemplum est Nicaei nobilis pyctae Byzanti geniti qui adulterio Aethiopis nata matre nihil a ceteris colore differente ipse avum regeneravit Aethiopem. (Tr. Beagon 2005: 70).
[76] Tanner 2010.
[77] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 2.
[78] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 93-112, 113-148, 149-187.

split further by both theme and medium, giving a good overview of various types of material relevant to the thesis. Her final chapter, which investigates images of 'Indians in Dionysiac triumph',[79] illustrates the complications of understanding ancient terminology and the lack of interchangeability with modern ethnic or racial categorisations.

Setting this work apart from that of her predecessors, Ako-Adounvo deliberately refrained from applying anachronistic ideas of 'race relations' to the ancient world. As she explains, '[t]he question guiding my research has not been "is this a representation of a Black?", but rather "what has the artist chosen to portray in this image, and what makes it different from other images?"'.[80] Reframing the question in this way was a necessity, allowing the author to identify not only depictions of Africans and their physical characteristics but also repeated iconographic themes, such as those given in her chapter outlines. This thesis has refreshed the way that researchers approach the topic of Africans in the ancient world, allowing for discussion to move beyond the back-and-forth debate around race relations.

Ako-Adounvo's thesis also provides a useful framework for identifying depictions of Africans in antiquity, not based upon modern stereotypes regarding physical features of Black people, but rather 'developed in relation to the Greco-Roman somatic norm'.[81] Ako-Adounvo lists five 'diagnostic criteria' upon which to analyse the images in question: 'hair type and/or hairstyle, skin colour, morphology

[79] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 188-213.
[80] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 214.
[81] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 3. However, it must be noted that the author suggests that said somatic norm is 'of Caucasian physiognomy', an awkward characterisation with its own problematic implications.

of lips, morphology of nose, and context'.[82] As will be discussed in the methodology section of this chapter, these categories are not without problems, nor are they inclusive of the frequently depicted features which deviate from the so-called 'somatic norm'. However, these 'diagnostic criteria' do indicate the author's effort to move away from projections of modern stereotypes, instead attempting objectively to gauge each artefact directly against ancient evidence.

Rethinking the Other in Antiquity (2011) by Erich Gruen takes a broader approach to the subject of ethnicity and 'Otherness'. The author uses evidence from Greeks, Romans, and Jews as a lens through which to view various foreign or ethnic 'Others', such as Persians, Egyptians, Gauls and Germans. Though the title of the book does not make this plainly clear, the 'Other' which Gruen aims to 'rethink' is that of the foreign 'Other', rather than countless other subjugated groups who could have been included with this catch-all term, such as women or the enslaved. The intersectionality implied by the title is therefore somewhat misleading.

Gruen dedicates a chapter of this book to Ethiopians.[83] An immediate problem with this chapter is found in its title: 'People of color'. The term 'people of colour' is used in modern parlance, particularly in the US, as a label to encompass those who are not white. The term has come under valid scrutiny for its generalisation about the lives and experiences of different racial and ethnic groups,[84] its assumption that white people are without colour and, subsequently,

[82] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 19.
[83] Gruen 2011: 197-220.
[84] E.g., T. Shoneye, 'As a black woman, I hate the term 'people of colour'' *The Independent* 19/05/20 https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/black-women-people-of-colour-racism-beyonce-coachella-black-lives-matter-a8316561.html (30/10/24).

race, and its reliance on whiteness as a central measure against which all others can be viewed. Projecting this term onto the ancient Mediterranean comes with its own complications. The title of this chapter does not immediately specify which ethnic 'Other' is to be examined here; the author specifies further in the short preface, stating that '[t]he ancients were not color-blind [*sic*]. Greek and Latin authors observed with curiosity and interest persons of black skin.'[85] Unlike the previous chapters, which give a specific ethnic group or region in their titles (e.g., 'Persia in the Greek perception', or 'Tacitus on the Germans'), the title of this chapter uses a problematic catch-all term for non-white people to mean Black, and relies on the reader's acceptance of Black to really mean 'Ethiopian', as specified a few lines later. It also implies that the Greeks and Romans saw themselves as 1) white and 2) without colour, an assumption which is demonstrably false; the Janiform cups described by Gruen later in the chapter do not show a 'black' head juxtaposed against a 'white' head,[86] but rather an African with black or dark brown skin juxtaposed against a Greek with beige or light brown skin.[87]

Gruen's approach to examining Ethiopians in the Graeco-Roman imagination is reminiscent of the earlier studies of Frank Snowden, using literary and artistic evidence to argue that the Greeks and Romans did not have negative feelings towards Ethiopian 'blacks' based on their skin colour or physical features. On the material evidence, Gruen suggests that '[Ethiopians] form no collective stereotype, they are rarely subject to caricature, and they are not singled out as a separate

[85] Gruen 2011: 197.
[86] Gruen 2011: 216-219.
[87] Cf. Dee 2003; Haley 2009: 29-34; Haley 2021a: 121 for Latin descriptors of skin colour.

species – let alone a marginalized species.'[88] The collection of evidence used by Gruen is heavily reliant on the corpus composed by Snowden, and his parallel approach to the subject draws similar conclusions.[89]

More recently, Sinclair Bell has published a chapter titled 'Images and interpretation of Africans in Roman art and social practice' in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Imagery and Iconography* (2022).[90] The inclusion of this chapter in a 'handbook' for ancient Roman art outlines not only the popularity of Africans as an iconographic subject in antiquity but also the importance for researchers to continually revisit and reflect upon our approach to the subject. Bell begins with a thorough investigation into the problems of identifying Africans in images and explains 'how casually seductive it can be to import modern notions of ethnicity or "race" into the study of antiquity and in this way to misread visual evidence.'[91] From the outset, the author sets himself apart from the essentialist stance of many of his predecessors, taking further measures to distinguish the 'Aethiopians' at the centre of his study from the modern racial terms 'Black' or 'black',[92] a message on the importance of terminology.

Bell gives a good overview of the Roman material. He explains that, owing to the geographical and chronological scope of ancient Rome, 'these visual depictions cannot be expected to provide a uniform vision of an ethnically diverse group of

[88] Gruen 2011: 211.
[89] This debate continued amongst researchers e.g., Thompson 1989; Thompson 1993; Tuplin 1999; Isaac 2004; Isaac 2006; Isaac 2009; van Wyk Smith 2009, esp. chapter 10; Isaac 2013. On the debate, see Wenghofer 2008: 18-32.
[90] Bell 2022.
[91] Bell 2022: 426.
[92] Bell 2022: 429.

people',[93] a new interpretation of what has previously been seen as a homogeneous group. The author is also the first to express the view that these images cannot be seen as direct reflections of reality: 'given that most Roman artists lacked direct familiarity with their subjects and that their primary intention was to produce works that appealed to their patrons, these images cannot be treated as highly reliable documents about those whom they depict (despite earlier scholars' confidence in their veracity…).'[94] Later, he explains that '[these] images never represent the complex, "inner" experiences of those whom they depict, as they were created not by them but *about* them for others.'[95] This developed understanding regarding *how* these artefacts may be used, not as reflections of fact but as reflections of aesthetic taste, fantasy, and the imagination, will be applied throughout this thesis.

Bell places significant value on the find contexts of artefacts (where known) and poses questions to develop understanding of these images as material objects.[96] Focusing on the Budapest bronze (figure 67),[97] he queries the decorative allure of the object and speculates about its changing function as a funerary piece, particularly given the numerous other images of Africans discovered as grave goods. Was there an influence from Hellenistic Greece? Why are pockets of these images discovered in 'particular localities within the empire (e.g., Britain)?'[98] Though unfortunately unable to answer these questions within the scope of the chapter, Bell

[93] Bell 2022: 430.
[94] Bell 2022: 430.
[95] Bell 2022: 441.
[96] Bell 2022: 437-439.
[97] Bronze statuette, from the ancient settlement of Aquincum, now in Budapest, Hungary. Height 15cm. Aquincumi Múzeum, Budapest: 51344. Snowden 1970: fig. 111; Adriani 1978: 126-127, taf. 42.2; Bolla 1998: 18; Bolla 2013: 25; Lenski 2013: 143; Bolla 2015: 142-143; Bell 2022: 438, 442; Bell 2025: 139, 141, fig. 1.
[98] Bell 2022: 439.

stresses the importance of reframing these objects as archaeological artefacts, and ponders 'what broader insights can we glean by shifting the focus of comparison away from *outward* aesthetic forms to *underlying* relational analogies, such as artifact classes, object lifecycles, and finds assemblages?'[99]

Bell's chapter highlights the progress that continues to be made in our scholarly approach to images of Africans in antiquity. He applies these advanced theories to artefacts which have already come under examination by Snowden (amongst others), who have generally found that depictions of Africans are 'sympathetic' and, therefore, 'indicative of their social integration into and acceptance within Roman society.'[100] By approaching these images as archaeological artefacts, and acknowledging that these are external constructions of identity rather than constructions of the self, Bell sheds a fresh light on these images. He explains that 'visual representation…cannot be taken as evidence of…social acceptance,'[101] and that, contrary to the omissions of Snowden (and, to a lesser extent, Gruen), many images show Africans in a humble position, for instance as enslaved servants and workers.

Finally, Bell also takes the necessary step of departing from the ongoing debate of "'before color [*sic*] prejudice" versus "(proto-) racism".'[102] He outlines the three crucial points of understanding needed to step away from this debate and refresh our approach to the subject:

1) Many Ethiopians appear across the Roman Empire as enslaved persons.

[99] Bell 2022: 439.
[100] Bell 2022: 441.
[101] Bell 2022: 442.
[102] Bell 2022: 444.

2) Slavery did not function based on race or ethnicity (unlike the modern trans-Atlantic slave trade, for instance).
3) Though ethnic prejudice did exist, this was not limited to Africans, nor was it 'perpetrated and replicated through *institutional structures*'.[103]

Bell emphasises the need to 'decouple the discussion of slavery from racism when considering the status of Aethiopians within the Roman Empire',[104] a step it is necessary to take in any analysis.

This is the first piece of research into these artefacts which addresses gender in any notable capacity, though it is not a central element of this work. Bell states that '[t]he corpus as a whole is dominated by representations of Aethiopian male youths (the overwhelming absence of visual representations of females has yet to be addressed in the scholarship).'[105] While the absence of females in the artistic repertoire is a topic for future research,[106] the gender of these African males has also yet to be addressed by researchers, who have, until Bell, overlooked the presence of any gender entirely. In his upcoming chapter 'In Living Color? Aethiopians in Roman Sculpture' (2025),[107] Bell consciously uses gendered language to describe each of the images used in his discussion, which exclusively focuses on 'Aethiopian' males, progressing the inclusion of gender in the study of ancient Africans without using gender as the focus of analysis.

[103] Bell 2022: 444-445.
[104] Bell 2022: 445.
[105] Bell 2022: 434.
[106] See conclusion.
[107] Bell 2025.

Sarah Derbew's *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity* (2022) similarly aims to deconstruct the essentialist stances of previous scholars,[108] applying both critical race theory and performance studies to representations of 'blackness' in the ancient Greek world, and critiquing the 'silences, suppression, and misappropriation of blackness' in modern scholarship.[109] While the relevance of Derbew's work, which focuses specifically on skin colour, to this thesis, which centres primarily on constructions of male gender, is limited, the author's critique of the modern scholarly approach to understanding 'blackness' in antiquity, including the influence of anti-Black prejudice, remains significant.

An innovative approach is taken by Derbew when discussing representations of blackness in material culture, specifically the famous Janiform cups from fifth-century BC Greece, discussing not only their descriptions and analyses in specialist scholarship but also their framing in public-facing museum displays.[110] While the author's extensive notes on terminology are, again, of limited use here, her general approach of reflecting upon the racialised narrative perpetuated in modern commentary is especially valuable, emphasising the influence of anti-Black prejudice on the perception of the ancient material and the importance of separating modern constructions of racial identity from antiquity. She also critiques the separation of Nubian and Sudanese archaeological material from the contemporary Greek, Roman, and Egyptian material in the British Museum,

[108] Derbew 2022. Cf. Derbew 2018.
[109] Derbew 2022: 1, cf. 187.
[110] Derbew 2022: 29-65.

positioning herself within the debate over the notion of 'Classical antiquity' and the Eurocentric perception of the ancient world, particularly in Europe and the USA.

Derbew acknowledges the lack of intersectionality in scholarship and specifically notes the absence of gender in discussions of 'black' people. For instance, she reflects upon the descriptions of the Janiform cups, which juxtapose a 'black' head and a 'brown' head,[111] as given by the Beazley Archive database for pottery. She explains that these descriptions 'generally concentrate on the color [*sic*] of the black face and female gender of the brown face, thereby nullifying the gender of the former and color [*sic*] of the latter.'[112] This simple statement highlights the importance of an intersectional approach; without intersectionality, aspects of both identity and, from an artistic perspective, iconography are entirely erased, limiting our understanding of both the ancient evidence and the people it represents. Here, Derbew has subtly indicated an avenue for progression in the literature.

A notable exception to the absence of intersectionality in scholarship can be seen in the work of Shelley Haley, who has dedicated much of her academic career to discussing both her experiences as a Black female Classicist and the presence and treatment of African females in the ancient world,[113] applying 'a lens of critical

[111] Here, 'black' and 'brown' are used by Derbew as accurate colour descriptors, as specified in her notes on nomenclature (Derbew 2022: xiii-xv, cf. 14-16). Such Janiform cups are generally believed to juxtapose an African (or Ethiopian) head with a Greek head.
[112] Derbew 2022: 50. Cf. Haley 2009: 30: 'when Americans say "African Americans", they mean black men, and when they say "Americans", they mean white men'; Haley 2021a: 125 reiterates this idea.
[113] Haley 2025, esp. 660 and n. 1, where she expresses that, even with the emergence of Black feminist scholarship, her imposter syndrome as a Black female Classicist 'will never disappear entirely.'

race feminist theory and of Black feminist thought' to her research.[114] Haley's chapter in *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (1993), titled 'Black feminist thought and classics: re-membering, re-claiming, re-empowering',[115] outlines exactly how her own identity has influenced her approach to the study of classics, and signposts the possibilities for and importance of studying the subject from a Black feminist perspective, explaining that '[t]hrough Black feminist thought, classics can be radically transformed from a discipline into a multiracial, multicultural multivalent field which better reflects the ancient world it studies.'[116]

Though largely focused on literary material, Haley's work sheds valuable light on the intersectionality of race and gender in antiquity and provides grounds for similar application to the artistic material. Haley's 2009 chapter 'Be not afraid of the dark: critical race theory and classical studies', published in the volume *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christianity* takes a particularly striking (re)approach to the ancient material. She first discusses Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, and the value in their application to the study of classics.[117] In order to do so, she redefines race and colour in the ancient Mediterranean,[118] and takes an intersectional approach to understanding the idea of 'difference', her description of which is so compelling that it cannot be paraphrased: 'it is plausible…that skin color [*sic*] was a factor in their formulation of a social construction of *difference*. But it was one of many factors. The simultaneity of these factors is crucial to my analysis; it is, therefore, important

[114] Haley 2024: 157.
[115] Haley 1993.
[116] Haley 1993: 38.
[117] Haley 2009: 28-29.
[118] Haley 2009: 29-34.

to examine the Roman construct of difference with particular attention to color [*sic*], gender, class, and culture using a symmetrical, nonlinear mode of thinking.'[119]

An example from this chapter proves exactly why revisiting the intersecting notions of ethnicity, colour and gender, as well as other aspects of identity such as class, remains necessary. Haley discusses the treatment of Scybale,[120] an African woman described in the *Moretum* of pseudo-Vergil, by two eminent scholars of race in antiquity, Frank Snowden Jr and Lloyd Thompson.[121] Haley quotes these scholars' translations of the passage describing Scybale:

> African in her race, her whole figure proof of her country – her hair tightly curled, lips thick, color [*sic*] dark, chest broad, breasts pendulous, belly somewhat pinched, legs thin, and feet broad and ample.[122]

> She was his only help. She was African in stock, and all her physical features gave testimony of her land of origin: tightly-curled hair, swollen lips, dusky complexion, broad chest with low-swinging breasts, belly rather pinched, thin legs, broad and ample feet.[123]

The author also provides her own, updated translation, 'as sensitive to black-feminist and female-empowering concerns as the Latin will allow':[124]

[119] Haley 2009: 30.
[120] Haley 2021a: 134 also discusses the description of Scybale.
[121] Haley 2009: 41-48.
[122] Haley 2009: 42-43, quoting Snowden 1970: 6. Cf. Snowden 2010: 182.
[123] Haley 2009: 43, quoting Thompson 1989: 31.
[124] Haley 2009: 42. Cf. Haley 1993: 31.

> She was his only companion, African in her race, her whole form a testimony to her country: her hair twisted into dreads, her lips full, her color [*sic*] dark, her chest broad, her breasts flat, her stomach flat and firm, her legs slender, her feet broad and ample.

There is a deliberate shift from negatively-charged language to neutral descriptors; the description of Scybale's lips has gone from 'thick' or 'swollen' to 'full', the description of her legs from 'thin' to 'slender' and her stomach from 'pinched' to 'flat and firm'. Further, Haley has completely reconstructed Scybale's body, within the confines of the original Latin, but distanced from the misogynoir which coursed through the earlier translations of Snowden and Thompson. Their descriptions of Scybale's breasts as 'pendulous' or 'low-swinging' are, as Haley rightly observes, strongly influenced by modern stereotypes regarding the Black female body and its construction under the racist, colonial gaze.[125] She notes other descriptions of African women in Latin sources and their overwhelmingly prejudiced scholarly response,[126] such as Juvenal's obviously exaggerated description of a Meroitic woman's breast as 'bigger than its fat baby'[127] which has been used by scholars to both stereotype the bodies of Black women ('large pendulous breasts are common in negro women'[128]), and to argue that the Romans would have seen their breasts as 'disgusting' and as one of a list of 'somatic 'defects''.[129] As Haley observes, other scholars describe Scybale as ugly, old, and a slave, despite no reference to such

[125] Haley 2009: 43-44.
[126] Haley 2009: 44-48.
[127] Juv. 13.163: *in Meroe crasso maiorem infante mamillam* (tr. Morton Braund 2004: 447).
[128] Courtney 2013: 489
[129] Wiesen 1970: 145; Thompson 1989: 35.

characterisation in the original Latin.[130] Here, Haley has proven the influence of modern prejudice over how we read the ancient material and the importance of continually revisiting the primary sources.

Haley continues to take an intersectional approach to the ancient world, contributing a chapter on 'Race and gender' to the core volume *A Cultural History of Race in Antiquity* (2021),[131] and more recently a chapter titled 'Signifying Dido: constructs of race and gender in Augustan Rome' in *Believing Ancient Women: Feminist Epistemologies for Greece and Rome* (2024).[132] Her research continues to highlight the intersecting prejudices of anti-Black racism and misogyny uniquely faced by Black females in the modern day and the way that such prejudice influences scholarly approaches to African females in antiquity. Her work underscores the importance of 're-reading' the ancient material through an unprejudiced, intersectional lens and for continued progression in the field;[133] in her own words, '[w]e must keep moving forward.'[134]

An intersectional approach

A deliberately intersectional approach is absent from previous analyses of the material at the centre of this study. As has been established in the above review of previous research, race has remained central to the discussions of these figures,

[130] Haley 2009: 46.
[131] Haley 2021a.
[132] Haley 2024. See also Haley 2021b.
[133] Haley 2025 details how she aims to continue her intersectional studies in the future through the lens of 'racialized gender', despite assertions from others that such an approach has nothing to do with Classics (p. 663).
[134] Haley 2025: 663.

whose collective identity has been continually reduced by researchers to 'Black' or 'African'/'Ethiopian'.[135] I argue that a renewed analysis of these artefacts through an intersectional lens, which considers race alongside gender and other aspects of identity, is overdue and will provide a fresh perspective on the external construction of African male identity in the late Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial periods. In order to do so, it will be beneficial to provide a brief history of the development of intersectionality and to outline its functionality as a framework.[136]

In 1989, Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw initially developed the framework of 'intersectionality' as a response to the mistreatment and exclusion of Black women in 'antidiscrimination law…feminist theory and antiracist politics,'[137] which have historically seen the Black male experience as encapsulating the Black experience, and likewise the white female experience as encapsulating the female experience. Crenshaw astutely observed the 'tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis' and the negative impact that such a 'single-axis' mode of analysis has on the understanding of the Black female experience.[138] She goes on to explain that 'the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.'[139] The neglect of an intersectional approach

[135] Alternatively, Haley 2021a: 119 notes that, while Classical studies *has* adopted the framework of intersectionality to some degree, 'classicists neglect the core axis of race in their application of the concept.'
[136] For an overview of 'intersectionality', its history, its criticisms and its value as a framework, see Cooper 2016.
[137] Crenshaw 1989: 139.
[138] Crenshaw 1989: 139-140.
[139] Crenshaw 1989: 140.

has directly led to the neglect, even erasure, of Black women from antidiscrimination law and movements, instances of which were outlined by Crenshaw in her foundational and pioneering article.[140] To counter such erasure, she proposes to recentre Black women within both antiracist and feminist movements and discourse through a multi-axis analysis of identity, as well as recognition of the interacting systems of power and subjugation to which Black women are doubly subject,[141] in order to 'resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences' and ultimately to 'facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups'.[142]

While the framework of intersectionality has its roots in Black feminism and therefore initially focused on the intersection of Black and female identities,[143] as early as 1991 Crenshaw recognised the importance of this framework to the understanding identities, especially those which face subjugation, more generally: '[m]y focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.'[144] Crenshaw and her colleagues continue to highlight the potential scope of intersectionality, having recently suggested that it 'offers a counter to the erasure of race, gender and other identities in all arenas,'[145] and noting that 'although

[140] Crenshaw 1989; cf. Crenshaw 1991.
[141] Cf. Cooper 2016: 386.
[142] Crenshaw 1989: 167.
[143] On Crenshaw's Black feminist predecessors who recognised the unique positionality of Black women, see Cooper 2016: 387-389.
[144] Crenshaw 1991: 1245. As Cooper 2016: 398-399 notes, the framework of intersectionality was never supposed to be limited to analysing the erasure and experiences of Black women, but rather that Black women have provided the necessary foundation for a theoretical framework which aims to shed light on systems of power.
[145] Crenshaw, Andrews and Wilson 2024: 3.

[intersectionality] emerged from a specific context it can and has been applied across a vast array of different locations.'[146]

I aim to adopt and adapt Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality to investigate the construction of male gender and masculinity in depictions of African males. Though Crenshaw's original framework developed as a response, in part, to patriarchal systems and therefore necessarily focused on Black females, the *external* construction of identity in these images allows for the extension of this framework to include male gender as one axis of analysis because, despite the fact that they were created and existed within a patriarchal society, the specificities of the construction of male gender could be used in conjunction with ethnic or racial identity to subjugate an individual or group. Furthermore, as Eileen Boris, whose work centres on the intersection of race, gender, and class in labour movements, notes, 'men have race and women have gender…the gender of men and the race of women [have] become lost',[147] and an intersectional framework which includes male gender, while originating as an important means to centralise the unique and lost experiences of Black women, will also work to counteract the unconscious misogynistic bias which sees males as ungendered and females as gendered,[148] and to develop our understanding of male gender and masculinity.

The figures at the centre of this study have been subject to gender erasure by modern commentaries which have generally reduced their identity to their perceived race. Consequently, the notion of gender and, specifically, construction

[146] Crenshaw, Andrews and Wilson 2024: 4. Cf. Carbado et al. 2013.
[147] Boris 2003: 10. Cf. Haley 2021a: 120; Haley 2025: 662.
[148] De Beauvoir 2011.

of African male gender in the ancient Graeco-Roman imagination has never previously been subject to analysis. This thesis aims to counteract this oversight and lay the foundations for a continued intersectional approach in the future. It also aims to investigate further intersecting layers of identity, such as sexuality and status, which are intrinsic to the construction of male gender and the male body in Graeco-Roman images of Africans.

A note on terminology

The term 'African' is used throughout this thesis to mean the people of sub-Egyptian or sub-Saharan Africa whose ethnic or racial heritage would be considered as outside the boundaries of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. I have chosen to use this term as an alternative, where appropriate, for the various terms such as 'Ethiopian', 'Aethiops', 'Αἰθίοψ', etc. for accessibility, given the modern understanding of 'Ethiopia' or 'Ethiopian'. These terms do not correspond to the modern country of Ethiopia but rather refer to the inhabitants of the Upper Nile beyond the boundaries of ancient Egypt, including the region known to historians as Nubia, and into the sub-Saharan region of the continent. 'Ethiopian' and its variants are occasionally used to similarly reference dark-skinned inhabitants of Asia, though this particular use is not of focus here. I have also chosen 'Africa' and 'African' over 'Ethiopia' and 'Ethiopian' (and their variants) due to the geographical limitations of the latter terms, which imply a heritage in the east of the continent. The specific intended heritage of the artistic subjects contained within this study is unclear; as will be demonstrated, these images do not represent real people but rather a fantasy of the African in the Graeco-Roman imagination, and so a specific

ethnic heritage was likely not meant. The vagueness of the terms 'Africa' and 'African' is a deliberate reflection of the vagueness of artists, who reduced their fictitious artistic subjects to a limited selection of iconographic criteria to depict a vague race rather than a specific geographic heritage.

The term 'Black', aside from where it is used in direct quotations from other scholars, is only used in discussions of modern racial categorisation and prejudice. I have deliberately avoided its use in discussions of the ancient evidence in order to prevent the application of such modern racial beliefs to the ancient world and its art. The word 'black' (with a lower-case 'b') is used in this thesis only to describe the presence of literal black colour and does not carry racial implications. Others, such as Sarah Derbew, prefer to use Black or black to describe people with physical features that denote an African heritage.[149] The varying terms preferred by different researchers indicate the difficulty in applying any modern term to the ancient world and its material. The outdated terms 'Negro', 'Negroid', and other related words are used only in direct quotation of earlier scholarship, and their repetition does not constitute condonation.

Iconographic criteria

This thesis does not aim to provide a complete catalogue of depictions of African males in the Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman periods, but rather investigates in-depth the construction of male gender and masculinity in a limited number of repeated visual themes and iconographic types. These have been identified through

[149] Derbew 2022: xiv, 14-16.

consideration of a wide range of museum collections, artefact databases, and relevant archaeological literature. The identification of relevant themes has been influenced by three factors. Firstly, the chosen themes/types constitute some of the most popular varieties of representation for African males in the relevant periods, therefore providing a substantial amount of supporting evidence for this study. Secondly, the popularity of these themes/types in modern research, which can highlight a need for reassessment. Finally, the potential effectiveness of these themes/types in an analysis centred on male gender (and, in some cases, masculinity).

Reliance on the identification of African ethnicity in other research and archaeological/museum records is often flawed; while earlier research has certainly provided a foundation for this study, it has proven necessary to re-evaluate every image to determine the probable intent of artists against a set of iconographic criteria. As noted above, Ako-Adounvo has previously provided a useful set of 'diagnostic criteria', which gives an initial guide for the selection of material.[150] These criteria have been identified based on their divergence from the so-called 'somatic norm', i.e., the physiognomic features which appear repeatedly in depictions of Mediterranean Graeco-Romans, listed by the author as 'pale brown skin, dark straight or curling hair, dark eyes, medium to thin lips with little eversion and prominent nose.'[151] Ako-Adounvo noted four physical divergences from her definition of the 'somatic norm' which may indicate an African ethnicity: tightly or moderately curled hair, which may appear cropped closely to the head or in longer

[150] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 19.
[151] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 18.

locs;[152] dark brown or black skin colour; full, often pronounced lips; and a short, sometimes broad nose. She also notes the importance of the context of images, for instance the impact that a Nilotic landscape can have on the interpretation of an image. Crucially, the author recognises that, even when using these 'diagnostic criteria', the recognition of relevant images remains problematic. For example, she suggests that features such as 'snub noses, full or thick lips, and very curly hair' appear in 'grotesques and caricatures' where an African ethnicity is not necessarily intended, leading to misinterpretation.[153]

The initial selection of relevant images for this thesis has relied on a similar set of criteria to reasonably determine the intended race or ethnicity of subjects, though with necessary modifications and recognitions of limits.

1. Skin colour, where present. 'Ethiopian' or sub-Saharan Africans were largely depicted with black or dark brown skin colour, crucially darker than the pale or medium brown colour which appears in both the artistic and literary self-characterisations of Mediterranean (male) skin.[154] Though an important factor in depicting African ethnicity, skin colour in art can be unreliable. The dark patina of a bronze sculpture may give an impression of dark skin where it is not intended, and likewise black-and-white figural mosaics rely on black colour for

[152] The term 'locs' is used throughout this thesis to denote a specific hairstyle historically known as 'dreadlocks'. The term 'dreadlocks' possibly has its roots in colonial history and, subsequently, has negative connotations (https://www.britannica.com/topic/dreadlocks accessed 16/09/25; https://www.vogue.com/article/locs-history-hair-discrimination#:~:text=Locs%20is%20a%20natural%20hairstyle,to%20cut%20off%20her%20locs. accessed 16/09/25). The term 'locs' should not be confused with 'locks', which is used to denote a collective of strands of hair, regardless of hair texture or style.

[153] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 19, 21-22. On problems with this approach more generally, see Ako-Adounvo 1999: 20-23.

[154] Thompson 1989: 10-11; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 18; Haley 2009: 29-34; Bell 2022: 433.

figures regardless of intended race or ethnicity. Conversely, the original painted colour of sculpture is often lost, giving the impression of white, pale brown, or other skin colours, depending on material, when perhaps dark brown or black colour would have originally been present. People of other ethnicities may have also been shown as having dark brown or black skin.[155]

2. Hair colour (where present), texture, and style. Hair colour could appear as dark brown or black, though the depiction of hair colour faces the same challenges as that of skin colour. Hair texture is most often depicted as tightly curled or in locs, while the style may be cropped tightly to the head or in longer locks. Hair is crucially more tightly curled than the looser, bigger curls or waves often seen in depictions of Graeco-Roman figures. The depiction of hair texture and style varies greatly depending on object size, medium, and artistic style. For instance, a small, crudely modelled terracotta may rely on small balls of clay to denote tight curls cropped closely to the head, more intricate bronze or marble sculptures often depict longer locks with spiral patterns, and jagged tesserae to show a curly hair texture are frequently found in mosaics. Again, a cautious approach must be taken when using hair as a determining quality of ethnicity, as tightly curled hair does not necessitate the intent of an African ethnicity.[156]
3. Facial features, as contrasted against depictions of Graeco-Roman figures, including a round head with high cheekbones, full lips, and a short nose with a low bridge. These features were shared in depictions of figures who are not

[155] Ako-Adounvo 199: 188-213 argues for the presence of Indians, not Ethiopian Africans, on scenes of Dionysiac triumph, despite their shared physical characteristics with depictions of Ethiopian Africans. She suggests that it is 'evidence that the ancient artists did not always have a clear mental distinction between the various dark-skinned peoples' (213).
[156] Bell 2022: 446-447.

necessarily supposed to have been African, namely grotesques and caricatures.[157] I also highlight the use of these qualities in depictions of young Graeco-Roman children, who are often shown with short noses, full lips, and round heads.

As explained above, no criterion functions alone as a reliable iconographic indicator of African race or ethnicity. Rather, it has been necessary to evaluate each image individually against this range of potential iconographic criteria to determine the *likelihood* that an African person was originally intended. It has led to the exclusion of material which would have otherwise seemed suitable for the thematic case studies forming the main body of this thesis. One notable instance is the famous bronze sculpture group of the horse and jockey from Artemision (figure 1).[158] The boy in this sculpture group has often been identified as Ethiopian or African, perhaps of a mixed ethnic heritage.[159] Hemingway's justification for such an identification largely rests on the dark patina discovered on the boy's face. He states that, although this dark skin colour alone would have been enough to 'secure the African descent of the Jockey', his facial features, which include a 'short broad nose, high cheekbones, large forehead, and small angular chin',[160] capture his ethnicity with certainty. However, measuring this image against the criteria set out above complicates this interpretation of the boy's identity. Firstly, contrary to Hemingway's

[157] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 21-22.
[158] Bronze sculpture from Artemision, Greece. Height 210 cm. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens, inv. X 15177. Hemingway 2004; Snowden 2010: 212, fig. 275.
[159] On the ethnicity of this boy, see Hemingway 2004: 111-112; Snowden 2010: 212.
[160] Hemingway 2004: 111-112. Cf. Golden 2008: 44 and n. 17, who cites this bronze as evidence for the popularity of boy jockeys 'with Negroid features' in the Hellenistic period. He does not provide reference to other artworks depicting young male jockeys with African features, and no further examples arise in the evidence.



Figure 1: Sculpture group. Young male jockey; jumping horse. Bronze. C. 150 BC. From off the coast of Artemision, Greece. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens, inv. X 15177. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jockey_of_Artemision_on_Red.jpg (accessed 18/11/24). Author: Nikos Kitsakis. Used under CC BY 4.0.

assertion, skin colour cannot be relied upon as a sole indicator of ethnicity, and in this case the author himself questions the origins of the black patina.[161] The appearance of the boy's hair, the second criterion for identification, is completely uncharacteristic of depictions of Africans, instead conforming to a typically Greek style; this boy's hair seems more similar to, for instance, the soft waves of the bronze youth from Fano (figure 12) than, for example, the tight curls of the similarly aged boy from Aphrodisias (figure 64) or the longer locs of the bronze boy from Reims (figure 65). Finally, Hemingway notes that the boy's facial features are 'softened',[162] and I suggest that the boy's full lips and short nose could be indications of his young

[161] Hemingway 2004: 72, 111.
[162] Hemingway 2004: 112. Elsewhere, Hemingway describes his Ethiopian features as both 'subtle' and 'prominent' (143).

age, approximated to be around ten years old. The author attributes this complicated array of iconographic features to the boy's mixed Ethiopian and Greek ethnic heritage,[163] as does Snowden who describes this bronze as 'the best-known Hellenistic statue of a mixed black-white type'.[164] This too is a complicated interpretation of the artist's intent which cannot be known for certain. Further, the perception of a mixed heritage within contemporary Mediterranean society is unclear. Should the artist have intended a mixed heritage, would this boy have even been perceived as Ethiopian or African? Would he have been seen as Greek? Would he have been seen as both? For these reasons, an artefact which may appear to be directly relevant to this thesis has been excluded in the hope that a similarly intersectional study may incorporate it, and other images which have fallen outside the scope of this study, in the future.

The focus on images of males and construction of masculinity has required a similar selection criterion based on male sex/gender. The fragmentary nature of many images, particularly smaller objects made of clay and other delicate materials, has unfortunately obscured the intended gender of the subjects, especially in the frequent cases where only a head survives. Such images have either been completely excluded or provided as supplementary or comparative material. Iconographic features used to indicate a male sex/gender differ depending on artistic style and medium, as well as the age of the subject. In many cases, male genitalia are visible and so the subjects can be securely identified as male, as can

[163] Hemingway 2004: 112, 143, 148 ('the Artemision Jockey is the finest extant example of a person of Greek and Ethiopian de[s]cent in Greek art').
[164] Snowden 2010: 212.

depictions of older males with facial hair, though these are less common. Full body images also reveal other details of body composition which indicate a male gender even when clothed, such as stature and musculature. Male gender can sometimes be assumed by comparing facial features and hair styles against those of other securely identified depictions of African males, though this is more complicated in depictions of young children, for instance the child depicted in the bronze balsamarium (figure 75), which has been identified as both male and female.

This thesis is specifically interested in the *external* construction of male gender, or the way that African male gender has been constructed in the Graeco-Roman imagination and, subsequently, Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial art, rather than the *internal* construction of masculinity, or the way that an African male could portray and perform his own gender. I have therefore excluded portraits in the selection of material, as subjects may have had some involvement in the production of their image and, therefore, the construction of their own gender.[165] Also excluded from the main body of material have been depictions of mythological figures (such as Memnon) and mythological races (such as the Nilotic pygmies found frequently in Hellenistic and Roman art), though such iconography is at times very relevant and will feature as supporting evidence in some of the discussions that follow.

[165] Bell (2025) questions the frequency with which images of Africans have been identified as portraits by scholars, noting that most instances have not been discovered with an inscription or other identifier to securely establish the existence of their subject.

Chronological scope

This thesis largely focuses on images from the late Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial periods (c. second century BC to second century AD), drawing occasionally on other suitable evidence for comparison. The Hellenistic period saw a significant shift in the iconography of Africans from that of the Classical period. Until around the third century BC, depictions of Africans were primarily found on vases, where they could be found as attendants (often to mythological figures), warriors, crocodile-wrestlers, or disembodied heads on Janiform cups. The vast expansion of the Greek world under Alexander the Great is usually regarded as having fostered an attraction to cosmopolitanism, which brought with it a new artistic style with new subjects, a reflection of the intertwinement of different cultures and peoples at this time.[166] 'Ethiopian' Africans were now neighbours of Greek society, having existed previously only through the barrier of Egypt, which was now under Ptolemaic control. Naturally, this enhanced interaction with the people of 'Ethiopia' influenced their depiction in art, moving from a frequently (semi-)mythological representation to representations of African males in everyday situations. This is also a reflection of the shift away from idealism to 'an interest in the variety of experience' in the broader Hellenistic artistic style,[167] which also showed a developed fascination with the body, movement, and expression, leading to a diverse collection of images representing African males with various bodily conditions, striking various poses, and taking part in various activities, unlike their Classical counterparts who were often static.

[166] E.g., Burn 2004: 75-76.
[167] Pollitt 1986: 141.

This shift in artistic trend gives the starting point for evidence collected for this thesis. Though the socio-political milieu of the Mediterranean changed significantly during the proposed time frame, and naturally artistic trends followed suit, the inclusion of early Imperial Roman representations of African males presents a valuable means to visualise the continuation, development, and creation of new popular iconographic themes during this socio-political change. Some image types appear to have initially emerged in the late Hellenistic period, while refinement of type and increased popularity seem to have occurred later. For instance, the depictions of idealised young enslaved boys (chapter 3) have origins in the Hellenistic period, with a few examples of boys with serving equipment or (now lost) instruments can be reasonably suggested as having come from the Hellenistic period. However, the majority of bronze images of this theme appear to have instead been a Roman development of this 'type' into the *puer delicatus*, and seem to have been particularly popular in the Roman west, although evidence has been discovered across the empire. Some image types, such as the mosaics discussed in chapter 4, appear to have been concentrated within early Imperial Rome, while other image types, such as the small, emaciated boys in chapter 3, were abandoned around the end of the Hellenistic period.

Another significant reason for the inclusion of material from such a broad chronological scope has been difficulty in identifying both creation date and provenance of some materials. Many artefacts, particularly the smaller objects, were donated to museums by private collectors with very little archaeological record and, therefore, insecure provenance. Further, the trend for Hellenistic-style art in the early Roman Empire means that chronology is not always possible to

determine with any certainty. For instance, the famous 'Caylus bronze' (figure 72), which, amongst those who accept its legitimacy, has often been considered as a Hellenistic original despite its alleged discovery in France. This also reflects a common presumption of Hellenistic Alexandrian origin for artefacts or their 'types' amongst historians, a classification which seems to largely rely on the perceived race or ethnicity of the artistic subjects.[168]

Research questions and methodology

The primary research question for this thesis hinges on the intersectional framework outlined above: how was male gender constructed in images of Africans from the late Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial periods? In order to answer this question, I will conduct an in-depth iconographic analysis of images belonging to four recurring visual themes: athletics, 'thaumatopoietic' entertainment, slavery, and non-ideal genitalia. As outlined by the title of the thesis, this will also include investigating the specific iconography of the body, conducting comparative analysis within image groups, across themes, and introducing material from beyond the corpus in order to determine the extent to which African male gender is shown to conform to or differ from representations of the ideal.

Crucial to this thesis is a recognition of the historiography of the subject and critique of the previous scholarship, not limited to the above review of earlier research. I aim to highlight the shortcomings and successes of previous discussions of these artefacts in order to demonstrate the need for continued progress,

[168] For examples of this debate, see Pressouyre 1962; Boucher 1973.

particularly regarding a new, intersectional approach to these artworks. This work does not aim to be a comprehensive look at depictions of African males in the relevant time period. Rather, I aim to prove the value of an intersectional lens, which greatly changes the perception of these images, and to create a foundation for the continued application of this approach.

Chapter 1 investigates the construction of masculinity in images of African male athletes. Repeatedly suggested to have been a popular iconography for African males, the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that this may not have been the case, as only a few rare instances from this period have survived. Nevertheless, this chapter draws on the limited evidence suggesting that African males had a role in the sphere of athletics in the Hellenistic period. Firstly, two depictions of African youths will be reconsidered, criticising the scholarship which has unobjectively painted them as enslaved and instead analysing their bodily compositions to suggest that they are more likely athletes. The remainder of the chapter largely centres on the Alexandrian wrestler mosaic (figure 18). The notion of gender performance in the masculine space of the gymnasium will be explored, and it will be shown that African males could partake in the activities of the Alexandrian gymnasium. Other Hellenistic examples of African athletes will be provided as support, and previous scholarly narratives, which have presumed caricature or parody, will be critiqued. Though the evidence for this chapter is limited, and therefore the conclusions drawn must be similarly restrained, these artefacts

suggest that African males could conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity within the sphere of athletics in the Hellenistic period.[169]

Chapter 2 will present depictions of African performers and entertainers in the sphere of 'wonder-making', or θαυματοποιία. Beginning with Hellenistic evidence, it will be shown that, though African males were occasionally shown to be 'wonder-makers', it was a rare iconography concentrated in a few examples. In the early Roman imperial period, however, an image 'type' emerged, showing nude African males performing handstands. It will be proven that these images most likely show performers rather than athletes, a crucial distinction, before comparison between these images and earlier Italian depictions of female acrobats will show that these images function as a means to feminise, exoticize and eroticise the African male body for the fulfilment of the Roman fantasy. Finally, the popular lamps depicting the disembodied, orally-penetrated heads of African males will be deliberated as images of fire-based entertainment and/or representations of graphic sexual fantasy.

Chapter 3 considers two popular case studies of young enslaved African boys. The first, primarily found throughout the Hellenistic period, shows emaciated and pathetic young boys as captives and servants, often in a crouching or hunched position. The composition of their bodies will be observed as a means to compare the second category of young enslaved boy which gained significant popularity in the early Imperial period. The second image category depicts mostly nude, semi-idealised servant boys, an iconography which I will argue is the most significant

[169] On the notion of hegemonic masculinity, see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005.

group of depictions of *pueri delicati* from antiquity. The role of *pueri delicati* will be presented, and the impact that such status has on the construction and perception of gender will be considered.

Chapter 4 focuses on the representation of macro- and ithyphallic African males, introducing Roman paintings and mosaics and drawing on evidence presented in earlier chapters. This discussion will consider the meaning of non-ideal genitalia and its impact on the perception of masculinity in the Roman imagination. The apotropaic function of non-ideal genitalia will be contemplated, particularly the specific, sexually aggressive protection provided by the symbol of the erect phallus. This will lead to an analysis of the construction of and speculation around African male sexuality in both ancient and modern thought, and the negatively influential prejudices intrinsic to the scholarship regarding these artefacts will be brought to light. An epilogue to this chapter focuses on a famous quote supposedly from Galen and the notion of the 'Black phallic fantastic', emphasising the continued need to revisit this material, particularly through a theoretically objective, intersectional lens.

Setting the scene: Africans in art and literature before c. 200 BC

Though this thesis centres on images of African males from the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods, dating between c. 200 BC to AD 200, references to Africans can be found in Mediterranean art and literature far earlier, possibly as early as the



Figure 2: Amphora. Black-figure vase painting attributed to Exekias. Memnon and two attendants. C. 535 BC. Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1849,0518.10. Source: The British Museum online catalogue https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1849-0518-10?selectedImageId=1599668001 (accessed 26/09/25). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Minoan period,[170] though evidence from this period is sparce and ambiguous. Around the sixth century BC, sub-Saharan Africans, referred to by authors primarily

[170] E.g., the so-called 'Captain of the Blacks' identified by Sir Arthur Evans after his reconstructions of wall-paintings at the palace of Knossos (Evans 1928: 755-757, pl. XIII; Snowden 2010: 143, fig. 145). However, the problematic nature of the reconstructions of these paintings must be noted, as must the dubious identification of this figure as 'African' based entirely on dark skin colour.

as ‘Ethiopians’, again reappear in the artistic repertoire as popular subjects of vase paintings.[171] Males of African appearance can be found as warriors alongside the mythological king of Ethiopia, Memnon, such as in this black-figure amphora attributed to Exekias (figure 2).[172] Here, they are depicted as muscular, wearing short loincloths and carrying a club and a crescent-shaped shield,[173] flanking a fully-armed Memnon.

African warriors were also a popular subject for white-ground alabastra, surviving in dozens of examples from the early fifth century.[174] These warriors were shown wearing patterned clothing consisting of trousers, a long-sleeved tunic, and a cuirass, armour deliberately distinct from the typically Greek style. They were most often kitted as archers,[175] and were occasionally also depicted carrying a shield or an axe, as in this example from Tanagra (figure 3).[176] This series perhaps similarly alludes to the existence of Ethiopians in Greek mythology,[177] and one example pairs an archer of African appearance with an axe-wielding Amazon wearing a Scythian cap.[178]

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[171] Olya 2025.
[172] Black-figure amphora, unknown provenance. H. 41.5 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1849, 0518.10. Beazley Archive: 310390. Beazley 1978: 144 no. 8; Snowden 2010: fig. 156. Cf. a red-figure cup from Poggio Sommavilla, Italy, held at the Louvre, Paris, inv. MNB 406, G 93. On images of Memnon in Athenian art, see Bérard 2000: 395-402.
[173] Cf. a black-figure amphora, also of unknown provenance, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 98.8.13, which depicts one of the African warriors with a bow and arrow.
[174] Neils 1980.
[175] Strabo *Geography* 17.3.7 describes Ethiopians as archers.
[176] White-ground alabastron, from Tanagra, Greece. H. 16 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1875,0309.24. Beazley Archive: 202779. Neils 1980: 16 no. 19; Jenkins 2015: 210.
[177] The example here has been tentatively identified on the museum’s online description as ‘perhaps Memnon’ (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1875-0309-24 accessed 01/10/25), though Jenkins 2015: 210 describes this figure as an ‘Ethiopian mercenary’ and nots that ‘[h]e is a very different character from the mighty Memnon’ pictured in the above example (figure 2).
[178] Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. V.I.3382. Beazley Archive: 202825. Neils 1980: 15 no. 1, pl. 1.1-2.



Figure 3: White-ground alabastron. African warrior. C. 480 BC. From Tanagra, Greece. The British Museum, London, inv. 1875,0309.24. Source: The British Museum online catalogue https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1875-0309-24 (accessed 01/10/25). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

King Bousiris, mythological king of Egypt, and his attendants were also often depicted with typically 'African' features,[179] though notably they are consistently bald, and their skin colour is confined to the contemporary Greek artistic convention for red-figure painting.[180] In an example discovered at Vulci, a nude and muscular

[179] On images of Bousiris, see Snowden 2010: figs 167-173.
[180] On the ethnicity of Bousiris, see Miller 2000.

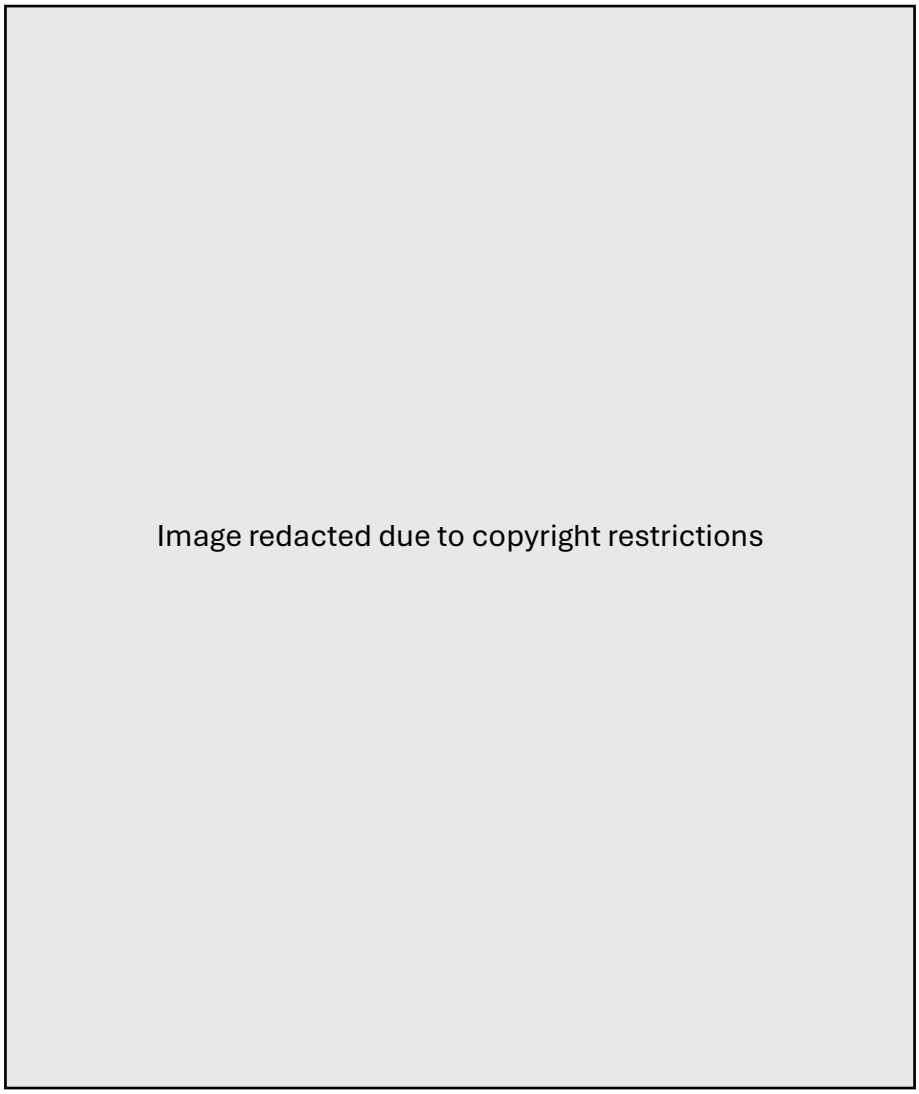


Figure 4: Stamnos. Red-figure vase painting. Herakles battling Bousiris; attendants fleeing. C. 470-460 BC. From Vulci, Italy. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1896-1908.G.270. Source: Ashmolean Image Library https://images.ashmolean.org/search/?searchQuery=AN1896-1908+G.270 (accessed 26/09/25).

Bousiris is shown battling Herakles while his attendants, distinct in appearance from the king only through their clothing, flee in panic (figure 4).[181]

In a shift from the mythological imagery seen above, a contemporaneous trend for head-shaped kantharoi saw Africans as common subjects,[182] either alone,

[181] Red-figure amphora from Vulci, Italy. H. 36.5 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1896-1908.G.270. Beazley Archive: 202323. Beazley 1963: 216.
[182] Bérard 2000: 409-411; Snowden 2010: figs 159-160; Derbew 2022: 29-50.

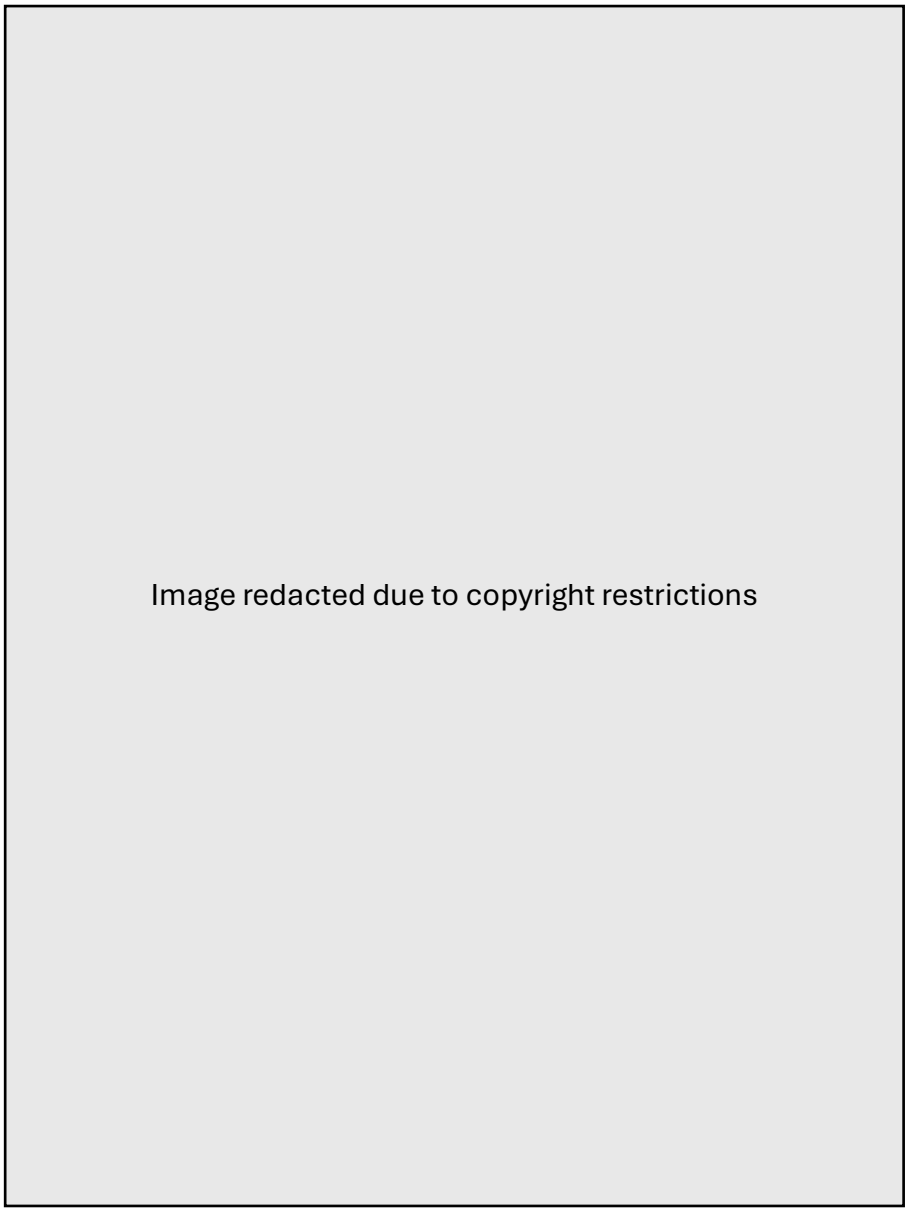


Figure 5: Kantharos. African (male) head. C. 510 BC. Unknown provenance. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 00.332. Source: Museum of Fine Arts Boston online collections https://collections.mfa.org/objects/178413/mug-in-the-shape-of-a-mans-head?ctx=0f8f4202-f7e3-4c07-870d-bd20c2fd5de2&idx=0 (accessed 26/09/25).

as in this kantharos held in Boston (figure 5),[183] or as one or both of a pair of janiform heads.[184] Unlike the previous examples, which saw males of African appearance stand alongside mythological kings as warriors or attendants, the artists of these

[183] Kantharos, unknown provenance. H. 17.7 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 00.332. Beazley Archive: 231207. Beazley 1963: 1529.1; Snowden 2010: fig. 154. For a catalogue of single-headed kantharoi depicting African heads, see Derbew 2022: Appendix 2.

[184] For a catalogue of janiform kantharoi depicting one or two African heads, see Derbew 2022: Appendix 1.

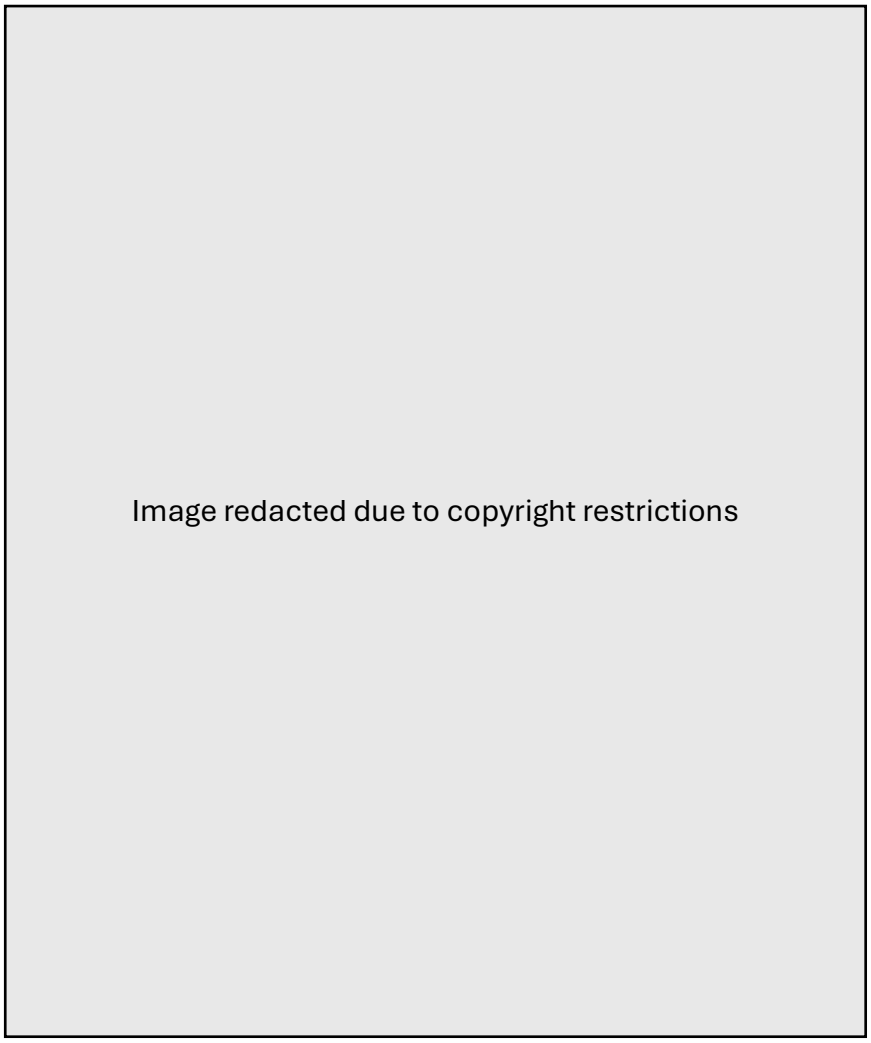


Figure 6: Janiform kantharos. African female head. C. 510-480 BC. Said to be from Tanagra, Greece. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 98.926. Source: Museum of Fine Arts Boston online collections https://collections.mfa.org/objects/153959/highhandled-drinking-cup-kantharos-in-the-form-of-two-fem (accessed 26/09/25).

kantharoi were concerned with placing Africans within the sphere of Dionysos, as the rim of this example makes clear. These kantharoi were specifically designed to be used at banquets, and evidently Africans were seen as especially suitable subjects for such a lively banquet setting. Unlike the masculine mythological scenes above, these kantharoi also allowed for the representation of African females, an iconography also missing from the later repertoire. A slightly later janiform kantharos sees the heads of two women, one Greek and one African

(pictured in figure 6), juxtaposed against each other.[185] The African woman's skin is painted with a black glaze, and she has bright orange hair in a dotted texture to denote its tight curls. She is depicted smiling with her teeth showing, a common iconographic feature in images of Africans throughout antiquity. She wears exquisite earrings. Her Greek counterpart is shown with skin painted in red-orange colour. Her hair is shown in red-orange colour, outlined in black to distinguish from her face, and is softly waved. Round the neck of the cup is the phrase ΚΑΛΟΣ Ο ΠΑΙΣ Ο ΠΑΙΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ, or 'handsome is this boy, this boy is handsome', probably a joke at the expense of the male who would take a sip from this cup at a banquet; he would raise the cup to his face, and would appear to transform into either of these beautiful women in the eyes of his fellow banqueters. The trend for three-dimensional heads of Africans continued into the fourth century and beyond,[186] appearing also on other types of vessels such as aryballoi or oinochoes (e.g., the later Hellenistic bronze oinochoe at figure 75).

Another popular image type from fourth century Italy played on the perceived geographical origins of the African subject.[187] An Apulian askos, epitomising this type, shows an African male wrestling a crocodile (figure 7),[188] certainly an allusion to the Nile and its inhabitants. The male is shown in black glaze with red-orange enhancements on his eyes, nose, mouth and genitals, contrasting with the

[185] Janiform kantharos, said to be from Tanagra, Greece. H. 19.2 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 98.926. Beazley Archive: 218366. Beazley 1963: 1534.9; Derbew 2022: 31, figs 2.1a-c.
[186] E.g., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 07.863 and 07.864.
[187] Snowden 2010: figs 213-214.
[188] Askos from Apulia, Italy. H. 15.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 55.11.3. Mayo and Hamma 1982: 123 no. 44; Picón et al 2007: 165, 440 no. 191; Olya 2025: 133-134, fig. 5.



Figure 7: Askos. African male wrestling a crocodile. C. 350-300 BC. From Apulia, Italy. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 55.11.3. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection online https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254817 (accessed 29/09/25). Used under CC0.

crocodile depicted in a red-orange colour with black details to show a reptilian pattern on its skin.

In the fourth century BC, African faces emerge as decorative elements on luxurious objects. An exquisite volute krater attributed to the Meleager Painter is highly decorated with mythological and Dionysiac scenes, as well as ornate painted

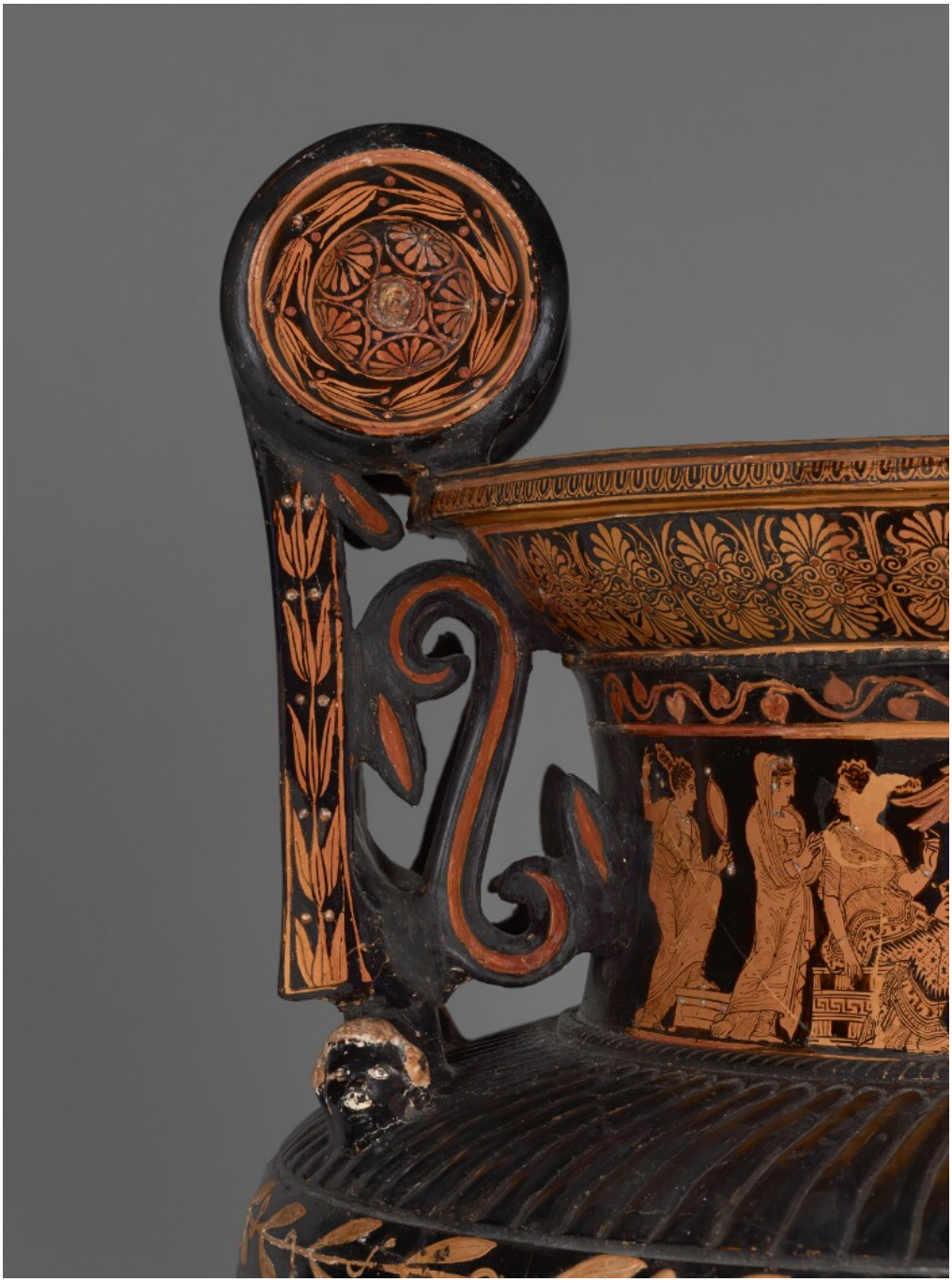


Figure 8: Volute krater. Head of an African youth. C. 390-380 BC. Unknown provenance. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, inv. 87.AE.93. Source: Getty online museum collection https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103WFJ?canvas=b5d10dd2-dbca-4b97-a2c0-4e6a608fbe04 (accessed 01/10/25). Used under CC0 1.0.

adornments. At the base of each handle is a three-dimensional head of an African youth, painted in black glaze with red-orange enhancements (figure 8).[189] This decoration seemingly has no relevance to the painted scenes on the vase, so

[189] Red-figure volute krater, unknown provenance. H. 78.7 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, inv. 87.AE.93. Beazley Archive: 44230. Tsiafakis 2019: no. 24, pl. 564-573.

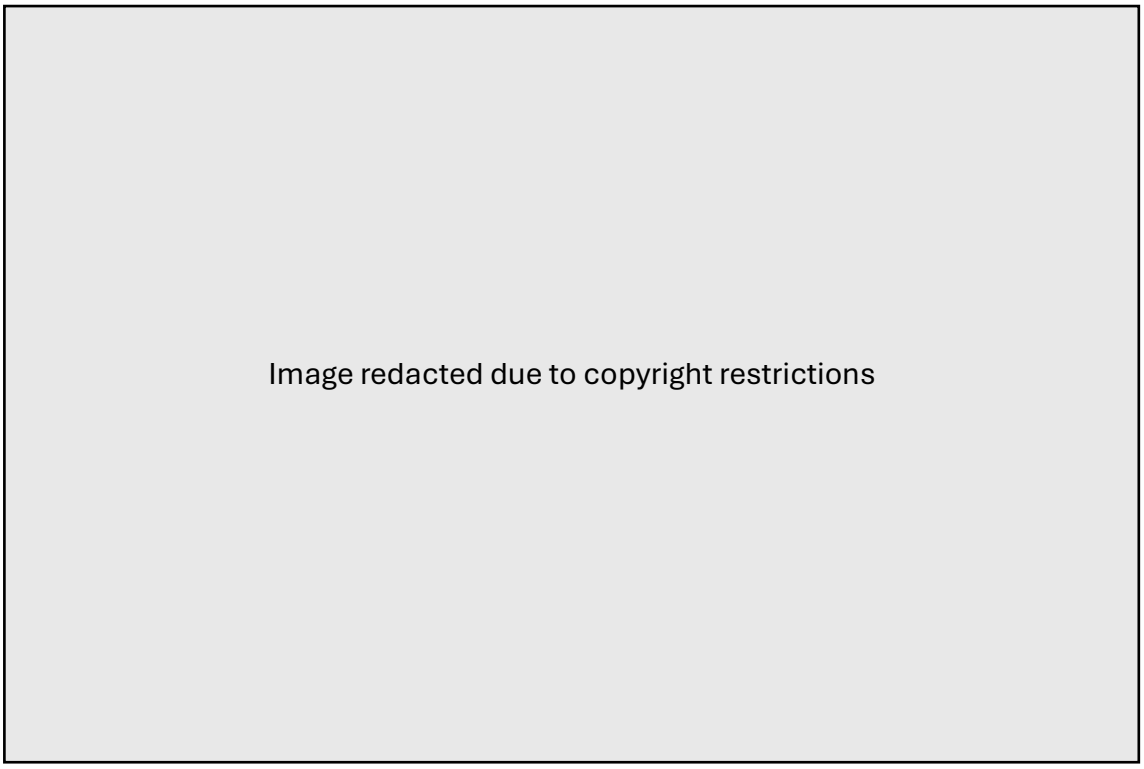


Figure 9: Phiale. Concentric rings of African male heads. Gold. C. early third century BC. From Panagyurishte, Bulgaria. The Regional Archaeological Museum, Plovdiv, inv. 3204. Source: World History Encyclopedia https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9065/gold-phiale-from-the-panagyurishte-treasure/ (accessed 01/10/25).

civilisation that sparked curiosity in Greeks and others. Hanno of Carthage, an explorer from around this time, called the Ethiopians 'inhospitable', and explained that the Trogodytai, a nearby people, were 'men with strange forms' believed to be 'faster than horses on a race course.'[193]

Herodotus' *Histories* similarly speculated about the Ethiopian people and their customs. He describes the people as μέγιστοι καὶ κάλλιστοι ἀνθρώπων πάντων,[194] and ponders their process for selecting a king: τὸν ἂν τῶν ἀστῶν κρίνωσι

[190] E.g., a gold pendant shaped in janiform African female heads, from Taranto, Greece. The British Museum, London, inv. 1896,0616.5.
[191] Gold phiale from Panagyurishte, Bulgaria. D. 24.7 cm. The Regional Archaeological Museum, Plovdiv, inv. 3204. Snowden 2010: figs 221-222; Valeva 2015: 202-203
[192] Hom. *Il*. 1.423; cf. 23.206. See also *Od*. 1.22-23, 4.84, 5.282, 5.287. Cf. Hes. *Theog*. 984-985 for Memnon as 'Αἰθιόπων βασιλῆα'.
[193] Hanno of Carthage *Periplous* 7; tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 179-180.
[194] Hdt. 3.20: 'the largest and most beautiful of all men.' (Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 181).

μέγιστόν τε εἶναι καὶ κατὰ τὸ μέγαθος ἔχειν τὴν ἰσχύν, τοῦτον ἀξιοῦσι βασιλεύειν.[195] He also suggests that they regularly lived to 120-years-old,[196] and reiterates Hanno's alleged observation that they were remarkably fast.[197] an indication that Ethiopian people were still semi-mythological in the Greek imagination. He suggests that the skin colour of Ethiopians was dark due to the heat,[198] and that their semen was similarly dark in colour.[199] Similar environmental theories can be found in much later sources, which suggest that the skin colour, hair texture, and even temperament of Ethiopians is due to the heat.[200]

A fourth century BC manuscript attributed to 'Pseudo-Skylax' details an exploration of the known world and gives a significant description of the Ethiopian people and their way of life.[201] It speculates about their trading practices and suggests that they have an abundance of exotic animal skins and ivory. The influence of Herodotus over this account is clear, as it expands upon his earlier comments regarding their appearance and their process for choosing a king: 'These Ethiopians are the tallest of all humans we know of and are over six feet tall, with some even ranging above seven feet tall. They have beards and long hair and are the most beautiful of all humanity. Their king is whoever among them is the tallest.' It also considers the food that Ethiopians consume, suggesting that they were 'meat-eaters and milk drinkers' and that they 'consume a great deal of wine from the vine'.

[195] Hdt. 3.20: 'their citizens think the man fit to be a king is the one they judge to be the largest and to have the strength for a man of such a size.' (Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 181).
[196] Hdt. 3.23.
[197] Hdt. 4.182.
[198] Hdt. 2.22
[199] Hdt. 3.101.
[200] Manil. 4.723; Philostr. *V A* 2.18; Plin. *HN* 2.79; Ptol. *Tetr*. 2.2.56; Vitr. *De arch*. 6.1.3-4.
[201] Ps. Skylax 112.8-12. Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 182.

The influence of these earlier sources on authors writing in the 1st century BC and beyond is clear. In his description of inhabitants of a fantastical island south of Africa, Diodorus Siculus, for instance, speculates about their remarkable height and beauty amongst more unbelievable claims, such as their forked tongues that allow them to communicate with animals.[202] He also claims that the religious practices of Ethiopians were most pleasing to the gods, drawing specifically on the Iliad as evidence.[203] However, he also describes other types of Ethiopians less favourably,[204] painting a disparaging picture of a distinct group of 'Others'. First, he describes their physical characteristics: οἱ πλεῖστοι δὲ τούτων καὶ μάλισθ᾽ οἱ παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν οἰκοῦντες ταῖς μὲν χρόαις εἰσὶ μέλανες, ταῖς δὲ ἰδέαις σιμοί, τοῖς δὲ τριχώμασιν οὖλοι.[205] He then goes on to describe their character as wild and bestial, suggesting that αὐχμηροὶ γὰρ ὄντες τοῖς ὅλοις σώμασι τοὺς μὲν ὄνυχας ἐπὶ πολὺ παρηγμένους ἔχουσι τοῖς θηρίοις παραπλησίως, τῆς δὲ πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλανθρωπίας πλεῖστον ὅσον ἀφεστήκασι.[206]

The artistic and literary backdrop for the material investigated in this thesis is vast and complex in nature. Africans (or Ethiopians), especially males, appear in mythological settings accompanying gods, and as such their pious nature appears in numerous sources. They are similarly found in the sphere of Dionysos in material culture, though this does not extend to the written sources. Most consistent through the art and literature before the second century BC, however, is a concern with the

[202] Diod. Sic. 2.56.2-5. Cf. Pompon. 3.85 for a similar allusion to the beauty of Ethiopians.
[203] Diod. Sic. 3.2.2-4.
[204] Diod. Sic. 3.8.
[205] 'Most of these, especially those living on the riverbanks, are black in color, have flat noses, and woolly hair'. Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 189.
[206] '[t]heir whole bodies are squalid, their nails are long and curved like wild animal talons, and they completely lack human kindness for each other.' Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 189.

geographical origins of Africans or Ethiopians. Reflections of fantasy can be found in the art, where African males can be found wrestling crocodiles, and in the literature, where authors questioned how geographical location impacted appearance, temperament, and lifestyle.

Chapter 1
African males as athletes

The first chapter of this thesis investigates images of African males as athletes. Unlike following chapters, this exploration of African males in athletic imagery does not rely on repeated iconographies or image types. Rather, a thematic link between a few disparate images has allowed for their grouping for the purpose of this thesis, and a single set of assumptions about masculinity underpin the collection of evidence presented here. These separate instances of representations of African athletes offer an alternative view of African masculinity to other thematic groups explored below.

This chapter will open with a discussion of two representations of African youths who have been mischaracterised as enslaved: a bronze statuette originally used as a lampstand, said to be from Perugia, and a mosaic of a youth carrying bath implements from Thmuis. This section will reframe these images within their artistic contexts, drawing comparisons with other depictions of African males and depictions of idealised Greek athletes. Analysis of body composition and costume will establish that the original interpretation of these youths as enslaved is unlikely, and I will instead demonstrate that these are more likely to be representations of athletes. These artefacts will be used to show the importance of revisiting depictions of African males from the ancient Mediterranean, the scholarly interpretation of which has historically been influenced by anti-Black bias and prejudice. I will revisit these artefacts with the new focus on idealised athleticism, and highlight how fragile constructions of masculinity can be, both in the ancient context and in the eyes of a modern viewer.

Discussion will then turn to less ambiguous representations of African athletes. This will centre on the famous Alexandrian wrestler mosaic, which depicts an athlete of African appearance competing against a wrestler of Graeco-Macedonian appearance. Despite scholarly imagination having been gripped by this mosaic since its discovery in 1993, discussion of its iconography has largely neglected to consider the scene in its entirety. In this section I will attempt to address the whole scene and its impact on the way we subsequently interpret the wrestling figures. Firstly, I will discuss the setting of the scene within the gymnasium. This will involve a consideration of the gymnasium as a masculine space and discuss the gender performance and education of masculinity which was central to its function in the ancient world, drawing comparisons to Gagen's work on gender performance in children's playgrounds. Focus will then shift to the wrestlers themselves in an analysis of their composition and its potential meaning, as well as a consideration of the impact that the gymnasium setting has on their perception. Other depictions of athletes, both Greek and African, will be brought in for comparison, including boxers and other wrestlers. Ultimately, I will argue that the lack of deviation between these representations and depictions of idealised 'Greek' athletes possibly indicates that these representations were equally supposed to evoke feelings of idealised masculinity, and that their ethnicity might not have had any impact on the construction of their gender.

African males as athletes in literature

The disparate and unrelated nature of these images is also reflected in the written record, which gives explicit no reference to African males as athletes in Greece or

elsewhere in the Mediterranean. As discussed below, Diodorus Siculus mentions the Greek education of Meroitic king Ergamenes, which probably would have involved physical education in the space of the gymnasium.[207] This, however, is an assumption that, if correct, exists as a single instance in an otherwise non-existent body of material. This being said, the absence of literary evidence does not mean that African males, or males of African appearance, were not athletes or were not allowed within the sphere of the gymnasium, as will be demonstrated below.

Ancient gender, modern agenda

A bronze lampstand said to be from Perugia (figure 10) gives the perfect introduction to this chapter.[208] Originally belonging to the collection of William Cleverly Alexander, a collector primarily of eastern Asian art, this piece was acquired by the British Museum in 1908 with little record of its provenance. The well-preserved lampstand shows a young nude African male standing in contrapposto, his weight balanced on his left leg and his right foot raised at the heel. His legs and torso are slender but muscular, the shiny quality of the bronze surface highlighting the soft delineations of his calves, abdominals and pectorals. His right hand is held at his hip while his left is held aloft, his palm facing upwards with his fingers slightly curved. Traces of an object support survive in this palm. His face, which, like his hair,

[207] Diod. Sic. 3.6.3.

[208] Bronze lampstand, said to be from Perugia, Italy. Height: 23.2 cm without base. The British Museum, London, inv. 1908,0515.1. Marshall 1909: 163-164, no. 6; Walters 1915: pl. LXVIII and commentary; Beardsley 1929: 112; Snowden 1970: fig. 66; Snowden 2010: 229; Lenski 2013: 144; Grawehr 2019: 98. The British Museum acquisition notice given by Marshall 1909: 163-164 gives the provenance of this piece as Perugia, though no record of the object exists before the purchase of the artefact by the National Art Collections Fund. The provenance of this piece is, therefore, not certain.



Figure 10: Lampstand. Young African male, nude. Bronze. C. first century BC-first century AD. Said to be from Perugia, Italy. The British Museum, London, inv. 1908,0515.1. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1908-0515-1 (accessed 22/07/2024). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

displays his African heritage, looks towards the now-lost object. Scholarly consensus has agreed that this object would have probably functioned as a lamp.[209] In his discussion of representations of enslaved boys and *lampadarii*, Lenski grouped this figure with the bronze statuettes of young enslaved African boys largely

[209] Marshall 1909: 163; Walters 1915: pl. LXVIII commentary; Lenski 2013: 144. See also Beardsley 1929: 112.

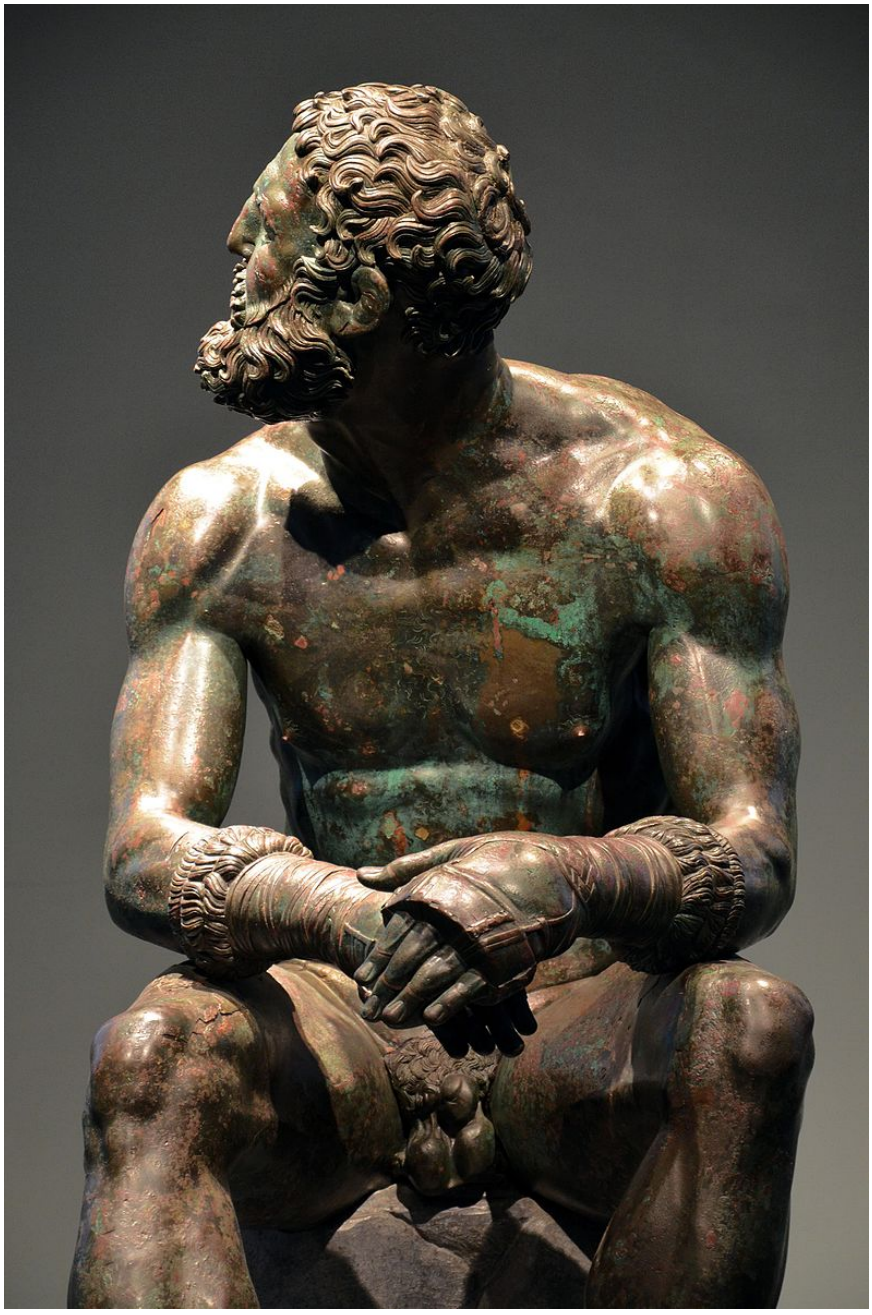


Figure 11: Sculpture. Boxer at rest. Bronze. C. third-first century BC. From Rome, Italy. Palazzo Mazzimo alle Terme, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 1055. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/66/Boxer_of_Quirinal%2C_Greek_Hellenistic_bronze_sculpture_of_a_sitting_nude_boxer_at_rest%2C_100-50_BC%2C_Palazzo_Massimo_alle_Terme%2C_Rome_%2813332932055%29.jpg (accessed 21/12/24). Author: Carole Raddato. Used under CC BY-SA 2.0.

dating to the first or second century AD,[210] to be discussed in chapter 3. Undeniably, there are shared characteristics between the artefacts which superficially support

[210] Lenski 2013: 144.

this conclusion. However, certain iconographic features which have been largely overlooked make the portrayal of such enslavement unlikely here.

The age of this male is the first point of consideration. His delicately delineated musculature, slender body proportions, long limbs, and lack of facial hair are features commonly used to indicate youth in the idealised Greek sculpture types popular from the Classical period through the height of the Roman empire.[211] Contrast can be found in many idealised depictions of adult males, but for just one example we can turn to the famous life-size bronze sculpture of a boxer at rest discovered at the Quirinal Hill in Rome (figure 11).[212] The adulthood of this male is undeniable given his thick beard, but his age is also highlighted by his anatomy. His shoulders are broad and his muscles, particularly deltoids and trapezius, are far more defined. The incredible sculpted detail of this bronze also includes the protrusion of veins on his arms, an indication of years of physical activity which is not always present in sculpture of this kind. A comparison to another famous bronze, the young athlete discovered off the coast of Fano, feels far more familiar in its composition to the youth in question (figure 12).[213] He is shown standing in the idealised contrapposto stance, raising his right hand to his head to adjust his wreath, a symbol of his victory in an athletic competition. Unlike the well-built musculature of the boxer at rest, his soft musculature and slender proportions give the impression of youth and are more like the African male in question. His

[211] On different depictions of youth in the sculpture of Polykleitos, see Plin. *HN* 34.55.
[212] Bronze sculpture, from the Quirinal Hill at Rome, Italy. Height 120 cm. Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 1055. Lanciani 1888: 304-307; Himmelmann 1989: 150-174; Smith 1991: 54-55, fig, 62; Daehner and Lapatin 2015: cat. 18.
[213] Sculpture, from off the coast of Fano, Italy. Height 151 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. 77.AB.30. Frel 1982; Mattusch 1997; Stewart 2014: 125, fig. 68; Daehner and Lapatin 2015: 197, 210-211, no. 12.

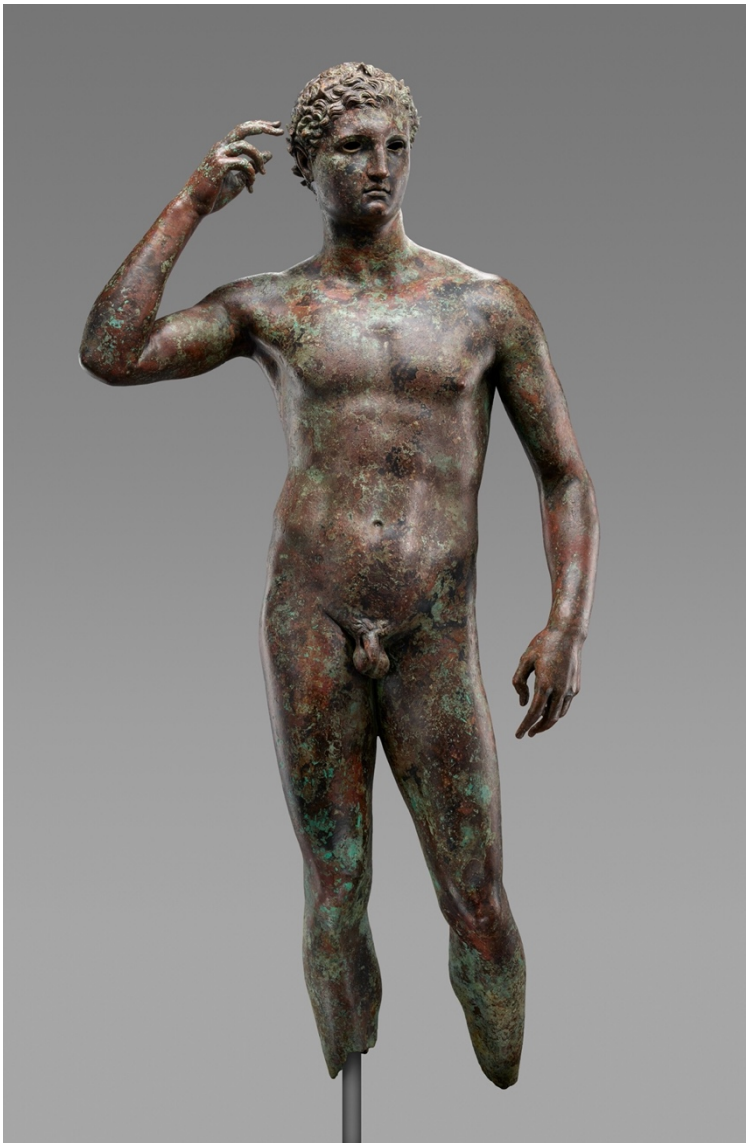


Figure 12: Sculpture. Youthful athlete. Bronze. C. fourth-second century BC. From off the coast of Fano, Italy. The J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. 77.AB.30. Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum collection online https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103QSX (accessed 23/07/2024). Used under CC0 1.0.

abdominals and pectorals are beginning to develop, but his shoulders remain narrow and undefined, and his limbs are long. Based on their body composition, I propose that the age of the African youth at the centre of this discussion is somewhere around that of the Fano athlete.

A further indicator of his age can be found in the depiction of pubic hair. As discussed in chapter 3, pubic hair was a crucial indicator of post-pubescence and was, therefore, undesirable for attractive young, enslaved boys, known as *pueri*

delicati, both real and imagined. Unlike other anatomical indications of puberty, it seems that body hair was particularly unwelcome.[214] Though evidently supposed to be a youth, the depiction of a thick mass of pubic hair has made the post-pubescence of this male indubitable and has distanced his depiction from those of young, enslaved boys. However, it must be recognised that the undesirability of pubic hair on boys is not reflected universally in ancient art. Rather, it is a common, acceptable, even desirable characteristic in different types of idealised sculpture, including depictions of athletes.[215] In an analysis of the iconography of age in athletic sculpture, Serwint explains that pubic hair is never seen on 'youths', while 'adolescents' and older males seem to be depicted with pubic hair most of the time.[216] For instance, if we take the comparanda given above, each of these males is shown with pubic hair, despite being depicted at different life stages. While she (rightly) does not ascribe specific numerical ages to her categories, Serwint's thorough analysis of depictions of athletes at various life stages highlights that pubic hair remains an important feature in denoting age in athletic statuary, just as in the depictions of young, sexually desirable enslaved boys. Unlike the iconography of enslaved boys, however, the presence of pubic hair in athletic statuary and its subsequent implication of post-pubescence does not undermine the idealism of the iconography. Rather, it is a determining factor of life stage, which was especially important in the sphere of the gymnasium and sport given the categorisation of

[214] See page 194.
[215] On the changing conventions of pubic hair in athletic statuary from sixth-century kouroi to mid-fifth century youths, see Smith 2007: 112-116, esp. fig. 16. Cf. Davies 2019: 154-155 on the aesthetics of body hair.
[216] Serwint 1987: 213-240.

males by age group.[217] The depiction of pubic hair in this bronze shows that he is not to be seen as a boy, but rather a post-pubescent male approaching adulthood. Pubic and, more broadly, body hair were not only seen as indicators of growing up, but also a sign of being a man, closely entwined with necessary qualities of masculinity.[218] To group this figure with the (mostly) later depictions of young, notably hairless enslaved African boys then does not seem suitable.

A closer look at the statuette in question reveals that the boy's penis is tied with a *kynodesmē*. The *kynodesmē*, literally translating as 'dog leash', was a piece of string which held the penis in place during exercise. It would be tied around the foreskin and pulled upwards, the excess string then tied around the waist to keep the penis held against the body.[219] Though the string is missing from around this youth's waist, it still seems likely that this was the intention of the artist given the upwards position of the penis. Grawehr has specifically noted that depicted here is a Greek *kynodesmē* rather than Roman *infibulation*, which would have typically pierced the foreskin and was associated with enslaved males and singers rather than athletes.[220] Though the exact function of a *kynodesmē* remains unclear,[221] it was primarily associated with depictions of Greek athletes.[222] The iconography of the athletic *kynodesmē* first appears on depictions of athletes on Archaic vases,

[217] On age categorisations in the Hellenistic gymnasium, see Crowther 2009; Weiler 2004: 31-32; Petermandl 2014: 295-296.
[218] E.g., Epictetus *Discourses* 3.1.26-31; Muson. fr. 21. Cf. Gleason 1995: 69-70.
[219] Grawehr 2019: 98. Cf. Hodges 2001: 381-384.
[220] Grawehr 2019: 98. This distinction between the Greek *kynodesmē* and Roman *infibulation* is defined by Vendries 2006. See also Fisher 2014: 253-256.
[221] Scott 2014: 97 gives numerous potential reasons for using a *kynodesmē*, such as modesty, practicality, and to mitigate unwanted erections; Barrow 2018: 28-30 suggests, on top of these, protection and to create the impression of a long foreskin, in-keeping with aesthetic preferences. Cf. Lee 2015: 59.
[222] Cf. Hodges 2001: 381 n. 22.

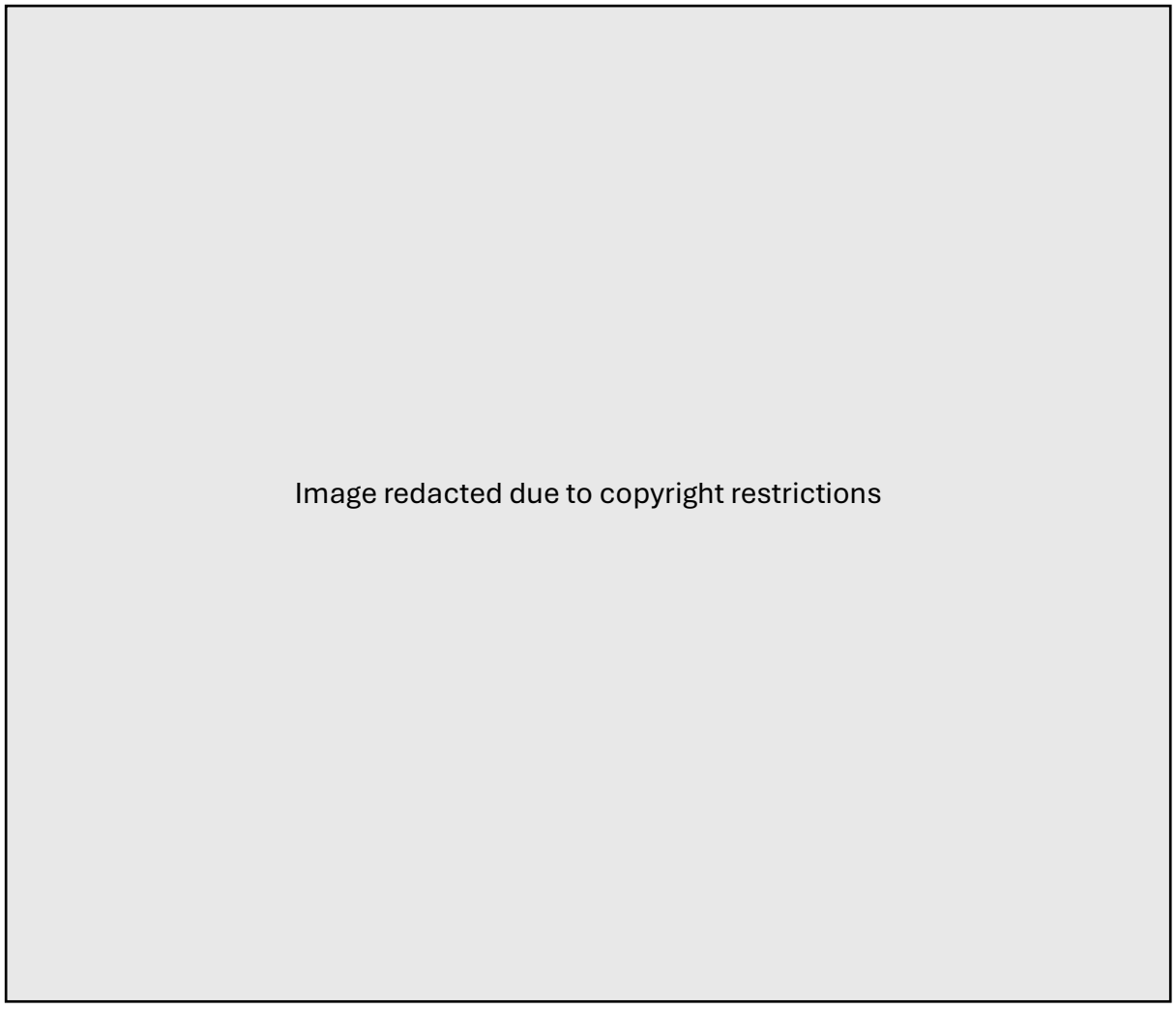


Figure 13: Calyx krater. Red-figure vase painting attributed to Euphronios. Gymnasium scene. C. 515 BC. From Capua, Italy. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. F2180. Source: Google Arts and Culture https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/at-the-gymnasium-euphronios/1gGotPEWHsi6qQ?hl=en&ms=%7B%22x%22%3A0.5%2C%22y%22%3A0.5%2C%22z%22%3A9.310935815212089%2C%22size%22%3A%7B%22width%22%3A1.8584956097560983%2C%22height%22%3A1.2375000000000005%7D%7D (accessed 21/12/24).

such as a famous calyx krater attributed to Euphronios, which depicts a gymnasium scene (figure 13).[223] Amongst a range of males in various states of dress and performing various gymnasium-related activities, is a youth holding his penis by its foreskin in his left hand and a piece of string in the other, preparing to tie it in a

[223] Red-figure calyx-krater, from Capua, Italy. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. F2180. Beazley Archive: 200063. Beazley 1942: 16.4; Lee 2015: 58-59, fig. 3.3; Shapiro 2021: 7-8, fig. 1.1.

kynodesmē. A Hellenistic example of this piece of athletic apparatus can be seen in the bronze boxer at rest discussed above (figure 11).[224]

For these reasons, it seems unlikely that this is a depiction of an enslaved boy, despite sharing certain characteristics. Instead, it seems far more likely that the original intent of the artist was to depict a youthful athlete, given the iconographic features shared with idealised athletes from Classical and Hellenistic art and their Roman copies. Had this youth not been depicted with African facial features, this would have likely been the predominant conclusion throughout relevant research, given the overwhelming implication of the *kynodesmē*. Yet it has been continually asserted that this youth is enslaved,[225] which of course has implications for the perception of his gender. The original interpretation of his identity as an enslaved boy would mean that he exists within a sub-class of males necessarily outside the norms of hegemonic masculinity, or at least placed by those norms in a subordinate position, essentially seen as an object to be purchased and dominated. This perception of his gender is only strengthened when considering his similarities to the depictions of African *pueri delicati* discussed in chapter 3 who, as it will be shown, were often forced into a sexually submissive and, consequently, effeminate position. However, the identification of this youth as an athlete shifts our perception of his gender significantly. He now exists firmly within the realm of idealised

[224] Bronze sculpture, from Rome, Italy. Height 120 cm. Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 1055. Lanciani 1888: 304-307; Himmelmann 1989: 150-174; Smith 1991: 54-55, fig, 62; Daehner and Lapatin 2015: cat. 18.
[225] Marshall 1909: 163-164; Beardsley 1929: 112; Snowden 1970: 187; Lenski 2013: 144; Grawehr 2019: 98.

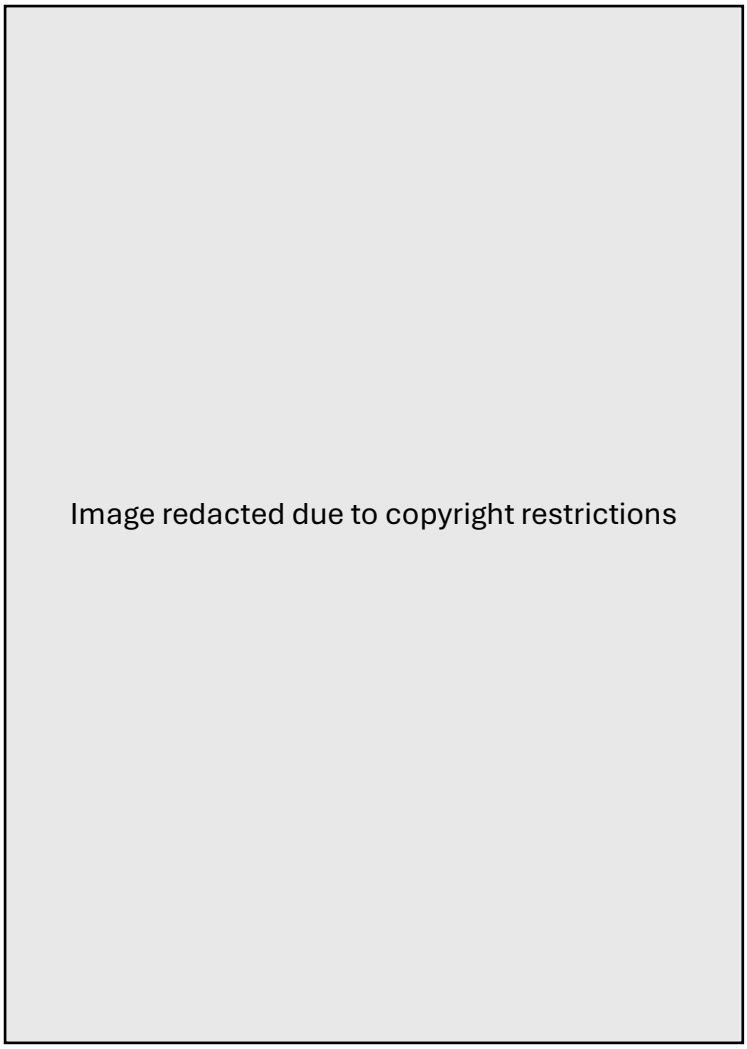


Figure 14: Fragmentary mosaic. An African male with bathing equipment. Early first century BC. From Thmuis, Egypt. Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, inv. 21740. Source: Guimier-Sorbets 2019: fig. 47.

masculinity. Such idealised masculinity associated with athletes, particularly within the sphere of the gymnasium, will be explored below.

A youth in a mosaic from Thmuis has been subject to similar mischaracterisation (figure 14).[226] The date of this mosaic itself has been disputed. Initially, a Roman imperial date was suggested based on its supposed lack of refinement.[227] A later comparison between the technique used in the creation of this

[226] Fragmentary mosaic, from Thmuis, Egypt. 1.02 x 0.695 m. Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, inv. 21740. Breccia 1932: 65, pl. LIII; Brown 1957: 69-70; Parlasca 1975: 364; Daszewski 1985: 164-165, no. 42, pl. 36a; Guimier-Sorbets 2004a: 25; Westgate 2011: 309-310; Guimier-Sorbets 2019: 56, 62-63, fig. 47-48.
[227] Brown 1957: 69-70.

mosaic to others found on Delos dating to the late second or early first century BC and to Hellenistic and early Roman mosaics from Thmuis point more convincingly to a date of the early first century BC.[228]

The mosaic is fragmentary, but enough survives to ascertain most of its original appearance. Surrounded by a meander pattern is a rectangular motif composed in bright polychrome, largely consisting of a blue-green background and a single central figure; a nude male standing in contrapposto. His body is mostly created in dark grey tesserae, though black is used for his outline and finer details such as musculature. The use of dark colours indicates that this person was perhaps intended to be African or of African heritage. Slung across his left shoulder is a long white towel or chlamys which drapes over his left arm. In his right hand he holds a bronze hoop with numerous implements attached with ribbons, such as a green and bronze aryballos and strigils.

Two interpretations of this image have prevailed in the scholarship. The first is that this youth is enslaved, carrying toiletries to the bath for his master.[229] This is. a possibility; numerous examples of African bath attendants exist from antiquity, including in mosaics. However, the iconography of each one of these examples, though similar to each other, diverges significantly from that of the Thmuis mosaic. Take, for instance, the representation of a bath attendant on a mosaic found in Pompeii (figure 89). Where the Thmuis youth is idealised – nude, athletic, and standing in contrapposto – the Pompeian figure is shown as the opposite, with a

[228] Daszewski 1985: 165; Guimier-Sorbets 2004a: 25; Guimier-Sorbets 2019: 56.
[229] Brown 1957: 69-70; Parlasca 1975: 364.



Figure 15: Statuette. African bath attendant stepping on a duck. Bronze. C. Early Roman Imperial period (?). Unknown provenance. Millesgården Museum, Lidingö, inv. A 107. Source: Millesgården Museum online https://konstdatabas.millesgarden.se/antiken.asp?id=112 (accessed 18/12/24).

distorted body and clumsily exposed genitalia, striding purposefully, askos in each hand, towards the bath where his imagined master awaits.[230]

Two bronze statuettes are remarkably similar in iconography to the Pompeian mosaic (figures 15 and 16).[231] Though their musculature is more prominent

[230] Cf. the much later mosaic of a macrophallic bath attendant from the north-western baths at Timgad, Algeria. See below figure 83.

[231] Figure 7: Bronze statuette of unknown provenance. Height 17.3 cm. Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart, inv. 3.358. Gaedechens 1862: 108, no. 440; Hafner 1958: 46-47, no. 358; Bielefeld 1992: 335, no. 289; Seiler 2011: 50, no. 95; Franken 2018. Figure 8: Bronze statuette of unknown provenance. Height 13 cm. Millesgården Museum, Lidingö, inv. A 107. Andrén 1964: pl. 26 and commentary; Franken 2018. These objects have been generally dated to the Hellenistic period (e.g., Franken 2018), and described as Alexandrian (e.g., Bielefeld 1992: 335). However, I would

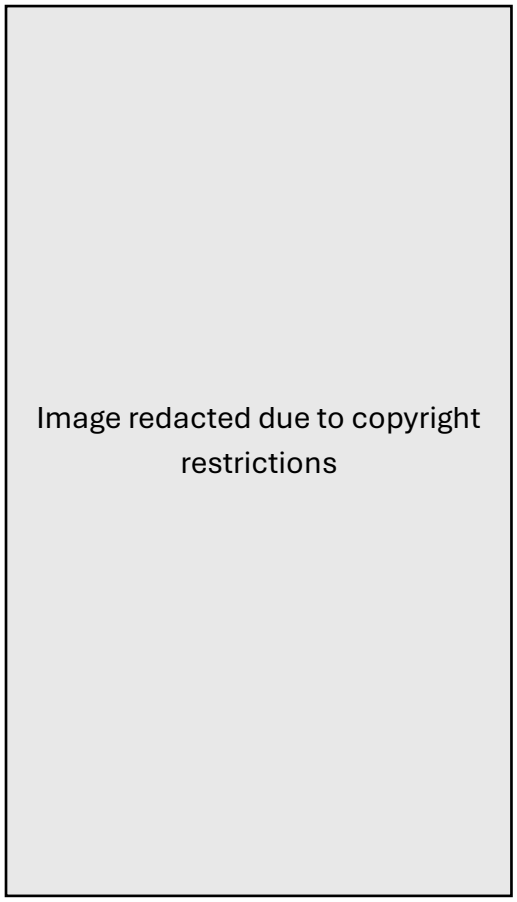


Figure 16: Statuette. African bath attendant stepping on a turtle. Bronze. C. Early Roman Imperial period. Unknown provenance. Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart, inv. 3.358. Source: Franken 2018: Taf. 9.1.

(particularly on the Millesgården example, figure 15), their slouched posture gives the impression that this is probably a result of hard work rather than leisurely athletics. In each hand they carry straight-sided handles, likely belonging to askoi.[232] They are shown mid-stride, stepping onto a tortoise and a duck respectively. While the aquatic creatures are probably a reference to the watery nature of the baths, this movement deliberately allows 'accidental' phallic exposure from beneath their short loincloths, a means to degrade the subjects and highlight their lower status. A

suggest that the style of the Stuttgart bronze in particular does not appear to be Hellenistic due to the body proportions and facial features. A later date of first-third century AD, as suggested by Seiler 2011: 50, perhaps seems more suitable.

[232] As thoroughly argued by Franken 2018: 46-48.

comparison between these examples shows a regular pattern of iconography which allows for the identification of bath attendants: movement, equipment, clothing, and (accidental) exposure of genitals. This iconography is strikingly different to that of the Thmuis youth: his leisurely contrapposto stance contrasts the busy movement of the attendants; he carries a single luxurious aryballos and a towel or chlamys casually slung over his shoulder, as if for personal use; and he is deliberately nude, a common feature of idealised ancient Mediterranean art which often carries dignity and, counter-intuitively, draws attention from the penis, the opposite effect to 'accidental' exposure of a clothed individual. As Daszewski states, '[t]here is no apparent reason other than colour to call the man a 'Nubian slave'';[233] he certainly does not fit any criteria which would identify him as such.

An alternative interpretation is that the youth of the Thmuis mosaic is an athlete preparing to cleanse himself after exercise.[234] The contrapposto stance and delineated musculature of the figure are similar to representations of athletes, including those discussed above. The image of the cleansing athlete is equally familiar. For comparison, Daszewski cites the Apoxyomenos of Lysippus, which shows a nude male figure standing in contrapposto and scraping himself with a strigil, presented here in a particularly remarkable Hellenistic bronze copy discovered off the coast of Vele Orjule (figure 17).[235] This popular sculpture type not

[233] Daszewski 1985: 165. This characterisation of the figure as a 'Nubian slave' comes from Brown 1957: 70.
[234] Daszewski 1985: 165; Guimier-Sorbets 2004a: 25; Westgate 2011: 309-310 agrees with this conclusion and suggests that this is made even more likely by the discovery of the Alexandrian wrestling mosaic in 1993; Guimier-Sorbets 2019: 56.
[235] Sculpture (bronze), from off the coast of Vele Orjule, Croatia. H. 1.94 m. Musej Apoksiomena, Mali Lošinj. Sténuit and Sténuit 2001; Michelucci 2006; Vidovič and Mille 2017; Bogovi (Zeskoski) 2018.

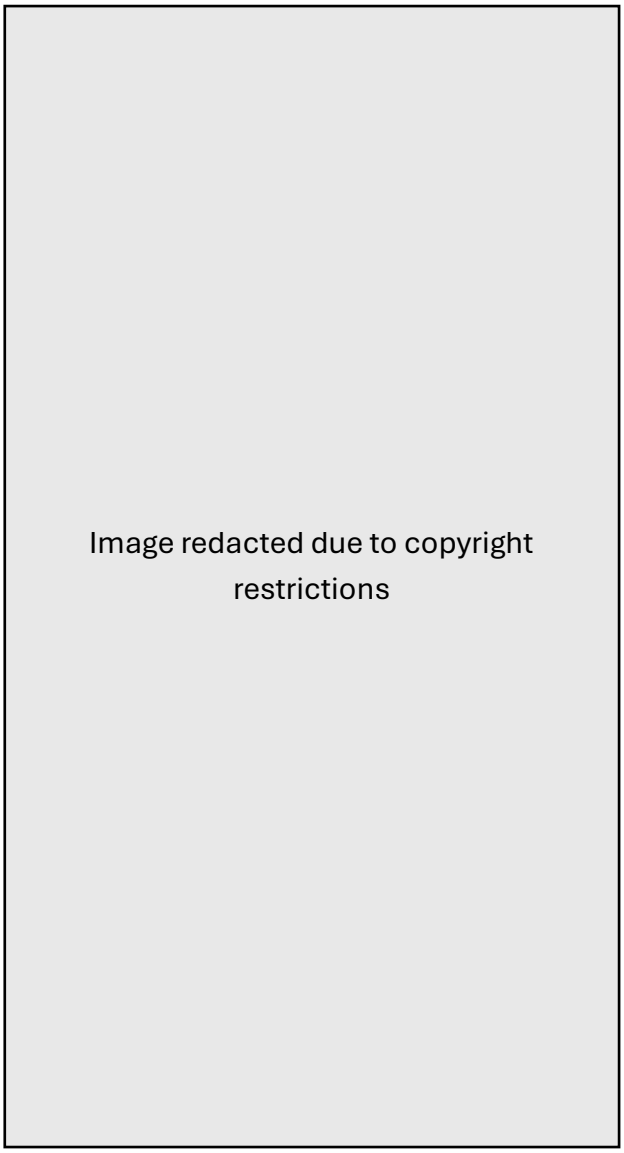


Figure 17: Sculpture. A youthful athlete bathing himself (Apoxyomenos type). Bronze. C. second-first century BC. From off the coast of Vele Orjule, Croatia. Musej Apoksiomena, Mali Lošinj. Source: Vidovič and Mille 2017: 43.1c.

only exemplifies an ideal for the athletic body in art of the late Classical tradition, which has already been shown to align with that of the Thmuis youth, but also highlights the importance of cleansing with oil in the ritual of athletics.[236]

The parallels between the Thmuis mosaic and these famous images of athletes are undeniable and, given the lack of any sense of humour or parody in this

[236] On Greek athletics and cleansing, see Philostr. *Gym*. 7, 18; Thuc. 1.6.5; Vitr. *De arch*. 5.11.2. For an overview of the link between baths and gymnasia in the ancient world, see Fagan 2021.

image, there is no reason to believe that this is anything other than a representation of an athlete attending the bath. There is such little variation from the idealised athletic type seen not only in the sculptures detailed here but in innumerable examples from antiquity that the African identity of this youth seems almost secondary to his characterisation as an athlete attending the bath. At least in this example, the construction of the young male body has not diverged at all from the self-characterisation of a particular type of idealised Greek athleticism and, therefore, race or ethnicity alone could not have had a significant impact on the construction and perception of masculinity here, at least as far is possible to determine from the surviving material.

These two instances of athletes mistaken for enslaved males raise important issues with understanding the construction of masculinity in depictions of African males in ancient art. Primarily, that this misidentification stems from modern socio-political biases and influence of contemporary beliefs around race and status. One instance of this can be found in Beardsley's discussion of the 'negro slave' from Perugia.[237] These two words alone are an obvious reflection of the anti-Black prejudice which permeates her work, an echo of the socio-political backdrop of 1920s USA,[238] but if we situate these words within the broader scope of this chapter, focused on 'The Character of the Ethiopian', it becomes clear that the Perugian youth was never going to be seen as anything other than a slave. She writes that the

[237] Beardsley 1929: 112.

[238] This bias is recognised even by her contemporaries: further to the references provided in the literature review of this thesis (pages 24-25), Brewer 1929: 532 suggests that Beardsley's assumption that 'the status of the African in Greece was determined as that of a menial, a comedian, or a slave purely on the grounds of color' was 'insanity' which had 'taken root only in America'.

'Ethiopian slave' was 'rare and fashionable…reserved for personal service or for entertainment,' before adding in a footnote that '[t]here is no doubt that they were slaves.'[239] This claim is based upon a single lekythos depicting an enslaved African for sale,[240] a piece which suitably supports Beardsley's pre-drawn conclusions about the status of Black people and,[241] in her eyes, excuses a lack of critical thinking and objectivity in the analysis of other depictions, including the Perugian youth. Subconscious bias leading to a lack of critical analysis is also evident in the research. Lenski, for instance, describes the Perugian youth as 'a youthful nude African', grouping the statuette with those I have classed as *pueri delicati* (chapter 3) and drawing subsequent parallels between these depictions and the so-called 'blackamoor' figures of the nineteenth century.[242] This analysis neglects in-depth iconographic analysis, missing the crucial differences between these types and relying on the plausibility that an African person could be enslaved. The misidentification of these youths has an impact on the way that their masculinity is perceived, which in turn contributes to a skewed, even prejudiced view of the status of African males in the ancient Mediterranean.

However, there are obvious parallels between these images and the depictions of enslaved Africans which have contributed to such a mis-categorisation of these images. It seems that there were desirable aesthetic qualities of the body which could equally construct a type of idealised masculinity or a type of non-ideal masculinity distinctly outside of the hegemonic norms,

[239] Beardsley 1929: 111 and n. 1.
[240] The British Museum, London, inv. 1873,0820.288.
[241] For a critical look at Beardsley's work, see pages 20-25.
[242] Lenski 2013: 144-146. On the 'blackamoor type', see Childs 2005; Childs 2010; Shohat 2018.

depending on accompanying qualities of the body. The soft musculature and slender proportions of the Perugian youth would certainly be fitting for a young, desirable enslaved boy, or for a fit, up-and-coming athlete. The delineated musculature of the Thmuis youth shows a strength which would be suitable for a hard-working bath attendant or a leisurely young man cleansing himself after exercise. The distinction between ideal and non-ideal hinges on subtleties and ambiguous hints at status, a reflection of the complexity of masculine ideals at this time which were not simply determined as 'masculine' or 'unmasculine', but rather functioned on a spectrum of gender performance, which determined that certain qualities were suitable for some but not for others.[243] This naturally complicates our ability as modern viewers to understand the intended construction of ancient masculinity. The addition of an African ethnicity, which allowed for even more flexibility in the iconographic construction of gender, complicates this further in the eyes of a modern viewer, particularly when combined with a bias which, consciously or otherwise, wishes to place Black males in a subordinate position.

The wrestler mosaic of Alexandria and the masculinity of the gymnasium

Not all depictions of African athletes are so seemingly ambiguous in their iconography. A now-famous mosaic excavated in Alexandria in 1993 is particularly pertinent to this study (figure 18).[244] Based on its location, which is believed to have

[243] For more on the physiognomy and semiotics of gender, see Gleason 1995: 55-81.
[244] Fragmentary mosaic, from Alexandria, Egypt. 3.25 m x 2.75 m. Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum, inv. 0858 (32045). Saïd and Fattah 1993: 111, 113-114; Saïd 1994: 379; Guimier-Sorbets 1998: 272-279; Daszewski 2001: 269-275; Fattah 2002: 51-54, BAAM 858; Guimier-Sorbets 2004a; Guimier-Sorbets 2004b: 70; Guimier-Sorbets 2007: 213-216; Rodziewicz



Figure 18: Fragmentary mosaic. Two wrestling youths, one Graeco-Macedonian, one African. Second century BC. From Alexandria, Egypt. Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum, Alexandria, inv. 0858 (32045). Source: Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum online collection highlights https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?a=858&lang=en (accessed 18/12/24).

originally been within the ancient royal district of the Ptolemaic dynasty,[245] and certain artistic details, such as the *opus vermiculatum* technique and the polychrome composition, the piece certainly dates to the Hellenistic period, most likely the first half of the second century BC.[246] Due to various archaeological

2009: 192-195; Westgate 2011: 309-310; Guimier-Sorbets 2019: 51-56; Riedel 2020: 160; Thomas 2021: 85-87.

[245] On discoveries in the region, see Saïd and Fattah 1997.

[246] Saïd 1994: 379; Daszewski 2001: 272; Fattah 2002: 53, BAAM 858; Guimier-Sorbets 2004a: 16; Guimier-Sorbets 2004b: 70 suggests the first half of the second century or just after 150 BC; Thomas 2021: fig. 2.28 suggests early- or mid-second century BC.

discoveries upon excavation, such as water sediment and a nearby aqueduct, it seems that this mosaic originally belonged to a bath complex.[247] This is also supported by the iconography of this mosaic, which will be investigated in due course, and a mosaic found in an adjacent room which shows a dog sitting next to a large bronze vessel (probably an askos) with a wooden handle, a sign of its suitability for the transportation of hot water in a bath complex.[248]

The composition of the mosaic is striking, combining a bold black-and-white geometric border with a more intricate *opus vermiculatum* technique in delicate polychrome for the figural panel, creating a pictorial illusion. The artist has similarly combined different sized tesserae in this panel to create a sense of three-dimensionality; pieces of around two to three millimetres make up the blue-grey background and beige floor, while smaller, less regular pieces have been used for the details in the foreground, including different coloured pieces for shading and highlights.[249] Only the left half of this panel has survived. On the far left of the figural panel, there is a large, intricately rendered water basin. It can be presumed that on the missing right-hand side of the scene there would have been a second architectural or artistic feature.[250]

This basin motif alleviates any ambiguity as to the imagined setting for this image: this is certainly a gymnasium scene. The situation of this activity within the

[247] For archaeological evidence that this may have been a bath complex, see Rodziewicz 2009: 192-193.
[248] For iconography of these mosaics as potential evidence that this was a bath complex, see Rodziewicz 2009: 193-195.
[249] Guimier-Sorbets 1998: 273.
[250] A herm was suggested in a recent talk delivered by J. Thomas (University of Oxford) titled 'From agōn to allegory? New thoughts on the Hellenistic wrestlers mosaic from Alexandria' (19/02/2024). Any future references to this talk in this thesis will be given as Thomas 2024.

gymnasium is immediately significant in a discussion centred on gender. Fundamentally, Hellenistic gymnasia were designed to be a space for the education of boys and young men, shaping them into good citizens, and a space for the performance of propriety by older men. While this education and performance originally centred on military training and exercise,[251] by the Hellenistic period gymnasia were used for physical and intellectual activities alike.[252] Though an extensive study of gender performance in the space of the ancient gymnasium is beyond the scope of this chapter,[253] I must touch upon the concept briefly here to highlight its significance here and subsequently to understand its impact on our perception of this exceptional piece of artwork. In an attempt to articulate the concept as succinctly as possible, I turn briefly to Gagen's work on gender performance in the playgrounds of early twentieth century USA.[254] Recognising that gender is a social construct, and expanding upon Butler's groundbreaking theories of gender performance,[255] Gagen successfully explores how 'heterosexist gender norms are sought through spatial practice, and emerge explicitly in learning environments'. She suggests that '[i]n spaces where learning is the predominant

[251] On the link between the Ptolemaic gymnasium and the army, see Paganini 2022: 70-72.
[252] E.g., Vitr. *De arch.* 5.11 describes the general layout of the contemporary Greek palaestra as not only having multiple spaces for exercise practice, a stadium for public competition, and baths, but also *exhedrae spatiosae…in quibis philosophi, rhetores reliquique, qui studiis delectantur, sedentes diputare possint* ('spacious exedrae…in which philosophers, rhetoricians, and all who delight in study, can sit and discuss'). Cf. Forbes 1945; Hawhee 2004: 109-132; König 2005: 45-50.
[253] On performance of masculinity in athletics and the gymnasium, see Papakonstantinou 2019, esp. 121-124, 131-133, 147-148.
[254] E.g., Gagen 2000.
[255] E.g., Butler 1988; Butler 1990. Butler posits that 'gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [*sic*]; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.' (Butler 1988: 519). In other words, gender is not something that one inherently *has* or *is*, but rather it is something which one *gains* or *becomes* through a series of conscious or subconscious performances as a result of social discourse.

enterprise, adults' efforts to induce particular performances confirms, first, that the aim of such practices is to acculturate children toward social norms, and second, that the alignment of certain gender performances within certain sexualised bodies is not inevitable, nor natural, but closely managed.'[256] This theory, while concentrated within a modern context and exclusively concerning children, can be used to shed light upon the gender dynamics of the ancient gymnasium.

Firstly, a gender binary is enforced in the gymnasium through the general exclusion of female participation. Unlike the playgrounds at the centre of Gagen's analysis which enforced segregation within a space and subsequently its activities, the external exclusion of females defines the ancient gymnasium as a male space,[257] imposing a further gender exclusivity upon many of the associated activities such as wrestling.[258] Further, the gymnasium was an environment for παιδεία,[259] providing young males not only with a physical and intellectual education, but more broadly educating them on the societal ideals of masculinity, i.e., 'heterosexist gender norms'. Epigraphic evidence from the period provides some insight into the masculine qualities provided by this education. For instance, Menas of Sestos, a gymnasiarch from the late second century BC, promoted εὐταξία (discipline), ἀρετή (excellence or virtue), and ἀνδρεία (bravery, closely linked with

[256] Gagen 2000: 184.
[257] Papakonstantinou 2019: 68; Paganini 2022: 194-196 specifies that there is no surviving evidence which would suggest female involvement in Egyptian gymnasia until the late Roman period.
[258] However, this does not seem to have been the case for all gymnasium activities (e.g., running, which girls were encouraged to participate in as part of some religious rites), nor were activities universally gendered across different areas of the Greek world (e.g., participation of Spartan women in wrestling matches). For an overview on women's sports in ancient Greece, see Kyle 2014.
[259] On παιδεία, see Jones 2012: 20-91.

manliness)[260] for the young men under his leadership.[261] To reiterate the words of Gagen, the educational scheme of the gymnasium was a closely managed regime to groom and acculturate young males to the expected or idealised behaviours of masculine gender performance. This management could even be found in the art and architecture of the gymnasium itself: the gymnasium at Pergamon, for instance, enforced masculine ideals through the statuary representations of traditionally manly gods and heroes such as Herakles, successful athletes, philosophers and politicians.[262] Of course, unlike playgrounds, the gymnasium was not restricted to use by young males; it was equally a space for the performance of masculinity by adult males, who continued their pursuit or display of manhood through the same activities they had been encouraged to undertake as children and adolescents.

Crucially, gymnasia were not only a space for the encouragement of ideal masculinity, but also the closely related quality of ideal citizenship.[263] The boys and young men involved at the gymnasium were learning how to be good Greeks, while the adults were given space to prove their qualities of Greekness.[264] This also meant that certain categories of males, though theoretically belonging to the correct gender, were also excluded from participation. A second century BC inscription

[260] On the concept of ἀνδρεία, issues of translation, and associations with the male gender, see Jones 2012: 92-173. Cf. Scanlon 2021: 654. On ideals of masculinity and manliness more generally, see Bassi 2003; McDonnell 2003; McDonnell 2006; Masterson 2014.
[261] *OGI* 339. Cf. Argyriou-Casmeridis 2016: 163-164.
[262] On the architecture and sculptural decoration of Pergamon's gymnasium, see Mathys, Stappmanns and von den Hoff 2011.
[263] Interestingly, Gagen's analysis of gender performance in USA's playgrounds also considers the promotion of ideal citizenship, in this instance as a response to the influx of immigrant families (Gagen 2000: 188-189). Immigrant children were taught how to become ideal, patriotic citizens by the promotion of traditional heterosexist gender norms, much in the same way that the education of young Greek males relied on the intersecting ideals of hegemonic masculinity and citizenship.
[264] Though not necessarily relating to the gymnasium, Athenodoros, a victorious athlete at Ephesos, was awarded citizenship as a prize (Argyriou-Casmeridis 2016: 161, I.Ephesos 1415).

from Beroea in Macedonia explicitly lists the enslaved, freedmen, and their sons as prohibited from disrobing in the gymnasium.[265] While it must be noted here that rules varied between gymnasia, there is little surviving evidence to suggest that participation of the enslaved was common elsewhere. One rare exception to this is an inscription from Gytheum from the first century AD which states that, for six days of the year, the enslaved were allowed to exercise and anoint themselves at the gymnasium.[266] Even a decree outlining the inclusion of enslaved persons in the space and activities of the gymnasium specifies their rejection for 359 days of the year, proving exactly how a social hierarchy focused on the intersection of gender, 'Greekness' and status functioned within this space. Not only did the gymnasium promote masculinity, but it also enforced a hegemony of masculinity which further excluded those who did not fit into the imagined ideals of Greekness and status. Given the notable lack of deviation elsewhere, it is not unreasonable to presume that a similar hierarchical practice would have been in place in Hellenistic Egypt.

Focusing on the Ptolemaic gymnasium specifically, it seems that there also was a financial cost to participation. A decree said to be from Ptolemais, dating to 104 BC, explicitly states that there is an entry fee for the gymnasium to be given to the κοινόν.[267] While no specific amount is given, it does imply that the poorer members of the city may not have been able to participate. Lucian describes παιδεία itself as a costly endeavour in more ways than one, requiring πόνου πολλοῦ

[265] *SEG* 27.261. Cf. Crowther 1992: 38-39, which lists this and other places where enslaved persons were excluded; Golden 2008: 40 lists numerous other places where enslaved persons were barred from exercising in gymnasia or palaestrae: Athens, Crete, Cyzicus, Miletus, Nisyrus, Pergamon, Sparta, and Teos.
[266] *IG* V.1 1208.38-39. *SEG* 13.258.38-39. Cf. Golden 2008: 41-42.
[267] *SEG* 8.641.8-9.

καὶ χρόνου μακροῦ καὶ δαπάνης οὐ μικρᾶς καὶ τύχης δεῖσθαι λαμπρᾶς.[268] Again, we can see a hierarchical practice enforced which meant that certain males could not participate in the learning and performance of the intersecting qualities of masculinity and Greekness, at least within regimented schemes of education such as that of the gymnasium.[269] This exclusion of certain males hinges on the not only gender and Greekness but also the intersecting axis of status, necessitating that even Greek males must belong to a certain echelon of society and possess a particular degree of wealth to be included.

With this in mind, examination of the two figures from the original central motif of the mosaic can begin. The figure on the left, whose body is mostly intact, is a nude male with a slender but athletic form. His body is made from various shades of pink and beige tesserae to create the naturalistic shadows of his muscles. White tesserae highlight his skin, creating the impression of a sheen caused, presumably, by sweat or oil. He is shown as hairless on his body and face, presumably an indication of his age and status as a παῖς or, more likely, an ἔφηβος.[270] His entire body lurches forwards to the right of the image, and his weight seems to be resting on his opponent. They are clearly in the midst of a wrestling match.

Though little of the right-hand figure remains, the remnants reveal important details about the original masterpiece. His head has survived and is mostly

[268] Lucian *Somn.* 1: 'a lot of hard graft, a long time, not a little financial outlay, and social prestige' (tr. Jones 2012: 41).
[269] Hawley 2012: 790 argues that athletic sculpture, such as the life-size bronzes outlined above, would have reinforced the status-based hegemony of the gymnasium: 'the physical ideal is also linked with high social status, as they had the leisure time to spend in physical activity'.
[270] Daszewski 2001: 274 gives the age of the Graeco-Macedonian wrestler as approximately 17.

rendered in dark-coloured tesserae in stark contrast to the first athlete.[271] The texture of his hair is exposed through the arrangement of dark tesserae, creating an impression of short, tightly curled locks. Clearly, the two figures are supposed to represent wrestlers of different ethnicities: the first Graeco-Macedonian,[272] the second African. This image of a Graeco-Macedonian and an African athlete competing together is unique in Hellenistic (and, coincidentally, early imperial Roman) art. Consequently, it gives an equally unique insight into the position of African athletes in the Ptolemaic imagination. This is the only surviving example from this time period of an African and a Graeco-Macedonian athlete rendered in the same context, by the same artist.

This being said, other images of African athletes participating in Greek-style sports are known, albeit in few examples. A pair of terracotta statuettes of unknown provenance show two African males fully participating in another typically Greek sport: boxing (figure 19).[273] The two men share physical characteristics which

[271] Lighter cream or white coloured tesserae are present on the face, though it is unclear whether these were originally used as unnaturalistic highlights or whether the original colour of these tesserae have been lost due to damage. Given the naturalistic rendering of shadows and highlights on the body of the Graeco-Macedonian, showcasing the ability of the artist, I am inclined to support the latter theory.

[272] Thomas 2021: 86 uses this term to describe the ethnicity of the paler wrestler. Though there are certainly difficulties with defining ethnicity or race of this figure, who we can imagine to be a member of the Ptolemaic leading class, this is a far more favourable option than 'white', which has occasionally been used to describe this figure (see, for instance, the entry for this artefact on the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum online collection, https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?a=858&lang=en accessed 10/1/25).

[273] Pair of terracotta statuettes, unknown provenance (listed by the British Museum as being discovered in Italy). H. 25.4 cm. The British Museum, London: 1852,0401.1-2. Walters 1903: 310-311, D84-D85; Beardsley 1929: 85 no. 170-171, 112; Snowden 1970: 165-166, fig. 49; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 184, 246 no. 51-52, fig. 69-70; Harrison, Swaddling and Cartwright 2012: 73, fig. 3; Masséglia 2015: 175-176, fig. 712. Like the Perugian youth above, these boxers have been similarly subject to Beardsley's anti-Black prejudice which categorises almost every depiction of an African from the ancient world as a slave. Here she insists that, for enslaved Africans, 'entertainment is required as well as butler service', and in order to fulfil this part of their job description, '[p]erhaps they hold boxing matches', using these statuettes as examples (112).



Figure 19: Pair of statuettes. African boxers. Terracotta. C. second-first century BC. Unknown provenance (said to be from Italy?). The British Museum, London, inv. 1852,0401.1-2. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1852-0401-1 and https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1852-0401-2 (accessed 01/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

denote their African heritage, and the first statuette (boxer A), still possesses traces of dark paint. The costume of each boxer is also the same; a short *perizoma* or perhaps a *chiton* which has been rolled down,[274] and a pair of boxing gloves, known

[274] The latter suggested by Masséglia 2015: 175. Though it was rare for athletes to be depicted in clothes, it is not completely unheard of. Numerous vase paintings show athletes (including boxers) wearing *perizomata*, e.g., Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1965.97; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, inv. De Ridder.252.

as ἱμάντες, σφαίραι, or *caesti*,[275] which were typically made from hardened leather strips. The professional equipment worn by these athletes suggests that they may have been participants at the gymnasium.[276] Boxer A, suggested to be the younger of the two,[277] stands in a wide stance side-on to his opponent (boxer B). He throws an upper cut at boxer B's head with his left arm, while his right is pulled back as if prepared to throw another. Boxer B stands front-on to his opponent, his feet and legs in an unstable position as he staggers backwards. His arms are both held up in front of his face in a final attempt to defend himself from his opponent's blow, but it is evidently too late as his head is thrown backwards; boxer A has successfully hit him on the chin. The older age of this male, as highlighted by his receding hairline, may suggest that he is a mentor of the younger, or that he is an old-timer at the end of his career being defeated by an up-and-coming athlete. The body composition of these figures deviates significantly from that of the athletes discussed so far in this chapter. They are not shown as overtly muscular or toned. Rather, their bodies are round and soft; boxer A has subtle delineations of musculature only on his stomach, while boxer B has a round stomach and lacks muscular definition. However, this body type is not abnormal for painted depictions of boxers,[278] including a tomb painting from the Andriuolo necropolis at Paestum, dating to c. 370-360 BC, which depicts a dark-skinned boxer with a round stomach competing against a pale-

[275] On the various terms for boxing gloves, see Nakamura 2019: 23, 26, 28.
[276] Masséglia 2015: 176 states that boxing was normally reserved for the elites of the gymnasium.
[277] Walters 1903: 311; Beardsley 1929: 85; Snowden 1970: 165-166; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 184.
[278] For vase paintings, see e.g., The British Museum, London, inv. 1846,0512.2. Bonfante 1989: 555-556; Shapiro 2000: 323-324; Bradley 2011: 14-15. Cf. Paus. 6.24.1 describes certain events as 'heavy' (βαρέα); Philostr. *Gymnasticus* 34 explains that, while a slim physique is best for boxing, there is an advantage to having a larger stomach.



Figure 20: Painting. A boxing match and an aulist. C. 370-360 BC. From Tomb 24/1971, Andriuolo necropolis, Paestum, Italy. Parco Archaeologico di Paestum. Source: Zuchtriegel 2020: fig. 8.

skinned boxer with a similar physique (figure 20).[279] However, not all boxers were depicted in this way, and a further Hellenistic terracotta statuette of a muscular African male has been cautiously identified as a boxer.[280] A male of African appearance also appears as a boxer in the literature of Pliny the Elder, who expresses fascination that the apparently 'famous boxer Nicaeus' resembles his Ethiopian grandfather.[281]

[279] Tomb painting from Tomb 24/1971 of the Andriuolo necropolis at Paestum, Italy. Parco Archeologico di Paestum. Castaldo 2013: 126, fig. 3; Zuchtriegel 2020: 37, fig. 8. Cf. Snowden 2010: 184, fig. 228.

[280] Snowden 1970: 166, fig. 106. Cf. Sieveking 1916: pl. 84 and commentary. Another statuette described as an athlete by Snowden (2010: 205, fig. 260), the bronze boy in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 18.145.10 (Picón et al. 2007: 452-452 no. 245), does not share iconographic characteristics with athletes, and instead seems to represent an enslaved or serving figure, and has therefore been excluded from this discussion.

[281] Plin. *HN* 7.12.51: 'Nicaei nobilis pyctae…ipse avum regeneravit Aethiopem.' Snowden 1970: 20, 166 also claims Ethiopian heritage for Pannichus, a wrestling coach with a 'flat nose and puffy lips' described by Martial (Mart. 6.39.8-9). The link between the physical characteristics given by Martial and an African ethnicity is tenuous.

The fragmentary nature of the Alexandria mosaic obscures its original composition. However, the surviving fragments of the African athlete's body allow for a fruitful examination of his posture, shedding light upon the athletic characterisation of the youths in the image. He is shown at a similar height to his opponent, which is not unexpected given the age (or, more broadly, developmental stage) categorisation of the Hellenistic gymnasium.[282] However, their equal height also confirms that the lost athlete was standing as far upright as his opponent; his weight would have similarly rested on the first youth, creating a (partially) symmetrical image. This is confirmed by the small surviving fragment of his torso which mirrors that of his opponent. His right arm is likely to have been held at his opponent's waist, as illustrated by a segment of damaged tesserae.[283] While the original pose of this wrestler is not certain, it is possible to compare the remnants of this piece with other depictions of wrestling matches to rule out certain compositions. For example, the African wrestler could not have been crushed under the weight of his opponent, as seen for example in a Hellenistic group known as the Uffizi wrestlers (figure 21).[284] He also would not have been lifted from the ground by his opponent, a motif seen in earlier vase paintings.[285] The medium of this piece

[282] Dreyer 2004, esp. 212-217; Weiler 2004, esp. 31-33. For this age-categorisation in a specifically Ptolemaic context, see Habermann 2004: 339-343.
[283] Just above this segment is an unusual object which has been largely unmentioned by scholars. Thomas 2024 suggested that this may be an item of clothing, but also highlighted how unusual this would be in an athletic scene.
[284] Sculpture, from Rome, Italy. Height 89 cm. La Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 1914 n.216. For a later example, see a third century AD mosaic from the baths at Githis of two wrestlers, one pinned between the other's legs (Musée national du Bardo, Tunis). Cf. a recurring image type of a Ptolemaic ruler defeating an opponent in allegorical imagery (Rabe 2010).
[285] For example, an Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Codrus Painter, which shows a wrestler throwing his opponent over his head (British Museum, London, inv. 1836,0224.196).

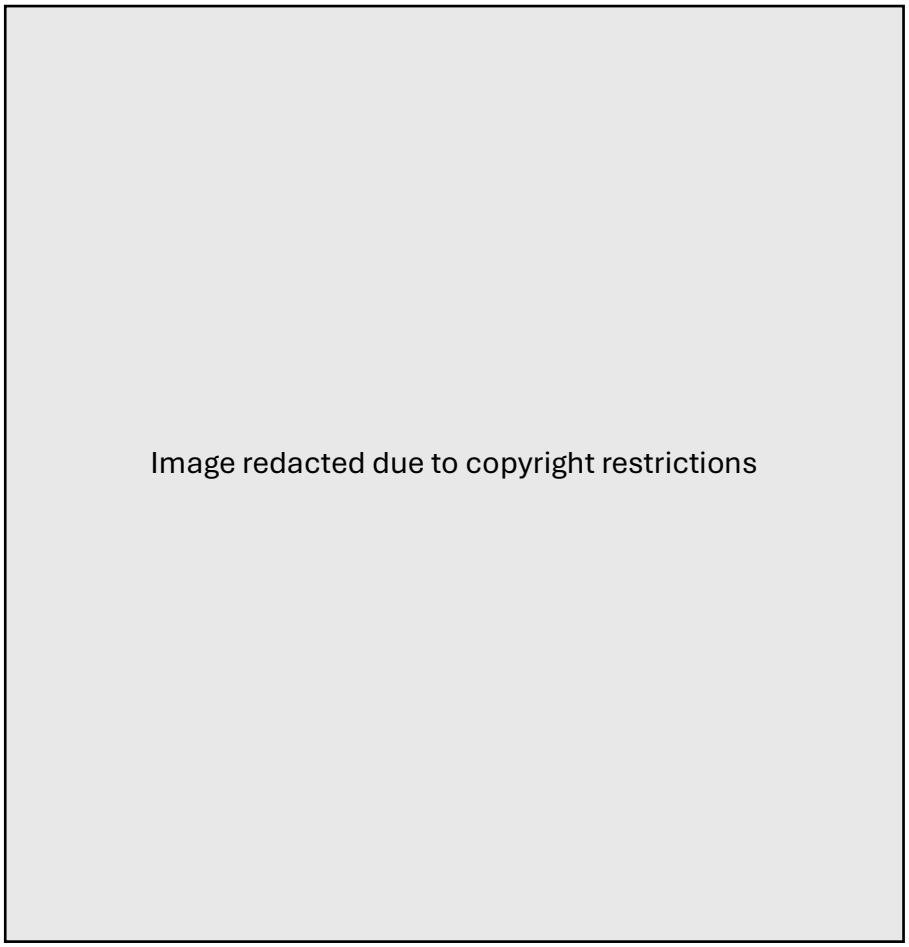


Figure 21: Sculpture. Pair of wrestling youths. Marble. C. first century AD. From near Porta San Giovanni, Rome, Italy. Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 1914 n.216. Source: Le Gallerie degli Uffizi artworks online https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/wrestlers (accessed 17/12/24).

would not hinder the representation of such a defeat, and so it can only be presumed that this was a deliberate decision by the artist. It may be that this was out of a desire for symmetry and the creation of an attractive triangular central motif. Yet, it may also have been an attempt to capture a moment of balance between the wrestlers, deliberately highlighting the equal strength of the opponents. A recent interpretation by Thomas suggests that, based upon convention in earlier Greek vase painting, the frontal composition of the African wrestler's face acts as an allusion to his impending defeat, emphasised by his open mouth which signifies

disappointment and anguish.[286] However, this seems unlikely, relying heavily on subtleties and technical knowledge of a much earlier artistic tradition. It also neglects to consider the balance of the piece, which highlights the equality of the athletes; the African wrestler highlights the strength of his Graeco-Macedonian counterpart, and vice versa.

This is in stark contrast to the only other known depiction of an African wrestler from this time period,[287] found in a highly fragmentary terracotta from Naukratis (figure 22).[288] Despite the fragmentary nature of the artefact, the surviving piece seems to have belonged to a depiction of a wrestling match. Still intact is the head of an African male, his ethnicity denoted by his round head, full lips, the shape of his nose and his tightly curled hair. A second person holds this male in a headlock, his head pressing into their armpit and elbow. His back is held parallel to the ground, and his left arm reaches around the back of his opponent. His fingers sprawl out as his hand grips into the back of his opponent. This, combined with his exhausted or perhaps pained facial expression, implies that the surviving figure was probably on the verge of losing this match. However, it must be stressed here that, due to the

[286] Thomas 2021: 86-87. In this interpretation by Thomas, it is also suggested that there is an allegorical meaning behind the mosaic. It is suggested that, especially given the political milieu at the time that this mosaic is believed to have been laid, this wrestling match between a Graeco-Macedonian youth and an African youth may be a metaphor for the ongoing grapple for power in Lower Nubia between the Ptolemies and the Kushites. For the history of Ptolemaic relations with Kush, see Török 2009: 377-426.

[287] A melted lead statuette of an African male from Letocetum (Wall), England, now kept in the Wall museum, was previously believed to depict an enslaved male, then subsequently interpreted as a wrestler given his body posture. Photographs taken of the figure after its removal from display in 2021 exposed a previously unseen hole in his hand, believed to have originally held a spear or weapon, which has now led to a fresh interpretation that this male is a warrior of some kind. On the figurine, its history, and its new interpretation, see Moffett 2022. On the presence of Africans in Roman Britain, see Ferris 2012: 89-92.

[288] Statuette fragment, from Naukratis, Egypt. H. 4.3 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1888,0601.106. Walters 1903: 258, C617; Guggisberg 1993: 555-556; Bailey 2008: 150, 3569 GR; Masséglia 2015: 176. See also Thomas 2019: 195 which refers to depiction(s) of Nubian wrestlers in relation to the cult of Harpocrates but does not specify this image.



Figure 22: Statuette fragment. Two figures wrestling. Terracotta. C. third century BC (?). From Naukratis, Egypt. The British Museum, London, inv. 1888,0601.106. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-106 (accessed 21/12/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

fragmentary nature of the terracotta and lack of any known image type as comparanda, it is impossible to know for certain how the original image would have appeared. This includes the identity of his opponent; they may have also been of an African ethnicity or heritage, or this could be a further Hellenistic example of a Graeco-Macedonian youth competing with an African youth. More important than any speculative conclusions about this image, however, is that this is a further example of an African male participating in a wrestling match.

Comparison between this terracotta and the mosaic highlights the equality of the African and Graeco-Roman wrestlers in question, both regarding their athletic

abilities and their artistic rendering. There is no hint of caricature or humour, nothing to suggest that this is out of the ordinary in any way. Instead, it is a naturalistic rendering of two youths who happen to be ethnically different from one another participating in a popular activity. It has been suggested that the ethnicity of the African youth casts doubt that this was a usual scene of the gymnasium as only Greek boys were educated in this way, and that this must instead be a form of entertainment seeing 'a white and a black' compete.[289] However, if we return to the rules and regulations of the gymnasium, which seemed to be universally exclusive of certain 'sub-classes' of males, there is no indication that this included discrimination based upon perceived race, ethnicity, or heritage, despite the importance placed on learning the ideals of Greekness. Considering Ptolemaic gymnasia specifically, the diverse nature of Hellenistic Egypt would have made such an arbitrary division of people near impossible to enforce. Evidence suggests that Egyptians and Judaeans, for instance, could participate in the life of the Ptolemaic gymnasium just like their Greek counterparts.[290] Three dedications in honour of Ptolemy X Alexander discovered in the Arsinoïte nome of the Fayum show the diversity of cultures associated with the Ptolemaic gymnasium.[291] These stelai, dating to 98, 95, and 94 BC, were dedicated by ex-epheboi to either Souchos or Sokneptynis, Egyptian crocodile-deities. Further evidence gives Egyptian or Graeco-

[289] Daszewski 2001: 273-274 (translated from the original French). The racial dichotomy of 'Black' and 'white', as given here by Daszewski, has generally been criticised by scholars of race as unapplicable to the ancient Mediterranean, e.g., McCoskey 2012: 23-27.
[290] Paganini 2022: 187-194. For evidence of non-Greek participation in Hellenistic gymnasia outside of Ptolemaic Egypt, see e.g., *IG* 12.9.952, a list of victorious athletes from Chalkis, which gives numerous names of non-Greek participants. Cf. Knoepfler 1979: 179-181; Gauthier 2010: 98-100. On non-Greek participation in Panhellenic games, see Remijsen 2019; Scharff 2024: 276-302.
[291] *CPI* (Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions) 2.294-296; Bernand 1981: 123-130 nos 200-202. Cf. Paganini 2022: 188-189.

Egyptian names of some gymnasiarchs or participants of the gymnasium,[292] such as Sarapammon,[293] Onnophris,[294] and Anoubion.[295] A papyrus addressed to Gaius Turannius, prefect of Egypt between 7 and 4 BC, sees a man named Helenos protesting his being charged poll tax on the grounds that he is aged over 60, the limit for paying said tax.[296] In this petition, he is described as Ἰουδαίου τῶν ἀπὸ Ἀλεξανδρε[ίας], or a Judean from Alexandria. Despite this, he describes the ἀρεσκούση παιδεία ('acceptable education') he received as someone who has lived in Alexandria his whole life, and may mention his father's gymnasium and an ephebate, though the fragmentary nature of the papyrus has put this into question.[297] More important than ethnicity or heritage was a commitment to the traditional Hellenic ideals, closely entwined with masculine ideals, instilled in the regime of the gymnasium.[298] There is no evidence to suggest that this could not have been extended to a person of African heritage. In fact, Diodorus Siculus describes the Greek education of Ergamenes, a Meroitic king and contemporary of Ptolemy II Philadelphos, which almost certainly would have included a physical and intellectual education in the gymnasium.[299]

With this wealth of information in mind, I suggest a reframing of this mosaic which, in the short history of modern research into this mosaic, has largely been

[292] Paganini 2022: 188.
[293] *PRyl*. 4.589, column 8. Though the original purpose of this document is unknown, it seems to give the financial details of a gymnasium, perhaps that of Philadelphia. Dated to 180 BC.
[294] *BGU* 4.1189. Dated to 1 BC.
[295] *SB* 1.3460. Though the provenance and date of this mummy label are unknown, Paganini 2022: 188 n. 10 suggests a Roman date based on the name Βησαρίων (Besarion).
[296] *BGU* 4.1140.
[297] E.g., Kasher 1985: 204 n. 59.
[298] Relating specifically to the Ptolemaic gymnasium, see Paganini 2022: 221-246.
[299] Diod. Sic. 3.6.3.

overlooked. The depiction of an African male within the space of the gymnasium, even just in one instance, is surely significant. As has been well established, the gymnasium was not merely a space for exercise or philosophy, it was an institution fundamental to the education of young males on the intertwined qualities of masculinity and Greekness which they would continue performing as adults in order to fit in and contribute to society in an acceptable way.[300] It was an exclusive space, restricting membership based on finances and status. The naturalistic composition of the image, which lacks any hint of comedy, caricature or irony, places a male of African appearance within this exclusive sphere. The intersecting axis of status is therefore also crucial to this piece; he is included in this elitist institution with no sense of irony, implying that this (presumably fictional) male possesses the necessary wealth and status to be included. I suggest that there is nothing exceptional about this African youth, and therefore the implications of his portrayal within the exclusive, masculine space of the gymnasium should have the same as that of his opponent, to whom he is equally matched. That is, he is shown (as far as is possible to tell) as an idealised masculine youth, epitomising the qualities of masculinity and Greekness instilled in males by the gymnasium and its associated activities.[301] The imagery is entirely in-keeping with the contemporary late Hellenistic trend for displaying masculinity in mosaics through sport, leisure and

[300] On institutionalised athletics in Greece, see Crowther 2007: 57.

[301] Westgate 2011: 308-313 discusses masculinity in late Hellenistic tessellated mosaics and briefly uses this and the Thmuis mosaic as examples of the prominence of sport in Eastern mosaics at this time (309-310). She suggests that the youth in the Thmuis mosaic 'is related to the culture of sport and physical training that was central to Hellenistic male lifestyles.' She does not in any way suggest that the Black youth in the wrestling mosaic is anything other than a further representation of sport as an elite male activity.

culture.[302] While I do not doubt that there were probably further aesthetic or artistic motivations behind portraying an African male in this particular piece, more important in a consideration of gender construction is the fact that an African male *could* be portrayed in this idealised and conventional way. This is a complete contrast to many of the images examined for this thesis which, as will be seen in the following chapters, show males existing outside the hegemonic norms of masculinity, using other intersecting factors such as status and sexuality to further push these males beyond the norms.

The depiction of an African athlete within the space of a gymnasium also suggests a potential reframing for the other depictions of African examined. Unlike this mosaic, which gives a spatial context for the depicted athletic activity, the sculpted nature of most other existing depictions of these athletes mean that a context is lacking. While many previous interpretations of these artefacts suggest that there must be some kind of novelty or humour behind these pieces,[303] the spatial context of the Alexandria mosaic gives a good basis to determine that this was not necessarily the case. While I recognise the limits of this interpretation – unfortunately we cannot know for certain the original meaning behind and response to these images – the Alexandria mosaic suggests that African males need not have been out of place within the space of the gymnasium, and their participation in

[302] Westgate 2011: 308-312 discusses this trend at length, noting its difference to the earlier trend of showing violence and aggression.
[303] E.g., Masséglia 2015: 176 who suggests they may 'represent a real form of entertainment, with African men taking part in traditionally high-status, citizen sporting activities as a kind of 'novelty act''. It must be noted here that Masséglia herself does not seem overly convinced by this interpretation.

traditionally elite Greek sports was not necessarily a novelty. It is possible that these athletes were considered firmly within the sphere of idealised masculinity.

Conclusion

Though the imagery is disparate and rare, these Hellenistic depictions of African males as athletes demonstrate a potential for conformity to the masculine ideals of Greek athleticism and the sphere of the gymnasium. The first two examples examined in the chapter demonstrate the biases of modern researchers and the need to continually revisit evidence. I argued that, based on the iconography of the pieces, the 'Perugian' youth and the Thmuis youth are, in fact, representations of African athletes conforming to the traditionally idealised depictions of Greek athletes. Their perceived African heritage does not impact the characterisation of their masculinity, conveyed through the composition of their bodies, and they should similarly be viewed as idealised portrayals of masculinity.

The famous Alexandria mosaic similarly constructs an idealised male gender. The situation of the scene within the gymnasium is surely significant. A highly exclusive space, with membership hinging on intersecting factors of status/wealth, 'Greekness' and gender, the gymnasium was used precisely for the education and performance of ideal (Greek) masculinity. Participation in the space of the gymnasium suggests conformity to the elite Greek masculine ideals, regardless of skin colour or heritage. Further, the composition of the piece, as far as is possible to determine, proposes the equality of participants. These (albeit rare) depictions of African males as athletes promote an idealised conception of male

gender conforming entirely to that of the self-characterisation of masculinity. However, the rarity of athletic iconography parallels the rarity of construction of idealised African male gender, as will be seen in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2
African males as 'thaumatopoietic' entertainers

Performance of entertainment encompassed by the Greek term θαυματοποιία, or wonder-making',[304] recurs in depictions of Africans from the Hellenistic and early imperial Roman periods. Loosely defined, θαυματοποιοί, or 'wonder-makers' were 'para-theatrical'[305] entertainers whose acts were necessarily spectacular, designed to be out of the ordinary and evoke a sense of wonder in their audience. 'Thaumatopoietic'[306] performances were often informal, unscripted and took place outside the confines of purpose-built spaces (such as theatres, amphitheatres and gymnasia).[307] The notion of para-theatricality is crucial in this definition and helpful in the categorisation of literary and artistic references as θαυματοποιία; this eliminates confusion with, for instance, athletes or drunken satyrs who may be depicted in unusual poses, and emphasises that this form of entertainment is parallel to, not overlapping with, theatrical performances such as the song and dance of a chorus.[308] Though this term and its definition are by no means perfect

[304] For translation of θαυματοποιία as 'wonder-making', and/or θαυματοποιός/θαυματοποιοί as 'wonder-maker'/'wonder-makers', see Lada-Richards 2007: 31; Vickers 2016: 9-10, 17, 141-142, 160-161. Cf. Dickie 2001: 602-602; van den Hoek and Herrmann Jr 2013: 189, 'wonder-working'; Vickers 2016: 141, θαυματουργία as 'wonder-working'; Lightfoot 2021: 176, θαυματοποιία as 'marvel-making' and θαυματουργία as 'wonder-making'. Cf. derivatives of τέρας used in the Roman period, e.g. Lucian *Somn.* 4 (τερατουργὸν) (Vickers 2016: 186 n. 515).
[305] Bueno and D'Incà 2012: 311; Vickers 2016: 137.
[306] I have adopted this term from Vickers (2016), who used it to mean 'related to θαυματοποιία'. In this discussion I use this term especially to distinguish between acrobatics in a performance context, those who would have been 'wonder-making' for the purpose of entertaining others, and athletic and martial tumbling, a skill used as a display of personal strength rather than as entertainment. I also use it to distinguish between juggling for entertainment of others and ballgames for self-entertainment.
[307] Bueno and D'Incà 2012: 312. It is important to note that, while thaumatopoietic performance did occasionally occur within these spaces, it is crucial that these spaces were not specifically designed for these acts in the way that, e.g., theatres were for plays.
[308] For the full discussion of this methodology in defining the 'thaumatopoietic', see Vickers 2016: 140-144.

(even ancient Greek writers could not agree on an absolute definition of θαυματοποιία), and the material under investigation is not limited to the Greek-speaking world, they are useful here to delineate a broadly cohesive theme within the body of material, and this is perhaps the best possible application of an ancient term to this material. This definition of θαυματοποιία naturally includes a plethora of acts. While the acts pertinent to this study are juggling, acrobatics and fire-breathing, under this umbrella term also fall puppetry, parody, conjuring, and more.[309]

The earliest examples of images depicting African θαυματοποιοί are a small number of representations of jugglers from Hellenistic Greece. Disparate in iconography with no indication of belonging to a fashionable 'type', there are limits as to the value of these pieces in a broad analysis of gender, race, and the body. They will instead be used in this chapter as a catalyst for discussion, setting out some preliminary ideas which will be expanded upon as further analysis unfolds. The iconography of three examples will be examined, a terracotta statuette from Boeotia, a further terracotta discovered in a tomb in Argos, and a particularly intriguing bronze statuette found in the excavations at Ampelokipoi, Athens. Comparison with the few other depictions of thaumatopoietic jugglers from the ancient world is necessary in order to create as full a picture as possible, highlighting the key factor of 'Otherness' which recurs in depictions of θαυματοποιοί.

[309] Tedeschi 2020: 138-139 gives indication of the different types of acts and spaces included in thaumatopoietic performance.

A more fruitful analysis can be conducted into images of African acrobats. Unlike the jugglers, a consistent image 'type' depicting African males performing handstands emerged across the Mediterranean in the early Imperial period. The thaumatopoietic nature of these images will first be examined through comparison to images of athletic male tumblers performing handstands and the irrefutably wondrous iconography of the female contortionist, seen frequently on South Italian vase paintings and Hellenistic terracotta figurines, as well as literary attestations to acrobatic performances. An in-depth analysis of these iconographies will reveal the shared characteristics between the African acrobats and these other acrobatic types, each strongly dichotomised in the construction and perception of gender. Ultimately, it will be shown that these images are thaumatopoietic in nature, creating an association with a traditionally female-gendered activity and the subsequent sexualisation to which performers of such entertainment were often subject.

Finally, the notoriously ambiguous lamps depicting disembodied African heads will be examined. Innumerable in quantity, a select few case studies will be presented to illustrate the general range of iconographies included in this image 'type'. The opposing interpretations of researchers, which suggest that they may be fire-breathing entertainers or sexually dominated victims of irrumation, will be presented and examined, before considering the possibility that this ambiguity was a deliberate reference to the association between African males, thaumatopoietic performance, and sexual subjugation.

It has often been suggested that the popularity of these depictions, particularly the acrobat 'type', reflects a reality of Africans frequenting as entertainers in the ancient world. The examination conducted in this chapter will ultimately suggest that this may not have been the case and that, rather, these images reflect a construction of African male gender in the (predominantly Roman) imagination.

African males as θαυματοποιοί in literature

No literary sources refer to African males as θαυματοποιοί. Rather, thaumatopoietic performance, especially when acrobatic in nature, seems to be reserved largely for females of non-descript ethnicity. Xenophon's *Symposium* of the fourth century BC describes a dancing girl 'skilled in acrobatic tricks' who later performed atop a potters' wheel to entertain revellers at the banquet.[310] Much later in the early third century AD, Athenaeus describes a different banquet with female acrobats as entertainers.[311] Only two references to the race/ethnicity of performers survive in the literary corpus, as both Athenaeus and Aelian, writing in the early third century AD, mention Ἰνδικῆς θαυματοποιοί in their descriptions of Alexander's wedding banquet.[312]

Elsewhere, authors show a negative response to thaumatopoietic performance. Musonius Rufus, writing in the first century AD, describes the risks that wonder-makers take in return for poor pay,[313] while Clement of Alexandria, a

[310] Xen. *Symp*. 2.1, 7.2.
[311] Ath. 4.129d.
[312] Ael. *VH* 8.7; Ath. 12.538e.
[313] Muson. 7.6.

Christian philosopher writing at the end of the second century/beginning of the third century AD, similarly describes acrobats as τινὸς κακοτεχνοῦντας ἐπὶ λυπρῷ τῷ μισθῷ.[314] Even in Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates questions those finding enjoyment in these wonderous performances.[315]

African males as jugglers

Three Hellenistic examples of African jugglers have survived. Though thematically similar, these images are heterogenous in their specific iconographies and do not seem to have conformed to a particular 'type'. The first is an unrefined terracotta statuette said to be from Thebes, Boeotia (figure 23).[316] Unfortunately, little is known about the provenance of this artefact. The terracotta has been subject to some damage, including surface level erosion and breakages, while the image itself has been quite crudely modelled. It shows a male standing on his left leg with his right lifted at a right angle, a ball balancing on his knee. His arms are held in front of his body, and he carries a second ball in his right hand. He wears an overly short loincloth, now obscured due to damage, and around his neck he wears a wreath, scored to show the texture of its natural material. On top of his tightly curled head of hair balances a third ball. Originally, this terracotta would have been decorated

[314] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 7.66.3: 'using their base art with some skill for a miserable pay.' (Tr. van den Hoek and Herrmann Jr 2013: 175.
[315] Xen. *Symp*. 7.2
[316] Terracotta statuette, said to be from Thebes, Boeotia. Height: 12.5 cm. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. TC 8327. Froehner 1892: 141, no. 350; *Inventar der Terrakottensammlung des Königlichen Antiquariums* 1892: no. 8327; Köster 1926: 89-90; Blümel 1934: 9, taf. 36; Snowden 2010: 210-213, fig. 266; Todisco 2013: 59-60, G. 125, tav. XIII; Masséglia 2015: 171, fig. 4.8; Dasen 2019: 132, fig. 3.

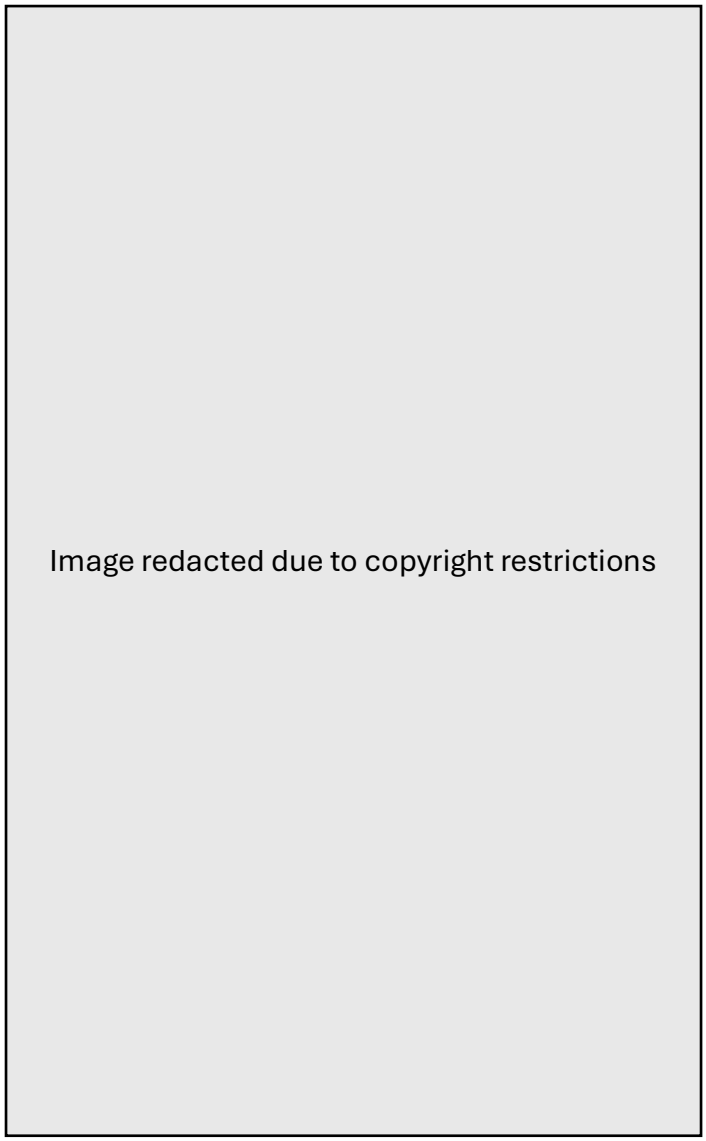


Figure 23: Statuette. African juggler. Terracotta. C. fourth century BC. From said to be from Thebes, Boeotia. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. TC 8327. Source: Dasen 2019: fig. 3.

with colour, and its entry in an 1892 auction catalogue details the pink and red colour which would have adorned the loincloth and wreath respectively.[317]

While the gravity-defying act of balancing balls across his body is certainly an entertaining display of skill, it is the wreath around his neck which secures the thaumatopoietic nature of this image.[318] Wreaths were a common iconography in depictions of Africans, particularly in terracottas of the Hellenistic period, for

[317] Delestre 1892: 141, no. 350.
[318] In contrast to images of ballgames and childlike play (see Golden 2021).

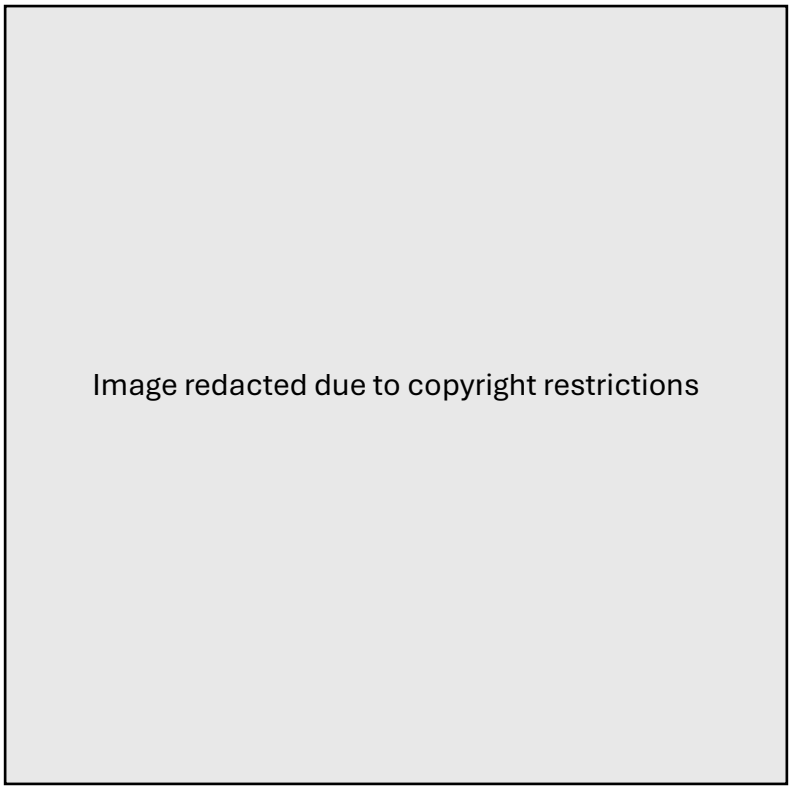


Figure 24: Statuette fragment. Wreathed head. Terracotta. C. first century BC. From the Agora of the Italians, Delos. Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, Delos, inv. A3452. Source: Barrett 2011: fig. D64.

instance a terracotta head from Delos (figure 24),[319] and another discovered at the site of a house in Priene (figure 25).[320] Organic wreaths of this kind were sometimes associated with Dionysiac festivity and banquets,[321] and the head from Priene was discovered alongside numerous images belonging to the sphere of Dionysus and linked themes such as theatrical imagery.[322] This link to Dionysus and festivity can be extended to this wreathed juggler,[323] who may be imagined as an entertainer hired

[319] Terracotta statuette fragment, from the Agora of the Italians, Delos. Height: 4.41 cm. Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, Delos, inv. A3452. Barrett 2011: 262-264, 265, 530-531. Cf. Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, Delos, inv. A2070; Barrett 2011: 260-261, 262-264, 265, 270-271, 482-483.
[320] Terracotta statuette fragment, from House 33, Priene. Height: 6.7 cm. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. TC 8638. Schrader 1900: 25; Schrader and Zahn 1901-1902, *Inventar der Kleinfunde von Priene*: TC 8638; Wiegand and Schrader 1904: 324, 359; Beardsley 1929: 83; Raeder 1984: 24-25; Rumscheid 2006: 501; Süvegh 2014: 148.
[321] Blech 1982: 63-74 discusses the use of wreaths at the symposium and by komasts, 181-246 details the link between Dionysus and ivy wreaths; Lee 2015: 144-145.
[322] Raeder 1984: 22-25; Rumscheid 1998: 145; Rumscheid 2006: 351-354; Uhlenbrock 1990: 78. See also Bieber 1961: 104-105 which does not mention House 33 specifically but does discuss iconographic themes in terracottas from Priene.
[323] Dasen 2019: 132.

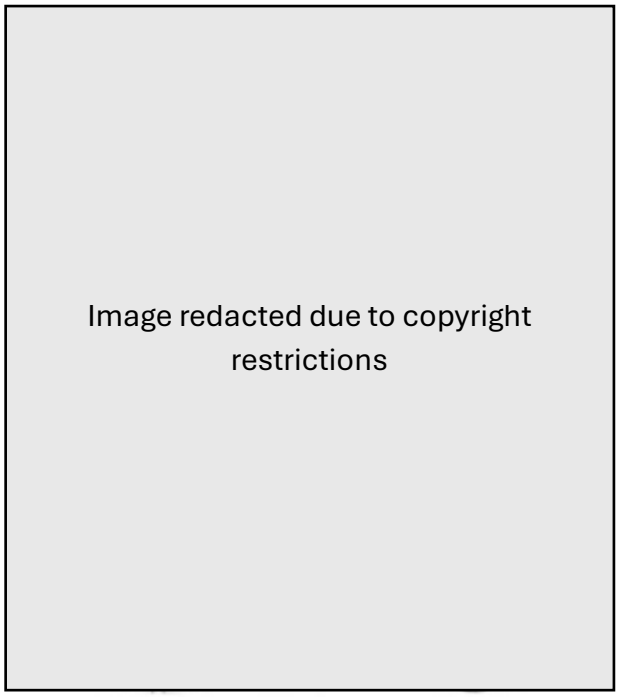


Figure 25: Statuette fragment. Wreathed head. Terracotta. C. second century BC. From House 33, Priene. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. TC 8638. Source: Rumscheid 2006: pl. 125.

to perform his wonders at a banquet.[324] The frequency of wreaths in fragmentary images of Africans may indicate that more depictions of African performers, perhaps even θαυματοποιοί, have been lost, although it is unfortunately impossible to know for certain what the original design of these images would have been.

Another wreathed juggler, possibly of African heritage, was discovered in a tomb at Argos (figure 26).[325] The accompanying contents of the tomb include numerous terracotta statuettes depicting a range of subjects, such as comic actors, a young girl with a writing tablet, and a dog, as well as lamps and vases.[326] The contents of the tomb indicate that the deceased was likely a child, perhaps a young

[324] For jugglers as wondrous performers, see e.g., Manil. 5.168-171; Xen. *Symp*. 2.8.
[325] Terracotta statuette, from Argos. Height 15.3 cm. Current location unknown. Bruneau 1970: 473-475, 59.93; Snowden 2010: 212 n. 211.
[326] On the contents of Tombe 59, see Bruneau 1970: 471-476 and figs 84-97. For discoveries from outside the tomb, see Bruneau 1970: 466-467 and figs 71-83.

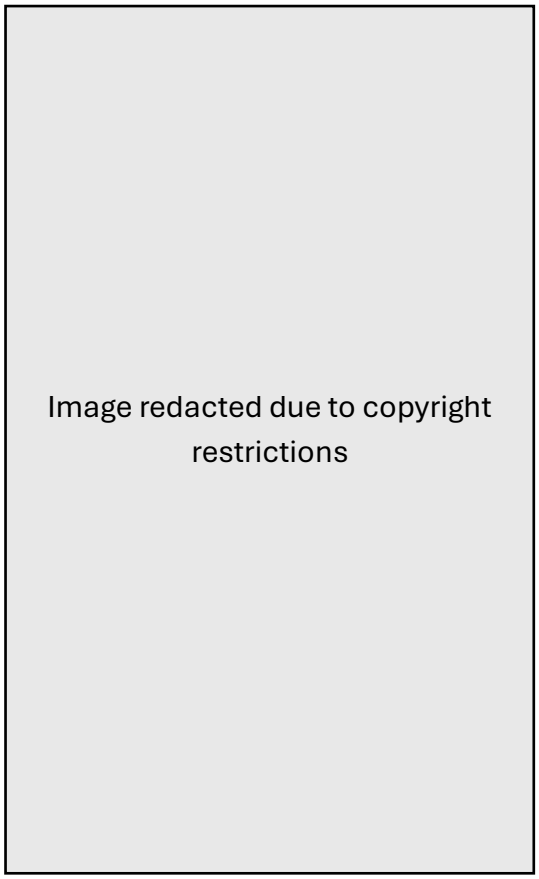


Figure 26: Statuette. African juggler. Terracotta. C. third century BC. From Argos, Greece. Current location unknown. Source: Bruneau 1970: fig. 95.

girl, while the style of the objects inside suggest a Hellenistic date.[327] Argive clay was used for both the juggler statuette and other statuettes discovered in the tomb, possibly indicating a local production.

The statuette in question is, again, crudely modelled and has been subject to significant damage. His limbs are short and thick, his body stout with little detail; this is clearly not supposed to be a naturalistic piece. The figure stands in a wide stance with his left hand on his hip and his right hand possibly out in front, though the loss of the right forearm obscures the image. He wears a short loincloth which exposes the join between the legs. His stomach is somewhat plump. In his right

[327] Bruneau 1970: 475 (referencing 471, 59.30) dates a lamp from the tomb to the third century BC and, 'faute d'autre indices', proposes the same date for the rest of the contents.

shoulder balances a spherical object, suggested by Bruneau to be a juggling ball.[328] He wears a wreath on his head, textured to show its organic material, and another spherical object sits in front; this may be a cluster of tightly curled hair, though I am inclined to suggest that it is a second juggler's ball. The original excavation report lists multiple traces of colours found on the terracotta at the time of its excavation; purple in an unspecified location, black and white on the wreath, black on the figure's eyes, and red on his mouth.[329] The physical characteristics of the figure's face potentially indicate an African ethnicity;[330] he has a round head, full lips, short and broad nose, and almond-shaped eyes characteristic of Hellenistic and Roman portrayals of Africans. However, the unrefined nature of the piece and the damage it has suffered cloud this identification with uncertainty.

A third statuette is comparatively outstanding in the quality of its design. This bronze statuette was discovered in the Ampelokipoi area of Athens during waterworks excavations during 1964 (figure 27).[331] The surface of the bronze is severely corroded, having developed a bright green patina as a result of oxidisation over time, but the figure itself remains remarkably intact with original intricacies clear. It shows a male in a dynamic pose; his heels are lifted from the ground, his right foot in front of his left, giving an indication of lively movement. His hips, covered

[328] Bruneau 1970: 475.
[329] Bruneau 1970: 473.
[330] Snowden 2010: 212 n. 211 describes the figure as a 'pronounced Negro'.
[331] Bronze statuette, from Athens, Greece. Height: 25 cm. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens, inv. X16787. Stavropoulos 1965 (esp. 105 no. 12); Karouzou 1975; Krystalli-Votsi 2014; Athanasopoulou 2021.

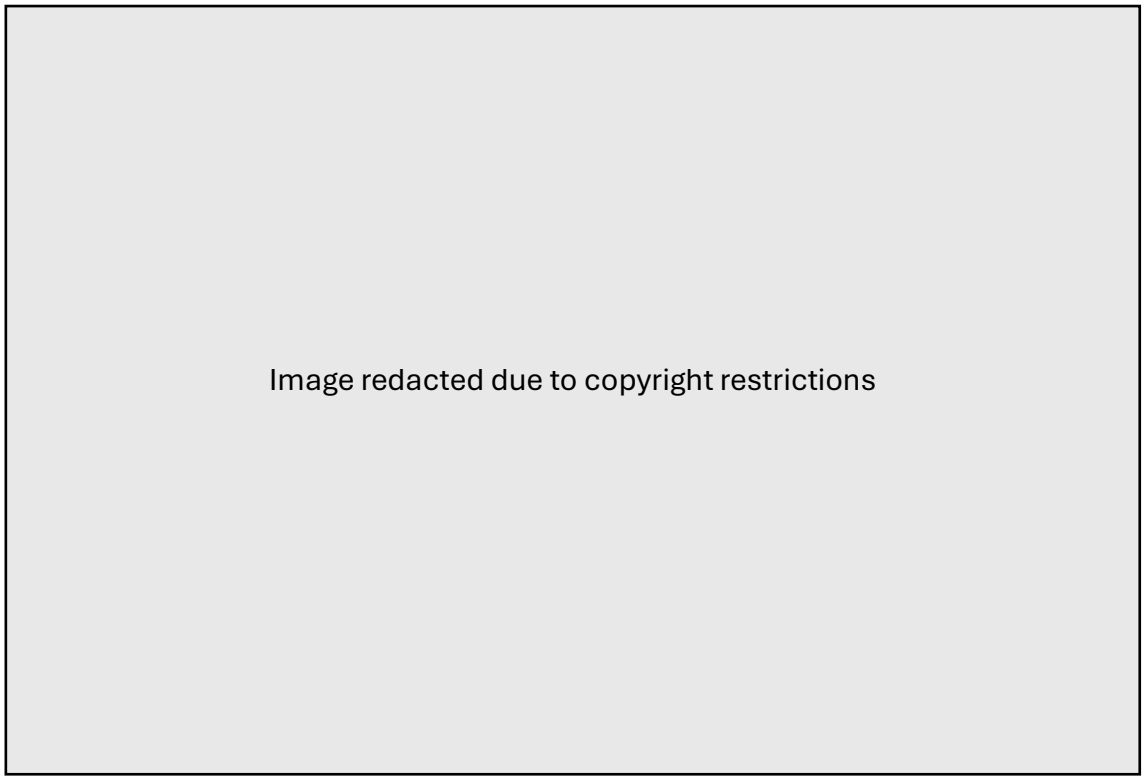


Figure 27: Statuette. African male, juggling. C. 200-150 BC. From the Ampelokipoi area, Athens, Greece. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens, inv. X16787. Source: National Archaeological Museum online exhibit of the month, September 2021 https://www.namuseum.gr/en/monthly_artefact/african-dancer-entertainer/ (accessed 19/12/24).

with a loincloth, are raised slightly to his right in a sort of *contrapposto* stance adapted to fit his energetic movement. His torso is muscular and lean, the delineations of his physique only enhanced by centuries of corrosion. His upper body leans dramatically over to the right as he moves to launch or catch a ball in his right hand. His left hand is pulled upwards towards his shoulder in a fist. He wears a wreath inlaid with silver around his neck, another around his head, clear indications of the thaumatopoietic nature of his performance. He has long locks of curled hair flowing down his neck. Remnants of a second ball survive on the crown of his head.

A striking iconographic feature of this figure is the characterisation of his age. His dynamic posture is reminiscent of youthful dancers and musicians, examined in chapter 3. His body is also notably muscular, unlike the jugglers seen above but

familiar in images of young African males. His face, on the other hand, betrays signs of aging, a rare feature in depictions of African males. While he possesses the now familiar facial features used to denote African heritage in Graeco-Roman art, the heaviness and roughness of his facial features, visible even below the corroded surface of the bronze, hint that this man was supposed to be older than his counterparts. His brow is deeply furrowed above his striking eyes, which have been inlaid with silver, giving an impression of both age and serious concentration. His sunken cheeks appear to sag slightly around his mouth. This figure is clearly not a youth or adolescent but is instead supposed to be seen as aging. Athanasopoulou summarizes his appearance nicely: 'his heavy worn face betrays the weariness of old age in contrast to the body that still seems to retain some of its vitality.'[332] He is clearly still a lively and agile performer, twisting his body to catch a ball whilst remaining steady enough to balance another on his head, despite also displaying physical signs of maturity. The image has been carefully designed to give the impression of a seasoned professional. The dynamic posture of the piece and the interest in the physical characteristics of aging are typical of Hellenistic art, and a date of the first half of the second century BC has been proposed.[333]

Though images of people juggling objects are known elsewhere in Graeco-Roman art, such distinctly thaumatopoietic jugglers are missing. Earlier depictions of people juggling can be found on Classical vases, though these largely consist of a markedly un-thaumatopoietic image type; a woman, fully dressed, sitting on a

[332] Athanasopoulou 2021.
[333] Athanasopoulou 2021.

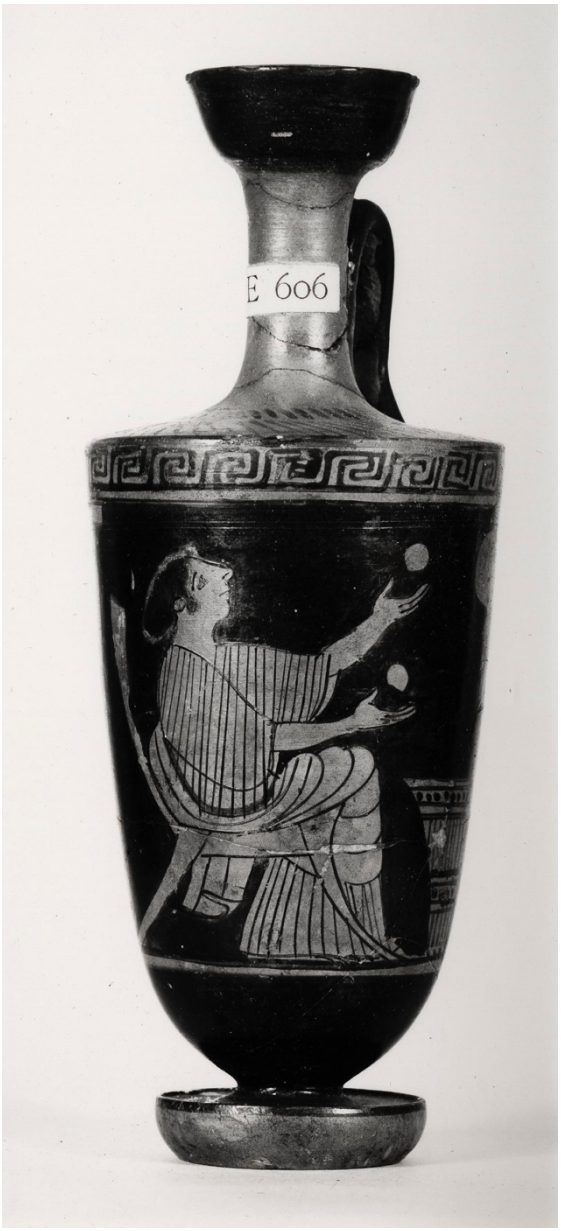


Figure 28: Lekythos. Woman juggling (balls of wool?). Red-figure vase painting. C. 480-470 BC. From Nola, Italy. The British Museum, London, inv. 1856,1226.179. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/492940001 (accessed 19/12/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

stool and juggling balls likely made of wool (as the frequent illustration of a kalathos would suggest). This type is epitomised on an Athenian lekythos discovered in Nola, Italy (figure 28).[334] There is no indication that these women were supposed to be

[334] Red-figure lekythos, from Nola, Italy. Height 13.97 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1856,1226.179. Smith 1896: 331, E606.

entertainers, professional or otherwise, nor were they supposed to be percieved as hetairai.[335] Clearly, this iconography was distinct from that of our professional male jugglers.[336]

A single further instance of a Hellenistic juggler is known. A terracotta statuette from a tomb in Lipari, Italy shows a cross-legged figure sat on top of a spool-shaped object, perhaps intended as a potter's wheel.[337] They hold a ball in their left hand, and perhaps would have held another in their now-lost right hand. This figure has been passively referred to as both male and female,[338] but the stephane on their head is similar to those frequently found in images of females, suggesting that this figure, too, is female. The tomb also contained a small terracotta statuette of a contorted female acrobat performing a musical number on a lyre, another thaumatopoietic image.[339]

[335] For contrast, see e.g., a red-figure column krater depicting a nude hetaira balancing phialai on her hands and head (State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, inv. 634.).
[336] A red-figure oenochoe from Apulia, Italy depicts a nude male juggling three balls with one hand (Musée Antoine Vivenel, Compiègne, inv. 1013). It has been suggested that this figure is a satyr due to the shape of his ear (e.g. the comments on the Beazley archive, available here https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/XDB/ASP/recordDetails.asp?id=%7B1D0A84AF-5BA5-4A7E-8CFD-C986A7E16C20%7D&noResults=1&recordCount=1&databaseID=%7B12FC52A7-0E32-4A81-9FFA-C8C6CF430677%7D&search=%20%7BAND%7D%20%20[Collection%20Name]%20Compiegne,%20Musée%20Vivenel%20%7BAND%7D%201013 (accessed 13/1/24), though damage to the paint makes this uncertain. Should the artist have intended a satyr, the mythological nature of the figure again distances his depiction from that of professional performance.
[337] Terracotta statuette, from tomb 313 at Lipari, Italy. Height 9 cm. Museo Archeologico Regionale Eoliano Luigi Bernabò Brea, Lipari, inv. 749 1. Bernabò Brea and Cavalier 1965: 116, XCV 4, 316, no. E1; Webster 1965: 319; Bernabò Brea 1981: 115, no. F17, fig. 193; Todisco 2002: 110, pl. XXXIX.3.
[338] Male: Bernabò Brea and Cavalier 1965: 116, 316, no. E1; Bernabò Brea 1981: 115, no. F17; Todisco 2002: 110. Female: Webster 1965: 319.
[339] Terracotta statuette, from tomb 313 at Lipari, Italy. Height 10.2 cm. Museo Archeologico Regionale Eoliano Luigi Bernabò Brea, Lipari, inv. 749 K. Bernabò Brea and Cavalier 1965: 116, XCV 3, 316, no. E2; Webster 1965: 319; Bernabò Brea 1981: 115, no. F16, fig. 192; Todisco 2013.



Figure 29: Funerary monument (left panel). Male juggling. C. first century AD. From Este, Italy. Museo di Palazzo Ducale, Mantova. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edicola_funeraria_di_septimia_spica,_I-II_secolo,_02_giocoliere.jpg (accessed 19/12/24). Author: Sailko. Used under CC BY 3.0.

A funerary monument from Este gives two of few known depictions of juggling from the early imperial period (figures 29 and 30).[340] Dedicated to a young girl, the

[340] Grave stele, from Este, Italy. Height 72 cm. Museo di Palazzo Ducale, Mantova. Levi 1931: 84-85 no. 183; Ziliani 2000; Bueno and D'Incà 2012: 315, fig. 6; Tamassia 2012; Todisco 2013: 79, no. 16, fig. 41; Dasen 2019: 132 n. 39.



Figure 30: Funerary monument (right panel). Male juggling. C. first century AD. From Este, Italy. Museo di Palazzo Ducale, Mantova. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edicola_funeraria_di_septimia_spica,_I-II_secolo,_03_giocoliere.jpg (accessed 19/12/24). Author: Sailko. Used under CC BY 3.0.

front panel of the monument consists of a portrait and an epitaph naming the child as Septumia Spica.[341] The left panel (figure 29) shows a male figure dressed in a loincloth. His right leg is planted on the floor while his left kicks upwards, his knee

[341] *CIL* V 1688.

at a right-angle. His arms are also at right-angles, his forearms held upwards. He looks towards his right hand, which holds a ball. Arching over his head are three more balls, culminating in a fifth ball held in his left hand. A sixth ball balances on top of his raised foot. A similar image is depicted on the right panel of the monument, which shows a male figure wearing a tunic (figure 30). He stands with his right foot on the ground, a ball balanced on his toes. His left foot is raised at the heel, where a second ball balances. His right arm is held to his side and carries a third ball. His left hand, which is raised next to his head, holds a fourth. He looks at this hand, his head in profile to the viewer, while a fifth ball balances on top of his head. A sixth and seventh ball hover above the figure. The act of juggling here seems thaumatopoietic:[342] each figure is shown individually, rather than playing a game in a group, and the amount of balls each tosses is surely designed to entertain and amaze, much like the juggler described by Manilius who 'can shower his limbs' with balls and 'create hands to spring up all over his body' to catch them.[343]

It has been suggested that the dress and physical features of these males signal their African or Eastern heritage.[344] Surface damage to the monument has made race or ethnicity of these males difficult to determine, particularly given the criteria outlined above, and so I will not include this as a case study. However, it can be said that these figures seem to diverge from the somatic norm, a hint that they were supposed to be non-Roman.

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[342] *Contra*. Tamassia 2012: 30, who suggests that the images allude to children's entertainment rather than professional *pilarii*.
[343] Manil. 5.168-171: *ille potens turba perfundere membra pilarum per totumque vagas corpus disponere palmas, ut teneat tantos orbes sibique ipse reludat et velut edoctos iubeat volitare per ipsum.* (Tr. Goold 1977: 313-315).
[344] Ziliani 2000: 91 ('caratteri somatici negroidi'), 94 ('giovinetti di origini africane o orientali').

While depictions of thaumatopoietic jugglers were apparently rare, and so the analysis and interpretation of this material is limited, some interesting points emerge from the comparison of these disparate images. Given the geographical and chronological span of the images and the lack of consistent iconography, there does not appear to have been a fashionable image 'type' which artists could copy and adapt accordingly. Rather, these are independent artworks with no relation to each other beyond the theme of iconography. Yet, amongst this uncohesive group, not one depiction of a male of the idealised Mediterranean appearance has survived. As far as is possible to determine from the limited evidence, it seems that juggling was reserved for depictions of women, both as domestic workers and thaumatopoietic entertainers, and 'Other' males. This 'Othering' comes both in the form of ethnicity, primarily African, and age, as in the case of the Athenian example.

African males as acrobats

Unlike the heterogenous images of African males as jugglers, which have inconsistent iconographies and span a broad geographical and chronological scope, an image type of the African male acrobat emerges around the turn of the milennium. Four terracottas of this type were discovered in a circular votive pit in the centre of Tell Timai, Egypt.[345] The pit itself was out of use by approximately the second half of the first century AD, giving a terminus ante quem for the material inside. Numerous other terracottas were found in the pit, including statuettes of Bes, Harpocrates, and an animal, possibly a bird. Jewellery and ceramic fragments

[345] Bennett 2014; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 13-15, 35, 37-39.



Figure 31: Lamp. African acrobat on a table. Terracotta. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Tell Timai, Thmuis. Source: Bennett 2014: fig. 1.

were also discovered. A provisional date for the terracottas in question was given by Bennett, who approximates a creation in the first century BC to the first century AD.[346] Each terracotta was made in a two-piece mould, and was designed as a lamp, with lug holes and wick emplacements, though Bennett argues that no evidence suggests their use as such,[347] implying a purely decorative or votive function.

The lamps in question represent African acrobats and share numerous visual features. Each shows one or two acrobats performing a handstand on a table. The acrobats themselves are shown as African through their physical features, such as short, tightly curled hair, a short nose, full lips, and a round head with high

[346] Bennett 2014; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14-15; Bennett 2023: 199 and n. 106.
[347] Bennett 2014: 107.

cheekbones. The first example is a relatively well-preserved image of the single acrobat type (figure 31).[348] Artistic detail is concentrated on the front of the statuette, highlighting its display against a wall. This display context is confirmed by the lug hole pierced between the acrobat's ankles, which also suggests to Bennett its use in a household shrine.[349] The figure performs a handstand on a circular table decorated with three leonine legs, a feature consistent across the examples from Tell Timai. Red pigment has been preserved on the table legs, yellow on the table top and the male's face, red on his body, and yellow on his ankles.[350] He performs his handstand resting on his forearms, his elbows completely bent. His legs and lower torso are completely perpendicular to his upper torso and his head is pressed against his lower back, an exceptional contortion of great exertion. His effort is evidenced by his deeply furrowed brow and pursed lips.

A second example was discovered in fragments and has subsequently been reconstructed (figure 32).[351] Though fragmentary, more detail has survived on this figure than the previous. His facial expression is especially marked, with a deeply moulded high arch on his brow. Fur detail can be seen on the table legs. A lug hole was similarly pierced between the figure's ankles. No pigment has been preserved on this artefact, which Bennett suggests may be a signal that they were created at different times, with no indication as to which was made first, and that this

[348] Terracotta statuette, from Tell Timai, Thmuis, Egypt. Height 20.3 cm. Bennett 2014: 107-109, fig. 1; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14, T.Cat.No.43, fig. 46.
[349] Bennett 2014: 107.
[350] Bennett 2014: 107-109; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14.
[351] Terracotta statuette, from Tell Timai, Thmuis, Egypt. Height 12.3 cm. Bennett 2014: 109, fig. 2; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14-15, T.Cat.No.44, fig. 47.



Figure 32: Lamp (reconstructed). African acrobat on a table. Terracotta. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Tell Timai, Thmuis. Source: Bennett 2014: fig. 2.

collection was added to over time.[352] The acrobat himself is depicted in the same pose as the previous example.

A third lamp from Tell Timai is distinct from the previous examples (figures 33 and 34).[353] Upon discovery this terracotta was, again, fragmentary, but its reconstruction shows that two acrobats were shown together. Each is shown in the familiar handstand pose, balancing on separate tables with leonine legs, but the tables are upon a shared semi-circular base. The legs of the acrobats (figure 34), now unfortunately broken from their bodies due to damage, are adjoined, and the

[352] Bennett 2014: 109.
[353] Terracotta statuette, from Tell Timai, Thmuis, Egypt. Height 22.36 cm. Bennett 2014: 109, fig. 3-4; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 15, T.Cat.No.45, fig. 48.

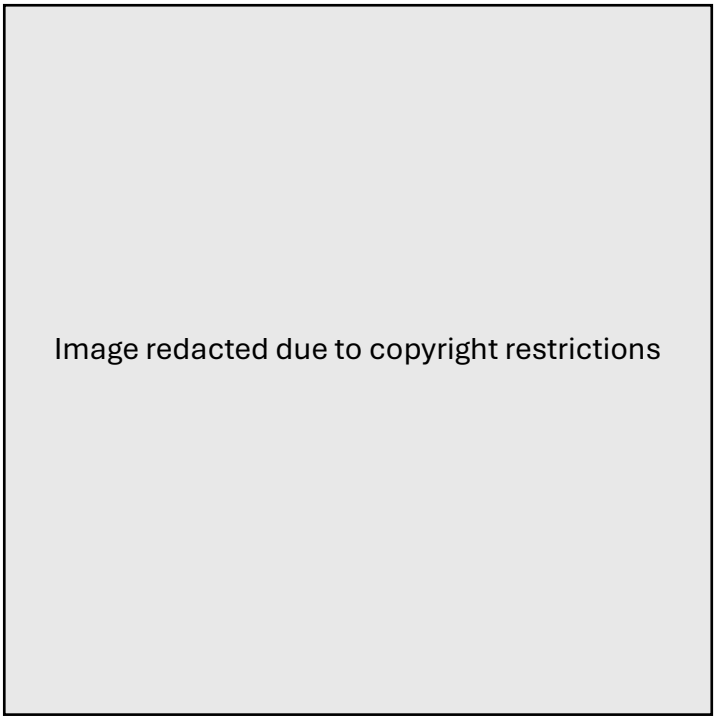


Figure 33: Lamp fragment. African acrobats on a table (upper body). Terracotta. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Tell Timai, Thmuis. Source: Bennett 2014: fig. 3.



Figure 34: Lamp fragment. African acrobats on a table (lower body). Terracotta. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Tell Timai, Thmuis. Source: Bennett 2014: fig. 4.

lug hole is pierced on an extension of terracotta above their feet. Two wick holes can be found on the lamp, one beneath each of the acrobats. Like the first example, pigment has survived on various areas of the artefact: the table legs were painted yellow, the base green, while the left-hand acrobat has yellow pigment on the face and reddish pink on their hair. Unlike the previous examples, these acrobats may be wearing wreaths, as indicated by a change in texture on top of the head, delineated by clear, matching lines which arch over the forehead of each figure.

A final fragment hints at a fourth lamp of the same type which has not survived (figure 35).[354] This fragment is part of a base like that of the previous double

[354] Terracotta statuette, from Tell Timai, Thmuis, Egypt. Height 6.54 cm. Bennett 2014: 109; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 15, T.Cat.No.46, fig. 49.



Figure 35: Lamp fragment. Base for a double acrobat figurine. Terracotta. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Tell Timai, Thmuis. Source: Bennett 2016: fig. 49.

acrobat terracotta and is made from the same material, indicating that it may have been part of a series. A wick hole is preserved at the bottom right of the vessel, and the front has traces of green pigment. It is reasonable to deduce, as Bennett has,[355] that the completed terracotta would have been similar or identical to the double acrobat lamp, and so the presence of a fifth and sixth African acrobat can be inferred. These terracottas are seemingly unique to the region of Tell Timai, and it is interesting to note that only distinctly African acrobats have been depicted.[356]

The type of the African acrobat is also found larger sculpted artworks. A particularly well-known example from around the first century BC to the first century AD is now held in the British Museum (figure 36).[357] Unfortunately, its history prior to

[355] Bennett 2014: 109.

[356] A bronze statuette from Bar Hill, Scotland, described by Moffett (2022: 4) as a 'a black dancer or acrobat', may give evidence for the fashion for images of African performers reaching the expanse of the Roman Empire. However, the figurine is now in private ownership (Eckardt 2014: 83), so its iconography cannot be known for certain. On this statuette, see also Keppie 1985: 51; Swan 1999: 421.

[357] Marble sculpture, provenance unknown. Height 75 cm. British Museum, London, inv. 1805,0703.6. British Museum 1808: 88, no. 88; Ellis 1836: 306-307; Ellis 1846: 306-307; de Clarac 1851: 141-142, no. 2223A, pl. 875; Vaux 1851: 224-225; British Museum 1876: 2, no. 3; Smith 1904: 114-115, no. 1768; Beardsley 1929: 104-105, no. 229; Lippold 1950: 327; Snowden 1970: 166, fig.



Figure 36: Sculpture. African acrobat on a crocodile. Marble. C. first century BC-first century AD. Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1805,0703.6. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1805-0703-6 (accessed 21/12/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

its acquisition by the British Museum is unrecorded and so its provenance is unknown. The posture of this acrobat is almost identical to those in terracotta; his hands grip the crocodile support, his elbows are tucked to his side, his body is

107; Kent Hill 1981: 93-94; Cook 1985: 49, fig. 45; Kapossy 1969: 47; Walker and Higgs 2001: 339, no. 360; Snowden 2010: fig. 299; van den Hoek and Herrmann Jr 2013: 190-191, fig. 9; Bennett 2014: 110; Masséglia 2015: 171-172; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14; Dasen 2019: 133; Giovanetti 2022: 340-341, 341 n. 59.

perpendicular to the floor with his legs straight up in the air and his head is pressed between his shoulder blades. His feet bend at slightly different angles, highlighting the considerable care taken by the artist to create an impression of realism, though it must be noted that the left foot is a modern restoration. Also subject to modern restoration is the crocodile's head, which has been reconstructed with an open mouth and sharp teeth. Some have suggested that the crocodile's mouth may have originally held a fountain spout,[358] though others have dismissed the claim.[359] Unlike the previous examples, this youth is shown with corkscrew locks rather than short hair curled tightly to his head, though this style still indicates his African heritage. He is youthful and muscular, his buttocks and legs particularly enhanced.

This acrobat's performance atop a crocodile has led to the comparison of this image with literary descriptions of the Tentyritae, a group from Egypt renowned for their control of crocodiles.[360] While comparison to these texts is tempting, the presence of a crocodile here does not support the conclusion that this was a realistic representation of a member of the Tentyritae, as many have claimed. Instead, it shows that there was an association between Africans and these dangerous animals in the Graeco-Roman imagination. It is also important to note that the literary descriptions of the Tentyritae and their control of crocodiles do not imply acrobatic performance or tumbling of any kind, which is a significant aspect of this iconography.

[358] E.g., Dasen 2019: 133 n. 42.
[359] Kent Hill 1981: 94 dismisses this reconstruction as 'mere surmise'.
[360] Plin. *HN* 8.92-93; Strabo *Geography* 17.1.44. Cf. Vaux 1851: 225; British Museum 1876: 2; Walker and Higgs 2001: 339; van den Hoek and Herrmann Jr 2013: 191; Bennett 2014: 110; Dasen 2019: 133.

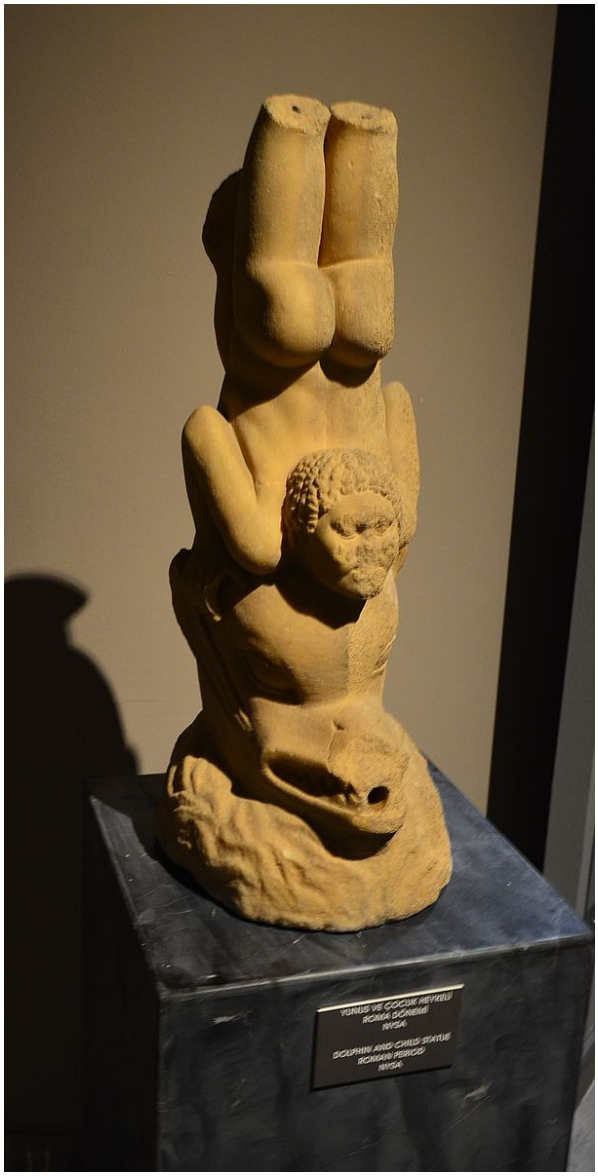


Figure 37: Sculpture. African acrobat on a dolphin. Marble. C. AD 150-200. From Aydın, Türkiye. Aydın Archaeological Museum, Aydın. Source: Wikimedia Commons. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aydın_Archaeological_Museum#/media/File:AydınArchaeologicalMuseum_(97).JPG (accessed 20/12/24). Author: CeeGee. Used under CC BY-SA 4.0.

A lesser-known contemporary marble sculpture is said to have been discovered at the ancient site of Nysa on the Maeander, located in the Aydın province of Türkiye (figure 37).[361] The posture of the boy is identical to that of the

[361] Marble sculpture, from Aydın, Türkiye. Height c. 80-90 cm. Aydın Archaeological Museum, Aydın. de Chaisemartin 2007: 211; Kapuci 2021: 83-85, 259-260, no. K.31, pl. XXXI a-c. Kapuci lists the object as unpublished.

example in the British Museum, though his legs are lost below the knee, and the facial characteristics and hair style of the youths are comparable despite surface damage to the Aydın piece. Replacing the crocodile of the British Museum marble is a dolphin, leading one researcher to identify this artwork as a representation of Hermias, a mythological youth from the Turkish city of Iasos who befriended a dolphin.[362] The dolphin itself has a waterspout between its jaws, indicating the artwork's suitability as a fountain. Kapuci has proposed a date of AD 150-200 based upon the stylistic details of the youth's face, though its remarkable similarity to the British Museum marble must be noted.

Another marble sculpture of an African youth performing a contorted handstand was discovered at the Via Nomentana, Rome during excavations at the Villa Patrizi (figures 38 and 39).[363] It is stylistically quite different from the previous pieces. His facial characteristics are distinctive, though still conforming to the typical characteristics of generic representations of Africans with full lips, a short, broad nose, a round head with high cheekbones and almond shaped eyes.[364] His hair is also different, represented in uniform rows of tightly twisted knots or curls, reminiscent of the modern hairstyle known as Bantu knots. Though stylistically different, the image type is still evident. Once again, a young, muscular African male

[362] Turgut 2010: 407. On the myth, see Ael. *NA* 6.15; Plin. *HN* 9.27; Plut. *Mor*. *De soll. an*. 984E-F.
[363] Marble sculpture, from Rome, Italy. Height 55 cm. Museo Nazionale, Palazzo Massimo, Rome, inv. 40809. Vaglieri 1908: 439; Gatti 1909: 134; Reinach 1913: 350, no. 1; Beardsley 1929: 104-106, no. 230; Paribeni 1932: 145, no. 319; Aurigemma 1946: 72, no. 184; Helbig 1969: 202, no. 2288; Kapossy 1969: 47; Snowden 1970: 166, fig. 51; Direzione generale per le antichità e belle arti 1977: 81; Kent Hill 1981: 93-94; Barbera and Paris 1998: 111, 116; van den Hoek and Herrmann Jr 2013: 190-191, fig. 10; Bennett 2014: 110; Bennett, Littman and Silverstein 2016: 14; Giovanetti 2022: 340-341.
[364] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 169 n. 55 argues that this figure does not possess 'clear determinative characteristics of the Black'. I dispute this claim, and instead argue that this male's physical characteristics, such as tightly curled hair, full lips, short nose and high cheekbones, are typical of Graeco-Roman images of Africans.



Figure 38: Sculpture. African acrobat. Marble. C. first-second century AD. From Via Nomentana, Rome. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, Rome, inv. 40809. Author's own image.

is portrayed in a contorted handstand. His right hand is held in a fist as he balances on his knuckles; his left hand is now lost, but it can be presumed that it would have appeared similarly. It is unclear whether he would have originally been positioned upon an object or creature as the support is now lost. The posture of this youth is especially contorted, his spine curved into a slight crescent. His musculature is also especially enhanced, particularly noticeable on his back which shows the subtle, naturalistic delineations of physical fitness. The size and shape of the buttocks, enhanced in each of these images, are naturally highlighted by the position.

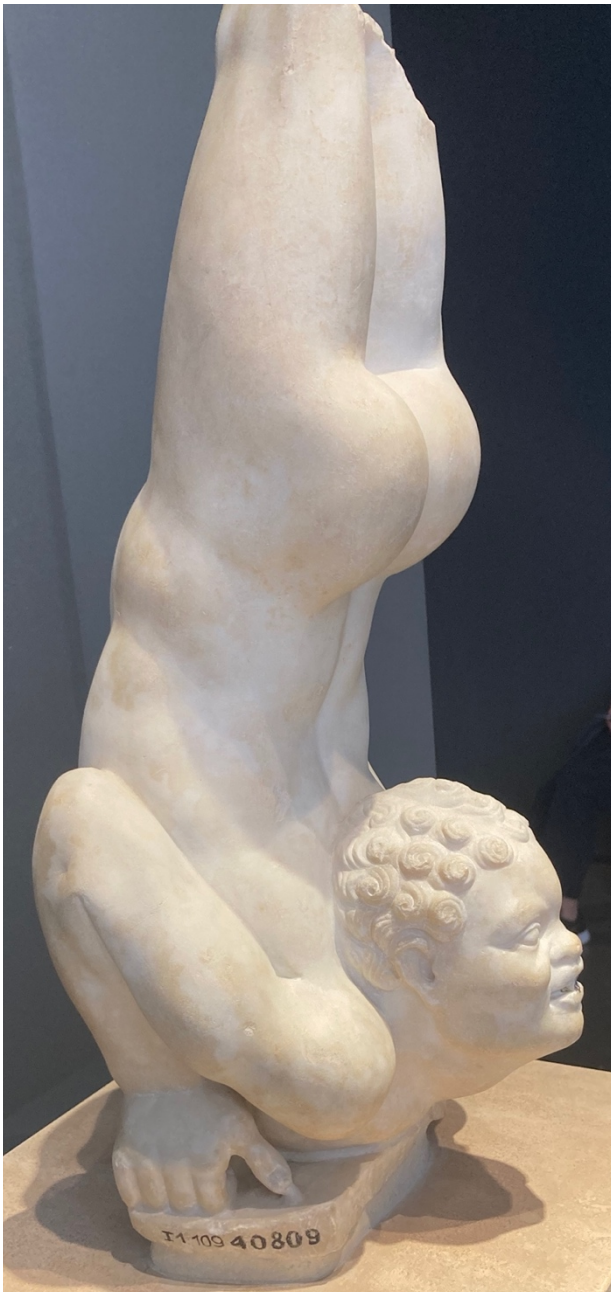


Figure 39: Sculpture. African acrobat. Marble. C. first-second century AD. From Via Nomentana, Rome. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, Rome, inv. 40809. Author's own image.

Masséglia takes this analysis further, suggesting that the 'motif relies on the appreciation of the African figure as physically powerful…and specially trained.'[365] Singular to this example is the facial expression of the youth, whose mouth is slightly open, and the situation of a water spout between his lips. Like the Aydın example,

[365] Masséglia 2015: 172.

this marble would have been used as a water fountain, though in this instance the water would emerge from the acrobat rather than his animal accomplice.

A final marble example from Aphrodisias is in a poor state of preservation.[366] Only the head, shoulders, and upper back survive, and these have been severely damaged over time. Despite this, the original composition of the piece may be deduced when compared to the examples presented here. Though the facial features have eroded, the remnants are possibly characteristic of representations of Africans, and tightly curled hair texture is still visible, depicted in small balls of marble. The back of the head is pressed against the upper back, comparable to the contorted position seen in the above examples, suggesting a reconstruction similar to the pieces investigated here.

Athletic versus thaumatopoietic imagery

A notable characteristic shared between these images is the male gender of the subjects; no image of an African female acrobat survives from this period of antiquity. Aside from the above examples, the iconography of male acrobats is relatively rare in Hellenistic or Roman imperial art, appearing exclusively in a series of bronze statuettes dating to around the early Imperial period.[367] Over twenty

[366] Marble sculpture, from Aphrodisias. Height unknown. Aphrodisias Museum, Geyre. de Chaisemartin 2007: 210-211, fig. 8.

[367] There is debate as to the original date of these objects, with arguments ranging from the Hellenistic period (Càssola Guida 1989: 94; van den Hoek and Herrmann 2013: 190-191) to the early Roman Imperial period (Kent Hill 1977, cf. British Museum, inv. 1878,1019.32 and 1975,0206.1 which have each been dated in the first century AD), and suggestions that there is stylistic influence from Etruscan iconography (Càssola Guida 1989: 94). Though many of the statuettes are of unknown provenance (e.g., Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Firenze, inv. 2356, Bueno 2015: 181-182, no. 159), those with recorded places of discovery (Kent Hill 1977: no. 1-6 – Aquileia (?), Armant, Seona, Constanța, Nîmes, Aquileia respectively; additionally Todisco 2013: P7 and P8 – Rabat, P11 – Egypt, M14 – Armant) indicate that was likely a Roman image type (as in



Figure 40: Statuette. Male acrobat performing a handstand. Bronze. C. early Roman Imperial period. From Nîmes, France. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, inv. bronze.963. Source: BnF Médailles et Antiques catalogue https://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/2695?vc=ePkH4LF7w1I9geonpBCEJuSkovy8qlQ9SzNjcM0K8wkAtU8VCg$$ (accessed 21/12/24). © Serge Oboukhoff. © BnF-CNRS-Maison Archéologie & Ethnologie, René-Ginouvès.

examples of this type, which depicts males performing handstands, have been discovered across Europe and the Mediterranean,[368] two of which will be presented

Bueno 2015: 182). For further examples, see Paribeni 1920: 230, no. 978 (Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 60698 and 66214).

[368] Kent Hill 1977 notes seventeen examples, and Todisco 2013: lists four more bronze examples (P7-P8, Mr13- Mr15) and some examples made from other materials.



Figure 41: Statuette. Male acrobat performing a handstand. Bronze. C. early Roman imperial period. From Armant, Egypt. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. 54.703. Source: The Walters Art Museum online collection https://art.thewalters.org/detail/295/acrobat-poised-on-hands-2/ (accessed 21/12/24). Used under CC0.

here in order to highlight the consistencies of the image type. One example of this type was discovered in Nîmes, France (figure 40).[369] This bronze shows a male performing a handstand balanced on both hands, which have been reconstructed in wax. His head is pressed against his back, which is perfectly straight. His legs and

[369] Bronze statuette, from Nîmes, France. Height 9 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Médailles et Antiques, Paris, inv. bronze.963. De Caylus 1752: 273-275, LXXIV, no. 2; Ménard 1758: 150, no. XVII; Babelon and Blanchet 1895: 426, no. 963; Deonna 1953: 47, 49, fig. 66; Kent Hill 1977: 76, no. 5; Cavalier 2013: 128-130; Todisco 2013: 82, P6.

ankles are held together, upright and perpendicular to the floor. A second example was discovered in Armant, Egypt (figure 41).[370] This bronze shows a male in exactly the same straight-legged handstand position,[371] though his forearms are now lost. This straight-legged posture, reflected universally across the acrobatic images presented in this chapter so far, is actually fairly rare in depictions of acrobatic movement and, for Vickers, is a reflection of 'sportive masculinity'.[372] Only three of the bronze statuettes of this series are shown in a different position, still with straight legs but balancing on their forearms.

Crucial subtleties distinguish these bronze statuettes from the depictions of African males performing acrobatic handstands. Unlike the nude males seen above, the bronze figures wear a distinctive costume which is almost uniform across the type. Each wears a cap (*galericum*), and all but one wear a loincloth (*perizoma* or *subligaculum*/*cingulum*). Tightly fitting, relatively plainly decorated caps like these are quite rare in Graeco-Roman art, though they are most common as part of athletic costume,[373] such as in an Athenian vase painting in the Musei Capitolini, Rome (figure 42).[374] The figure in this painting is completely nude apart from the cap in question, which completely covers his hair and leaves his ear exposed. He is muscular, as shown particularly on the back. Also shown are a pickaxe, a bag, and

[370] Bronze statuette, from Armant, Egypt. Height 8.4 cm. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. 54.703. Rubensohn 1906: 142, abb. 11; Kent Hill 1949: 68-69 no. 144, pl. 5; Kent Hill 1977: 75, no. 2; Todisco 2013: 81, P3.
[371] Rubensohn originally misinterpreted this figure as a swimmer, disregarding the possibility that this could be an entertainer due to a lack of traces of any attachment on his feet (Rubensohn 1906: 142).
[372] Vickers 2016: 68.
[373] Hyde 1921: 165-167; For literary references, cf. Mart. *Ep*. 14.50; Plut. *Mor.* 38b.
[374] Red-figure Kylix of unknown provenance (Athens, Greece?). Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. 389. *CVA* Roma, Musei Capitolini 2, III.I.7, pl. 29.1 and 30.2; Vanhove 1992: 278, no. 140.



Figure 42: Kylix. Athlete wearing a cap. Red-figure vase painting. C. 500-470 BC. Unknown provenance (Athens?). Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. 389. Source: Musei Capitolini collections online https://www.museicapitolini.org/en/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/museo_del_palazzo_dei_conservatori/sale_castellani/kylix_attica_a_figure_rosse_con_pentatleta_di_spalle (accessed 21/12/24).

three stick-like objects which have been identified as javelins,[375] highlighting the athletic nature of the image.

This association between caps and athletic imagery spans later periods and different art forms. A pre-Imperial bronze,[376] currently held at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, explicitly illustrates this connection (figure 43).[377] This intricately crafted statuette shows a nude youth in an active position, lunging

[375] Vanhove 1992: 278.
[376] On dating, see Filippi 2015: 168 who suggests that this bronze is from the second or first century BC.
[377] Bronze statuette of unknown provenance. H. 13.8 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, inv. 2330. Milani 1923: 169, 170; Filippi 2015: 167-168, no. 139; Sinn 2018: 30, abb. 13.

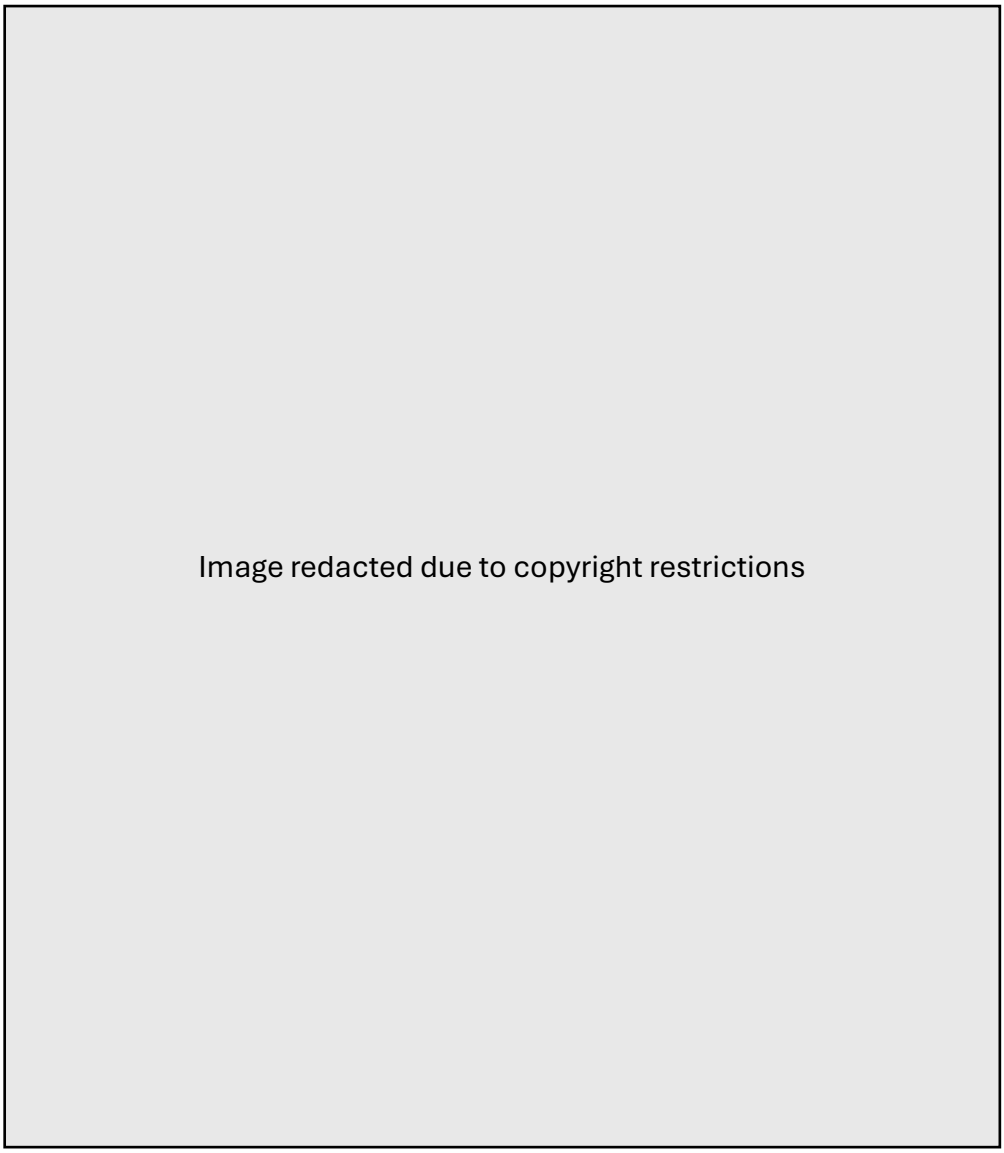


Figure 43: Statuette. Athlete wearing a cap. Bronze. C. Hellenistic period. Unknown provenance. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, inv. 2330. Source: Sinn 2018: abb. 13.

forward on his right leg. His left foot is tilted, digging into the ground to brace against force or to push forward. His upper body is similarly dynamic; his torso is twisted, and his arms reach out in front. His posture implies that he may be a participant in a wrestling match or similar athletic activity. His body is very muscular, particularly defined at his calves, thighs, pectorals and back. The athleticism of this figure is highlighted throughout its iconography, which significantly includes a cap.[378] So,

[378] For further examples, see an Etruscan bronze head (British Museum, London, inv. 1824,0427.1; Walters 1899: 261, no. 1614), though there is debate as to whether this is a representation of a priest or an athlete; a relief of a victorious athlete (Musei Capitolini, Rome, inv. 1000; Sinn 2018: 23-

while not particularly common in the vast expanse of Graeco-Roman art, the iconography of the cap in conjunction with dynamic movement, as in the bronze statuettes of males performing handstands, may have encouraged a recognition of athleticism by viewers. The specific iconography of these bronzes leads me to interpret them as representations of young athletes showing off their skills, looking to impress others.

Such a distinct allusion to sport is missing from the images of African acrobats. Though their musculature is emphasised through their pose, highlighting physical fitness, it may be that this is a naturalistic rendering of a body capable of such controlled contortion, without necessarily having further implications of athleticism or participation in sporting activity. There may also be erotic connotations of this body type, which I will discuss below.[379] I would suggest that the iconography of these African acrobats is perhaps more aligned with that of θαυματοποιία, or 'wonder-making'. It must be stressed here that acrobatic performance within the sphere of 'wonder-making' was considered as completely separate to that of martial or athletic tumbling, similar to the differentiation between gymnastics and circus acrobatics in modern thought.

Certain artistic choices create a distinction between the images of African acrobats and the statuettes of tumbling athletes, hinting at 'thaumatopoietic' performance. The British Museum and Aydın examples use an aquatic creature as a support for the performance. Though a person may have been used to dolphins in a

36, abb. 11); a marble head (Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, inv. 147678 MNW; Dobrowolski 2004: 165, no. 115).

[379] See pages 145-146.

decorative context, a common feature of Roman fountains, it is not unreasonable to imagine that their presence here may have evoked curiosity or wonder as to the nature of the act being performed.[380] Perhaps this would have been seen as a comedic twist on the traditional Greek iconography of horseback tumbling, adapted to be made more suitable for images on fountains. Similarly, the way that water has been included in at least two of the examples, with a waterspout emerging from the mouth of the youth in the marble from the Villa Patrizi and from between the jaws of the dolphin of the Aydın example, creates a feeling of wondrous entertainment.[381] Although water is, of course, expected in the creation of water features, the placement of the spouts creates the impression of a circus-like trick, distancing this iconography from the seriousness of athletic tumbling.

The lamps from Tell Timai consistently use a table as support for acrobatic performance. Though not as overtly thaumatopoietic as the animal supports, the tables allude to the casual nature of their performance. These acrobats should be interpreted as street performers (*circulatores*)[382] rather than athletic or martial tumblers who would have most likely used professional equipment or horses as supports. They may also have been intended as banquet performers, the tables acting as a signifier of internal, domestic space, again highlighting the lack of technical apparatus and the casual, unregulated nature of the performance.

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[380] For literary links between dolphins and thaumatopoietic acts, see Manil. 5.442-444; Nonnus *Dion*. 3.24-26. Other authors link dolphins and music, e.g., Plin. *HN* 9.24.1; Plut. *Mor*. 704F.
[381] Rogers 2018: 74-75 even argues that Roman fountains should be classified as a kind of spectacle.
[382] Bueno and D'Incà 2012: 312 suggests that *circulatores* was used to describe street performers due to the circles of people (*circuli*) who gathered round to watch their performances. For use of this term to describe street performers and the like, see e.g., Petron. *Sat*. 68.6. However, as Bueno and D'Incà 2012: 312 n. 6 notes, this term was more often used to describe charlatans, e.g., Sen. *Ep*. 29.7.

The facial expressions of the Tell Timai figures, as well as the Villa Patrizi youth, lack the restraint and composure of the athletic images. They are instead expressive, showing either strain or a grin. This lack of composure is designed to entertain a viewer, highlighting that this is a *performance*, designed to attract attention and create enjoyment in others, rather than a display of personal athletic skill; the character of the acrobat was as important as the act itself. The dual-figured lamp from Tell Timai may also costume its acrobats with wreaths, an allusion to festivity certainly distanced from the seriousness of athletic imagery.[383]

Thaumatopoietic acrobatics and gender

Literary references to thaumatopoietic acrobatics generally place females at the forefront. In the mid fourth century BC, Xenophon wrote about wonder-makers in his *Symposium*. He mentions 'a dancing girl – one of those skilled in acrobatic tricks'.[384] Later, 'a potter's wheel was brought in for the dancing girl, on which she was to put on a show'.[385] Athenaeus, in the much later work *Deipnosophistae* from the early third century AD, describes the wedding feast of Karanos in a similar way: 'They were followed by ithyphallic dancers and clowns, and by naked female acrobats who did tumbling tricks among swords and blew fire from their mouths.'[386] Epigraphic evidence similarly provides a gendered image of thaumatopoietic performers;

[383] On wreaths and festivity, see above pages 106-107.
[384] Xen. *Symp.* 2.1: ὀρχηστρίδα τῶν τὰ θαύματα δυναμένων ποιεῖν (tr. Todd, rev. Henderson 2013: 571).
[385] Xen. *Symp*. 7.2: εἰσεφέρετο τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι τροχὸς τῶν κεραμικῶν, ἐφ᾽ οὗ ἔμελλε θαυματουργήσειν. (tr. Todd, rev. Henderson 2013: 637).
[386] Ath. 4.129d: μεθ᾽ οὓς εἰσῆλθον ἰθύφαλλοι καὶ σκληροπαῖκται καί τινες καὶ θαυματουργοὶ γυναῖκες εἰς ξίφη κυβιστῶσαι καὶ πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἐκριπίζουσαι γυμναί. (tr. Olson 2006: 117).



Figure 44: Skyphos. Female acrobat performing a handstand on a potter's wheel and a comic actor. Red-figure vase painting. C. 365-335 BC. From Paestum, Italy. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. 1945.54. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Asteas_-_RFVP_2-33_-_female_acrobat_on_turn-table_and_phlyax_-_maenad_and_Dionysos_-_Oxford_AM_1945-48_-_02.jpg (accessed 21/12/24). Author: ArchaiOptix. Used under CC BY-SA 4.0.

amongst many performers listed on an inscription from Delos dating to 268 BC is a single θαυματοποιός, a female named Kleopatra.[387]

In the artistic repertoire, females remain at the forefront of representation. The image of the thaumatopoietic acrobat can be found in many late Classical vase paintings, often depicting girls and young women performing at banquets or accompanying comedic actors. These vases were particularly popular in Magna Graecia,[388] and largely date to the fourth century BC.[389] A red-figure Paestan skyphos depicts a female acrobat performing a handstand on a potter's wheel, a common

[387] IG xi 2.110.34.
[388] Scholz 2003: 101 even suggests that acrobatic performance for entertainment was native to Magna Graecia, citing the amazement of Callias' guests at the tricks of Syracusian θαυματοποιοί in Xenophon's *Symposium* (2.2.1-2) alongside the high concentration of archaeological evidence to this region.
[389] Scholz 2003; Todisco 2013: 120-123.

prop in this type of performance (figure 44).[390] Her upper body is held perfectly straight, a reflection of skill and strength as seen in the examples of African performers. However, her legs are bent at the knee, contorting to almost touch her forehead. Her neck is bent completely backwards so her head presses against her upper back, also like the examples above. She wears a loincloth and sock-like shoes. Her breasts are exposed, a common iconography for female acrobats in vase paintings; as Dearden notes, this deliberately exposes the gender of the performer, a contrast to her companion who is artificially gendered with a fake beard and phallus.[391] She has a bracelet snaked around each wrist and a string of beads or pearls bedazzling her torso, attracting the eye. She wears a wreath on top of her flowing curly locks, a signal of festivity. This is certainly an example of θαυματοποιία.

A kalyx-krater from Lipari makes the female gender of an acrobatic performer even more explicit (figure 45).[392] A nude female acrobat performs a handstand upon a table in the same posture as the previous example. Other figures appear in the scene: Dionysus sat on a throne, two actors who stand behind her and watch, and two further actors who appear in windows above. The use of colour is absolutely crucial to understanding this image. The acrobat is painted completely in white to illustrate not only her nudity but her female gender. This is in complete contrast to Dionysus and the two actors behind her, who are depicted in standard red-figure

[390] Red-figure skyphos from Paestum, Italy. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. 1945.54. Dearden 1995: 82-83, pl. 1a; Todisco 2013: 71, MGS11.
[391] Dearden 1995: 83.
[392] Red-figure kalyx krater from tomb 367 at Lipari, Italy. Height 39.7 cm. Museo Archeologico Regionale Eoliano Luigi Bernabò Brea, Lipari, inv. 927. Trendall 1967: 52, no. 80 (74); Trendall and Webster 1971: 128, no. IV.11; Trendall 1987: 46 no. 99, pl. 12f; Trendall 1989: ill. 340; Dearden 1995: 83, pl. 1b; Green 2012: 321-322, 339, no. 54; Maclachlan 2012: 351-352; Piqueux 2022: 39-40, fig. 1.19.



Figure 45: Kylix krater. Female acrobat performing a handstand, Dionysus and comic actors. Red-figure vase painting. C. 390-380 BC. From Lipari, Italy. Museo Archeologico Regionale Eoliano Luigi Bernabò Brea, Lipari, inv. 927. Source: Piqueux 2022: fig. 1.19.

with white details such as hair. The actors in the windows, however, are shown in red-figure but with white masks, showing that these were male actors playing female characters. Here, the artist has gone to great lengths to distinguish between a real female acrobat and male actors temporarily masquerading as females for the sake of comedy.

The trend for nude, semi-nude, or nude-appearing female acrobats continues into the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Again largely concentrated in the region of Magna Graecia, numerous funerary terracottas show female acrobats in a handstand pose, resting either on her forearms or hands, or performing a backwards bridge bend. A particularly well-preserved statuette of this type was

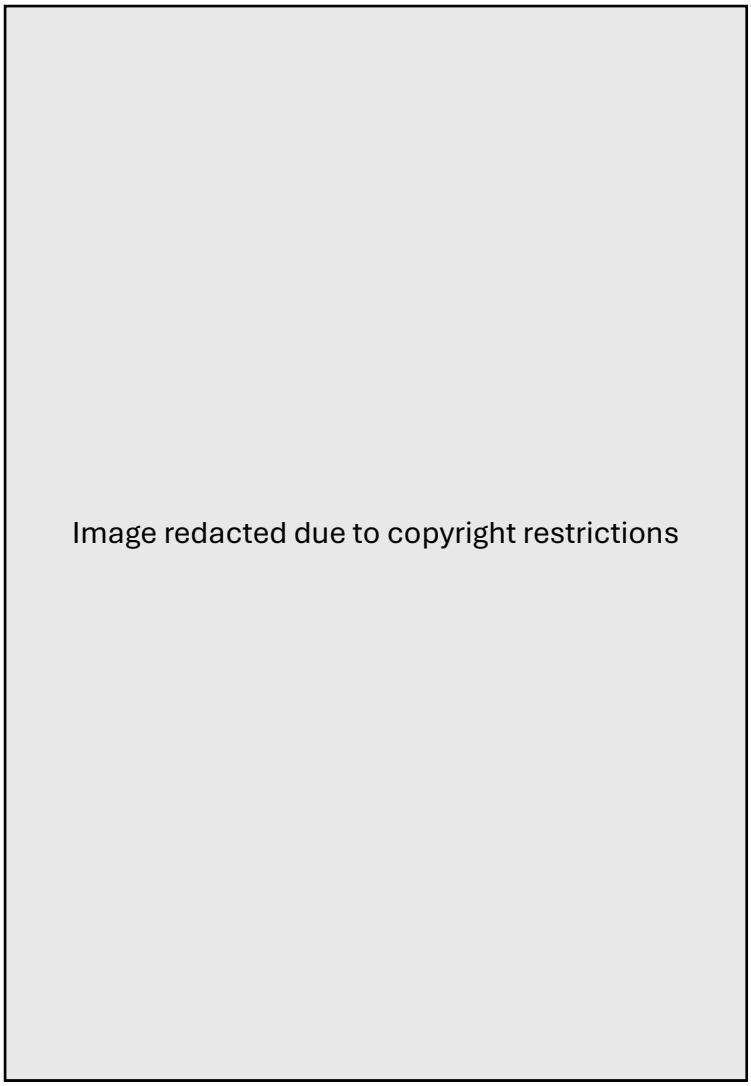


Figure 46: Statuette. Female acrobat performing a handstand. Terracotta. C. end of fourth century BC. From Taranto, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Taranto, inv. 4090. Source: Google Arts and Culture https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/front-view/PQELRKRSlnjabg?childAssetId=aQGe8WnGw6H81Q (accessed 21/12/24).

discovered in a tomb in Taranto (figure 46).[393] It shows a young female performing a handstand on her hands, arms outstretched. She holds her body upright in a display of strength, but her legs bend at the knee exhibiting her flexibility. Traces of red paint

[393] Terracotta statuette from Taranto, Italy. H. 17.5 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Taranto, inv. 4059. Todisco 1990: 107, 113 fig. 146; Graepler 1997: 234, 235 fig. 288, 256 Grab 10 no. 3; Todisco 2002: 110; Todisco 2013: 77 MGS49. For a similar terracotta statuette from Taranto, see Todisco 1990: fig. 146.

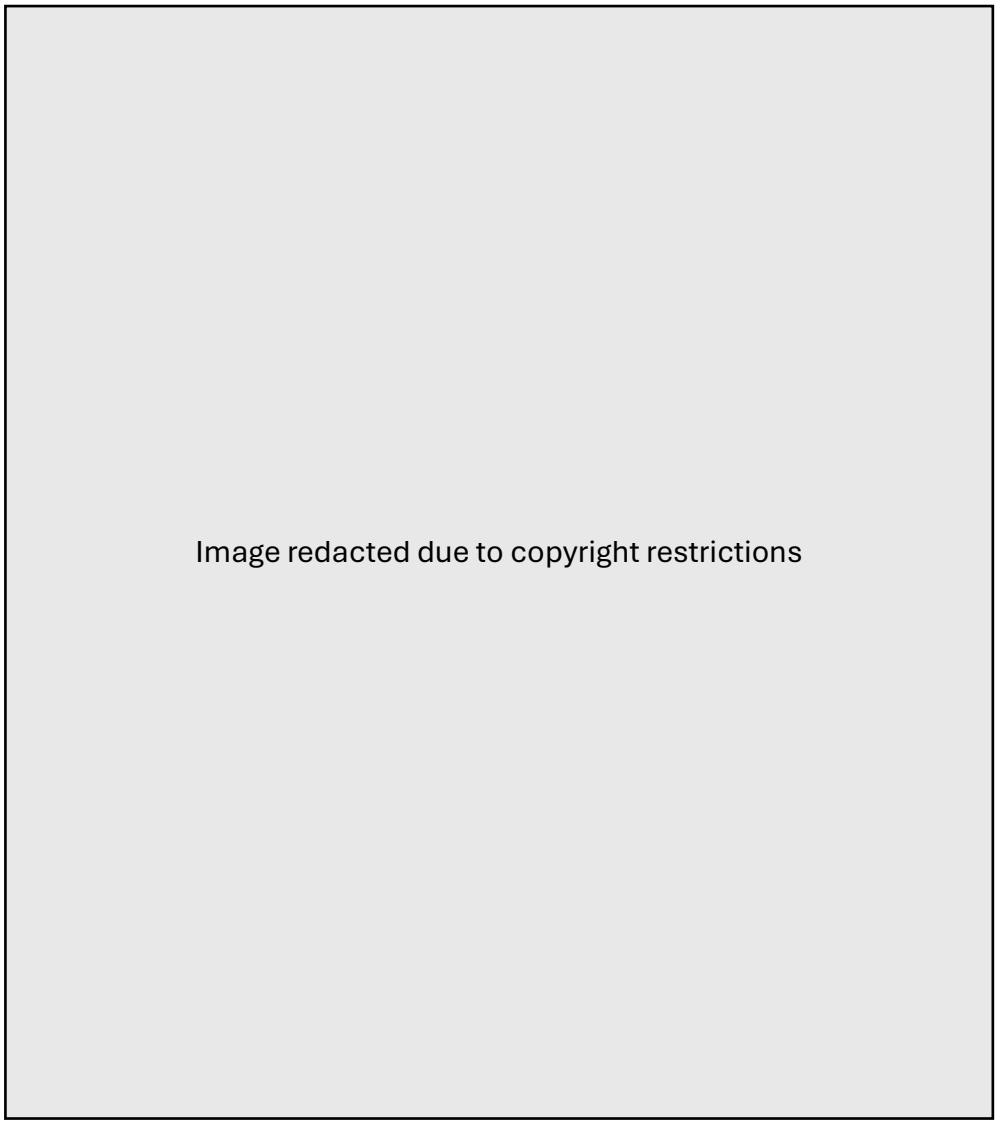


Figure 47: Statuette. Female acrobat performing a backbend. Terracotta. C. end of fourth century BC. From Taranto, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Taranto, inv. 50323. Source: Google Arts and Culture https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/acrobat/vAEqLFy4a5ghrw?hl=en (accessed 21/12/24).

survive on her hair and feet, the latter perhaps an indication of her original costume. She also seems to have been wearing armbands, shown by delineations in the clay.

The additional contents of this tomb reveal an even stronger connection between thaumatopoietic acrobatics and female gender.[394] Discovered alongside this statuette were jewellery and a mirror, an indication that the deceased was likely female. Four other terracottas were also found, almost exclusively depicting female

[394] For a list of the tomb's contents see Graepler 1997: 256 Grab 10.

subjects (besides a group containing an image of Eros).[395] A second terracotta statuette (figure 47),[396], depicting a nude female acrobat performing a one-handed backbend, was found in similar conditions. The contents of this tomb, again, indicate the female gender of the deceased, and amongst the nine figurines discovered within the tomb, not one shows a male figure.

The images of African acrobats appear to straddle two dichotomised types of acrobatic iconography. The first, a seemingly masculine type of athletic acrobatics; the subjects share their male gender and their posture is similar, though the enhanced musculature of the African males must be highlighted. The second, thaumatopoietic entertainers, are perhaps exclusively female in gender and performed an entertaining form of acrobatics for the enjoyment of others. I argue, based on iconography and perception, that this second type of acrobatic performer gives a closer comparison for the images in question, despite considerable differences in identity. Though each type of acrobatic performance and their associated iconographies show abnormal feats of the body supposed to amaze a viewer, the (imagined) environment of performance and the identity of the performer had implications for the perception of both the status of the performer and the feat itself. While athletic tumblers would have been admired for their physical prowess, perhaps acting as a symbol for aspiration for other youths, thaumatopoietic acrobats were low status performers of unnatural feats designed to simultaneously attract and disturb viewers.

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[395] Graepler 1997: 239.

[396] Terracotta statuette from Taranto, Italy. H. 8 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Taranto, inv. 50323. Todisco 1990: 107, 113 fig. 147; Graepler 1997: 234, 235 fig. 289, 265 Grab 64 no. 2; Todisco 1990: fig. 147; Todisco 2002: 110; Todisco 2013: 76-77 MGS45.

With this in mind, it becomes even more significant that the literary and artistic references to thaumatopoietic acrobats almost exclusively centre on nude or semi-nude female performers, often in a banquet or theatrical setting. Though there is no suggestion that they would have necessarily been enslaved or sex workers,[397] the artistic iconography and literary description of these females gives a clear indication as to their perceived status, both social and sexual. Given the conventions of female nudity in art and the imagination at this time, their nudity within a banquet or theatrical setting immediately associates these females with prostitutes and courtesans.[398] Further, the acrobatic movement of (nude) bodies, though not inherently sexual, invites the (male) gaze to typically hidden areas of the body, displayed for an audience in unusual ways. The buttocks and thighs may be highlighted by a handstand pose, which draws the rear to be in-line with the face, whereas a backbend may emphasise nude breasts. In a similar way, the handstand posture of the African males in question accentuates their exaggerated musculature, particularly their buttocks and legs which are noticeably enhanced.[399] Such an emphasis on physical appearance can also be found in literary references to thaumatopoietic entertainers, such as Socrates who, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, ponders the pleasure to be found in watching 'the young and beautiful twisting their bodies about and imitating hoops'.[400]

[397] Vickers 2016: 146.
[398] On the association between female performers and sex work, see Goldman 2015; Olsen 2017, esp. 20-24.
[399] Cf. Masséglia 2015: 172.
[400] Xen. *Symp*. 7.3-4: οὐδὲ μὴν τό γε διαστρέφοντας τὰ σώματα καὶ τροχοὺς μιμουμένους ἥδιον ἢ ἡσυχίαν ἔχοντας τοὺς καλοὺς καὶ ὡραίους θεωρεῖν (tr. Todd, rev. Henderson 2013: 639).

This connection between (nude) bodies, appearance, and performance would have made performers of this kind akin to sex workers in the later Roman imagination, who would have seen such entertainers (and others, such as actors and gladiators) as selling their bodies, even if not explicitly for sexual purposes.[401] These entertainers were also crucially viewed as lower status, existing beyond the norms of regular society. In fact, Athenaeus makes such an association between thaumatopoietic performers and sex workers explicit: 'prostitutes came in, two wonder-working girls, whom Stratocles was driving like swift-footed birds.'[402] From the limited evidence available to us, it seems then that the African males in question were dually degraded in the eyes of an ancient viewer, who would have associated their image not only with a traditionally female iconography but also with a sexualised practice. Their percieved race evidently made them fitting candidates for such a portrayal; they were suitably 'Other', just as females were in their gender, to be subject to such fascination and fantasy of the viewer.

The African acrobats, in being associated with a traditionally feminine type of performance, are representative of the fantasy around African males, their bodies, and their gender. Their association with an iconography so dominated by representations of females suggests that their gender was seen as both flexible and subordinate. Though the depictions are all male, and their bodies show characteristics desirable within the contemporary artistic construction of the ideal male body, they are still shown as acting beyond the norms of hegemonic

[401] Richlin 1992: 99-100; Edwards 1997.
[402] Ath. 4.137c: πόρναι δ' εἰσῆλθον, κοῦραι δύο θαυματοποιοί, ἃς Στρατοκλῆς ἤλαυνε ποδώκεας ὄρνιθας ὥς. (Translation adapted from Olson 2006: 157).

masculinity through abnormal movements which were, ultimately, associated with a traditionally feminine performance. Their 'exotic' race allows for this fantasy about gender and abnormal bodily movement,[403] creating a safe distance between the viewer and the subject.[404] This sort of fantasy about bodily capabilities and wonder about what 'Others' can do is reflected in the depictions of other African θαυματοποιοί discussed above, but it is these representations of acrobats which give a fuller picture of how this impacts the perception of gender. Unlike the images of other wonderous performers, an eroticisation of the African body occurs here through the display of the nude body with exaggerated features in acrobatic poses and the association between (female) performers and sex work. The imagined background for these images, which show African entertainers hired to perform for others in either a public or private setting, also plays on the status of the figures to further drive them beyond the hegemonic societal norms; they are inherently low status in the eyes of elite Roman viewers, which then further disrupts the perception of their gender. There is also a disparity between the popularity of this theme in art and elsewhere, perhaps pointing to a prevalence of this fantasy in art that does not reflect reality.[405]

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[403] On the connection between 'exotic' ethnicity and thaumatopoietic performance, see Ael. *VH* 8.7; Ath. 12.538e who both describe the Ἰνδικῆς θαυματοποιοὶ ('Indian wonder-makers') at Alexander's wedding celebration as διαπρέποντες ('remarkable'), and Aelian suggests that they were κρατεῖν τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ἀλλαχόθεν ('better than others from elsewhere').

[404] This fantasy around bodily movement and ethnicity is reflected in a description given by Diodorus Siculus' who, in an attempt to create distance between Greek men and others, suggests that there is a certain group of Ethiopians whose bones bend and straighten: εἶναι δὲ τοὺς τὴν νῆσον οἰκοῦντας ταῖς τε τῶν σωμάτων ἰδιότησι καὶ ταῖς ἀγωγαῖς πολὺ διαλλάττοντας τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν οἰκουμένην· πάντας μὲν γὰρ παραπλησίους εἶναι τοῖς ἀναπλάσμασι τῶν σωμάτων, καὶ κατὰ τὸ μέγεθος ὑπεράγειν τοὺς τέτταρας πήχεις, τὰ δὲ ὀστᾶ τοῦ σώματος ἔχειν ἐπὶ ποσὸν καμπτόμενα καὶ πάλιν ἀποκαθιστάμενα παραπλησίως τοῖς νευρώδεσι τόποις. (Diod. Sic. 2.56.2-3).

[405] Contra., e.g., Snowden 1970: 166; Snowden 2010: 230.

Θαυματοποιός or *irrumatus*?

A series of small, head-shaped lamps establish a particularly popular image type from the early Imperial period. Countless examples can be found in museums, private collections and art markets across the world, a reflection of their popularity across the Roman Empire. The type's popularity both in the ancient world and in modern art collections, which house numerous forgeries and replicas dating from between the Renaissance period and the twentieth century, pushes presenting each individual example beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, for its function here I have selected four case studies which best outline the iconography and subsequent problems in interpretation of this image type.

Perhaps the most famous example, owing to its find context, was discovered in the 1907 excavations of the necropolis at Pompeii's Porta di Nola (figure 48).[406] Remarkably, despite its provenance in the city's necropolis, this was not a funerary object; rather, it was discovered with the remains of a couple who were trying to flee the city as Vesuvius erupted, an indication of the object's importance and value. Though corroded over time, and believed to have been subject to now out-of-date conservation practices after its discovery,[407] the appearance of the lamp remains outstanding. It depicts the head of a male who appears to be older than most images discussed in this thesis. His facial characteristics are probably that of an

[406] Bronze lamp from the necropolis at Porta di Nola, Pompeii. Height 5 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 133320. Spano 1910: 396-397; Beard 2008: 1, ill. 1; Bielfeldt 2022: 20, fig. 1.1.
[407] Bielfeldt 2022: 20.



Figure 48: Lamp. African head. Bronze. C. early first century AD. From the necropolis at Porta di Nola, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 133320. Source: Flickr © Mary Harrsch https://www.flickr.com/photos/mharrsch/16714453674 (accessed 21/12/24). Used under CC BY 2.0.

African man; he has full lips, a short nose, and high cheekbones. Unfortunately, the appearance of his hair has been distorted due to damage.

The specific design of this lamp's practical features and others like it has prompted a debate as to the meaning of the iconography. This example has a large circular handle on the back of his head, elaborately decorated with a large palmette which would have probably originally attached at the fuel hole in the top of his head. As in every example of this type, the spout sits within his mouth.[408] When lit, this

[408] This was originally suggested to have been the tongue of the man (Spano 1910: 396-397).



Figure 49: Lamp. African head. Bronze. C. first century AD. From Tàrraco, Catalonia. Museu Nacional Arqueològic, Tarragona, inv. MNAT 2865. Source: MNAT online collection https://arqueoxarxa.colleccions.cat/objecte/mnat-2865/ (accessed 21/12/24). © Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona. Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

would have created a remarkable sight; a small African head with flames sparking spectacularly from their mouth. It is unsurprising, then, that one interpretation of these images sees African males as thaumatopoietic fire performers.[409] Fire has already featured in Athenaeus' description of nude acrobat girls cited above,[410] and he likewise refers to a certain Cratisthenes of Phlius who could spontaneously produce fire.[411] If one imagines this lamp in a banquet setting, reference to such a

[409] Grandjouan 1961: 33; Berg 2020: 207; Berg 2022: 56.
[410] Ath. 4.129d.
[411] Ath. 1.19e.

performance seems appropriate. The presence of palmettes on some of the examples, like that from Pompeii, give the impression of festive headdresses suitable for spectacular performance, strengthening this interpretation. Such a headdress is seen in a second example, discovered in the excavation of a house in Tàrraco, though the headdress is not quite as spectacular (figure 49).[412] It must be noted, however, that Athenaeus' allusions to fire performance are the only surviving references in the relevant literary corpus, and so it seems to have been far less common than the popularity of this lamp type would suggest.

A less festive impression is made by an example currently held at the British Museum, unfortunately of unknown provenance (figure 50).[413] Again, this shows an African male, significantly younger than the first example, with a spout in his mouth. The opening for fuel is here disguised within the hair, which opens at the top to function as a lid. A possible allusion to festivity can be seen in the lamp's handle, which is decorated in a leaf-like pattern all the way round, but it is far more subtle. Other examples lack any attempt at festivity, such as another unprovenanced example at the British Museum (figure 51).[414]

The lack of overt allusion to festivity in this latter examples raises further concern with the interpretation of this iconography as thaumatopoietic. While it may be the case that these are less decorated images of θαυματοποιοί, these lamps may

[412] Bronze lamp from the ancient settlement of Tàrraco (now Tarragona), Catalonia. Height 5.5 cm. Museu Nacional Arqueològic, Tarragona, inv. MNAT 2865. Bernal Casasola 1993; López Vilar 2020: 82, no. 54.
[413] Bronze lamp of unknown provenance. Height 4.5 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1824,0454.17. Bailey 1996: 17, Q3581; Fentress 2011: pl. 8; Newman (upcoming).
[414] Bronze lamp of unknown provenance. Height c. 6 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 115506. Bailey 1996: 16, Q3579, pl. 15.



Figure 50: Lamp. African head. Bronze. C. first century AD. Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1824,0454.17. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1824-0454-17 (accessed 21/12/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

instead allude to something far more grim. In each example, and many more of this image type, the mouth is shaped in an unnatural position, stretched around the spout.[415] Comparison between these images and other depictions of θαυματοποιοί, who generally perform with effortlessness, reveals the discomfort of these subjects: their cheeks are sucked in, their lips are stretched around a (sometimes overtly)

[415] This is particularly evident in an example from Mardin, Turkey, where the spout has been removed (The British Museum, London, inv. 115507).



Figure 51: Lamp. African head. Bronze. C. first century AD. Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 115506. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1841-0726-17 (accessed 21/12/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

phallic object, and the brows are often strongly furrowed. As a result, an alternative interpretation is that these are allusions to forced *irrumatio*, or penetration of the mouth.[416]

These lamps were created upon a social backdrop which, at least notionally, conveyed strong beliefs about oral sex. To be the provider of oral sex for another person carried negative implications due to the inherent filthiness of genitalia and

[416] Fentress 2011: 67. On the act of *irrumation*, see Krenkel 1980: 77; Richlin 1981; Adams 1982, 125-130; Williams 2010: 161-162; Kamen and Levin-Richardson 2015: 450-451.

the importance of the mouth. For Cicero, the mouth was *sanctissima…parte corporis*, or the most sacred part of the body,[417] likely due to its role in daily life, especially for men who would have been practising politics, business and religion. To defile your mouth, particularly with foul genitalia,[418] would leave one open to accusations of *os impurum*, or unclean mouth, a favourite form of invective for poets such as Catullus or Martial and orators like Cicero.[419] To voluntarily perform oral sex was bad enough; to be forcefully irrumated was even worse,[420] seen as the strongest possible threat, particularly against adult males.[421]

The ambiguity of this iconography to the modern viewer is frustrating, and either interpretation is not certain. On the one hand, these lamps present an often festive image which would have created a small spectacle when in use. On the other, the depiction of their faces create an unsettling impression that this was an uncomfortable, unwelcome act. Perhaps this ambiguity was deliberate, a double-entendre designed to entertain viewers in multiple ways. Some viewers of these lamps may have seen an African male being orally penetrated with a phallic object, evoking a feeling of shock, humour, or possibly even arousal.[422] Then, upon seeing the lamp alight, the meaning of the image shifts entirely to one of spectacular performance, revealing that the viewer had been tricked. The key to this ambiguity

[417] Cic. *Red. sen.* 11; cf. Williams 2010: 198.
[418] On the foulness of genitalia and sexual acts, see Richlin 1992: esp. 26-27.
[419] E.g., Catull. 99; Cic. *Dom*. 104; Mart. 7.85. This trope of the unclean mouth, or κακοστόματος, is also found in Greek invective epigram e.g., *Anth. Pal.* 11.155. Cf. Williams 2010: 197-199; Richlin 1992: 99, 128; Arena 2007: 156; Worman 2008: 321-324. Arena 2007: 156 states that this insult was also aimed at people who had consumed too much food or drink.
[420] Richlin 1992: 27, 69. One particularly negative effect of forced irrumation was seen to be the forced silence, as seen in Catull. 74.
[421] E.g., *Pria*pea 13.
[422] See pages 192-198, 205-224 on the sexualised depictions of young African boys.

is the malleability of the identity of African males, a malleability which reappears across thematic groups, who were appropriate and believable as both thaumatopoietic performers and subjects of sexual degradation. No matter the intended activity of this iconography, it is crucially never shared with depictions of Roman males and, in fact, does not appear often in depictions of other non-Roman males.[423]

Conclusion

Depictions of African θαυματοποιοί, though generally rare and disparate, shed light on the fantasy of African males in the Graeco-Roman imagination. Emerging first in the Hellenistic period, infrequent depictions of African jugglers highlight the potential for African males to exist within this sphere of wonder-making. For those who commissioned or owned such artworks, there was a curiosity around the limits of the human body and nature, and the potential for 'Others' to disrupt these limits. Around the turn of the millenium, however, a type emerged which consolidated fantastical beliefs around African males, their status, their bodies, and their gender.

The image type of the African acrobat was relatively popular, appearing across the Mediterranean in the early imperial period. While this has previously been used as evidence of a large population of African performers in the empire, there are no attestations to this elsewhere, indicating that this was instead a reflection of the African male as he existed in the Roman imagination. An analysis of the specific iconography revealed that these acrobats were most likely

[423] Cf. Louvre, Paris, inv. Br 3095 and Br 3096.

θαυματοποιοί rather than athletes; they seem not to be references to inherently masculine athleticism, but instead belong to a traditionally feminine sphere of entertainment and its related iconography. Acrobatic entertainment was associated with females precisely because of their place outside the hegemonic norms of patriarchal society, their bodies able to be manipulated in art and reality to bring pleasure to viewers. This seems to have extended to the African males depicted in contorted handstands, whose percieved race or ethnicity created a barrier of 'Otherness' between themselves and the intended viewer. Despite their male gender, they exist outside of the masculine norms, allowing them to be shown in a traditionally feminine iconography. Their 'exotic' identity similarly allowed for fantasy around the possibilities of bodily movement and subsequent entertainment of others. Working as an entertainer, especially one which relied on the use of the body, was also inherently perceived as a low status activity, and so the intersecting axis of status was additionally employed to drive these African males beyond hegemonic norms in stark contrast to, for instance, their inclusion in the sphere of the gymnasium discussed in chapter 1. Crucially, no directly corresponding images of Graeco-Roman males exist for any activity examined in this chapter.

The inherent eroticism of thaumatopoietic acrobatics is also crucial. The depiction of desirable bodies in unusual poses would have naturally invited the erotic gaze and evoked fantasy in the viewer's imagination. This is only enhanced by the association between (thaumatopoietic) performance and prostitution in Roman thought. As will be seen in the following chapter, which investigates the popularity of the semi-idealised nude enslaved boy images popular in the imperial period,

African males were often eroticised in the Roman imagination, evidence of their existence within sexual fantasy.

This association between sexual fantasy and thaumatopoietic performance is most evident, at least in modern research, in the interpretation of the series of head lamps popular across the Roman empire. While this analysis has been limited by the impossibility of proving their original perception, the backdrop of trends for inherently erotic images of African males (see chapters 3 and 4) and the trend for African males as thaumatopoietic acrobats (who may have also been subject to sexual fantasy) creates a possibility that these lamps reflect the malleability of African males in Roman fantasy. Their bodies were flexible for the viewer; they were performers, existing on the edge of society as weird and wonderful *circulatores* or θαυματοποιοί, and they were objects for sexual desire.

Chapter 3
African males as enslaved

Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman representations of enslaved Africans survive in great numbers, particularly those of young, enslaved boys which constitute the majority of the relevant artworks. Though seemingly sharing a surface-level characterisation of identity, the specific iconographies of these images vary greatly. Two of the most popular yet most contrasting iconographies will form the basis of this chapter. Some examples of the first image 'type', that of small, emaciated crouching or sleeping boys, commonly illustrated on small vessels or statuettes and especially popular in the late Hellenistic period, will be analysed first to understand the common features of the type. Following this, focus will shift to the contrasting iconography of 'semi-ideal' nude servant boys particularly popular in the early Imperial period.

The focus of my discussion will then shift almost entirely onto the second category in order to understand the difference in iconography. I will argue that these artworks portray a specific type of slavery which was popular in contemporary literature: the so-called *puer delicatus*. This will involve comparing the iconography of the artefacts to the descriptions of these enslaved boys, concentrating on both the practical role which these boys played and the characterisation of their physical features. I will also present the role which enslaved African boys played in the display of luxury and wealth, an association commonly made in the appearance of enslaved Africans or Ethiopians in literature. More representations of African children will be reframed within this context. Finally, the sexual role played by *pueri delicati* will be explained and highlighted as a necessary element in the

interpretation of these artefacts. Depictions of erotic *pueri delicati* and other so-called 'sexy boys' (to use Bartman's phrase)[424] will be presented and compared to the depictions of African boys in question. To conclude, it will be argued that these African boys embody an impossible sexual fantasy, hinging on a non-ideal yet in some way desirable characterisation of boyhood, which was not applied in the same way to males of other ethnic groups.

African males as enslaved in literature

African males appear as enslaved more frequently in the literature than the thematic groups discussed in chapters 1 and 2. A deeper analysis of these references will be conducted below.

Theophrastus, writing in the late fourth or early third century BC, lists ὁ ἀκόλουθος Αἰθίοψ as a means for a 'man of petty ambition' to boast.[425] In the first century BC, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes a comparable scenario of a man parading as rich, and explains that he will be sure to take his 'uncle's Ethiopian' as an attendant to the baths.[426] In a similar way, Petronius' *Satyricon*, dating to the late first century AD, satirises the exuberant wealth of an extravagant freedman. Two long-haired Ethiopian boys, or *Aethiopes capillati*, carry wineskins for guests to wash their hands in a particularly ludicrous display of wealth.[427] Later in the text, Encolpius suggests to Giton that they disguise themselves as enslaved Ethiopians using dark ink, but Giton protests, suggesting that they will not also be able to

[424] Bartman 2002.
[425] Theophr. Char. 21.
[426] *Rhet. Her.* 4.63.
[427] Petron. *Sat*. 34.4.

change the shape of their lips, the texture of their hair, or the shape of their legs, and suggests that they would also have to scar their foreheads.[428] In the third century AD, Athenaeus describes a particularly lavish banquet held by Ptolemaic queen Cleopatra, who similarly used Ethiopian boys to display her wealth.[429]

Unseen in the artistic evidence are references to African females as enslaved. Though also rare in the literary material, (up to) two references appear in Roman texts. In Terence's *Eunuchus*, a comic play from the 2nd century BC, a young man named Phaedria seeks to impress his love interest, Thais. In order to do so he buys her a Eunuch and an unnamed enslaved African girl.[430] The young girl has no lines in the play. The second possible reference to an enslaved African female comes in the *Moretum*,[431] discussed above. In this text, Simulus, a farmer, calls for help from Scybale, described as *Afra genus*. Scybale has often been interpreted as enslaved based on her description as Simulus' 'only help', but the farmer seems also to participate in domestic labour. The physical description of Scybale in this passage has also come under much scrutiny.[432]

African boys as enslaved: the sleeping or crouching type

African boys were frequently portrayed as enslaved, though the specific iconographies of slavery differ significantly. Images of small, emaciated African boys were especially popular in the Hellenistic period, an example of which can be

[428] Petron. *Sat*. 102.14-15.
[429] Ath. 4.148b.
[430] Ter. *Eun*. 165-169, 470-471.
[431] *Moretum* 31-35.
[432] E.g., Haley 2021a: 134.

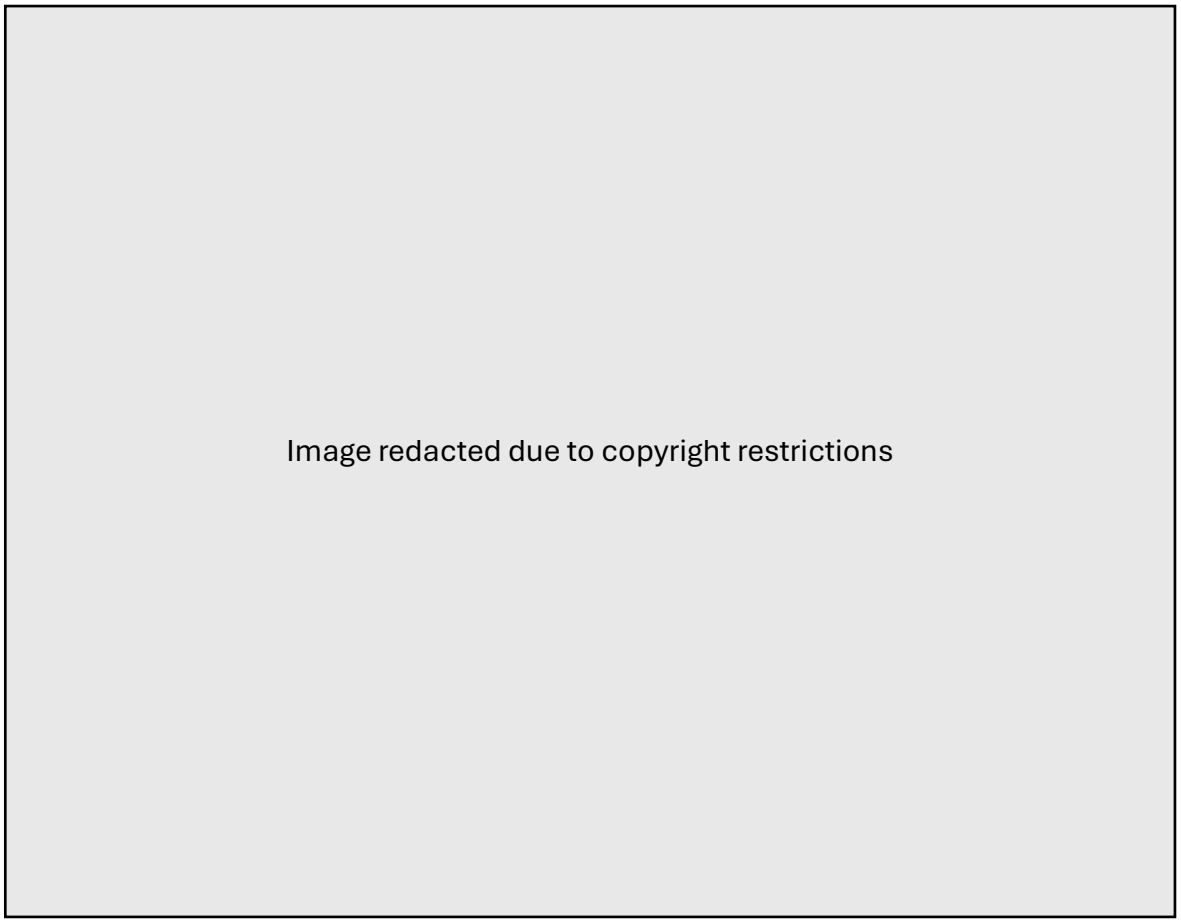


Figure 52: Vessel (?). Sleeping African boy leaning against a Rhodian amphora. Terracotta. C. late Hellenistic period. From Taranto, Italy. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1884.583. Source: Ashmolean Image Library https://images.ashmolean.org/asset/9352/ (accessed 20/08/24).

seen in a small terracotta figurine of a sleeping boy discovered in Taranto (figures 52 and 53).[433] Based on the artistic composition, which is concerned with naturalistic rendering of a pathetic body, this terracotta likely dates to the late Hellenistic period. Here, a young boy rests against an amphora, perhaps a hint at his status as enslaved; one can imagine that he is exhausted after a gruelling day and has fallen asleep on his work equipment.[434] He is nude, though his arms are wrapped tightly around his body and his knees are tucked into his chest. His head seems too big for

[433] Terracotta vessel, from Taranto, Italy. Height 6.3 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1884.583. Evans 1886: 37-38, no. 9, pl. LXIV; Beardsley 1929: 90-91 no. 197; Hausmann 1962; Adriani 1978: 127-128; Piper 1995: fig. 21; George 2003: 165, fig. 1; Fentress 2011: 67, pl. 6; Masséglia 2015: 165-166, fig. 4.3. On sleeping African figures, see Masséglia 2015: 162-167.
[434] Piper 1995: 25 (caption to fig. 21) suggests that he may be drunk, though the state of his body and facial expression convey exhaustion.

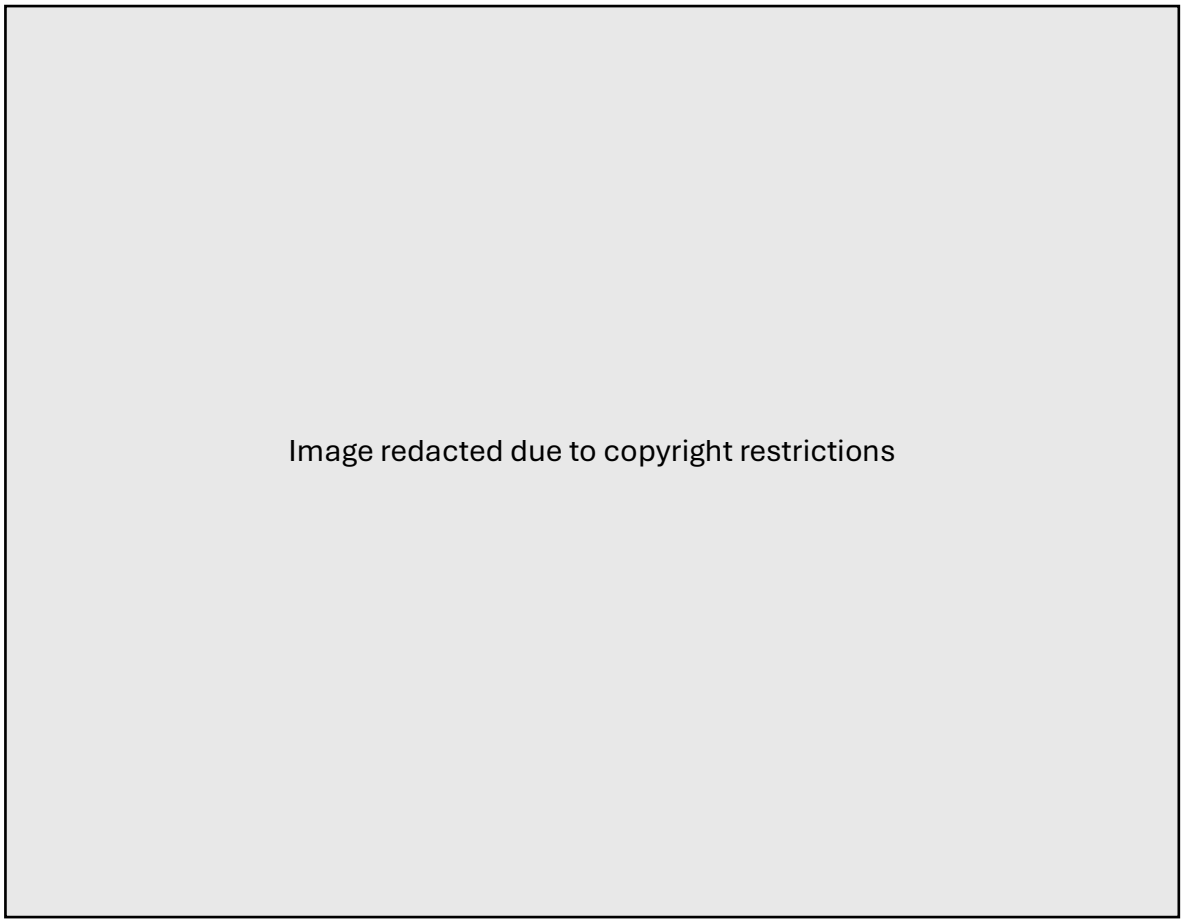


Figure 53: Vessel (?). Sleeping African boy leaning against a Rhodian amphora. Terracotta. C. late Hellenistic period. From Taranto, Italy. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. AN1884.583. Source: Ashmolean Image Library https://images.ashmolean.org/asset/9349/ (accessed 20/08/24).

his body, highlighting both his young age and the gauntness of his physique. The boy's limbs are long and frail, and his curved back only enhances the overwhelming sense of pathos characterising this piece. The skin of the boy is almost translucent, accentuating every rib, every vertebra of his spine as he hunches over himself.

A small black steatite figurine said to be from Egypt is similarly striking in its portrayal of the body (figures 54 and 55).[435] This boy is similarly curled up; his arms are wrapped around his front and his legs are curled up to the side while his body twists to his right. His limbs once again betray his malnourishment, his bones prominent and joints pointed. The boy's back is again shockingly skeletal, with the

[435] Steatite statuette, said to be from Egypt. Height 8.8 cm. Brooklyn Museum, New York, inv. 49.59. Himmelmann 1983: fig. 49a; Masséglia 2015: 164 n. 29.



Figure 54: Statuette. Crouching African boy. Black steatite. C. second-first century BC. Said to be from Egypt. Brooklyn Museum, New York, inv. 49.59. Source: Brooklyn Museum online collection https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/62601 (accessed 21/08/24). Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

spine and ribs demarcated in the stone. Unlike the previous example, this boy is not sleeping. Instead, his facial expression carries a sense of distress. His mouth is wide open, as are his eyes, and his brow is furrowed indicating pain or emotional distress. His posture, though similar to his sleeping counterpart, is not peaceful in sleep but rather writhing in discomfort.

Another popular but slightly different iconography is that of crouching enslaved African boys. There are many examples of this type, but for the purpose of this thesis I will present three similar images with slight variations. The first example,



Figure 55: Statuette. Curled-up African boy. Black steatite. C. second-first century BC. Said to be from Egypt. Brooklyn Museum, New York, inv. 49.59. Source: Brooklyn Museum online collection https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/62601 (accessed 21/08/24). Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

dating to approximately the first century BC and said to have been discovered in Campania, depicts in pale clay a nude boy squatting with his knees held to his chest (figure 56).[436] His facial features are a clear indication of his intended race, and as Bell notes the now-lost original black glaze of the piece would have added to this characterisation.[437] Like the previous examples, his ribcage is clearly defined by

[436] Clay flask, said to be from Campania, Italy. Height 20.32 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1873,0820.288. Walters 1896: 264 no. G 168; Bell 2022: 440-441, fig. 18.8.
[437] Bell 2022: 440.



Figure 56: Flask. Crouching African boy. Clay. C. first century BC. Said to be from Campania, Italy. The British Museum, London, inv. 1873.0820.288. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1873-0820-288 (accessed 21/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

rows of grooves, highlighting his emaciation. His mouth is also open, perhaps a display of anguish. Around his neck hangs a *titulus*,[438] a collar used to show that he is a slave for sale. Another black-glazed flask of a similar design was discovered in

[438] Walters 1896: 264; Bell 2022: 441. Cf. Petron. *Sat*. 29.3; Sen. *Ep*. 47.9.



Figure 57: Flask. Crouching African boy. Clay. C. first century BC. From Ruvo, Italy. The British Museum, London, inv. 1873,0820.287. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1873-0820-287 (accessed 22/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Ruvo, Italy (figure 57).[439] This boy, also African, is also shown crouching and clutching his knees to his chest, and his body type is similarly emaciated, his ribs prominent despite a general lack of fine detail. Instead of a *titulus*, this boy wears an organic wreath on his head which may have functioned as a similar symbol of his

[439] Clay flask, from Ruvo, Italy. Height 23.5 cm. The British Museum, London, inv 1873,0820.287. Walters 1896: 264 no. G 167; Snowden 2010: 184, fig. 224; Fentress 2011: 67, pl. 7; Masséglia 2015: 164 n. 28. On Ruvo as a producer of images of Africans, see Budischovsky 1978.

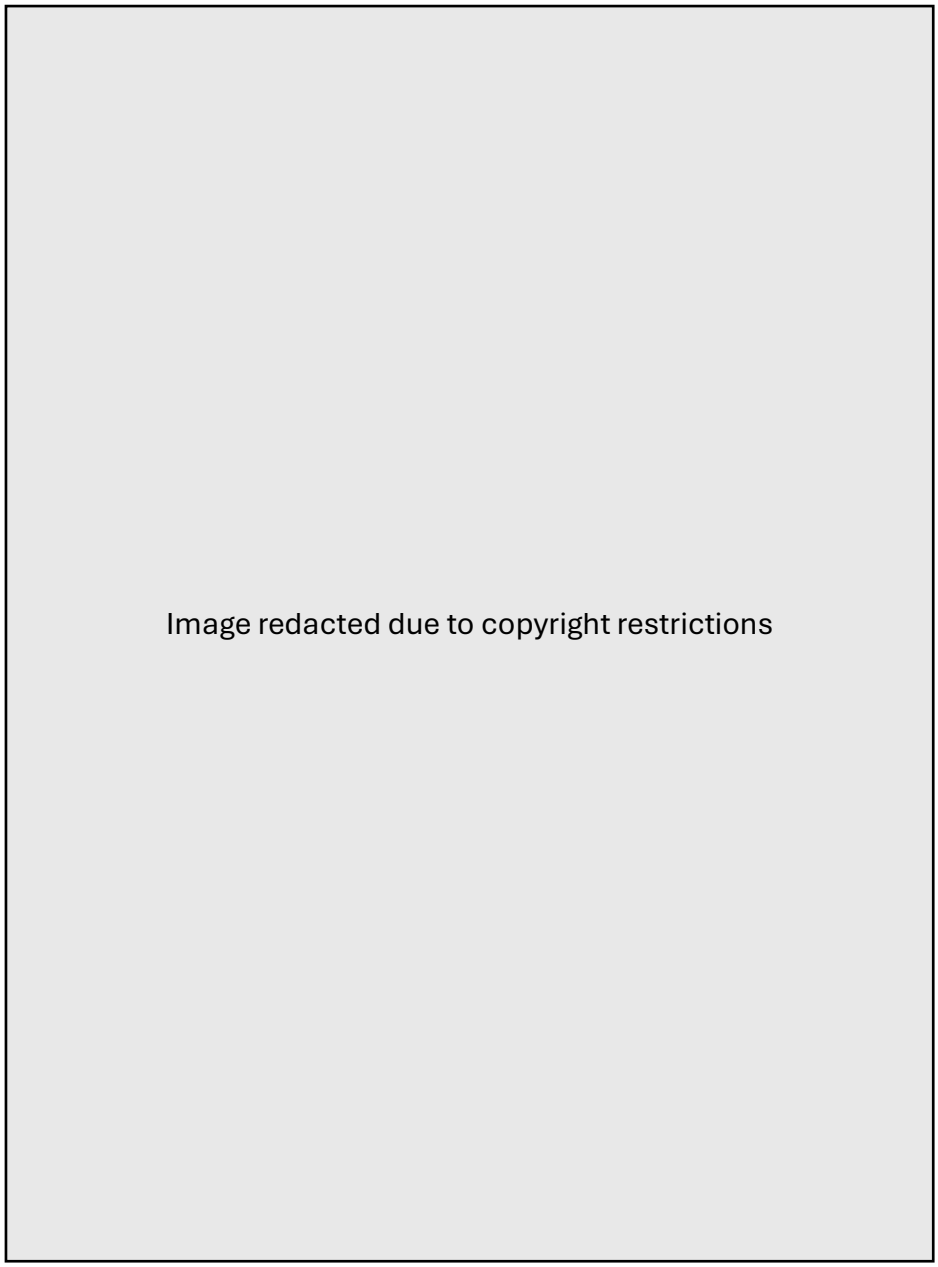


Figure 58: Statuette. Crouching African boy. Black steatite. C. first century BC-first century AD. Said to be from Corinth (?). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 01.8210. Source: Museum of Fine Arts Boston online collections https://collections.mfa.org/objects/151115/figure-of-a-seated-african-youth?ctx=87dcc457-a535-4da2-ba3c-619f4d0638ae&idx=0 (accessed 22/08/24).

status; the Latin term *sub corona*, or 'under a crown/wreath', was often used to describe the sale of enslaved persons,[440] particularly war captives.[441] Unlike the previous examples, his face does not portray a sense of pathos, rather he smiles

[440] Joshel 2010: 85-86.
[441] Gell. *NA* 6.4 makes this connection explicit. Cf. e.g., Flor. 2.33.52; Livy e.g., 41.11.9, 42.63.11-12, 43.4.11; SHA *Aurel*. 7.1; Tac. *Ann*. 8.39; *Hist*. 1.68; Varro *Rust*. 2.10.5.

cheekily in a (perhaps humorous) juxtaposition to the pitiful portrayal of his body and status.

A steatite figure, believed to have originally belonged to or been used as a box, shows a third variation of this iconography (figure 58).[442] He is similarly completely nude and in a squatting position but sits even more compactly with his chin resting on his knees. His body type is similar to the previous examples, his ribcage standing prominently from his arched back. His hands, rather than holding his legs, are clenched beside his inflated cheeks. His mouth is slightly open, perhaps to draw or release breath in frustration or anguish. Two features make this piece particularly noteworthy. Firstly, the boy's ankles are held in shackles,[443] a clear indication of his status and a suitably tragic feature for such an image. Secondly, he has pierced ears. Though now lost, these piercings may have originally held earrings of precious metals which have since been lost or removed, highlighting the luxuriousness of both the object and its iconographic subject matter.[444] Alternatively, the impression of luxurious adornments may have been made by copper or iron earrings at a cheaper cost.

These images, each showing a young, African enslaved boy, share crucial iconographic features. Their body types are presented as malnourished, emaciated

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[442] Black steatite statuette, said to be from Corinth, Greece. Height 9.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 01.8210. Snowden 1970: fig. 42; Comstock and Vermeule 1976: 71 no. 112; Ridgway 1981: 429; Comstock and Vermeule 1988: 109 no. 112; George 2003: 165-166, fig. 2. Cf. a terracotta rattle discovered in a baby's sarcophagus at Corinth which depicts an African boy in the same pose (Shear 1930: 429, fig. 19; Snowden 2010: 230-236, fig. 302). Cf. a bronze balsamarium of unknown provenance, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, inv. bronze.1011; Babelon and Blanchet 1895: 441 no. 1011.

[443] Comstock and Vermeule 1976: 71 suggest that the boy is wearing 'high leather "sock-slippers"', though this is unlikely.

[444] On enslaved Africans as a luxury, see below pages 198-205.

and skeletal. The boys' postures are closed off either through a hunched over sleeping position or a crouching position with the knees held closely to the chest. They are all completely nude, though the combination of posture and body type highlight that this is not an idealised or sexualised nudity, but rather a symbol of their low status.

African boys as enslaved: the semi-idealised type

Next, I will turn to a different iconography of nude enslaved African boys which markedly contrasts the above. Most of the artefacts in question date to the early Imperial period, and provenance ranges from across Europe and the Mediterranean. Most figures were created in bronze, but other materials such as dark stone or terracotta were used. Though no two are identical, there are crucial iconographic elements which appear in every image. First is the portrayal of African identity, characterised in all examples through the full facial features, round faces, high cheekbones, and by tightly curled hair or locs. Next is the contrapposto stance, shared by most of the images, which is portrayed through one relaxed leg and one straight leg which bears the weight. Many of these examples also over-exaggerate this posture with a twist at the waist. Finally, these boys are mostly depicted in roles of service or entertainment. Almost every figure is nude.

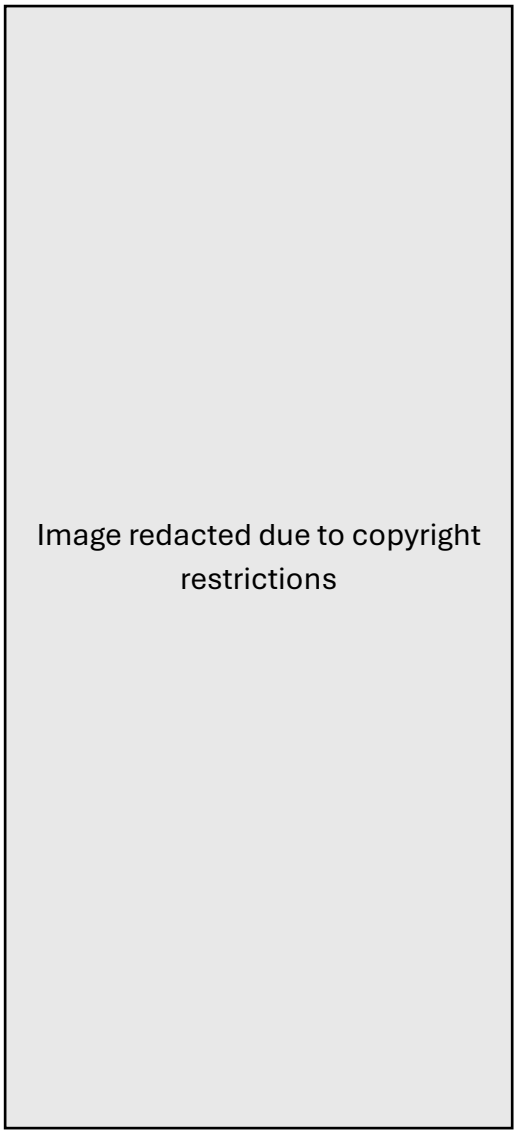


Figure 59: Statuette. Young African male, nude, holding a vessel. Bronze. C. fifth-fourth century BC. From Kainua (Marzabotto), Italy. Museo Nazionale Etrusco 'Pompeo Aria', Marzabotto. Source: Budischovsky 1978: pl. IX, 2.

An especially early example of this iconography comes from the eastern necropolis of Kainua, an Etruscan settlement located in modern Marzabotto (figure 59).[445] This bronze statuette is believed to have originally been part of a candelabrum, one of several discovered in the necropoleis of Kainua.[446]

[445] Bronze statuette, from Kainua (Marzabotto), Italy. Height unknown. Museo Nazionale Etrusco 'Pompeo Aria', Marzabotto (?). Gozzadini 1870: 38-39, tav. 12.6; Schneider 1885: 6; Brizio 1890: 273-274; Beardsley 1929: 93, no. 205; Budischovsky 1977: 72, no. X; Budischovsky 1978: 196, pl. IX, 2; Pizzirani 2023: 172, fig. 16.5.
[446] Pizzirani 2023: 172.

Unfortunately, despite the secure provenance of the piece, little more is known about its find context due to ancient looting and poor records from the original excavation.[447] However, the origin of this piece and its artistic style date it to around the second half of the fifth to early fourth century BC.[448] The bronze itself is rather crudely modelled, unlike the highly detailed examples to be discussed below. Yet, crucial features of his appearance remain clear. He is nude and details of his musculature are visible through the rough surface of the bronze, especially on his torso and legs which are particularly shapely. He stands with his right hand on his right hip, while his left hand carries a heavy vessel at his shoulder, a sign of his enslaved status. His facial features may indicate an African ethnicity, supported by the helmet-like mass of thick, tightly curled hair. This statuette differs greatly from the examples to be discussed below and is so significantly earlier than the main collection of images that there are limits to its value in this discussion. However, it does show that fit, young, (possibly) African boys were presented as enslaved in northern Italy (and likely elsewhere) much earlier than the period in question, though a trend for such images had not yet been established.

A statuette from the necropolis at Myrina is another comparatively early example (figure 60).[449] This terracotta was discovered in the excavations at the

[447] Pizzirani 2023: 165-166, 170-171.
[448] Budischovsky 1977: 72. On the relatively short chronology of Etruscan Kainua, see Govi 2023a: 29; Govi 2023b.
[449] Terracotta statuette, from Myrina, Greece. Height 16.7 cm. Louvre, Paris, inv. Myr 335 (Myrina 130). Pottier and Reinach 1886: 181 no. 335 (130); Pottier and Reinach 1887: 473-474; Beardsley 1929: 86, no. 177; Mollard-Besques 1963: 144, pl. 176F.



Figure 60: Statuette. Young African male, wearing a loincloth. Terracotta. Late Hellenistic period. From Myrina, Türkiye. Louvre, Paris, inv. Myrina 130, Myr 335. Source: Louvre online collections https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010282832 (accessed 27/08/24). © 2013 GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec.

necropolis of the city, though unfortunately no record was made of the tomb from which it was recovered nor its related grave goods. This statuette has typically been dated to the late Hellenistic period based on its style and its provenance in the Myrina necropolis, which has a certain *terminus ante quem* of AD 106, the date of an earthquake which devastated the city.[450] Pottery, epigraphic and numismatic evidence from the site, mostly dating between the third century BC and early first

[450] Burr 1934: 3; Tezgör 1995: 114; Kielau 2019: 275.

century AD, gives further indication for the chronology of the necropolis.[451] The terracotta statuettes discovered at the site have been broadly dated on the basis of stylistic comparison and contextual evidence,[452] suggesting that the earliest terracottas at the site date to the second half of the third century, while the 'increase in the number of the grave-offerings together with the falling off in the standard of craftsmanship' coincided with the gain of Roman control over the region in 133 BC and ended with the conclusion of the Mithridatic Wars in 63 BC.[453] While the lack of specific context for this terracotta, including related grave goods, hinders the certainty of its chronology, I would suggest that this time bracket gives an appropriate date for the statuette in question, though this may be further complicated by its red-brown clay, which has been seen by some as an indication of its creation in the Fayum rather than locally.[454]

Notably, this is the only terracotta example of this iconography, which mostly appears in bronze and, occasionally, stone. Coarsely made and not as well-preserved as the following examples, this clay statuette provides a slightly different iconography from later pieces and can perhaps be seen as a kind of earlier 'prototype' of a future image style. Though he is not nude, he wears a translucent loincloth which reveals his buttocks through the fabric, its short length catching the viewer's eye without exposing the boy's genitalia.[455] Despite the overall lack of fine detail on this artefact, intricacies of musculature are visible on his torso and legs, evidencing the importance of physique to images of this kind. These details are

[451] Burr 1934: 4.
[452] Burr 1934: 5-8.
[453] Burr 1934: 6. Cf. Kielau 2019: 275.
[454] Mollard-Besques 1963: 144.
[455] Bartman 2002: 261-263.

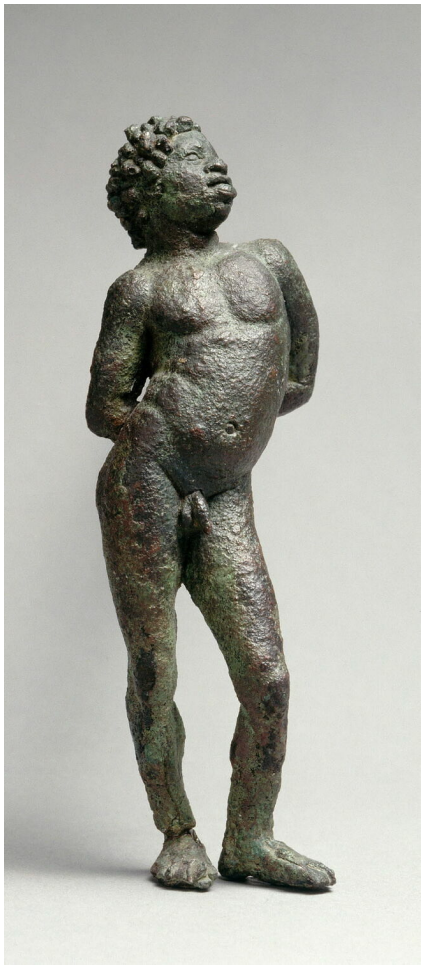


Figure 61: Statuette. Young African male, nude, captive. Bronze. C. Hellenistic period. Said to be from Mit-Rahineh, Egypt. Louvre, Paris, inv. Br 361 (MNC 1645). Source: Louvre online collections https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010258102 (accessed 28/12/24). © 1999 GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

accentuated by the boy's posture, his waist twisted almost to the point of contortion. The emphasis placed on musculature may indicate that he is an older boy around his late teens. His right arm is mostly missing, while his left arm is bent upwards with a flat, round tray balanced on his hand. Together with the oenochoe held at his waist,[456] this iconography clearly points to a representation of a servant. His hair is curled in ringlets and reaches his shoulders, a deviation from the

[456] This area of the terracotta is distorted through the loss of his right arm, making it unclear whether the oenochoe is held in his hand or fastened at his waist.

iconography of most African boys but a significant feature, as will be discussed below. The exaggerated posture and emphasis on musculature seen here appear elsewhere in Hellenistic images of enslaved African males, such as this bronze statuette from Mit-Rahineh which shows a young captive (figure 61).[457]

A group of Roman sculptures, dating to roughly the first to second century AD, exhibit a later development of this iconography into a trend for similar representations of enslaved African boys. A well-preserved bronze from the ancient residential area of Tarragona, Spain shows a nearly life-sized boy standing on a hexagonal plinth (figure 62).[458] His body type is that of a young boy, approximately five-years-old;[459] he has a smooth, plump stomach, no muscular definition, short limbs and a large, round head. His body type is fit for a young boy of his age and bears no resemblance to that of the young, emaciated boys examined above, notably the example from Taranto who appears to be similarly aged. Unlike the Myrina boy, he is nude, though he maintains the contrapposto stance. He, too, is a servant, carrying a large, flat serving tray in his hands, transforming the statue into a functional object. The boy may have held lamps and lighting instruments upon this

[457] Bronze statuette from Mit-Rahineh, Egypt. Height 12.5 cm. Louvre, Paris, inv. Br 361 (MNC 1645). Beardsley 1929: 99, no. 216; Hausmann 1962: 261; Adriani 1978: 125; Bolender 2000: 93-95; Snowden 2010: 205, fig. 261. Cf. a Roman (?) bronze statuette said to be from Egypt, Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. Misc. 7456. Snowden 2010: 211, fig. 264, 211 n. 194 ('[t]he physical characteristics, in my judgment, are clearly Negroid').

[458] Bronze sculpture from the ancient settlement of Tarraco, now Tarragona, Spain. Height 81 cm. Museu Nacional Arqueològic, Tarragona, inv. MNAT 527. Hernández Sanahuja 1894: 54-55; Reinach 1910: 353 no. 6; Beardsley 1929: 100 no. 222; Poulsen 1933: 58, pl. LVIII Fig. 90-92; García y Bellido 1949: 442-443; Arce 1990: 279; Trillmich et al 1993: 378, Taf. 171; Clavería Nadal and Koppel Guggenheim 2007: 268; Snowden 2010: 229, Fig. 290, 303; Lenski 2013: 143-44; Benito Lázaro and España-Chamorro 2015: 2179; Bell 2022: 442-43; Pozo 2022: 107-109, no. 34. Poulson 1933: 58 suggests that this base points to an imperial Roman date, but that the figure itself was based on an earlier Alexandrian model. This claim, however, is unsupported.

[459] Lenski 2013: 143 approximates this age.



Figure 62: Sculpture. Young African male, nude, carrying a tray. Bronze. C. first-second century AD. From Tarraco (Tarragona), Spain. Museu Nacional Arquelògic de Tarragona, inv. MNAT 527. Source: MNAT works in the collection https://www.mnat.cat/en/artwork/4/el-negret/ (accessed 27/12/24). © Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona. Used under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

tray, and the sculpture would have been placed within a *domus* as an inanimate but realistic and functional lamp-bearing enslaved boy.[460] The tray could have also been used to present guests with food and drink.[461] The discovery of a similarly functional sculpture of a young Bacchus in the neighbouring area of Cambrils perhaps

[460] The sculpture was also discovered with a candelabrum (Poulsen 1933: 58; García y Bellido 1949: 442-443; Lenski 2013: 143 n. 74). Poulsen notes that the branches of the candelabrum are antique, while the shaft and the lamps are much later and made from wood.
[461] Lenski 2013: 143.

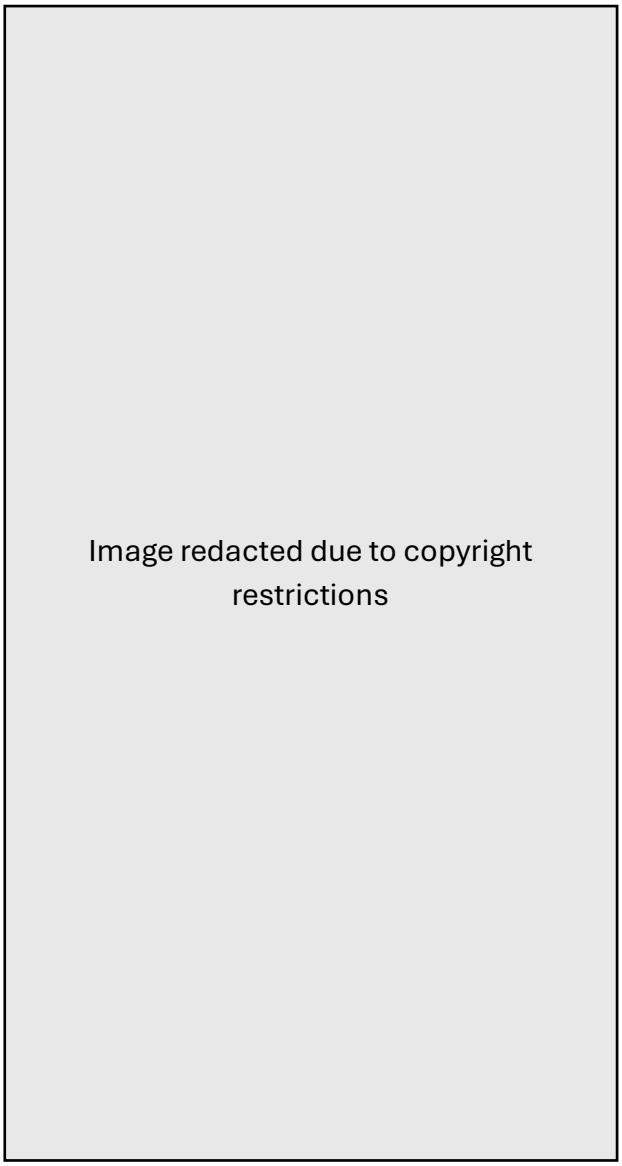


Figure 63: Statue. Young African male, nude, holding a dove. Black marble. C. second century AD. From Sousse, Tunisia. Musée Archéologique, Sousse. Source: Desanges 2010: fig. 365.

indicates a local trend for such pieces.[462] A similarly aged African boy crafted in Aphrodisian marble was discovered at the 'Monge' house in Sousse, Tunisia (figure 63).[463] Though representing a young boy holding a bird rather than a tray, it is claimed

[462] Pozo 2022: 103-105 no. 31.

[463] Black marble sculpture from Sousse, Tunisia. Height 52.5 cm. Musée Archéologique, Sousse. Cagnat 1901: CLXXXIII; Gauckler 1902: 405-406; Gauckler, Gouvet, and Hannezo 1902: 39, no. 3, pl. XIII, fig. 2; de Chaisemartin 1987: 47-48, no. 42; Baratte 2001: 69-70, 76-78; de Chaisemartin 2007: 207-212, figs 4-6; Desanges 2010: 274, fig. 365; Fentress 2011: 67. A bronze statuette which may show a young African boy holding a bird is known through a drawing by Reinach (1910: 353 no. 5). It is described by Beardsley (1929: 93 no. 206) as 'a standing Ethiopian who holds a bird in his right hand. His hair is in wavy locks, his nose broad and his lips thick. He is heavy in build, and does not



Figure 64: Sculpture fragment. Head of an African child. Grey marble. C. second century AD. From Aphrodisias, Türkiye. Source: Aphrodisias Excavations Project 2018: fig. 26.

that this sculpture would have originally stood at the foot of a table as a piece of attractive decoration, similar to the domestic context of the previous example.[464]

show the emaciated thinness characteristic of most negro portraits.' Listed by both Reinach and Beardsley as belonging to the 'Courtot Collection', it seems likely that this piece was bequeathed by L'Intendant Alfred Courtot (cf. Boucher 2012: 169 and n. 38) and is now held by the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, though I have been unable to find reference to this artefact elsewhere.

[464] Baratte 2001: 69, 77-78. Other examples of African boys believed to be furniture decorations are known, such as a bronze bust from the first or second century AD (Antikenmuseum, Basel? Hornbostel 1980: 268-269 no. 152).

The same has been suggested for a grey marble head of an African child recently discovered in Aphrodisias (figure 64).[465] This may indicate a trend for such images in the area of Aphrodisias, though it is unknown whether the Sousse boy would have been created and exported from Asia Minor, or whether it was only the material which was exported. Further, the recurrence of the dark coloured Aphrodisian marble and other dark coloured materials such as the bronze of the Tarragona example, may indicate a particular suitability for dark coloured, luxurious materials for the depiction of these young African boys.

Four further bronzes employ a slightly different iconography to the previous examples, though together they may indicate a cohesive type. They show African boys in their early teens. The first presented here was discovered in Reims, France (figure 65).[466] Once again, his physique is distinct from the emaciated children examined above; he is shown with long, slender limbs and soft but defined musculature. He is nude, and his phallus is somewhat prominent compared to the contemporary ideal, though it is unclear whether this should be seen as a deliberate enhancement by the artist. The boy's posture is open, his left arm held out to his side and bent upwards at the elbow, his right shoulder perpendicular to his body. Unfortunately, his right arm is now lost, but the remnants of his shoulder may signal

[465] Grey marble sculpture fragment, from Aphrodisias, Türkiye. Height 18 cm. Aphrodisias Excavations Project 2018: 4, fig. 26.
[466] Bronze statuette, from the ancient settlement of Durocortorum, now Reims, France. Height 16cm. Musée d'archéologie nationale, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, inv. MAN818. Pottier and Reinach 1887: 473-474; Reinach 1894a: 211-212; Reinach 1894b: 28-29; Reinach 1931: 561; Braemer 1963: 109 no. 484; Snowden 1970: 187, fig. 112; Adriani 1978: 126; Rolley 1979: 16-17; Daumas 1993: 197, 199; Bolla 1998: 18; Snowden 2010; Lenski 2013: 143-144; Bell 2022: 438; Newman (upcoming).

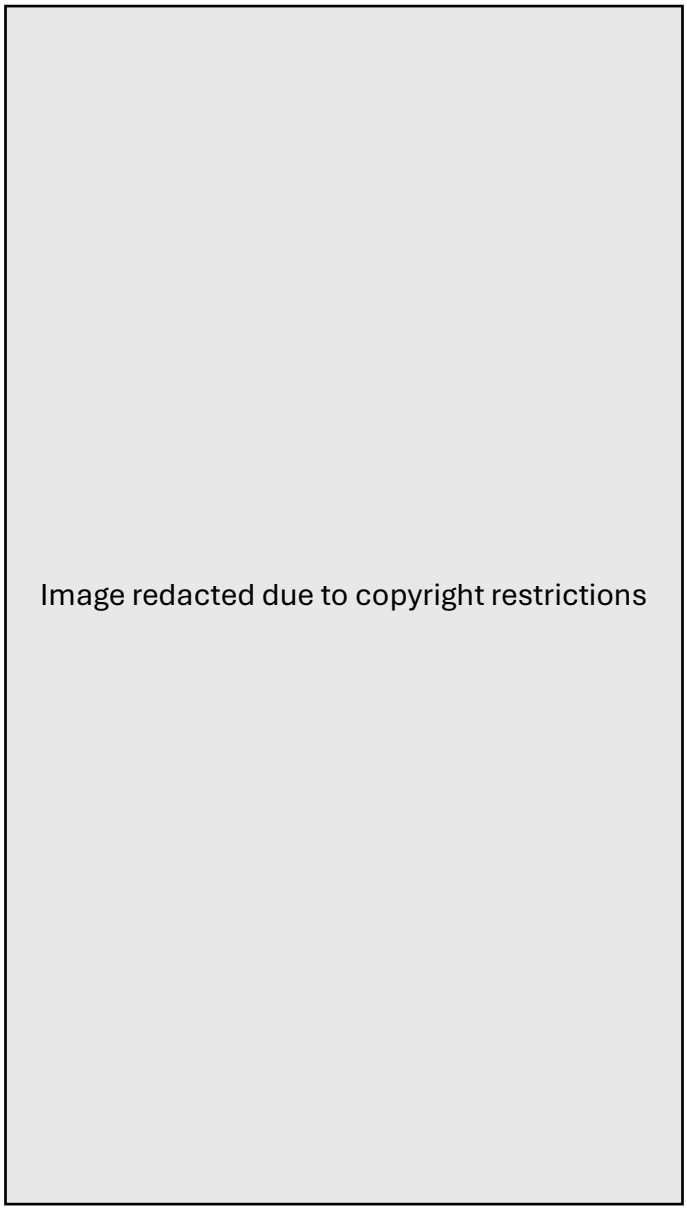


Figure 65: Statuette. Young African male, nude. Bronze. C. first-second century AD. From Reims, France. Musée d'archéologie nationale, domaine national de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, inv. 818.S. Source: © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Archéologie nationale) / Jean Schormans.

an upwards position, perhaps similar to the Herculaneum example below (figure 68). His gaze is directed towards a now lost object originally held in his left hand, most likely a tray, bowl, or lamp. The texture of his hair, different to that of any of the previous examples in this chapter, is shown through elongated pieces to denote longer curled hair or locs. Such a depiction of hair texture is consistent with many Hellenistic and Roman images of similarly aged African boys, as seen in this



Figure 66: Sculpture fragment. Head of an African boy. Dark marble. C. second century BC. Said to be from Türkiye. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, inv. 70.59. Source: Brooklyn Museum online collection https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3790 (accessed 23/08/24). Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

fragmentary sculpture said to be from Asia Minor, which is especially detailed in the rendering of tightly curled locs (figure 66).[467]

The second example of this type was discovered in a cremation burial tomb at the ancient site of Aquincum, located in modern Budapest (figure 67).[468] The burial tomb itself has been dated to the second century AD, and the style of the

[467] Dark marble statue fragment, said to be from Asia Minor, now Türkiye. Height 28 cm. Brooklyn Museum, New York, inv. 70.59. Bothmer 1971; Kiang 1972.
[468] Bronze statuette, from the ancient settlement of Aquincum, now in Budapest, Hungary. Height 15cm. Aquincumi Múzeum, Budapest: 51344. Snowden 1970: fig. 111; Adriani 1978: 126-127, taf. 42.2; Bolla 1998: 18; Bolla 2013: 25; Lenski 2013: 143; Bolla 2015: 142-143; Bell 2022: 438, 442; Bell 2025: 139, 141, fig. 1.



Figure 67: Statuette. Young African male, nude. Bronze. C. second century AD. From Aquincum, Hungary. Aquincumi Múzeum, Budapest, inv. 51344. Source: Bell 2022: 438 fig. 18.7.

bronze itself seems fitting for this date.[469] This statuette differs only slightly from the Reims example. The boy's musculature is marginally more defined, particularly on his abdomen and gluteus maximus. His ribs show through his skin, though his muscular physique signifies that this is not a result of malnutrition, a significant divergence from the skeletal emaciation of the sleeping or crouching boys above. Like the Reims boy, he holds his right arm up, his palm flat and facing upwards parallel to his shoulder. His left arm, however, reaches across his body, holding his

[469] Bolla 2013: 25; Bell 2022: 438; Bell 2025: 139.

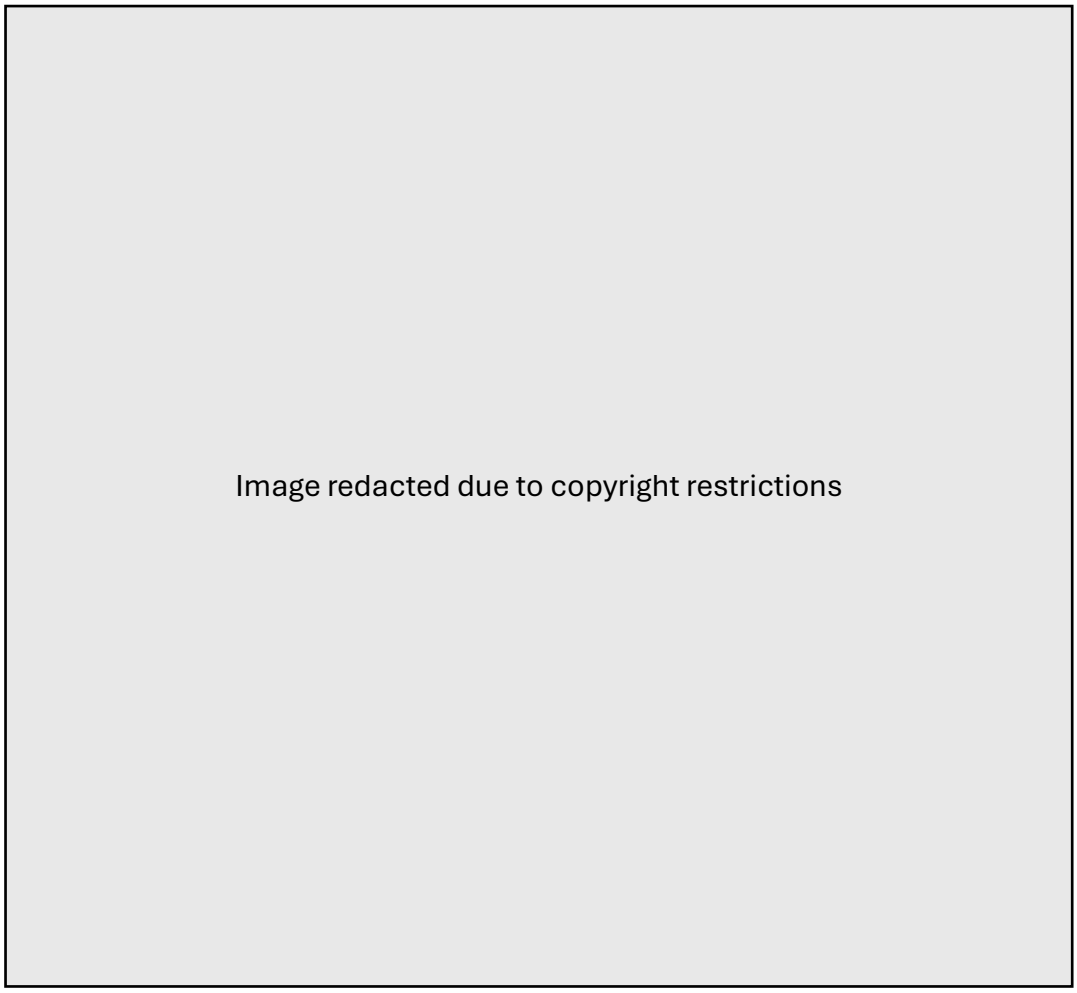


Figure 68: Statuette. Young African male, nude. Bronze. C. first century AD. From Casa a Graticcio, Herculaneum, Italy. Parco Archeologico di Ercolano, inv. 75621. Source: Di Franco 2019: fig. 19a-b.

fist next to his right shoulder. The boy's right hand could have originally held a tray, lamp, or dish. Bell notes the remnants of gilding surviving on the piece and the now-missing inlaid eyes, which would have been made of silver,[470] highlighting the luxuriousness and expense of the artwork.

A third statuette of this type was discovered in a wardrobe at the Casa a Graticcio, Herculaneum (figure 68).[471] The provenance of this statuette suggests a domestic display and gives a date within the first century before AD 79, at least a

[470] Bell 2022: 439; Bell 2025: 139.

[471] Bronze statuette from the Casa a Graticcio, Herculaneum, Italy. Height 6 cm. Parco Archeologico di Ercolano, inv. 75621. Di Franco 2019: 97, 101 no. 12, fig. 19. On the excavation of this area, see Monteix 2009: 190-192, fig. 12.

few decades before the Aquincum example's burial. Despite the damage suffered by the statuette, which is now missing its hands and one foot, this is clearly another representation of a young servant boy. The nude youth, similarly aged to the Reims and Aquincum boys, stands in the familiar contrapposto, though the tilt of his hips is especially exaggerated. His right arm hinges forwards at the elbow, meaning his now-lost forearm and hand would have been in front of his body, and his upper left arm is held upwards. Both hands are now lost, but it is likely he would have similarly held an object such as a tray or torch. The miniscule height of the bronze at only six centimetres leads me to question its practicality as a functional object. While Lenski has convincingly argued that the Aquincum and Reims bronzes were functional,[472] like the Tarragona sculpture, it seems unlikely that the Herculaneum bronze would have been able to support a useable tray or bowl. It is possible that the statuette could have functioned as a small lampstand.

The final example of this type is known to me only through the work of Bolla, who states that the bronze was acquired in Egypt and has been kept in the Museo Civico Archeologico di Milano since the 1940s (figure 69).[473] Again similar in age, posture, and physique, there are some notable differences between this and the previous examples. The first is the definition of musculature, which seems again more pronounced on his iliac area, torso, and arms. This may simply be an enhancement of desirable features for an artistic purpose, or it may be an indication

[472] Lenski 2013: 143-144.

[473] Bronze statuette, provenance unknown. Height 12.1 cm. Civico Museo Archeologico, Milan. Bolla 1998: 7-8, 17-20. Cf. a fifth statuette of similar appearance, kept in the Musée Saint Raymond, Toulouse. Beardsley 1929: 99, no. 219; Reinach 1931: 561; Adriani 1978: 126-127. Though similar in posture and stature, this bronze lacks the definition of the previous examples. Adriani also states that the tightly curled hair is the only hint that this is supposed to be an African boy, and so his relevance to this group is questionable.

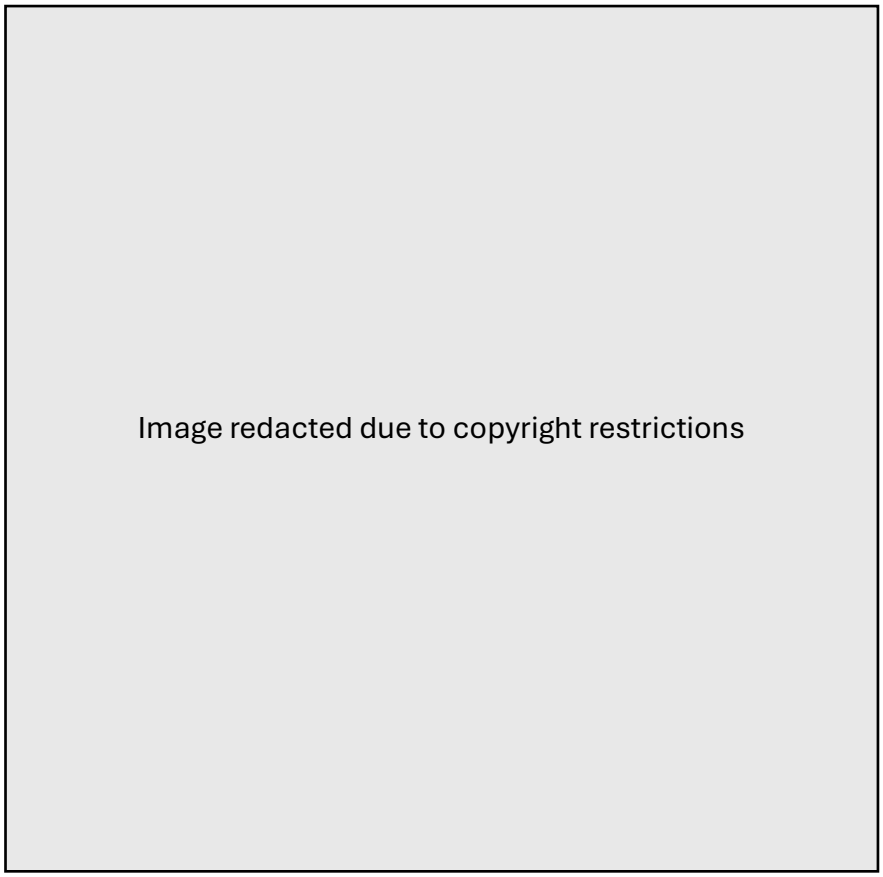


Figure 69: Statuette. Young African male, nude. Bronze. C. early Imperial period. Unknown provenance, possibly Egyptian. Civico Museo Archeologico, Milan. Source: Bolla 1998: tav. V, figs 7a and 7b.

that he is slightly older than the other examples (though crucially still a teenager, the importance of which will be discussed below). Second is the position of his arms: his right is again held up so that his now-missing hand would have been parallel to his right shoulder, but his left hand is held in a fist and pressed against his lower back. Finally, and most significantly, his phallus is not merely pronounced but is distinctly macrophallic, a stark juxtaposition to the semi-idealised portrayal of a youthful body.

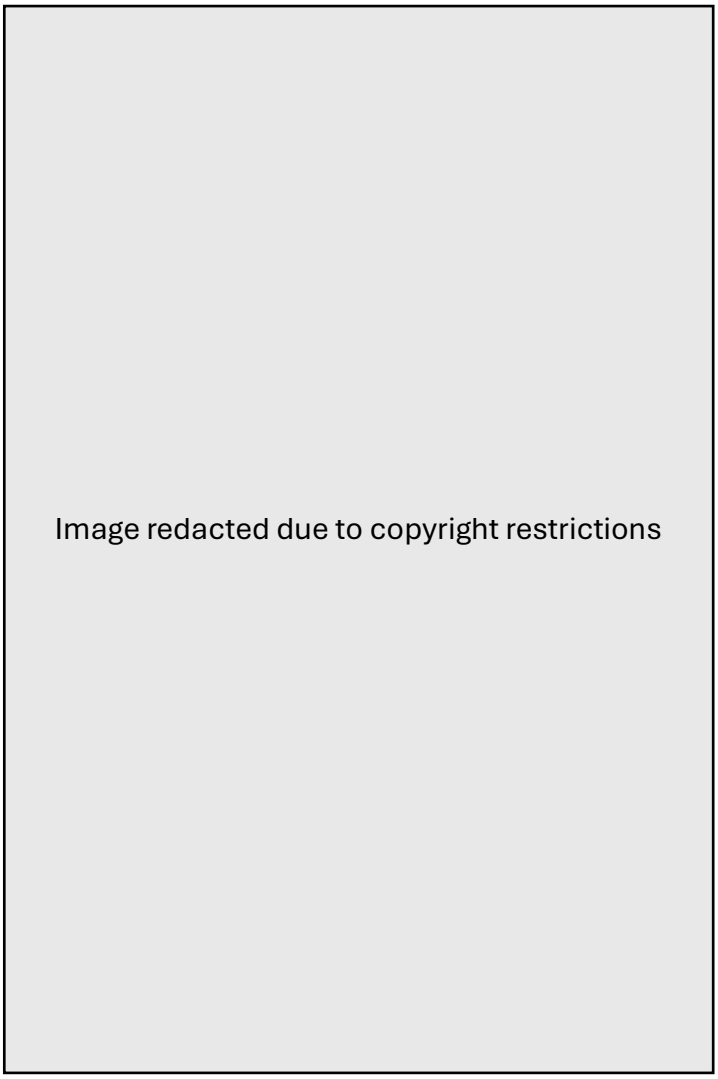


Figure 70: Statuette. Young African male, nude. Basalt. C. Hellenistic period. From Alexandria, Egypt. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens, inv. 22. Source: National Archaeological Museum online collection https://www.namuseum.gr/en/collection/hellenistic-ptolemaic-period/ (accessed 28/12/24).

I would suggest that, on the basis of body composition and iconography, more examples may be grouped with these images despite perceived thematic differences. An earlier basalt statuette believed to be from Alexandria is remarkably similar given its supposed creation in the Hellenistic period (figure 70).[474] The

[474] Basalt statuette, from Alexandria, Egypt. Height 40 cm. Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío, Athens: 22. Puchstein 1882: 15-16; Schreiber 1885: 383-385; Pottier and Reinach 1887: 473-474; Reinach 1894a: 211-212; Beardsley 1929: 101-102, no. 223; Reinach 1931: 561; Hausmann 1962: 261-262; Adriani 1978: 119-124, 128-130; Rolley 1979: 16-17; Daumas 1993: 195-196, 199; Bonacasa 2004: 93; Snowden 2010: 205, figs 256-258. For information on the original collector of the artefact, Ioannis Dimitriou, see Chrysikopoulos 2007: 333-335, 339-340; Dimitriou donated a large

sculpture has suffered significant surface damage and breakages, and is missing components such as the original silver eyes and an object originally attached to the figure's left shoulder. Certain iconographic characteristics are familiar, such as the boy's age, stance, and racial characterisation. He is shown in the nude, like the previous examples, and his genitals are pronounced.[475] There are also notable variations. His musculature is less defined, perhaps an indication of his slightly younger age or perhaps a signal of the sculpture's earlier creation. However, the subtlety of his musculature still highlights a modest, youthful strength, seen especially in his upper arms which bulge slightly. The remnants of his arms appear to mirror those of the Aquincum boy, but the position of his head and contortions of his body feel more laboured. His pose and the fragment of a support on his left shoulder may indicate that this boy was intended as a dancer or musician. The lost object is likely a musical instrument,[476] such as a lyre or harp.[477] Schreiber stated that the instrument could not have been the Greek lyre, suggesting instead that it was 'irgend ein in den oberen Nilländern übliches Instrument gewesen sein',[478] or some instrument common in the upper Nile. However, it is now understood that the African ethnicity or race of the boy does not necessitate an 'un-Greek' instrument. Notable for this study is the consistency of iconography between this piece and the images of serving boys, and the significant divergence from that of the

collection of Alexandrian antiquities to the Ethnikó Archaiologikó Mouseío in 1881, which included this statuette.

[475] Adriani 1978: 120-121 describes the boy's genitals as 'molto sviluppati e cascanti', or well-developed and sagging, and suggests that this underscores the realism of the piece. On the problematic association of African or Black males and macrophallism, see below pages 270-279.

[476] Snowden 2010: 205 recognises the presence of a musical instrument but does not offer a suggestion as to the type of instrument.

[477] Lyre: Puchstein 1882: 15-16; Beardsley 1929: 101-102. Harp: Daumas 1993: 195.

[478] Schreiber 1885: 384.

thaumatopoietic performers outlined in chapter 2 despite their perceived thematic similarity. I suggest, therefore, that the image in question does not primarily represent a professional entertainer, but rather should be interpreted as a young, enslaved boy performing for his master (and others). A bronze of a similar iconography is outlined by Himmelmann.[479]

Other images of performing African boys are known from the Hellenistic and early Imperial periods. A terracotta statuette from Taranto shows a young boy playing *crotale*, or castanets (figure 71).[480] The clay is roughly modelled; his legs are joined despite his contrapposto stance, his fingers are hardly defined from the instrument he holds, and there are no attempts at detail on his body. Despite this lack of detail, a young boy is clearly meant. He wears a loincloth, unlike most of the previous examples. His torso is slim and undefined. In his left hand is a small disk, believed to be a *crotalum* or castanet.[481] His right hand would have held another object, likely a disk. His head is round and oversized, likely an indication of childhood, and displays features of an African heritage. Though this object has suffered significant surface damage, his hairline still shows locks of tightly curled hair. The creation of this piece in terracotta signifies its cheap production relative to those produced in luxurious materials such as (gilded) bronze and stone. The iconography of the piece is also significantly different to those outlined above. Though the age of the child conforms to other images, he is shown as clothed with

[479] Bronze statuette, unknown provenance. Unknown height. Archäologische Museum, Münster: 574. Himmelmann 1983: 65, taf. 43a. Cf. Bolla 1998: 18; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 61.
[480] Terracotta statuette, from Taranto, Italy. Height 14 cm. Museo d'Antichità 'J.J. Winckelmann', Trieste, inv. 4865 (T.205). Winter 1903: 449 no. 6; Beardsley 1929: 88, no. 185; Snowden 1970: 165; Snowden 2010: 205.
[481] Snowden 1970: 165; Snowden 2010: 205.



Figure 71: Statuette. Young African male playing crotala. *Terracotta. C. Hellenistic period (?). From Taranto, Italy. Museo d'Antichità 'J.J. Winckelmann', Trieste, inv. 4865 (T.205). Source: © Civico Museo d'Antichità "J.J. Winckelmann".*

little attention drawn to his body, suggesting that he does not belong to the same artistic tradition as those above. Regardless, the significance of this statuette for this discussion lies in its embodiment of a taste for depicting young African boys as musical entertainers.



Figure 72: Statuette. Young African male, nude, dancing (?). Bronze with silver inlays. C. Early Imperial period. From Chalon-sur-Saône. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, inv. Bronze.1009. Source: BnF Médailles et Antiques catalogue https://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/1181?vc=ePkH4LF7w1I9geonpBCEJuSkovy8qlQ9oLQluGqFeQUAyHcVMg$$ (accessed 29/12/24). © Serge Oboukhoff. © BnF-CNRS-Maison Archéologie & Ethnologie, René-Ginouvès.

The final statuette to be presented here is the most famous and has proven to be somewhat controversial. The so-called 'Caylus bronze' (figure 72) has appeared regularly in scholarship for over a century, often used as an example of the supposed 'Hellenistic Alexandrian style' and the contemporary trend for

representing Africans in art, despite the questionability of both the chronological and geographical assertion of this claim.[482] The bronze, which has consistently been noted for its exceptional preservation and elegant form, is almost completely untarnished with a dark patina. The statuette shows a nude African boy around his early teens, consistent with the previous examples. He stands in an exaggerated contrapposto stance and has long, slender limbs and light muscular definition over his torso. The rendering of facial features and hair are similarly consistent. The positions of his arms and fingers signify a now-lost object originally carried on his right shoulder, though the exact nature of the object is now uncertain. Originally it was argued that it was some sort of stringed musical instrument, more recently it has been proven that the C-shaped position of his fingers renders this suggestion impossible. It is perhaps more likely that he would have been holding a cornucopia,[483] a wine skin,[484] or, to some, an elephant's tusk.[485] Though some literary accounts link Ethiopian boys and ivory,[486] this is an infrequent association and one

[482] Bronze statuette, from Chalon-sur-Saône, France. Height 20.2 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris: Bronze.1009. De Caylus 1767: 279-280, 285; Nisard 1877: 419-420, letter 82; Schreiber 1885: 383-384; Pottier and Reinach 1887: 473-474; Reinach 1894a: 211-212, no. 198; Babelon and Blanchet 1895: 439-440, no. 1009; Alves Pereira 1903; Babelon 1928: 29; Beardsley 1929: 97-98, no. 214, fig. 20; Richter 1929: 45, 63; Reinach 1931: 561; Bieber 1961: 96; Hausmann 1962: 261-262; Boardman et al. 1966: 514; Becatti 1968: 274; Snowden 1970: 165, figs 60a-c; Cooney 1971: 213; Adriani 1978: 122; Rolley 1979: 16-17; Laubscher 1982: 56-57, 80-81; Himmelmann 1983: 64-66; Aghion 1988: 27-28, 43-45, pl. III; Daumas 1993: 191-206; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 54-56; Bolender 2000: 94-101; Aghion 2002: 143, no. 57c; Bonacasa 2004: 93; Snowden 2010: figs 253-255; Thalmann 2011: 90; Lenski 2013: 144-145; Benito Lázaro and España-Chamorro 2015: 2179.

[483] Daumas 1993: 196-197 argues that this is, in fact, less likely than an elephant's tusk as a cornucopia was typically held in the left hand and one carrying a cornucopia would not have usually been shown with such a dramatic twist of the body.

[484] Lenski 2013: 144-145.

[485] Boardman et al. 1966: 514; Daumas 1993: 195-197; Thalmann 2011: 90; Lenski 2013: 144-145.

[486] E.g. Hdt. 3.97, which describes an Ethiopian gift to the Persian king Darius, which sees large quantities of gold and ebony presented alongside five Ethiopian boys and twenty great elephants' tusks. Cf. Diod. Sic. 31.8.12 for reference to elephant's tusks in a triumphal procession of the first century BC.

which does not appear elsewhere in Graeco-Roman art. A wineskin or (non-stringed) musical instrument seems most probable,[487] and either would be fitting for his bodily contortion, laboured movement, and facial expression,[488] which includes an open mouth with visible teeth.[489]

Despite the artefact's frequent mention in scholarship, there has been significant debate around the bronze's authenticity, which requires careful attention. The strange record of the objects provenance and acquisition have contributed to this speculation. Discovered in the summer of 1763, it is supposed to have been contained within an oak chest which had been recently buried in a vineyard near Chalon-sur-Saône, sparking questions around its date of creation.[490] The Comte de Caylus, who acquired the bronze and those discovered in the same chest that summer,[491] is supposed to have conjured an explanation for this unusual circumstance: they had probably been in a private collection before the owner had to relocate due to war, and so they were buried to protect from plunder.[492] The chest of bronzes was taken to the Bishop of Chalon, who later presented around nine of the statuettes to the Comte de Caylus to be studied and drawn.[493] The Count then

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[487] Benito Lázaro and España-Chamorro 2015: 2179 suggest that this is an image of a musician, using it as evidence that '[p]laying music by the streets of cities seems to have been a usual occupation for black people in Antiquity.'

[488] Researchers have often commented on the strong sense of emotion conveyed in this image, e.g., Babelon 1895: 439-440; Beardsley 1929: 98; Richter 1929: 63; Bieber 1961: 96; Becatti 1968: 274.; Adriani 1978: 122.

[489] This is a common iconographic feature of Hellenistic and early Imperial images of Africans, particularly festive imagery. Here I must note Laubscher's outdated and prejudiced comments on this artistic tradition, which he attributes to the supposed innate stupidity, malice, and cowardice of Black Africans (Laubscher 1982: 56-57).

[490] Cooney 1971: 213.

[491] Nisard 1877: 419-420, letter 82. The chest is supposed to have contained up to eighteen bronze figures, although this number varies depending on the account (cf. de Caylus 1767: 285-286; Daumas 1993: 192-193). Included in this collection was another bronze statuette depicting an African youth, now kept in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 59.11.

[492] Daumas 1993: 193.

[493] Nisard 1877: 419-410, letter 82.

exchanged a collection of books for most, if not all of the bronzes. Upon his death a year later, twelve of the bronzes were bequeathed to King Louis XV, while the remaining six seem to have been left to the Duc de Caylus.[494]

The questionable reputation of the Comte de Caylus himself has also contributed to the doubts of authenticity. Despite his high reputation in the history of archaeology, he was supposed by some in his day to have been a disreputable character with a fascination for dealing antiquities but a lacking the intellectual capability to study them.[495] Not all of his contemporaries trusted his opinion, which has inevitably caused modern researchers to examine his records for artefacts, which are often contradictory, and question the legitimacy of the bronzes in question.

Additionally, certain physical and iconographic qualities of the bronze were examined by Irène Aghion in 1988.[496] This included the patina of the bronze, the posture of the figure, and the arrangement of his hair. The green colour of the patina, she argues, was fashionable in the early 1500s, while the posture is comparable to Renaissance pieces. The Comte de Caylus himself is even supposed to have suggested that the posture is a little exaggerated in the hips and loins, using terms such as 'rare' and 'rarity' in its description.[497] Furthermore, according to Aghion, the hair, which fans in a semi-circle at the front and a circle at the crown, is unusual for

[494] Daumas 1993: 192-193.
[495] For instance, a certain Abbé Brechi is supposed to have suggested that the Count was devoid of all knowledge necessary to make a good antique dealer (Daumas 1993: 192), while letters between two priests laugh at the fact that he is considered any sort of expert on inscriptions (Babelon 1928: 13; Daumas 1993: 192). An epitaph joking about the Count also describes him as a cantankerous and short-tempered dealer (Babelon 1928: 12; Daumas 1993: 192).
[496] Aghion 1988: 43-45.
[497] Aghion 1988: 27-28.

images of Africans in antiquity, and is more familiar in Renaissance art. Other researchers, such as Michèle Daumas, have defended the authenticity of the bronze.[498] Certainly, many features of its iconography are consistent with the examples examined above. Even the apparently exaggerated pose of the figure is replicated in undoubtedly authentic artefacts such as the Herculaneum bronze. Unfortunately, the legitimacy of the Caylus bronze remains under question so, while it must be included in this thesis on account of its fame and popularity in scholarship, I have discounted it from my analysis. Should its legitimacy be proven at a later date, it can retroactively be considered as a beneficial piece of supporting evidence for the comments made in this chapter.

African boys as *pueri delicati*

The distinct iconographies and image types presented here are irrefutably contrasting. On the one hand, representations of emaciated, skeletal enslaved boys seem to have been particularly popular in the late Hellenistic period. On the other, semi-idealised, muscular enslaved boys were depicted as servants and entertainers in a fashion which seems to have been most popular in the first and second centuries AD. The similarities in iconography, i.e., status, ethnicity, age, and (often) nudity, are outweighed by their different body types and postures which evoke contrasting feelings in a viewer. Though they all probably depict enslaved boys, the characterisation of slavery is completely different in each type, a fact which has largely been skimmed over in discussions of African males in art from this

[498] Daumas 1993: 191-206.

time period. In an attempt to understand the meaning behind these opposing portrayals, I will now primarily focus on the latter iconography and propose that these statuettes of young, fit, semi-idealised boys may represent a particular type of slavery found commonly in Roman literature: the *puer delicatus*.[499] In order to make this assertion, I will draw comparisons between the images in question and common characteristics found in the literary or epigraphic descriptions of this particular type of young enslaved boy.

Pueri delicati were enslaved boys kept in wealthy households, whose identity and function seemed to differ from that of other enslaved persons.[500] As the name would suggest, this role was reserved for boys.[501] Though there were no strict age limits for *pueri*, references to age in literature give an indication that this was usually reserved for boys under the age of around eighteen.[502] Funerary inscriptions dedicated to household *pueri* also give an indication as to this upper age. While numerous inscriptions refer to these young, enslaved boys, only two give an age of

[499] This conclusion was also recently drawn by Bell, who presented on these statuettes (Bell 2023) as a precursor to an upcoming publication. On the use of the word *puer* for these young enslaved boys, see Néraudau 1984: 50-51.

[500] For comprehensive discussions of *pueri delicati*, see D'Arms 1991: 173-176; Pomeroy 1992: 46-48; Richlin 1992: 34-44; Dupont and Éloi 1994: 207-212; Szesnat 1998: 90-95; Pollini 2003: 149-158; McKeown 2007: 58-59; Huemoeller 2016: 205-250. Aldrich 1993: 28 attributes the growing taste for *pueri delicati* to the increased Hellenization of Rome, thus causing an adoption of the Greek pederastic tradition.

[501] A female equivalent does not seem to have gained the same popularity, though a description for a five-year-old *puella* given by Martial uses the similar language to that of *pueri delicati* (Mart. 5.37); cf. Watson 1992.

[502] Petron. *Sat*. 75.11 gives an ambiguous account of Trimalchio's experience as a *puer delicatus*, including a statement which scholars have interpreted as either meaning he ceased to be a *delicatus* at the age of fourteen (Reeve 1985: 378-379; Bodel 1989: 72-74; Schmeling 2020: 225; cf. Macrob. *Sat*. 7.7.6), or that he was the master's favourite for fourteen years (Wade Richardson 1986: 201; Pomeroy 1992: 45-53; Huemoeller 2016: 246-247). Strato (*Anth. Pal.* 12.4; cf. Richlin 2010: 335) lists the ages at which he is most attracted to boys as between twelve and fifteen. His opinion, however, is that the ages of sixteen and seventeen are "of the gods", and any desire for an older boy is an indication of a desire to be penetrated. Cf. *Anth. Pal.* 12.205.

eighteen,[503] with no surviving references to older males. Of course, this should not be considered as a formal upper age limit for *pueri delicati*, but rather an indication of dwindling popularity of boys aged eighteen and above owing to their approaching adulthood. All of the images above depict boys within this age group, including the particularly young examples from Tarragona and Sousse.[504]

More important than the actual age or life stage of a *puer delicatus* was the appearance of youth and prepubescence in the fantasy of the *puer delicatus*. Numerous sources outline hairlessness as the most desirable characteristic.[505] Martial expresses his desire for a boy 'made smooth by youth, not pumice stone',[506] while poems frequently lament the growth of body and facial hair on beautiful boys.[507] Smooth buttocks were also particularly desirable, with one poet comparing the anus of a boy with hairy buttocks to a rosebud on thorns.[508] This literary concentration on appearance gives an initial indication as to the difference between these young enslaved boys and other enslaved persons in the household, whose appearance is not usually a focal point.

Other allusions to grooming and cosmetic preferences are also common[509]. Most frequent are descriptions of hair, which was preferred to be long and curled in

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[503] *CIL* V 3825, VI 17.149.
[504] For discussion of very young *deliciae*, see Richlin 2015. It is made clear by Richlin that these youngest children may have been subjected to sexual activity (to be discussed below), as in Suetonius' tale of Tiberius and his *pisciculi* (Suet. *Tib.* 44.1).
[505] Catull. 61.134-136; Mart. 1.31, 5.48.7-8; Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 52; Plin. *HN* 32.47; Sen. *Ep*. 47.7; 95.24. Cf. Richlin 1992: 35-37; Dupont and Éloi 1994: 231-233; Szesnat 1998: 91-92; Pollini 2003: 156-158; McKeown 2007: 58-59; Williams 2010: 78-79, 83; Shay 2014: 79; Huemoeller 2016: 214-217, 238.
[506] Mart. 14.205: *Sit nobis aetate puer, non pumice levis*. (Tr. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 317).
[507] *Anth. Pal*. 12.220. Cf. *Anth. Pal.* 11.326.
[508] *Anth. Pal.* 12.40. Cf. *Anth. Pal*. 12.204.
[509] On the artificial body of the *pueri delicati*, see Dupont and Éloi 1994: 229-242. Cf. Baroin 2015: 39-40. On the association between *pueri delicati* and beauty, specifically as portrayed in Petronius' *Satyricon*, see Panayotakis 2019.

an almost androgynous fashion,[510] like that of the Myrina terracotta (figure 53). Other expectations for these beautiful boys included cleanliness, cosmetics including make-up and perfume, and fine clothes and accessories such as jewellery.[511] More extreme treatments were also supposed to have been performed by slave traders to make the boys more attractive to consumers,[512] including enlarging a child's buttocks by striking them.[513] These cosmetic and grooming treatments highlight the importance of appearance and, more specifically, which body parts were prioritised by owners of enslaved persons. Cosmetic treatment, such as body hair removal, hair styling and buttocks enhancement, defines the status of a *delicatus*, highlighting that their identity was entirely externally constructed by slave traders and owners who saw them as malleable and subhuman, and subjected real boys to the extremes of their fantasy.[514] Their desirability revolved around the appearance of youth rather than the biological reality of age and the superficial requests of the owner which were 'aspirational ideal[s] corresponding to a particular Roman fetish.'[515]

Understanding the importance of physical desirability for this particular role in slavery, we can again reflect upon the contrasting image types seen in this

[510] Apul. *Met.* 2.19; Mart. 2.57.5, 3.58.31, 12.49.1, 12.70.9, 12.97.4; Petron. *Sat*. 27.1, 34.4, 57.9, 70.8, 97.2; Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 51; Sen. *Ep*. 95.24, 119.14. For the different terminology used to describe long-haired enslaved boys, see Keegan 2013: 74, 82. Cf. Pollini 2003: 149-159, 161-163 for the discussion of hair on *pueri* and artistic representations of these boys; Huemoeller 2016: 213-214, 215.
[511] Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 51
[512] Huemoeller 2016: 218-222. For discussion on the castration of enslaved boys, see Huemoeller 2016: 223-232.
[513] Galen *MM* 10.999. For this translation as 'striking', see Huemoeller 2016: 219; for a translation as 'incision', see Johnston and Horsley 2011: 505.
[514] Huemoeller 2016: 207 suggests that '[t]he category of *puer* was an artificial one that was created by the slave market, that is by the dealer's alteration of their bodies, by the story told of their origin, and above all by the inflated price for which they were purchased.'
[515] Huemoeller 2016: 208.

chapter. On the one hand there are young boys, almost certainly enslaved, who are characterised as weak and emaciated. These images are disturbing and unpleasant, an intentional design to evoke pathos, pity and repulsion. One the other hand, the depictions of fit, muscular, smooth-skinned boys border on idealised, and certainly fit the characterisation of the physically attractive children described above. The open postures shown by many of the boys invite the admiring gaze of the viewer, who can appreciate their physique, their hair, their smooth skin, and their genitalia.

As a result of their perceived attractiveness, boys would have been given roles accordingly. The practical jobs reserved for *pueri delicati* would have often been outward facing, including serving water, wine, and food to guests at banquets and escorting their master to the baths,[516] a means for an owner to show off to peers whilst also providing a service. Philo's description of young boys at a banquet outlines this duality: διακονικὰ ἀνδράποδα εὐμορφότατα καὶ περικαλλέστατα, ὡς ἀφιγμένα οὐχ ὑπηρεσίας ἕνεκα μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ φανέντα τὴν τῶν θεωμένων ὄψιν ἡδῦναι.[517] It is notable that the second type of African boys examined above are all shown in a position of service or entertainment, some even surviving with their accompanying equipment. In the case of the near life size boy from Tarragona (figure 54), one can even imagine this bronze placed in the corner of

[516] Cic. *Fin*. 2.23; Cic. *Tusc*. 5.61-62; Mart. 11.75; Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 50-52 explains that different tasks were carried out by boys of different ages. Cf. Richlin 1992: 34; Williams 1997: 31; Szesnat 1998: 91-92; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 129 explains that wine-servers might have held a higher rank than other servants; Dunbabin 2003a: 151; Dunbabin 2003b: 445; Huemoeller 2016: 238.
[517] Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 50. 'There are well-formed and extremely beautiful serving slaves, as though they have arrived not to delight by service but rather, by their appearing in such a way, to delight the eye of the beholders.' (Tr. Taylor and Hay 2020: 82, see also 241-242). Cf. Cic. *QFr*. 1.1.8 for comparison of enslaved persons to beautiful objects such as paintings and statues; Cic. *Tusc*. 5.61-62.



Figure 73: Painting. A banquet scene. C. first century AD. From the Casa del Triclinio, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 120030. Source: PompeiiinPictures https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R5/5%2002%2004%20p4.htm 29/08/24. © Johannes Eber, courtesy of Jackie and Bob Dunn.

a dimly lit banquet, plates of food or jugs of wine balanced on his tray, getting mistaken more and more frequently for a real *puer* as the night progresses and the drink flows. A fresco from the Casa del Triclinio reveals how such an artefact was imagined to have functioned within the space of a banquet (figure 73).[518] Unfortunately the painting is in a poor state of preservation, but the limited remains of a figure at the bottom right of this section are enlightening nevertheless. The legs,

[518] Painting of a banquet scene, from the Casa del Triclinio, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples: 120030. De Petra et al. 1897: 114-115 no. 1810 (120030); Lenski 2013: 142, fig. 5.9.

which stand in a familiar contrapposto stance, are long and slender, contrasting the thicker calves of the person standing next to them. They are painted in a dark brown colour unseen elsewhere in the image and are uniquely highlighted with white colour to show reflections of light. They are nude while others in the image appear to be clothed, and they carry a light brown or gold tray with objects balanced on top. This figure is not meant to be seen as a real person serving at a banquet but is instead a painted representation of a bronze statue functioning as an enslaved boy, a fact which is betrayed by the circular base upon which it stands.[519]

African *pueri delicati* and luxury

The reservation of roles such as serving wine and food for the most attractive boys reveals that *pueri delicati* were not only kept for private use by owners, but that they were put on display to show off.[520] This would have been both a form of entertainment for guests, who would have been invited to admire the beauty of these boys, and a display of owners' wealth as *pueri delicati* were particularly expensive and perceived as luxurious. As a result, a sort of hierarchy appears in texts regarding the origins of these boys, the most expensive and desirable coming from the most far off, 'exotic' lands.[521] This seems to have especially been the case for those boys with rare features. Martial, for instance, favours pale Egyptian boys *nive*

[519] Ritter 2005: 308; Lenski 2013: 142.
[520] Roller 2006: 30; Joshel and Hackworth Peterson 2014: 37-40; Huemoeller 2016: 216, 241, 243. Cf. Petron. *Sat*. 26-78 (the *Cena Trimalchionis*), which intersperses enslaved boys in a string of ludicrous displays of affluence such as using gold and silver coins as playing counters and parading a silver bread oven through the banquet hall.
[521] Boese 1973: 123 notes more generally that the majority of enslaved persons at this time came from the east, noting particularly Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Egypt; Dalby 2000: 126-133; Scheidel 2011: 303-304.

candidior,[522] and suggests that there is beauty in their rarity.[523] Other areas which seem to produce the most attractive *pueri* in the eyes of buyers are Syria,[524] Phrygia, Lycia,[525] and Asia.[526]

A painting from the Casa del Triclinio at Pompeii seems to reflect a similar desire for enslaved African boys (figure 74).[527] Two men at the far left are deeply engaged in a drunken conversation, one having his shoe fastened or removed by a small enslaved boy whilst a larger, pale-skinned boy offers him a cup of wine. Next to this pair is a man facing to the right seemingly adjusting his clothes. On the right of a scene a man who has clearly over-indulged is being sick while a small enslaved boy props him upright. Behind them is a young man who faces out towards the viewer. He holds a large cup in his hand, a suitable accompaniment for the inscription above his head: *bibo*, or 'I'm drinking'.[528] At the head of the table sits an older man in a green robe. The word above his head – *valetis*, a common greeting – identifies this man as the host of the banquet. Though looking outwards and directing this greeting towards the attendees of his party (and also the viewer), his arm is passively placed on the shoulder of a small enslaved boy who appears to be

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[522] Mart. 4.42.5: 'whiter than snow' (tr. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 291).
[523] Cf. Mart. 4.42.56: *namque in Mareotide fuscapulchrior est quanto rarior iste color.* 'for in dusky Mareotis that complexion gains beauty in proportion to its rarity.' (Tr. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 291).
[524] Suet. *Aug*. 83.
[525] Juv. 11.145-148.
[526] Juv. 5.56. For other areas, cf. Mart. 7.80.9-10: *Mitylenaei roseus mangonis ephebus vel non caesus adhuc matre iubente Lacon,* 'a rosy youth from a Mitylenian dealer or Laconian not yet flogged at his mother's orders' (tr. Shackleton Bailey 1993: 139); Stat. *Silv*. 5.5.66-69: *Non ego mercatus Pharia de puppe loquaces delicias doctumque sui convicia Nili infantem lingua nimium salibusque protervum dilexi: meus ille, meus,* 'I did not love a chatterbox favorite bought from some Pharian boat, taught in infancy the chaff of his native Nile, too glib of tongue, a pert jester: no, he was mine, mine.' (Tr. Shackleton Bailey, corr. Parrott 2015: 365).
[527] Painting from the House of the Triclinium, Pompeii, Italy. 77.6 x 77.5 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 120029. De Petra et al. 1897: 115 no. 1812 (120029); Dunbabin 2003: 58-59, fig. 28; Clarke 2006a: 241-242, pl. 21; Clarke 2007b: 130-131, fig. 109; Beckmann 2023: 76-78, fig. 15.
[528] Clarke 2006a: 242.

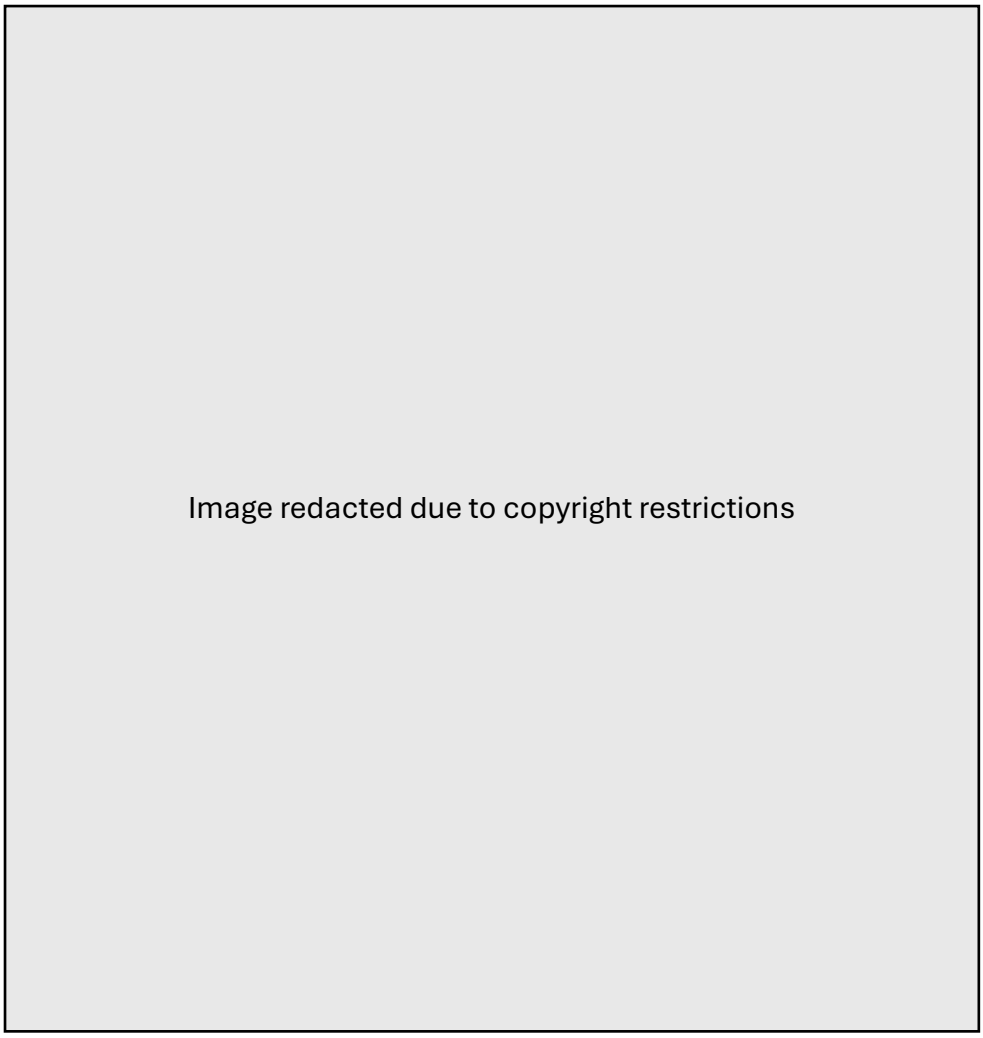


Figure 74: Painting. Banquet scene. C. first century AD. From the Casa del Triclinio, Pompeii, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 120029. Source: Pompeii in Color, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/pompeii-in-color/objects/banquet-scene (accessed 29/08/24).

stabilising him or helping him stand up. Beckmann notes the unbalanced power dynamic between these figures which helps identify them as master and enslaved, highlighting the passive assertion of dominance by the older figure, who weighs his arm on the boy's shoulder whilst simultaneously paying him no attention in 'an open indifference to [his] personhood'.[529] The African ethnicity of this boy is made clear through his dark brown coloured skin and his black, tightly curled hair. Owing to his close contact with the host of the banquet, it can be presumed that he is a particular

[529] Beckmann 2023: 77-78.

favourite of his master and, given his young age, he is likely a *delicatus*.[530] The fact that this boy has been chosen as his master's favourite, the one to stay by his side and attend to his needs rather than to serve his guests like the other boys, perhaps indicates the preference given to African boys when assigning roles and, particularly in a banquet situation, attempting to boast to peers.

Although *pueri delicati* from Africa appear less frequently in texts than boys from elsewhere, it seems that, in the Roman imagination, they may have been some of the most exclusive type of enslaved person a master could own.[531] Trimalchio's comically excessive wealth is flaunted by *duo Aethiopes capillati*, or 'two long-haired Ethiopians', who carry wine instead of water for handwashing.[532] The ludicrousness of the situation gives even a modern reader the impression of extreme wealth, and the specification of the African heritage of the enslaved persons enhances this characterisation of luxury.[533] Similarly, Athenaeus describes Cleopatra's banquet in great detail, painting a lavish picture.[534] This includes gold drinking vessels decorated with gems, purple and gold tapestries, and horses with silver adornments. It can be presumed that many enslaved persons would have been used for such a lavish event, and it is even noted that Cleopatra provided litters and bearers for every man of high rank. Yet, the only enslaved persons specifically

[530] For an identification of this boy as such, see Beckmann 2023: 76-77.
[531] Scheidel 2011: 204 suggests that enslaved Black persons from Somalia, as well as enslaved Indians, were some of the rarest and, therefore, were often more expensive than other groups; Redfern 2024: 152.
[532] Petron. *Sat*. 34.4. Cf. Schmeling 2011: 121.
[533] See, for contrast, the enslaved persons described at 34.2, who are not defined by their ethnicity.
[534] Ath. 4.147e-148b.



Figure 75: Balsamarium. Head of an African child. Bronze. C. second-first century BC (?). Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1955,1008.1. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1955-1008-1 (accessed 28/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

mentioned by Athenaeus are λαμπτηροφόρους παῖδας Αἰθίοπας, or lamp-bearing Ethiopian boys,[535] presumably as they were the most suitably extravagant (literary) device for such a display of luxury.

This connection between exuberance and African children can also be found elsewhere in the archaeological evidence, such as this bronze *balsamarium* of

[535] Cf. *P. Cairo Zeno* 59087.3-4, 59782a.69, which mentions a real African male (though not specifically a boy) named Helenos in the role of lamp-bearer.

unknown provenance now kept in the British Museum (figure 75).[536] The vessel is shaped into the form of a young African child's head.[537] Though small in size, their features are intricately designed and remarkably naturalistic. They have full, round cheeks, a clear indication of their young age. Their facial features and hair, which is rendered in short pieces of material with spiral detail to denote curls or locs, signal their African heritage. Their eyes are deeply incised, an indication that they would have originally been inlaid with another material such as silver. This vessel provides numerous indications of luxuriousness. Its original function as a container of perfume gives some indication that this was an object used for indulgence,[538] while the bronze fabric and intricate craftsmanship display the expense of the object itself. Given the connection between luxury and African children (specifically boys) as enslaved in literature, the image portrayed on the *balsamarium* would presumably would have only added to its perceived luxury and expense and, subsequently, the wealth of its owner.

Elsewhere in literature, enslaved Ethiopians, though not specifically *pueri*, appear as a means to display wealth and exuberance.[539] Theophrastus' *Characters*,

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[536] Bronze *balsamarium* of unknown provenance (Snowden 2010: 197 claims that it is from Alexandria). Height 10.16 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1955,1008.1. Haynes 1958; Snowden 1983: 15, fig. 23; Jenkins and Turner 2009: 122-123; Snowden 2010: 197-198, fig. 241; Jenkins 2015: 214-215. Cf. a similar vessel at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, inv. 2288 (Snowden 2010: fig. 242), and an almost identical bronze from Tell Moqdam listed by Perdrizet 1911: 57-58 no. 94, pl. XXV.

[537] The child is listed as a 'young African woman' by the British Museum (cf. Jenkins 2015: 214, who describes them as 'a black girl'). However, the young age of the child complicates the identification of their gender. There are also so few securely identifiable depictions of African females that it is unknown how features like hair would have been portrayed differently between genders and ages. I am therefore opting to use gender neutral language to discuss this image.

[538] On perfume, perfume vessels, and luxury in ancient Greece, see Massar and Verbanck-Piérard 2013. On the Roman association between perfume and luxury, see Potter 1999: 175-176, 179.

[539] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 115-117 outlines references to enslaved Black persons through Greek and Latin literature.

an earlier text dating to around the late fourth or early third century BC, outlines how a man of 'petty ambition' could flaunt his wealth and attempt to improve his status.[540] This includes deliberately positioning himself next to the host of a dinner party, paying a debt using a brand new coin, and walking around the market in his riding cloak after a cavalry parade. Amongst these excessive and ludicrous displays of status is this seemingly simple suggestion: ἐπιμεληθῆναι δέ, ὅπως αὐτῷ ὁ ἀκόλουθος Αἰθίοψ ἔσται.[541] Clearly, simply mentioning an enslaved Ethiopian would have been enough for a contemporary reader to understand the implied ostentation of this character, no embellishments required. In the first century BC, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* similarly describes a man attempting to portray himself as wealthy.[542] With jewellery, gold, and a thoroughbred Asturian horse tied outside the front of his house, the man requests one of his uncle's enslaved Ethiopians to escort him to the baths in a public display of his imaginary wealth. With this in mind, perhaps the bronze statuettes of African bath attendants discussed above (figures 15 and 16) should be seen as tangible displays of wealth. Finally, Terence's *Eunuchus* sees Phaedria attempt to woo his beloved Thais by gifting her an enslaved African girl, whom he purchased for an exorbitant amount of money.[543]

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[540] Theophr. *Char*. 21.

[541] Theophr. *Char*. 21: 'He takes care to have an Ethiopian attendant.' (Tr. Rusten and Cunningham 2002: 111).

[542] *Rhet. Her*. 4.63.

[543] Ter. *Eun*. 165-169, 470-471. Phaedria states that he purchased both the African girl and a eunuch for twenty minas. It is likely this was supposed to be received as an excessive amount to spend on two enslaved persons who, in the real world, could have been purchased for far less (Barsby 1999: 115. See also Xen. *Mem*. 2.5). Brown contradicts this, suggesting that the cost of an enslaved person was higher than this in Terence's lifetime (Brown 2006: 326 n. 169), and so the punchline of the joke is that they were excessively cheap. This interpretation is based on Plutarch's claim that Cato, a Roman statesman and contemporary of Terence, spent no more than 1500 drachmas (or fifteen minas) on an enslaved person (Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 4.4). The questionable reliability of Plutarch's second-hand information, and the fact that he was writing centuries after Cato's life, make this interpretation less likely.

The material used for most of the artefacts in question, namely bronze or dark coloured stone, is an immediate signal as to the luxury of these pieces of artwork. Some of these sculptures have traces of gilding, such as the Aquincum bronze, and many are missing inlaid eyes which may have been made from expensive material such as silver. The detailed and intricate design of many of the objects, which can be presumed to have been individually crafted rather than mould-made, would have added to both their monetary and perceived cultural value. However, it seems that also that the subject of these artworks, which portray young enslaved African boys, would have similarly enhanced the evocation of luxury and wealth in the mind of a viewer. *Pueri delicati* were expensive, and their function as slaves was largely superfluous, a display of opulence and excess rather than practicality. The evidenced connection between African race or ethnicity and luxury or expense in the Graeco-Roman imagination would have only added to the expense and perceived luxury of a *puer delicatus*, perhaps an indication as to the reason behind the popularity of the African *puer delicatus* in art.

There is also a marked contrast between the luxury of these objects, constructed in expensive materials, and the owners of *pueri delicati*, whose wealth allowed them to purchase boys at least partially as a means to display their high status, and the low status of the boys depicted in these images, whose childhoods were disrupted and consumed by slavery. The low status of the subjects, namely enslaved African *pueri delicati*, serves as a further means to enhance the status of those who own them, alongside the real-life expense of the objects themselves.

The sexual and gender identity of African *pueri delicati*

So far it has been seen that *pueri delicati* were meant to be young and physically attractive, with much emphasis being placed on their superficial appearance, and that they were often used as a display of wealth and luxury by their owners. It has been shown how the images of African boys above fit this description and mirror the favour shown for enslaved Ethiopians (and, in some cases, specifically enslaved boys) in the literary record. One further element of the role of a *puer delicatus* must be brought to light in order to fully understand the impact that this label should have on the analysis of gender construction in these images. The focus on beauty and youth in the literary evidence shed light upon a crucial but grim expectation of boys forced to be in this role: they were kept to be subject to their owners' desires, commonly of a sexual nature.[544] Any enslaved person in a Roman household was property of their master, and so in theory it was accepted that any enslaved person could be subject to sexual use at any time; a master could effectively do whatever they wished to their own property.[545] However, this was not the primary occupation of the majority of enslaved persons, who were first and foremost employed to do other tasks, it was rather a side-effect of being considered someone else's property. For a *puer delicatus*, however, a primary element of their job was to be attractive,

[544] This point is summed up nicely in Cicero's insult of Antony (Cic. *Phil*. 2.18.45): *Nemo umquam puer emptus libidinis causa tam fuit in domini potestate quam tu in Curionis.* 'No slave boy bought to satisfy lust was ever so completely in his master's power as you were in Curio's.' (Tr. Shackleton Bailey, rev. Ramsay and Manuwald 2009: 97.) Here I must note Cohen's suggestion that it was not as pervasive as scholars usually claim (cf. Sigismund Nielsen 1990). However, this suggestion is based on the fact that "little actual evidence exists testifying to such victimisation, and none for its frequency" (Cohen 2014: 197). Given that the ancient sources were generally written by the elite, not the enslaved, it is likely that this was not because this victimisation did not exist, but rather the victims did not have the means to express themselves.

[545] Verstraete 1980: 227, 231; Fantham 2011: 118-120; Marshall 2015; Mira Green 2015; Perry 2015: 56-57; Levin-Richardson 2021; Strong 2021: 174-175, 179.

desirable, and often act as their owner's young 'pet'/'boyfriend'. Sometimes, the appearance of these beautiful boys was enough satisfaction for an owner, who perhaps wanted to have an attractive object to look at and to display to impress others.[546] However, boys were frequently also subject to abuse such as groping, forced kisses,[547] and rape.[548] It was not expected for an owner to gain consent from an enslaved person before pursuing them, and it is important to remember that, from a modern perspective, we can recognise that the age of these boys and the power imbalance between the respective parties would make sexual interactions inherently non-consensual.[549]

A passage from Seneca's letter 47, which criticises the systems of Roman slavery, gives a particularly gruesome insight into this role of a *puer delicatus*. While it must be noted that Seneca's intention was to criticise, and subsequently the picture he paints may be exaggerated or twisted to fit his desired narrative, its

[546] E.g. Mart. 11.75, in which the poet is upset that a fellow bath-goer will not unfasten the sheath of their enslaved male to reveal his penis. This poem demonstrates the perception of a *puer delicatus* not only by his master but also those his master interacted with.
[547] E.g. Mart. 5.46; Petron. *Sat*. 74.8-9.
[548] E.g. Cic. *Phil*. 2.45. Cf. Lucr. 4.1052-1057, which does not outline a literal rape, but discusses ejaculation of an adult male caused by his lust towards a young boy.
[549] Hubbard claims that '[e]ven in master-enslaved relations, the dynamic was not necessarily one of unchecked power to dominate' (Hubbard 2003: 13), using Pliny's account of an enslaved boy rejecting his master's kisses as evidence (Plin. *Ep*. 7.4). This story has an unreliable narrator, with Hubbard himself acknowledging that this tale has come from 'an author hostile to Cicero' (342, no. 7.76) and certainly cannot be taken as a real account of the experience of sexually abused enslaved persons. In reality, a master *did* have 'unchecked power to dominate' an enslaved person: an enslaved person would have had no reasonable means to reject advances and may have faced the threat of physical abuse in the case of rejection and, therefore, could not consent (cf. Davis 2014, esp. 43; Laes 2017: 63 recognises that the sexual use of enslaved children is a fundamental human rights abuse). The use of the term 'consent' is used in this thesis with recognition that this is a modern term denoting the necessity for all parties to enthusiastically and without coercion agree to participate in a sexual act, but without the implication that consent was perceived the same way in Graeco-Roman society. Despite the differences in culture, we have a responsibility as modern scholars to apply our developed understanding of sex and consent to the ancient world and to acknowledge that these sexual interactions were non-consensual, making the boys discussed here victims of sexual abuse.

effectiveness as a narrative relies on its foundations in reality. In his letter, he outlines the less glamorous jobs reserved for enslaved persons at banquets, including cleaning vomit, tidying after guests, and carving meat.[550] Seneca then goes on to describe in great detail the tragic life of the wine-serving *puer*:

> *Alius vini minister in muliebrem modum ornatus cum aetate luctatur; non potest effugere pueritiam, retrahitur, iamque militari habitu glaber retritis pilis aut penitus evulsis tota nocte pervigilat, quam inter ebrietatem domini ac libidinem dividit et in cubiculo vir, in convivio puer est*.[551]

Here, Seneca outlines the fine line walked by *pueri delicati* as both servant and object of lust. This *puer* is in an outward facing role, serving wine to guests at a banquet. He is effeminate and fits the previously outlined requirement of youth (or, at least, appearance thereof).[552] The description of the previous roles for enslaved persons, who had primarily been instructed to clean, includes no mention of their appearance, so it was clearly not a determining factor for enslaved persons given these jobs in the same way as wine-serving. Seneca then outlines the struggle this male has with his age, as he teeters on the edge of adulthood, prevented from becoming a man by his owner. The language used to describe his age (*luctatur*…*non potest effugere*) indicates his struggle, the non-consensual nature of his forced

[550] Sen. *Ep*. 47.6-7.
[551] Sen. *Ep*. 47.7. 'Another, who serves the wine, must dress like a woman and wrestle with his advancing years; he cannot get away from his boyhood; he is dragged back to it; and though he has already acquired a soldier's figure, he is kept beardless by having his hair smoothed away or plucked out by the roots, and he must remain awake throughout the night, dividing his time between his master's drunkenness and his lust; in the chamber he must be a man, at the feast a boy.' (Gummere 1917: 305).
[552] For attraction to effeminacy in young boys, see Lucr. 4.1052-1057.

boyhood, and the pressure he is under to stay youthful to appease the desires of his master. Finally, Seneca outlines the sexual expectation of the wine-serving role, as the boy is expected to be *in cubiculo vir*. The contrast of adulthood and childhood by Seneca highlights the fact that a *puer*'s identity was almost entirely constructed by their master; they were viewed as objects to be adults or children at will, depending on what best suits their owner at that time, and were expected to be inhumanly malleable.

Statius' mournful elegies to beloved *deliciae* less directly allude to the erotic connotations of the role. A poem dedicated to Glaucias, his friend's favourite enslaved boy, frames the enslaved-master relationship as akin to both that of a parent and child and that of lovers.[553] Statius draws attention to Glaucias' beauty (*hinc me forma rapit*), which is not unusual in elegiac poetry or epigraphs dedicated to children, but eroticism also permeates his description, as noted by Laes.[554] This includes further mention of his appearance, such as his blushing complexion, starry eyes, and beautiful hair,[555] but also details of interactions between the boy and his master, such as the young child stealing food from his master's mouth,[556] described by Laes as 'an erotic topos'.[557] Another poem, devoted to the emperor Domitian's favourite Earinus and, more specifically, his hair, evokes the myth of Ganymede,[558] beautiful enslaved boy belonging to Zeus, and details Earinus' castration, which was undertaken for aesthetic purposes: *ne prima genas lanugo nitentes / carperet et*

[553] Stat. *Silv*. 2.1. On Statius' *Silvae* 2.1, see Bernstein 2005; Laes 2010.
[554] Laes 2010: 251-252, 267.
[555] Stat. *Silv*. 2.1.41-45.
[556] Stat. *Silv*. 2.1.60-61.
[557] Laes 2010: 252.
[558] Stat. *Silv*. 3.4.12-20. Cf. Laes 2010: 260.

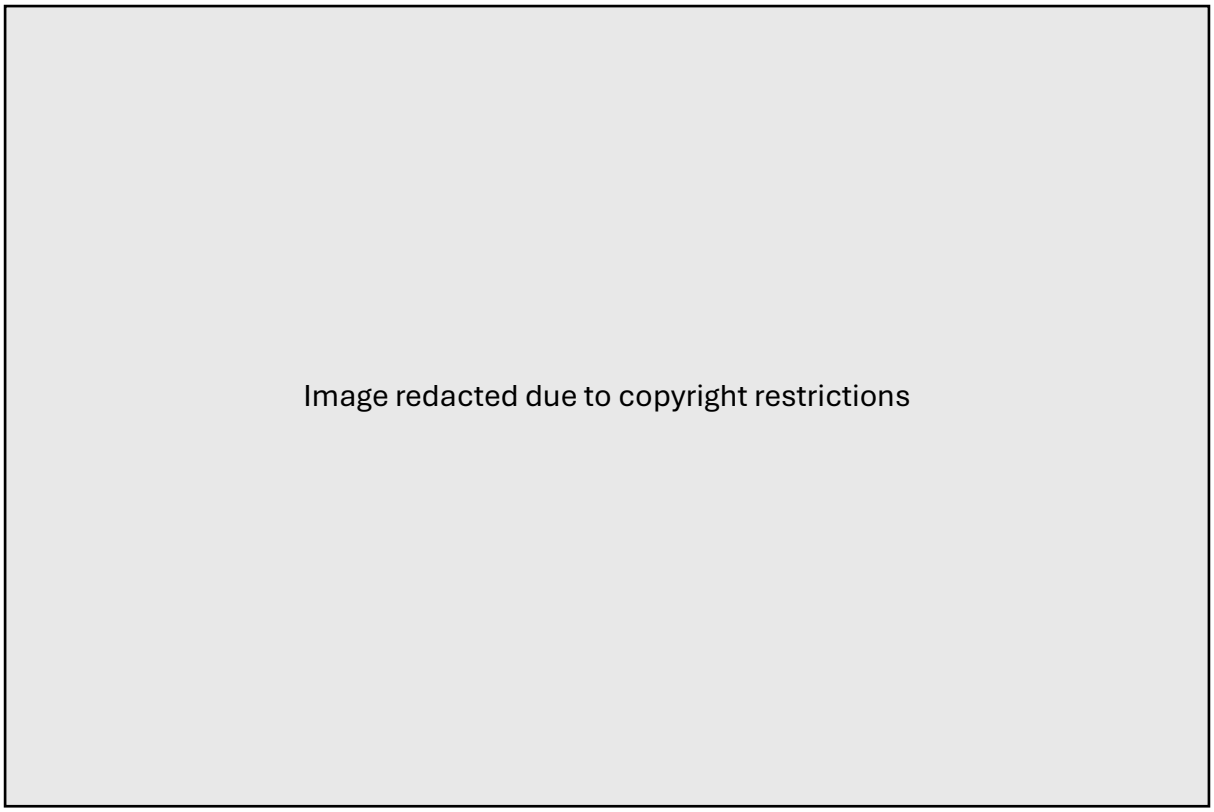


Figure 76: Painting. An erotic scene between a man and a woman; an enslaved boy holding a cup. C. first century BC. From the Villa della Farnesina, Rome. Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 1188. Source: Beckmann 2023: fig. 12.

pulchrae fuscaret gaudia formae.[559] Though Statius' *Silvae* often present the master-enslaved relationship as mutually loving and familial, the eroticism pervading these poems underscores the often sexualised nature of the *delicatus*/*delicia* role, as well as the unbalanced perspective offered by the masters in such a power dynamic.[560]

An erotic fresco from the Villa della Farnesina in Rome explicitly draws on the sexual role of the young *puer delicatus* (figure 76).[561] The scene depicts a semi-nude couple kissing and embracing in the lead up to sexual intercourse. Beside the bed

[559] Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.65-66: 'lest the first down mar your shining cheeks and darken your beauty's joys' (tr. Shackleton Bailey, corr. Parrott 2015: 205).
[560] Laes 2010: 267 notes the poet's bias, which paints Glaucias as the initiator of erotic activity without ever considering his real feelings.
[561] Painting of an erotic scene, from the Villa Farnesina, Rome. Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, inv. 1188. Clarke 1998: 102-104, fig. 33; Beckmann 2023: 73, fig. 12. For another painting which may depict a *puer delicatus*, recently identified as such by Beckmann 2023, see the nude boy on the famous fresco of the Villa dei Misteri, Pompeii (in situ).

stands a nude boy, probably around the age of the young teenagers seen in the sculptures above. The depiction of his anatomy is closely aligned to the African boys at the centre of this chapter; his arms, legs, and buttocks show hints of musculature while his stomach displays a certain roundness seen in depictions of children (e.g., the young boy from Sousse). His body faces towards the bed, and he holds a cup in his hand like a prop for his owners' service. His face, however, looks outwards at the viewer, drawing attention away from the couple on the bed and towards himself. The combined position of his body and face integrates both himself and the viewer firmly in the erotic scene. This is in contrast, for instance, to the person standing behind the bed, who demurely looks away from both the erotic activity and the viewer. This boy is not merely present for practical service, but he is also being used as an erotic device by both the couple and the artist/viewer.

Other depictions of boys, though not necessarily *pueri delicati*, shed light upon the sexualisation of young boys in the Roman imagination and provide useful visual comparanda for the African boys in question. In 2002, Bartman conducted a study which focused on the so-called 'sexy boys' of early imperial Roman sculpture.[562] Mainly focusing on sculptures which emulate the Classical style, the bodies and postures of these boys, often identified as mythological figures, were examined to prove how they diverge from the ideal masculine norm seen in other Classical/Classical-style images of youths, such as the Doryphoros. Although explicitly distinguishing between these images and *pueri delicati*, the language used

[562] Bartman 2002.

by Bartman to describe these boys (e.g. 'soft, just-pubescent', 'Ephebic',[563] etc.) is certainly reminiscent of the characterisation of *pueri delicati* in literature.

Also evocative of the literary *delicati* are the emphasised iconographic features of these sculptures. These boys are all either nude or wearing scant garments which draw attention to their bodies beneath,[564] as in the case of the Myrina terracotta (figure 60). Bartman highlights the uniform contrapposto stance of these boys and their downwards glance, which she describes as 'latent eroticism', in a modest aversion of the gaze in response to being looked at.[565] Another focal point is their hair, which is often shown as long and curled, sometimes in a knot or braided ponytail.[566] Bartman emphasises that, while some of the hairstyles can be seen as effeminate, often they were creations of the artist with the sole intention of exaggerating 'exoticism and otherworldliness' rather than styles linked to the fashion of a particular gender.[567] The preserved sculpted form of these boys reveals no beards or pubic hair, which, as established in chapter 1,[568] was not necessarily an undesirable characteristic of adolescent youths, but rather was a vital absence in the depiction of *sexually* desirable boys. The physique of these boys is uniform; they are depicted as slender and soft, with varying degrees of adolescent musculature on their chests, stomachs, and iliac area.[569] One such example of a

[563] Bartman 2002: 249, 254.
[564] Bartman 2002: 261-263.
[565] Bartman 2002: 251-253.
[566] Cf. Sculpture of Dionysus. Palazzo Massimo, Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. 622.
[567] Bartman 2002: 253-254, 257-258.
[568] Pages 68-69.
[569] Bartman 2002: 254-256.



Figure 77: Sculpture. Dionysus, nude, with a panther. Marble. C. First half of the first century AD. From the nymphaeum at Punta Epitaffio, Baia (Bacoli), Italy. Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei nel Castello di Baia, inv. 222739. Source: Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/IORXELH3DLKQ3VXP4533TELNGKNESW4R (accessed 16/1/25).

'sexy boy' can be seen in a sculpture of Dionysus from Baia (figure 77).[570] While it is specified that these mythological boys 'are not meant to be understood literally as slaves', she goes on to emphasise that 'we should not rule out the similar resonances of meaning that were attached to these statues; after all, both enslaved persons and statues have essentially the same status as possessions of a rich owner.'[571] These images of adolescent boys give a clear indication as to the sexual

[570] Marble sculpture of Dionysus, from the nymphaeum at Baia (Bacoli), Naples. Height 141cm. Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei nel Castello di Baia, inv. 222739. Bartman 2002: 255-256, 265, figs 11.3a-b.
[571] Bartman 2002: 268.

attraction of some Roman adults to young males, the use of the adolescent male body in art to appease the adult male gaze, and the characteristics which are used to emphasise their beauty and eroticism. There are obvious comparisons which can be drawn between the iconographic features of Bartman's 'sexy boys', the literary descriptions of *pueri delicati*, and the African boys at the centre of this chapter.

The disparity in status between the intended subjects – gods and other idealised mythological youths and enslaved boys of an inherently low status – demonstrates the complexity of understanding the intention of these image types and their perception by the everyday viewer. As considered in chapter 1, representations of athletes in the gymnasium, an exclusive space which necessitated the high status of participants, and young enslaved *pueri delicati*, perceived as low status by those Romans wealthy enough to own them, were remarkably similar iconography. These gods and other mythological 'sexy boys' were, again, depicted in a similarly idealised way, yet their high status was unattainable to even the wealthiest and most highly-regarded Roman citizens. The intersecting axis of status is, therefore, fundamental in the construction of these images and necessary for both the ancient and modern understanding of the desired perception of these iconographically linked but intrinsically contrasting image types.

Another fruitful comparison are the numerous *lampadarii* (also known as *lychnouchoi* or *lychnophoroi*) discovered across the Roman empire,[572] such as this

[572] Lenski 2013: 139 table 1 notes ten life-size or near life-size *lampadarii*, outlining where each of these were found, their heights including any attached bases, and the date when they were found. Four of the bronzes were discovered in Pompeii, while others were discovered elsewhere in Italy,



Figure 78: Sculpture. Lampadarus *or tray-bearing youth. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Porta del Vesuvio, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Napoli, inv. 125348. Source: Bielfeldt 2018: pl. 2.*

example from the Porta del Vesuvio at Pompeii (figure 78).[573] Originally, this boy's right arm was found unattached from the figure and holding a bronze tendril. A

Morocco, Cyprus, Egypt and Türkiye. Like the depictions of African *pueri delicati*, these depictions are largely concentrated (6 out of 10) in the Roman west (Lenski 2013: 144).

[573] Bronze sculpture of a young tray-bearer, from Porta del Vesuvio, Pompeii, Italy. Height 124 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 125348. Gralfs 1988: 27-32; Boriello and Cantilena 1989: 146, no. 251; Bielfeldt 2018: 428-430. On other sculptures which may represent *pueri delicati* see Pollini 1999; Pollini 2001; Pollini 2002: 53-62; Pollini 2003. Examples used by Pollini include a marble sculpture of unknown provenance held in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, inv. 1914.57, and a marble sculpture fragment of a head said to have been discovered in Rome, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 13.229.5. The first example was originally identified as a female based on the hair (Mansuelli 1961: 69; Saladino 1983: 36), but Pollini (2003: 150-151) has argued that the taste for effeminacy in *pueri delicati* explains this misidentification. Lenski 2013:



Figure 79: Sculpture. Lampadarus *or tray-bearing youth. C. first century BC-first century AD. From Casa dell'Efebo, Pompeii. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 143753. Source: Bielfeldt 2018: pl. 8.*

second tendril was discovered alongside the figure. Analysis of these tendrils show that, when reinserted into the open hands, a flat surface could be created by placing a tray over the top,[574] transforming the boy into a servant. A second bronze from the

142-143 has argued that the famous life size bronze of a traybearer from Xanten, Germany (currently held in the Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. SK 4) belongs to a group of 'dumb waiters' similar to the *lampadarii* seen here.

[574] Bielfeldt 2018: 428-430.

Casa dell'Efebo at Pompeii has been reconstructed, demonstrating how such a sculpture could have been made functional (figure 79).[575] Interestingly, Bielfeldt suggests that the head of the second sculpture is actually that of a female,[576] highlighting the flexibility of gender identity in these bronzes and the desirability of androgyny/effeminacy for consumers, as seen in some of the descriptions of *pueri delicati*. Bartman also describes these figures as 'young, beautiful, and foreign',[577] drawing on the ethnicity or heritage of the boys like certain literary descriptions of *delicati*.

Though the *lampadarii* figures undoubtedly share characteristics with the African boys presented above, there are also differences in representation which must be addressed. The *lampadarii* are depicted with slender physiques, long limbs and only subtle hints at musculature, while the African boys are depicted as slightly stockier with shorter limbs and, in some cases, more overt musculature. These variations in representation can be attributed to the different artistic traditions to which these iconographies belong; although the *lampadarii* are early Imperial Roman artefacts, their iconography conforms to late Classical depictions of idealised ἔφηβοι.[578] The parallels between this iconography and that of idealised ἔφηβοι complicates any categorisation of these images as *pueri delicati*. Given the

[575] Bronze sculpture of a young tray-bearer, from Pompeii, Italy. Height: 149 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples: 143753. Boriello and Cantilena 1989: 146, no. 252; Bielfeldt 2018: 430.
[576] Bielfeldt 2018: 430. Cf. Zanker 1979: 289. For another example, see the bronze boy from the Casa di M. Fabius Rufus, Pompeii (Antiquarium, Boscoreale, inv. 13112), whose hair is long and curled in an androgynous style, leading initially to its identification as Dionysus (Lenski 2013: fig. 5.7; Bielfeldt 2018: 430-431).
[577] Bartman 2002: 268.
[578] For an in-depth analysis of these depictions of Greek boys in a Roman context, see Bielfeldt 2018.

taste for traditionally Greek art and culture, especially visible in areas like Pompeii, it may be that these boys should rather be seen as belonging to the earlier Greek pederastic convention which involved the sexualisation of young Greek boys by older Greek men.[579] This convention specifically involved boys who were seen as future citizens rather than as enslaved, once again hinging on subtleties in the construction of status in antiquity. Despite this, it remains true that these *lampadarii* represent the taste for depictions of beautiful boys and their sexualisation by older males, and so they remain a valuable comparison for the depictions of young African boys as servants at this time, though I am reluctant to label them as *pueri delicati*.

Having established the specific role of *pueri delicati* – to serve, both practically and sexually – a grim light is shed on the depictions of young African boys who fit the criteria to be classified as such desirable enslaved boys. While the first image type presented in this chapter makes explicit the inhumane nature of slavery, the seemingly healthy, idealised young boys of the second type speak to a specific and different form of exploitation. Images of the second category depict boys in serving or entertaining roles, duties akin to that of the poor boy described by Seneca, while only one of the emaciated boys is shown with a prop for service. The postures of the sleeping/crouching boys are uniformly closed off, not inviting but rather warding off the gaze. This is unlike the second type, whose postures are consistently

[579] Cf. the 'Warren Cup', said to be from Betar, Palestine. Height 11 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1999,0426.1. Pollini 1999 argues that the scenes depicted on the cup represent two sexual encounters between an adult master and young enslaved boy. Williams 2015: 166-169 disputes this, claiming instead that they should be understood as a Roman representation of Greek pederasty.



Figure 80: Lamp. African boy guiding his master. Terracotta. C. second-first century BC. Believed to be from Thebes, Greece. The British Museum, London, inv. EA37561. Source: The British Museum collection online https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37561 (accessed 31/08/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

open, the exaggerated contrapposto stance enhancing their bodies and inviting the gaze of a voyeur.

Another beneficial contrast can be drawn with a terracotta lamp displaying an image of a young African servant who, despite undertaking a role in close service of his master, is characterised in an entirely different way (figure 80).[580] The boy,

[580] Terracotta lamp, believed to be from Thebes, Greece. Height 16.5 cm. The British Museum, London: EA37561. Snowden 1970: fig. 114; Walker and Higgs 2001: 91 no. 98. See also Snowden 1970: fig. 113 for another African lantern-bearer.

carrying a torch in his left hand, guides his drunken master on their return from a party. The master is using his enslaved boy for stability, his arm slung around the boy's shoulder. The boy is of a similar age to those at the centre of this study, and is undertaking a superficially similar role, but is portrayed in a less desirable, perhaps even humorous fashion. He is clothed, his body fully concealed beneath the fabric, and his body hunches under the weight of his intoxicated master. His head is disproportionately large and round, and his body does not have the same elegant quality of long, slender limbs as the above portrayals. It should be considered that, given to the date of this piece, the trend for depictions of African *pueri delicati* was, at best, in its infancy at this stage. Also, its Greek provenance separates this piece from a trend which seems to have been particularly popular in the Roman West. Nevertheless, the contrast between this artefact and those discussed above highlights the overt sexuality of the nude, semi-idealised enslaved boys. The combination of a serving role and the specific iconography of the body/posture defines them as *pueri delicati*, young, enslaved boys who not only acted as servants but were also subject to sexual exploitation. The enhanced genitalia of some of the boys, particularly the marked macrophallism of the Egyptian youth (figure 69), make the sexual intent of this image type explicit, not only inviting an admiring gaze but encouraging explicit sexual fantasy and fetishisation. Fentress also argues that the dove held by the boy from Sousse 'makes the erotic allusion explicit.'[581]

These depictions of African boys as *pueri delicati* speak to a fetishisation of the young African male body and their overt sexual abuse, at least in the imagination

[581] Fentress 2011: 67.

of the viewer. In many ways, these images create a perfect alternative for a real *puer*. The boys deliver two of the main functions of *pueri delicati* – serving (particularly in the case of functional objects) and looking desirable – without the expense. The owners of these statuettes could flaunt a beautiful young 'exotic', and therefore luxurious, boy without paying to maintain a real child. In most cases, these images were made of bronze, which would have only enhanced the appearance of luxury. Furthermore, owners of these boys would not face the same complications that would have come from owning real *delicati*. They can never resist the lustful gazes or physical advances of their owners. More importantly, they can never get old, a fear expressed frequently in poetry dedicated to *delicati*. One such instance sees a lovesick poet lamenting the fact that his beloved. Nikandros, glorified as one of the 'immortals', has begun growing body hair.[582] The owner of a bronze *puer* would never face such devastating challenges. It can be said, then, that these African boys have been literally objectified to satisfy the (sexual) desires of their viewer/owner, who would possess a boy forever.

The everlasting boyhood of these figures has a significant impact on the construction and perception of their gender, as well as the intersecting quality of status. Richlin explains that '[*pueri delicati*] are never viewed as potential adults who will become freedmen, carry on business and government, have children, or grow old.'[583] In other terms, they would never be viewed as ideal men, whether citizen or freed, remaining low status for eternity. Of course, in reality the boys who acted as *pueri delicati* would have grown up and possibly become men who held a

[582] *Anth. Pal.* 12.39.
[583] Richlin 1992: 34.

significant place in society, like the satirical figure of Trimalchio.[584] The African boys at the centre of this discussion, who, as noted above, were by far the most common subject for these representations, provide an exception to this. They are not potential men; they exist only and perpetually as *pueri delicati*. They embody a fantasy about male gender, one which is desirable for others, those to be subjugated into low status, but not for the self.

While 'sexy boys' appear often in the artistic repertoire, and a few depictions of enslaved boys who were not supposed to be seen as African can fairly confidently be defined as *pueri delicati* (such as the young boy in the fresco from the Villa della Farnesina, figure 68), these few depictions of African boys make up a considerable proportion of identifiable depictions of *pueri delicati*, and no other race or ethnicity is portrayed in this exact iconography; it seems to have been reserved for African boys.[585] The literary record occasionally refers to African boys in this role, as outlined above, but always in a display of extravagance or even ludicrousness rather than as a reflection of reality. In fact, no surviving archaeological or epigraphic evidence supports a reality for the overwhelming popularity of African *pueri delicati*. This is not to say that African boys would never have been found in this role, but rather that there seems to be a notable disparity between the artistic representations and other evidence. Despite this, researchers such as Fentress have used these images to argue for a reality of such sexual slavery.[586] While Fentress may be correct in her

[584] Petron. *Sat*. 75-76.
[585] This is supported by Bell (2023), whose search of the artistic material has returned the same conclusion.
[586] Fentress 2011, esp. 66-68. Fentress 2011: 66 also claims that the evidence for 'black slaves in the Mediterranean from as early as the sixth century BC' is 'exclusively in the form of images: in paintings on ceramics and in small statuettes which clearly represent black slaves.'

assumption that the change in imagery coincides with a change of commercialised slave trade around the first century BC,[587] and the inclusion of sub-Saharan Africans in the trans-Saharan and Mediterranean slave trade is a certainty,[588] Wilson argues that 'black slaves always remained an exotic minority among the slave workforce of the Roman Empire'.[589] Further, Wilson stresses that the trans-Saharan 'slave trade remains archaeologically almost invisible'.[590] The shift in iconography of enslaved African may represent a change in mindset and a change in trade practices, but it cannot be taken as a reflection of a reality for African *pueri delicati*, or even for enslaved Africans.[591] Rather, like the emergence of acrobatic African θαυματοποιοί in the first century BC to the first century AD, the fashion for young, sexualised, low status African boys in the first to second centuries AD reflect the changing position of African boys in the Roman imagination and sexual fantasy.

Conclusion

It can be seen that, at least in the artistic repertoire, African boys made particularly suitable *pueri delicati*. There are many possible influences for their popularity. Sub-Egyptian Africa remained outside of the empire, contributing to a perception of exceptional exoticism of its people, as has already been seen in the images of

[587] Fentress 2011: 67-68.
[588] Wilson 2012: 427, 432-435; Wilson 2018: 605. Cf. Burstein 1995: 195-198. See, for instance, an inscription dedicated to Phryne, a young enslaved girl said to be from Africa (American Academy in Rome, inv. 9347; Babcock 2015: 100, fig. 4.1.8). On recorded names of enslaved persons and their possible indications of African heritage, see Baumgart 1936: 64. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* details the trade of enslaved persons, though the perceived race or ethnicity of the enslaved is unknown (Huntingford 1980: 23-24, 28).
[589] Wilson 2012: 433.
[590] Wilson 2018: 606.
[591] Hunt 2018: 32 acknowledges that 'dark-skinned African slaves may be overrepresented in art'.

thaumatopoietic African males. Their exoticism may have contributed to their luxurious characterisation as enslaved, particularly the already expensive *pueri delicati*, which, for sculptures largely created in bronze and dark stone, seems like a suitable image type. Perhaps the dark colour of the material meant that dark-skinned African boys were naturally the most appropriate subject for this image type, unlike the strikingly pale-skinned enslaved boys from the north. Most likely, a combination of these factors influenced the popularity of African *pueri delicati* in Roman art.

The images of enslaved Africans examined for this chapter reveal two dichotomised iconographies. The first, a Hellenistic trend for young, emaciated, hunched over enslaved boys creates a pitiful impression of boyhood, one which revolves around work, as the young boy sleeping on his serving jug would suggest, and one which seems hopeless. The second, a fashion particularly of the first and second centuries AD which portrays African boys in a semi-idealised fashion: nude, in contrapposto, and muscular. However, they too are pitiful in their portrayal; while the body composition of the first group is explicitly pathetic, it is exactly the semi-idealised portrayal of the boys in the second group which hints at their own pathetic characterisation as objects of lust the lustful gaze. As Bell notes in his description of the Tarragona boy (figure 63), 'his nudity and pose define him socially and somatically to the viewer as the antithesis of a freeborn Roman boy'.[592] Boyhood was a means to an end in the Roman imagination, a device to create the ideal man and high-status citizen in adulthood. These boys are in a state of perpetual boyhood,

[592] Bell 2022: 442.

enforced upon them as a result of the sexual subjugation desired by another. Crucially, they are portrayed in a way reserved for the ethnic or racial 'Other', which then leads to the 'Othering' of their male gender. These African boys represent the fantasy of the immortalised boyhood and impossible manhood, a fantasy which was only desired for the 'Other' and not for the Roman self.

Chapter 4
Macrophallic, ithyphallic, and exposed African males

In the previous chapters, we have seen how the African male body could be subtly eroticised for the pleasure of the viewer. This eroticisation was facilitated by the malleability of the African body in the (mostly) Roman imagination, unrestrained by the usual confines of artistic tradition regarding the Roman body, or the conception of the self. While the sexualisation of the African male body usually relied on the subtleties of musculature and posture to differentiate from the norm, it has already been seen how, occasionally, genitalia could be used to contribute to this characterisation. Taking, for instance, the bronze statuette of a young, muscular African boy now kept in Milan (figure 69), the sexualisation of his body is made especially apparent by his conspicuous macrophallism, making clear his subjection to the erotic gaze. There have also been more subtle uses of non-ideal genitalia, such as the bronze bath attendants whose phalli are uncontained by their ineffective garments (figures 15 and 16).

Further instances of African males with non-ideal genitalia occur in the artistic repertoire, namely in mosaics and paintings dating to the early Imperial period. Many of these instances occur in Pompeii and the surrounding areas, though some mosaics occur elsewhere. This chapter will investigate these images and revisit some examined in previous chapters to understand the different types of non-ideal genitalia in images of African males, the motivation behind such non-ideal representations, and the impact that these portrayals may have had on the perception of African male gender.

This chapter will begin with an investigation into the famous swimmer mosaic at the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii. Located in one of the biggest and most lavish residences of the city, this bath mosaic will provide an initial insight into a trend for representations of ithyphallic African swimmers in mosaics, seemingly local to Pompeii. The bath complex of the Casa del Menandro will also give an indication as to another trend seen in mosaics and paintings for macrophallic, often exposed, African males. This mosaic requires careful attention, as questions have been raised about the figure's intended race/ethnicity. Often perceived as African in the modern eye, I will conduct a thorough analysis of the specific iconography to determine the probability that an African male was intended, before turning to more secure depictions of exposed, macrophallic Africans. This will include the chaotic, Nilotic paintings from the peristyle of the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, which characterises the macrophallic African male body in a different way.

Following an in-depth look at the evidence, I will present the current scholarly narrative regarding these linked image groups. Largely dominated by the research of John Clarke, discussion has hinged on the idea of apotropaism, or symbolic protection from the negative forces of the Evil Eye. In support of this idea, I will investigate the specific function of the phallus in apotropaic imagery and determine the characterisation of the African male body, specifically their genitalia, as protective devices, focusing on the notion of sexual activeness and aggression. Such a characterisation of African male sexuality, paired with the evidence analysed earlier in the thesis which paints African males as the subject of eroticisation and the lustful gaze, raises questions as to the speculation and fetishisation of African male sexuality in the Roman imagination. In an attempt to answer such questions, I

will reflect upon the representation of Black male hypersexuality as a direct result of slavery and sexual mistreatment from the trans-Atlantic slave trade through to today, in order to draw comparison and understand how the body and sexuality have historically been used to subdue and subjugate particular groups and individuals.

Ultimately it will be seen that, while non-ideal genitalia (ithyphallic or macrophallic) was not a particularly pervasive stereotype of African males, unlike the 'Black phallic fantastic' seen in the modern white conception of the fantastical Black male body,[593] these repeated instances of non-ideal genitalia and the associated sexual characteristics reflect a possibility for the construction of African male gender and sexuality as out of control, used as a means to control an unfamiliar, subjugated group.

African male sexuality in literature

Discussions of African male sexuality appear infrequently in the literature. Herodotus' *Histories* from the fifth century BC alludes briefly to the sexuality of African males, suggesting that their semen is dark coloured like their skin.[594] Aristotle, writing around the mid-fourth century BC, asserts that Herodotus was wrong with this claim, and that the semen of all animals is white in colour.[595]

Of the surviving evidence, the largest consideration of African sexuality, both male and female, comes from Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, dating to the 1st century AD. In this work he suggests that Ethiopians, amongst others who inhabit the centre of the

[593] On the 'Black phallic fantastic', see Kitossa 2021.
[594] Hdt. 3.101.2.
[595] Arist. *Hist. an.* 523a17-18.

world, are polygamous and polyandrous, with some even marrying their sisters.[596] He also suggests that they are incredibly fertile, and suggest that 'some even despise their generative parts because of the orientation of the evil-doing stars with western Aphrodite.'[597]

Ithyphallic African males

This investigation into depictions of non-ideal genitalia in images of African males begins at the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii (figure 81).[598] The house itself is one of the largest in Pompeii, occupying over three quarters of its insula. If the grandeur of the space and number of rooms were not enough to indicate the luxuriousness of the home, its decoration and contents,[599] including the famous silverware discovered in a small cellar,[600] provides a bounty of evidence as to the expensive tastes of the owners. For this particular analysis, we must turn to the private bath complex of the house (rooms 46-49 on figure 81; figure 82), another signal of the immense wealth of its owners. This bath complex is located at the west side of the grand peristyle, accessible only through the complex maze of the house. The bath complex itself is a vast space, containing a *tepidarium*, *caldarium*, and its own impluvium. It was luxuriously decorated with paintings of the Second Style, including figural paintings of bathing women, as well as brightly coloured paintings

[596] Ptol. *Tetr*. 2.3.72.
[597] Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 108.
[598] On the Casa del Menandro, see Ling 1997, esp. 47-144; Painter 2001; Stefani 2003, esp. Ling 2003; Ling and Ling 2005, esp. 3-106; Allison 2006, esp. 56-153, 298-334.
[599] Ling and Ling 2005, esp. 3-106; Allison 2006, esp. 56-153, 298-334.
[600] Painter 2001: 3.

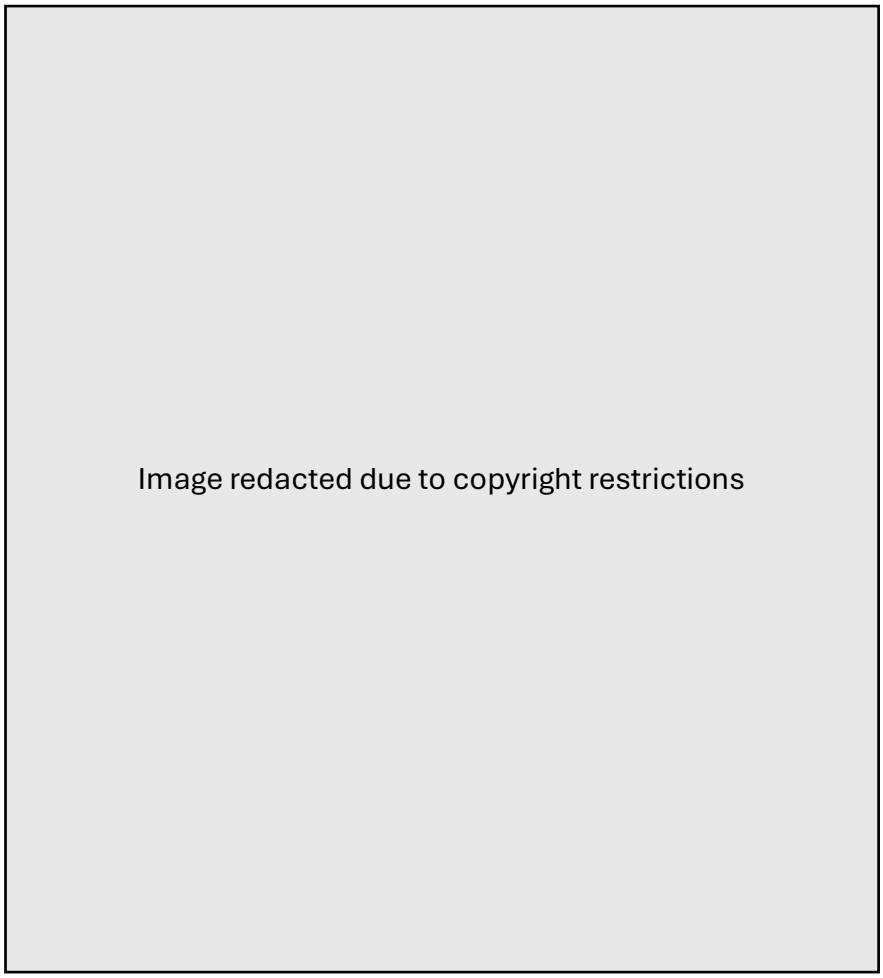


Figure 81: Floor plan of the Casa del Menandro (I.10.4), Pompeii. Source: P. M. Allison (2004), Pompeian Households: an on-line companion*, online https://web.archive.org/web/20190611064632/http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/house?id=9 (accessed 30/12/24).*

of the Fourth Style which were incomplete at the time of the eruption in AD 79.[601] The bath complex was also paved throughout with mosaic flooring, almost exclusively in the black-and-white style. The mosaic panels of the impluvium atriolum (room 46 on figure 81) show marine imagery, such as dolphins, sea horses, and tridents, as well as birds, dogs, and flora in silhouette. The exceptions to this exclusively black-and-white mosaic style are most relevant to this chapter.

The first mosaic in question is found on the floor of the *caldarium*, or hot room, of the house's bath complex (room 48 on figure 81; A on figure 82). This

[601] Ling and Ling 2005: 6.

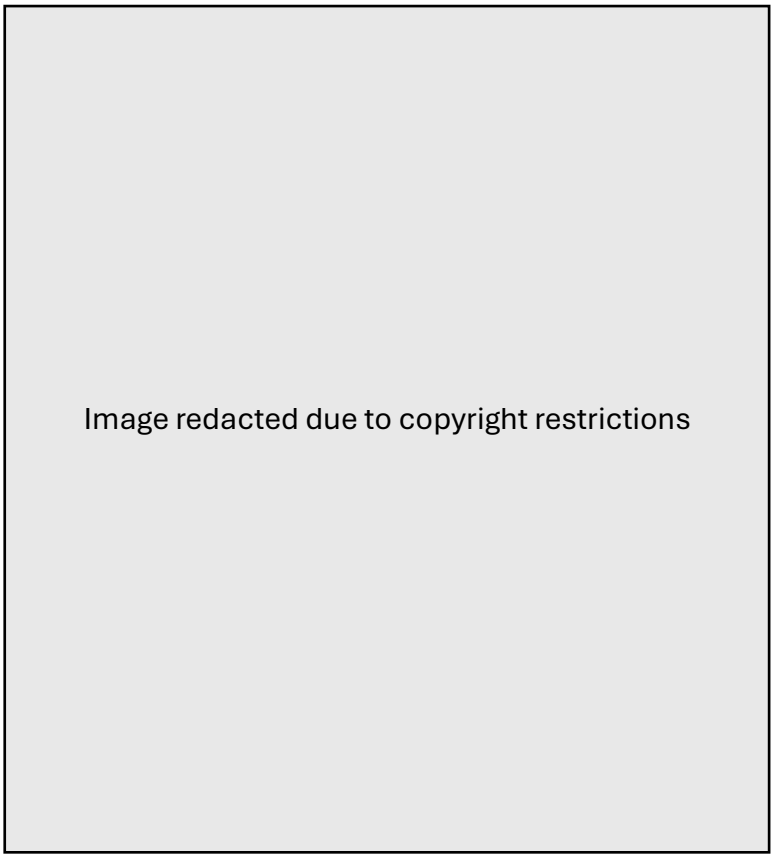


Figure 82: Plan of the bath complex in the Casa del Menandro (I.10.4), Pompeii. Source: Ling 1997: fig. 2b. Edited with labels added.

mosaic (figure 83),[602] surviving in an outstanding state of preservation, shows an intricately decorated marine motif. John Clarke has convincingly argued that this mosaic is not only the first of this image type, further examples of which will be examined later, but also that it is probably the earliest known example of the emerging black-and-white figural style that swept across Italy and elsewhere in the late first century BC and early first century AD. In an in-depth analysis of the transition from Hellenistic polychrome mosaics in *opus vermiculatum* to the contrasting late Republican/early Imperial monochrome mosaics in *opus tessellatum*, Clarke identified the emergence of the silhouette subgenre in this

[602] Mosaic from the *caldarium* of the Casa del Menandro (I.10.4), Pompeii, Italy. 287 x 232 cm. In situ. Maiuri 1933a: 146; Clarke 1979: 13-14, 58-62; Clarke 1982: 666-667, 669; Dunbabin 1989: 43-44; Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1990: 240-241, 382; Clarke 1998: 122; Ling 1998: 40-41; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 94-96, 99-101; Dunbabin 1999: 57-58; Ling 2003: 23; Ling and Ling 2005: 17-18, 59-62; Clarke 2007b: 328-329; Newman (upcoming).



Figure 83: Mosaic. A marine motif, including sea creatures, an ithyphallic swimmer and a fisherman, and a central floral tondo. C. 20 BC. From the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompei_-_House_of_Menander_-_Caldarium.jpg (accessed 03/09/24).

mosaic which pairs the two techniques. Consequently, Clarke dates this artwork to around 20 BC.[603]

Suitable for the black-and-white style of the mosaic is its plain background, which makes the bold lines and colours of the figural decoration stand out.[604] A central tondo, bordered in red, contains a brightly coloured, nature-themed image. The same red colour is partnered with vibrant shades of green and yellow to depict a leafy acanthus plant and a small, singing bird, possibly a bee-eater.[605] This vivid central motif is juxtaposed by its surrounding marine-themed image, which mainly consists of black, grey, and dull green colours with small accents of red. This

[603] Clarke 1979: 58-62.
[604] Ling and Ling 2005: 59 notes that this is the first known example of a marine themed mosaic to use a light-coloured background rather than the more conventional (and realistic) dark tones of black, blue, or green.
[605] Tammisto 1997: 122-123, 420; Ling and Ling 2005: 61.

includes dolphins, fish, a moray eel, and a crab.[606] A final creature of unusual composition was identified by Ling and Ling as a *ketos* or mythological sea-serpent,[607] though its relative size to the dolphins of the scene make it unlikely that such a beast was meant; this was possibly another image of a dolphin shown at a different angle.

Contained within this aquatic scene are two males. The first, visible from the opening to the *caldarium*, is an African fisherman. He is depicted in animated movement as he lunges towards the sea creature in front of him. His left leg is straight while his right is bent upwards with his knee resting upon an object.[608] He holds a lit torch towards the creature and draws back a trident in his other hand, ready to strike. He is probably nude, the contours of his musculature visible through the outline of his silhouette. His legs and buttocks are muscular, and a slight protrusion in his stomach may hint at a strong set of abdominals. His face, depicted in profile, is also observable in the silhouette. He is shown with a low forehead and a short, prominent nose. The texture of his hair is shown by triangular tesserae, giving the impression of tight curls close to his head. Clearly, an African ethnicity was meant. Extra detail is provided through white tesserae to depict his eye and areolae.

The second male is shown swimming. He lies horizontally, his limbs creating an impression of weightlessness. His legs float up behind him, perhaps in a kicking motion, while the position of his arms make the impression of a more deliberate

[606] Ling and Ling 2005: 59-60 notes that, while marine-themed mosaics appear in the Hellenistic period, this is seemingly the first to include a crab.
[607] Ling and Ling 2005: 60.
[608] Ling and Ling 2005: 60-61 suggests that this is part of a boat.

movement. His left arm extends forwards beneath his head, while his right arm moves over the top of his back, in the motion of a front-crawl. His body is slender but the muscles of his legs and buttocks are, once again, emphasised. This figure is also nude, though, notably, his genitalia are not only visible but prominent in the image, unlike his fisherman counterpart who is more discreet in his nudity. The swimmer has a large, clearly erect penis with a delineated glans, and both of his testicles are depicted. His head is composed in a similar way to the previous figure, but with a more prominent chin and rounded jaw, and an even more exaggeratedly projecting but short nose. The texture of his hair is highlighted in the same way as the fisherman.

This mosaic is one-of-a-kind in the ancient artistic repertoire, but the motif of the ithyphallic African swimmer appears twice more in mosaics of Pompeii. The next example was found, remarkably, across the road from the Casa del Menandro, in the bath complex of the Casa del Criptoportico. Here, the motif is part of a larger mosaic floor.[609] Central to the mosaic is a large tondo containing a floral decoration. On the left are a pair of polychrome dolphins, facing each other, depicted in red and green. On the right are a pair of swimmers, depicted almost entirely in black (figure 84). They are on either side of a red amphora, broken in half horizontally across the middle. The amphora has some kind of ropes or ribbons attached, which the figures clasp onto. The body of the figure on the left is straight, his post rigid, with his legs straight out beneath him; it would be easy to miss that he is imagined to be in water.

[609] Mosaic from the Casa del Criptoportico (I.6.2), Pompeii, Italy. 237 x 180 cm. In situ. Pernice 1938: 52; Beyen 1960: 185; Picard 1980: 185; Clarke 1982: 669-670; Dunbabin 1989: 43-44; Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1990: 274-277; Clarke 1998: 122-124, 137-138; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 99-101, 226 no. 2; Ling and Ling 2005: 17, 60.



Figure 84: Mosaic. Pair of ithyphallic swimmers; broken amphora. C. 20-10 BC. From the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii, Italy. Author's own image.

His counterpart on the right of the amphora, however, is more obviously swimming. More detail is visible despite the silhouette style, such as the musculature of the right-hand figure, the rounded stomach of the left, and each of their facial features.[610] These features include white bands of tesserae to indicate their eyes, which appear to be half closed or smiling, and the outlines of their noses, which appear short and prominent. Once again, they are depicted with curly hair through the use of triangular pieces of tesserae. The only hint of colour which survives on these figures is red detail, the same deep colour as the amphora, to depict musculature and to highlight the erect penises which stand prominently from each

[610] Clarke 1982: 669; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 226 note extensive reconstructive works, including the heads of both figures, the left of whom was apparently originally looking upwards.

male. The composition of these figures is remarkably similar to that of the swimmer of the Casa del Menandro. A comparative analysis of the Menandro swimmer and the right-hand swimmer of the Casa del Criptoportico determined that they are exactly the same size, and their torsos, heads, and legs have nearly identical outlines.[611] Given the remarkable similarities, it is believed that the two mosaics were created by the same artist(s), and that they were laid around the same time, though the mosaic of the Casa del Menandro is believed to have come first.[612]

A third example of this motif comes from the bath complex of the Domus M. Caesi Blandi (figure 85).[613] Though not pictured here, the whole mosaic is made up of a large central tondo with a geometric pattern, flanked on either side with a pair of swimmers. Each pair has a piece of equipment suitable for the baths between them. On the one side, they swim away from an *askos*, while pictured here are a pair swimming away from an *aryballos* and strigils strung together on a metal hoop.[614] Once more, the style of the mosaic belongs to the black-and-white trend of the late first century BC, and the figures are depicted in silhouette with only a single detail of white to signify their eyes. Despite the overall lack of detail, the texture of their hair is once again depicted through unusually arranged tesserae, here depicted in

[611] Clarke 1994: 91. It must be noted, however, that the mosaic at the Casa del Criptoportico has undergone significant reconstruction. Clarke 1982: 669 and Ako-Adounvo 1999: 226 note extensive reconstructive works, including the heads of both figures, the left of whom was apparently originally looking upwards.
[612] Beyen 1960: 185; Clarke 1994: 91-96. See also Maiuri 1933b: 270; Clarke 1991: 62-63; Ling and Ling 2005: 18 for comparisons between the two mosaics. It has also been suggested that the same artist(s) may have created the mosaic at the Domus M. Caesi Blandi (figure 79); see Beyen 1960: 185; Clarke 1991: 62; Clarke 1994: 95-96.
[613] Mosaic the Domus M. Caesi Blandi (VII.1.40), Pompeii, Italy. 255 x 218 cm. In situ. Blake 1930: 80; Pernice: 1938: 54; Beyen 1960: 185; Picard 1980: 185-187; Clarke 1982: 669-670; Dunbabin 1989: 43-44; Pugliese Carratelli 1996: 435-436; Clarke 1998: 121-122; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 99-102, 226-227 no. 3; Ling and Ling 2005: 17-18, 62-63.
[614] Cf. a bronze hoop with an *aryballos* and strigils, Detroit Institute of Arts, inv. V2016.6.



Figure 85: Mosaic. Two ithyphallic swimmers; bathing equipment. C. 20-10 BC. From the Domus M. Caesi Blandi, Pompeii, Italy. In situ. Source: Pernice 1938: pl. 20.1, cf. https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R7/7%2001%2040%20p2.htm (accessed 02/09/24).

straight rows of tesserae standing perpendicularly to their heads. This deliberately noticeable technique, particularly in such an undetailed design, shows that their hair was meant to be distinctive. Given that hair was one of the crucial iconographic markers of African ethnicity, it is likely that these figures were meant to be percieved as African. Despite the overall lack of detail, missing the highlighted musculature and other anatomical features present in the previous examples, the figures are notably ithyphallic, their genitalia depicted by triangles of tesserae sitting perpendicularly to their bodies.

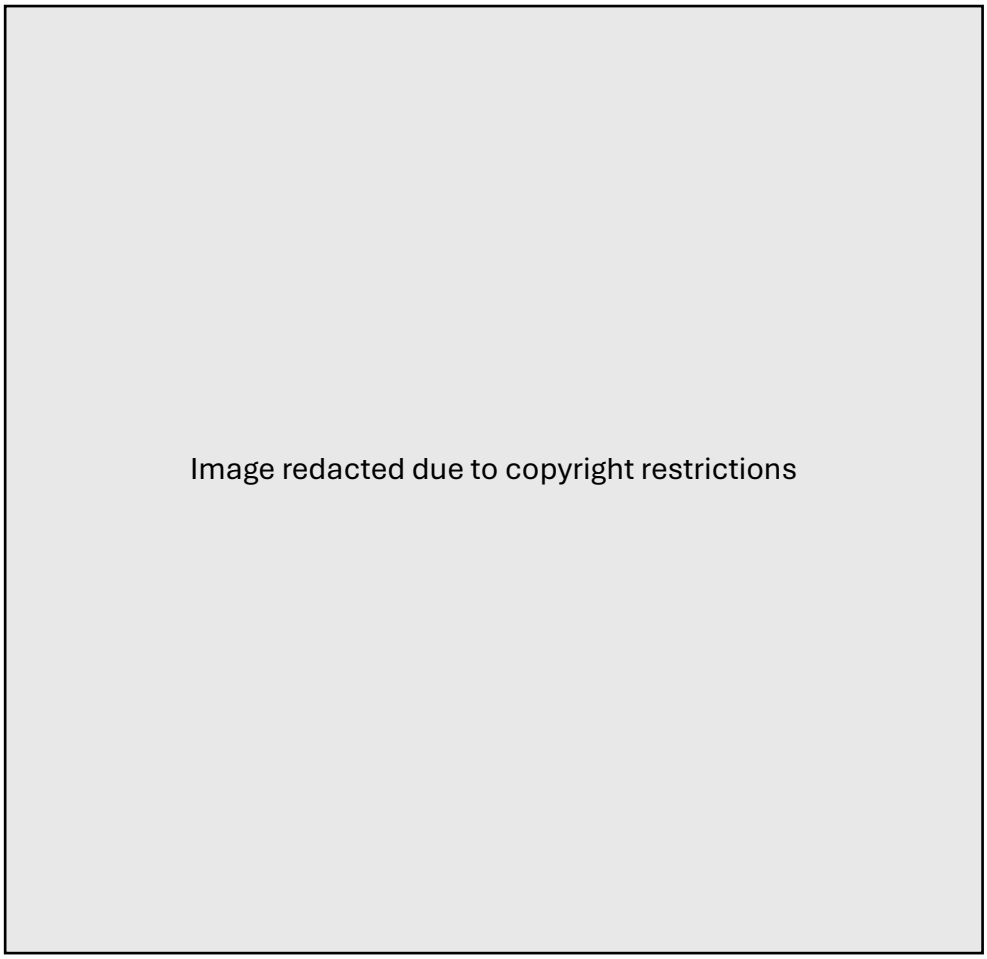


Figure 86: Mosaic. Large anchor motif; pair of swimmers; pair of dolphins. C. early first century AD. From a villa near Bosco de Siervo, Ottaviano, Italy. Parco archeologico di Pompei (?). Source: Pompeii Commitment https://pompeiicommitment.org/en/inventario/mammiferi-marini (accessed 02/09/24).

The motif of African swimmers is not unique to Pompeii, with three more examples of pairs of African swimmers appearing on mosaics from across the Roman world. The first presented here is from a bath in a villa at Ottaviano, a town not far from Pompeii (figure 86).[615] This square, black-and-white mosaic, bordered by a wave pattern, is comparatively simplistic in its design. In the centre is a large

[615] Mosaic from a villa near Bosco de Siervo, Ottaviano, Italy. 283 x 283 cm. Parco archeologico di Pompei (?). Cicirelli 1995-1996: 185; Cicirelli 1998: 345-350; Ling and Ling 2005: 60. Cicirelli (1995-1996: 185; 1988: 347) gives a date range for this mosaic between the first century BC and the destruction of Ottaviano in AD 79. The monochrome, silhouette style of the mosaic conforms entirely to the black-and-white trend which evolved through the late first century BC and early first century AD and lacks remnants of polychromatic detail popular in the earlier mosaics of this trend (see the mosaics from the Casa del Menandro and Casa del Criptoportico examined above). Consequently, I would suggest a date of the early first century AD. On the trend of black-and-white figural mosaics and their chronology, see Clarke 1979; Clarke 1982.



Figure 87: Mosaic. Pair of swimmers; pair of dolphins; vessel. C. first century AD. From Via Salute, Este, Italy. Museo Nazionale Atestino, Este. Source: Museo Nazionale Atestino online https://atestino.cultura.gov.it/sala-vii/ (accessed 02/09/24).

anchor motif. Swimming diagonally towards the anchor are two dolphins, situated at the bottom left and the top right, and two human figures, at the top left and bottom right. These figures mirror each other, with one arm bent and the other reaching towards the centre of the mosaic, fingers outstretched. This motion surely indicates that these figures are swimming, an appropriate action given mosaic's aquatic theme. Even for a black-and-white mosaic, these figures are especially lacking in detail, shown entirely in shadowy silhouette. Despite this, the artist has chosen to depict the hair texture of these figures in square tesserae set at irregular angles, appearing jagged against the otherwise smooth outline. This is an indication of tightly curled hair and, presumably, an intent of African ethnicity.

A second example from Este, Italy, presents another pair of swimmers and dolphins (figure 87).[616] The silhouettes are slighly more detailed than the previous example, including some musculature and colour, e.g., on the lips and hands. Clarke has also identified colour on the chest of the right-hand figure which he

[616] Mosaic from the Via Salute, Este, Italy. 207 x 67 cm. Museo Nazionale Atestino, Este. Alfonsi 1911: 313-315; Blake 1930: 80; Clarke 1982: 669-670; Donderer 1986: 149-150; Cicirelli 1998: 348; Clarke 1998: 120, 137-138; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 94-96, 227 no. 4; Ling and Ling 2005: 60.



Figure 88: Mosaic. Pair of swimmers. C. late first century BC (?). From Constantine, Algeria. Musée National Cirta, Constantine. Source: Desanges 2010: fig. 357.

believes indicates the presence of breasts, making this figure female.[617] Similarly to the Ottaviano figures, their tightly curled hair is depicted by a few additional tesserae on the tops of their heads. Though the original context of this mosaic is uncertain, the aquatic imagery and shared iconography with other mosaics indicates that it was likely situated in a bath complex.[618]

A final example of this trend comes from Cirta, now known as Constantine, Algeria (figure 88).[619] It is again believed to have originally been part of a bath complex due to the presence of a hypocaust.[620] A date of between 50 to 30 BC has been proposed based upon comparison to the Pompeian mosaics, the combination of the polychrome and black-and-white techniques, and the history of the Roman invasion of Cirta,[621] contradicting Clarke's date for what he considers to be the earliest example of the black-and-white figural style in the Casa del Menandro. I would suggest a slightly later date at the end of the first century BC, consistent both

[617] Clarke 1998: 137-138.
[618] Donderer 1986: 149-150.
[619] Mosaic from Constantine, Algeria. 750 x 510 cm. Musée National Cirta, Constantine. Berthier 1966: 113-124; Picard 1980: 185-187; Donderer 1986: 149-150; Clarke 1998: 120; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 94-96, 101-102, 227 no. 5; Ling and Ling 2005: 60; Desanges 2010: 272, fig. 356-357.
[620] Picard 1980: 185-187.
[621] Picard 1980: 187.

with Clarke's chronology for black-and-white mosaics and the history of Cirta, which was under Roman rule at the time.[622] The mosaic is split into three sections. As a viewer would have seen it in situ, the central panel contains a large geometrically-patterned circle with an eagle motif in the middle tondo. To the right was a panel with cargo ships carrying animals and weaponry.[623]

The left-hand panel contains two figures swimming towards each other, rather than towards an object. Again depicted in silhouette, the physical characteristics of these figures are slightly more visible and naturalistic than the previous examples of non-ithyphallic swimmers. Musculature is denoted on their torsos and upper legs, and Berthier has suggested that these figures may have originally had additional details depicted in white against the black tesserae.[624] The facial features of these figures are also depicted in greater detail. Each has a short nose and full lips. It is generally believed that these facial features indicate their African ethnicity, with one scholar describing them as 'determinative characteristics of the black.'[625] Berthier suggested that the mosaic has a solar theme, the African swimmers used to evoke the 'Orient' and, therefore, the dawn.[626] Desanges agreed with the theme, asserting that '[i]t is very probable that the black swimmers send us back to Memnon', a mythological king of the Ethiopians and son

[622] On Julius Caesar's conquest of North Africa in 46 BC, see Cass. Dio 43.9.
[623] For a comprehensive description of the other panels of the mosaic, see Berthier 1966: 113-116.
[624] Berthier 1966: 116.
[625] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 101. For identification of this figure as African or Black, see Berthier 1966: 116; Donderer 1986: 149-150; Ling and Ling 2005: 60. Picard 1980: 185 describes the men as '*nageurs noirs*'. This seems to be a reference to the black-and-white colour of this section of the mosaic rather than race/ethnicity. He does, however, go on to compare these figures to the other depictions of African or Black swimmers seen here.
[626] Berthier 1966: 121.

of the goddess of the dawn, Aurora.[627] Berthier's argument was swiftly disputed,[628] and I would further suggest that both are based upon inaccurate preconceptions about the place of Africans both historically and in art; that they were considered 'Oriental' or 'exotic', or that they inherently relate to Memnon, a figure who appears rarely, if ever, in art of this period. Focusing on Desanges' conclusion in particular, it places too much emphasis on Berthier's flawed solar characterisation of the mosaic, and lacks consideration of the other representations of African swimmers from across the Roman empire at this time.

Evidently, there was a fondness, if not a trend, for depictions of African swimmers around the end of the first century. Appearing in bath complexes, the aquatic theme seems appropriate. The trend for specifically African swimmers, however, is more curious, and the propensity for specifically *ithyphallic* African males in Pompeii requires more attention. An investigation into the meaning and purpose of such imagery will follow, but first, I wish to draw attention to a slightly different iconography of African males with non-ideal genitalia in mosaics.

Macrophallic African attendants

Here, we return once again to the bath complex of the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii, to visit a second curious mosaic (figure 89).[629] Located in the entryway to the *caldarium* (B on figure 82), it neighbours the previous mosaic of the ithyphallic

[627] Desanges 2010: 272.
[628] Bruneau 1966: 713-714 n.3; Picard 1968: 149 n.2.
[629] Mosaic from the Casa del Menandro (I.10.4), Pompeii, Italy. 107 x 69 cm. In situ. Maiuri 1933a: 146; Clarke 1979: 13, 61; Dunbabin 1989: 43-44; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 96, 102; Dunbabin 1999: 57-58; Clarke 1982: 670; Clarke 1998: 120-136; Clarke 2002a: 16-18; Ling 2003: 24; Ling and Ling 2005: 17-18, 62-63; Clarke 2006b: 158; Clarke 2007a: 75; Newman (upcoming).



Figure 89: Mosaic. A bath attendant (above); bathing equipment (below). C. 20 BC. From the Casa del Menandro, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompeii_-_House_of_Menander_-_Caldarium_-_Mosaic_1.jpg (accessed 03/09/24).

African swimmer. Though, as will be discussed below, the intended race or ethnicity of this figure is questionable, its popularity in research has influenced its position at the beginning of this section, and I will investigate its iconography thoroughly before turning to more secure depictions of macrophallic African attendants. This mosaic, broadly belonging to the 'black-and-white' style, consists of two separate but related motifs. The top motif consists of a male figure rendered mostly in black tesserae. Though colour has been used to highlight areas of the image, he is largely shown in silhouette, the outline of his body clear against the white background. His

body composition is rather odd, with a protruding stomach and a bulging back. He is shown in mid-stride, seemingly on his approach to the *caldarium*. His limbs highlight this movement, one arm held in front of his body while the other swings behind, his legs carrying him forwards. His wide, striding stance has allowed for the exposure of his exaggeratedly large phallus and one testicle from beneath his short (and clearly ineffective) white loincloth. The glans of his penis is emphasised by orange-brown tesserae. The same colour is used to portray two *askoi* which he carries, one in each hand. His face is depicted in profile, showing a small, pointed chin, a slightly protruding top lip, a short, straight nose, and an eye which has been depicted in white. He wears a wreath which has been depicted in black or white to contrast with its related background.

The second motif, depicted below this striding figure, is a large representation of bathing equipment. It consists of four strigils, each depicted in three contrasting rows of coloured tesserae, arranged around an orange-brown aryballos carried on chains.[630] This certainly seems like an appropriate motif for the mosaic's setting within a bath complex, and closely relates to the image above, which evidently depicts a bath attendant. The colour of the aryballos matches that of the *askoi* carried by the figure, highlighting their shared thematic link. The question remains as to why the glans of the attendant's penis is depicted in the same colour, thus equally highlighting these seemingly different parts of the mosaic. Clarke has suggested an answer which relies on the unusual arrangement of the bathing equipment.[631] He argues that the strigils, which curve around the aryballos,

[630] Dunbabin 1989: 43-44; Clarke 1998: 122; Ling and Ling 2005: 17, 62-63; Clarke 2007a: 75.
[631] Clarke 1998: 133; Clarke 2006b: 158; Clarke 2007: 75.

form the shape of labia, while the aryballos could be a clitoris, vagina, or, with the strings attached, a penis. Furthermore, it may be that the *askoi* were supposed to be seen as intentionally phallic in shape. The colour shared between them may allow the viewer to create a visual link between the different parts of the mosaic, enhancing the sexual undertone of the iconography.

The race of this figure has often been perceived as Black or African, and was confidently identified as such by Clarke.[632] Others, however, have been more reluctant to identify him as African, suggesting that he lacks the appropriate physical characteristics.[633] The emerging black-and-white trend of the time certainly allowed for the depiction of African figures as a play on the silhouette style. In fact, the depictions of African men in the mosaics discussed in this chapter are some of the earliest examples of figural detail in the black-and-white trend,[634] emerging earlier than any other human figures in this monochrome style.[635] This may have been seen a humorous play on the perceived skin colour of African people, deployed to draw an exaggerated contrast with the fashionable white background.

However, as outlined in the introduction, colour was rarely, if ever, the sole element used to represent an African race or heritage in Graeco-Roman material culture,[636] and it is an especially unreliable ethnic feature in black-and-white figural

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[632] Clarke 1998: 122; Clarke 2002a: 16-17; Clarke 2007a: 75.
[633] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 101-102 states that he fits the 'somatic norm', a statement which I dispute, while Ling and Ling 2005: 62-63 suggest that he 'lacks negroid features'.
[634] Clarke 1979: 59-62; Clarke 1982: 666.
[635] In a discussion of the workshop that created the Pompeian mosaics, Clarke 1979: 62-63 suggests that at the beginning of the black-and-white trend, the 'repertory was limited', relying on 'marine objects such as dolphins, anchors, ithyphallic Negroid swimmers, octopi, and hybrid sea creatures.' Cf. Donderer 1986: 149-150.
[636] See pages 50-51. Cf. Bell 2022: 429-430, who explains that hair texture and skin colour are the two physical characteristics that appear the most in Roman literary descriptions of Ethiopian

mosaics. Rather, numerous physical features recur as a means to denote African race or heritage, particularly tightly curled hair or locs which is a recognisable feature found even the silhouette style mosaics above. Also seen in the more detailed mosaics above are typical facial features such as a short nose with a low bridge. While the bath attendant of the Casa del Menandro mosaic is shown with black skin and a short nose, other features of an African ethnicity, most notably hair texture, are seemingly missing.

Despite this, it must be noted that the bath attendant equally does *not* conform to the physical norm for images of Roman males.[637] His body is depicted atypically, his back bulging significantly between his waist and his shoulders. This strays from other depictions of African servants, who were often shown as physically fit. It may be the case that this is accidental and reflects merely the artist's level of skill in realistic representation. No effort has been made to depict fingers, for instance; his arms blend seamlessly into the *askoi* he carries. Perhaps, then, this is an unnaturalistic attempt to depict exaggeratedly large muscles. On the other hand, it is possible that this was a deliberate deviation from the ideal in a representation of a person with kyphosis, often labelled with the outdated, derogatory term 'hunchback', or a similar spinal condition. People with this condition appear frequently in apotropaic mosaics such as this second century example from a villa at Jekmejeh, Türkiye (figure 90).[638] This mosaic depicts a male

appearance. He also specifies that, in the visual evidence, the depiction of Ethiopian people relies on 'a *package of traits*', and that ethnicity cannot be deciphered by skin colour alone.

[637] Contra. Ako-Adounvo 1999: 101-102.

[638] Mosaic from Jekmejeh, near Antioch, Turkey. 83 x 84 cm. Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Antakya, inv. 1026a. Levi 1941: esp. 228-229, pl. 56; Levi 1947: 32-33; Trentin 2015: 54-55, 100 no. 17, pl. at 114 cat. no. 17. Unfortunately, ableist language is prevalent in the literature on this mosaic, with Levi using terms such as 'deformed goblin' and 'gnome' to describe the figure, and 'monstrous' to



Figure 90: Mosaic. Macrophallic male with kyphosis; an inscription reading ΚΑΙ ΣΥ. C. second century AD. From Jekmejeh, Türkiye. Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Antakya, inv. 1026a. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Lucky_Hunchback_mosaic_from_Antioch,_dated_beginning_of_the_2nd_century_AD,_Hatay_Archaeology_Museum,_Antakya,_Turkey_%2852043531052%29.jpg (accessed 04/09/24). Author: Carole Raddato. Used under CC BY-SA 2.0.

with kyphosis playing with rhythm sticks. He is decidedly macrophallic, an iconography shared by many representations of males with kyphosis dating as far back as the early Hellenistic period.[639]

The bath attendant's phallus is a deliberate deviation from the norm, depicted as abnormally large with a bright orange-brown glans. The colour used here contrasts the black and white tesserae used for most of the mosaic, drawing the eye to his genitalia and creating a visual emphasis on the glans of his penis.

describe his appearance. Such derogatory language not only imposes a negative bias on the figure in the image, but also has mythological connotations for our interpretation which do not necessarily translate into reality; this is a depiction of a human figure with a physical condition rather than a representation of a non-human creature like a goblin.

[639] See Trentin 2015: 51-72.

Despite the shared characteristic of macrophallism, this conscious distinction between the glans and the shaft of the penis is not shared with other depictions of macrophallic males with kyphosis. If we compare the male in the Jekmejeh example, for instance, we can see that he has been given a consistently coloured penis and, importantly, a foreskin, a feature which is notably missing from the Pompeian example. The distinction between the shaft and the glans of his penis may therefore be a representation of circumcision in an attempt to further distinguish the body of the attendant from the Roman 'norm'.[640] Circumcision, a practice considered unusual by the Romans, was mostly associated with Egyptian and Jewish culture,[641] though references to sub-Egyptian African circumcision can also be found. For example, Herodotus states that the Colchians, Egyptians, and, crucially, Ethiopians have always practiced circumcision,[642] a claim reiterated by Josephus in his *Against Apion* in the early second century AD.[643] So, while most of the typical characteristics signifying a specifically African ethnicity are missing, there is an allusion to the figure's non-Roman status.

The iconography of this bath attendant is similar to two unprovenanced bronze statuettes of African bath attendants discussed above (figures 15 and 16). Their style likely indicates an early Imperial date, though others have argued for a Hellenistic date. Each statuette depicts an African youth carrying square handles. The attached objects are lost in each case but, on the basis of comparison with the Pompeian example, they were probably *askoi*. Like the Pompeian attendant, these

[640] Ling and Ling 2005: 63 n. 339 suggests the same.
[641] E.g., Philo *On the Special Laws* 1.1.2-3; Strabo *Geography* 17.2.5.
[642] Hdt. 2.104.
[643] Joseph. *Ap*. 1.22.169.

males are shown in forwards motion, though they step upwards onto aquatic creatures. They each wear a short, ineffective loin cloth and their genitalia are exposed. The resemblance between these two figures and the Pompeian attendant is striking and may indicate a contemporaneous artistic type. The bath attendant's close proximity to the *caldarium* mosaic, which certainly includes two images of African males, would have perhaps strengthened the characterisation of an African race or heritage for this figure. On this basis, there is a reasonable likelihood that the bath attendant of the Casa del Menandro was intended to be perceived as African.

A mosaic from Timgad, Algeria similarly plays on the iconography of the macrophallic bath attendant (figure 91).[644] Though much later in date, this mosaic provides a useful comparison for the Pompeian mosaic and shows a continued iconography of a macrophallic African bath attendant. He is more clearly African in his ethnicity, as denoted by his tightly curled hair, dark brown skin colour, and facial features such as full lips, short nose and high cheekbones.[645] He, too, is shown in purposeful forwards movement, a visual cue seen in these depictions of attendants to indicate working status. Another indication of his working status is the shovel slung over his right shoulder, which identifies this figure as a *furnacator*, an enslaved person who shovelled fuel for the hot baths. Once again, the iconography relies on the low status of the imagined subject. Unlike the previous examples, this figure is

[644] Mosaic from the north-western baths, Timgad, Algeria. 80 x 70 cm. Musée de Timgad, Timgad, inv. 89. Ballu 1906: 208-209; de Pachtere 1911: 22 no. 86; Germain 1969: 94 no. 129, pl. XLII; Dunbabin 1989: 43; Desanges 2010: 272, fig. 347; Parker 2021: 183.

[645] Gsell 1913: 302 n.2 suggests that the mosaic 'représente un nègre avec une exactitude qui semble indiquer que l'artiste avait sous les yeux des modèles vivants'. It is unclear whether this is just in reference to the facial features, which are typical of Roman depictions of African males, or whether it includes his penis, which is objectively exaggerated and non-realistic. The mythology around Black male genitalia will be discussed below but, should the latter be true, it may be seen as a reflection of harmful modern stereotypes around the genitalia of Black men.

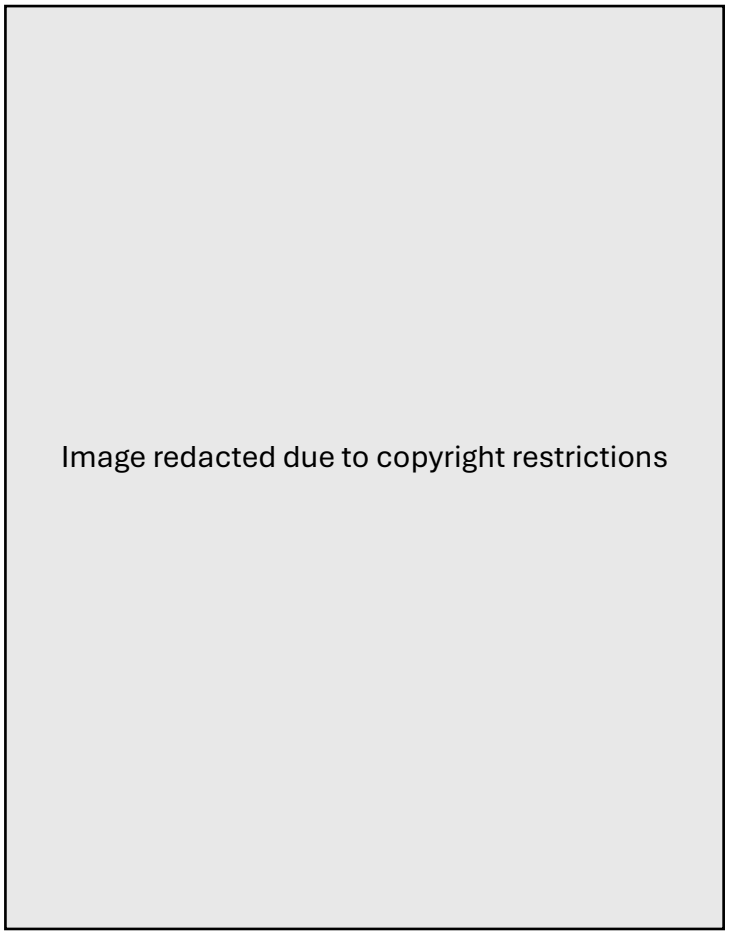


Figure 91: Mosaic. A macrophallic furnacator. *C. AD 200. From the north-western baths, Timgad, Algeria. Musée de Timgad, Timgad, inv. 89. Source: Desanges 2010: 347.*

completely nude. He holds his exaggeratedly large phallus in his left hand while a stream of liquid flows from it to the floor. Though it has previously been argued that this figure is ithyphallic and can be seen to be ejaculating,[646] it has more recently been suggested that, given the physical support needed to keep the penis in its horizontal position, the bath attendant is not ithyphallic and the liquid should instead be seen as urine.[647] This may be the case; the phallus does not seem rigid, indicating at least semi-flaccidity, while the copious amount of liquid and its continuous flow seem more suitable for a depiction of urination than ejaculation. However, this interpretation relies on at least some intention of naturalism by the

[646] Dunbabin 1989: 43.
[647] Parker 2021: 193.



Figure 92: Mosaic. A macrophallic fisherman. C. second century AD. From the House of the Calendar, Antioch, Türkiye. Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Antakya. Source: World History Encyclopedia https://www.worldhistory.org/image/7963/roman-mosaic-of-an-aethiopian-fisherman/ (accessed 10/09/24). Author: Nevit Dilmen. Used under CC BY-SA 4.0.

artist. It may be that the physical support of the phallus identified by Parker is instead a representation of masturbation, and the continuous flow of liquid is a humorously exaggerated portrayal of ejaculation. In either case, the African male in this mosaic is decidedly macrophallic, and therefore at least reminiscent of the earlier images of exposed bath attendants.

Another depiction of a working macrophallic male can be found in a mosaic from Antioch dating to around the second century AD (figure 92).[648] The dark-brown

[648] Mosaic from the House of the Calendar, Antioch, Turkey. Dimensions unknown. Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Antakya. Stillwell 1938: 192 no. 72 Panel B, pl. 53; Levi 1947: 36-39; Cimok 2000: 43-45; Pamir and Sezgin 2016: 262, fig. 15. Cimok labels this figure as a 'dwarf', an outdated term for

colour of the figure's skin in this polychrome mosaic has led to his identification as African. Though this is a possibility, perhaps even a likelihood, I would suggest that certain aspects of his portrayal cast doubt upon this identification. For instance, his nose is especially uncharacteristic of portrayals of African people at this time. As seen above, typically the iconography of an African race or ethnicity involves a short nose with a low bridge, whereas this figure is shown with a long, high-bridged nose. Nevertheless, this male is evidently supposed to be perceived as ethnically or racially 'Other'. He carries two sticks in his right hand and over his left shoulder balances two baskets on a large pole, likely indicating his status as a working fisherman. Like the figures in the previous mosaics, he strides forwards purposefully. He similarly wears a short loincloth and, combined with his wide stance, his exaggerated phallus falls from beneath his ineffective clothing. Though evidently performing a different role to the attendants above, the iconography of the accidentally exposed macrophallic worker on a mosaic is curiously similar.

The African phallus and apotropaic protection in previous research

These depictions of macrophallic and ithyphallic Africans have been studied at length, particularly Clarke who has dedicated multiple chapters to the discussion of these images and their respective comparanda.[649] The existing analyses of these images have largely revolved around their potential for apotropaic protection

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someone with achondroplasia or similar growth-restricting conditions. The figure in this mosaic does not present the physical characteristics seen in representations of people with such conditions from the ancient Mediterranean (such as short limbs), and it is likely that Cimok has only labelled him as such due to his exaggerated phallus.

[649] Clarke 1979: 13-14; Clarke 1998: 120-142; Clarke 2002a: 16-18; Clarke 2002b: 156; Clarke 2007a: 74-78.

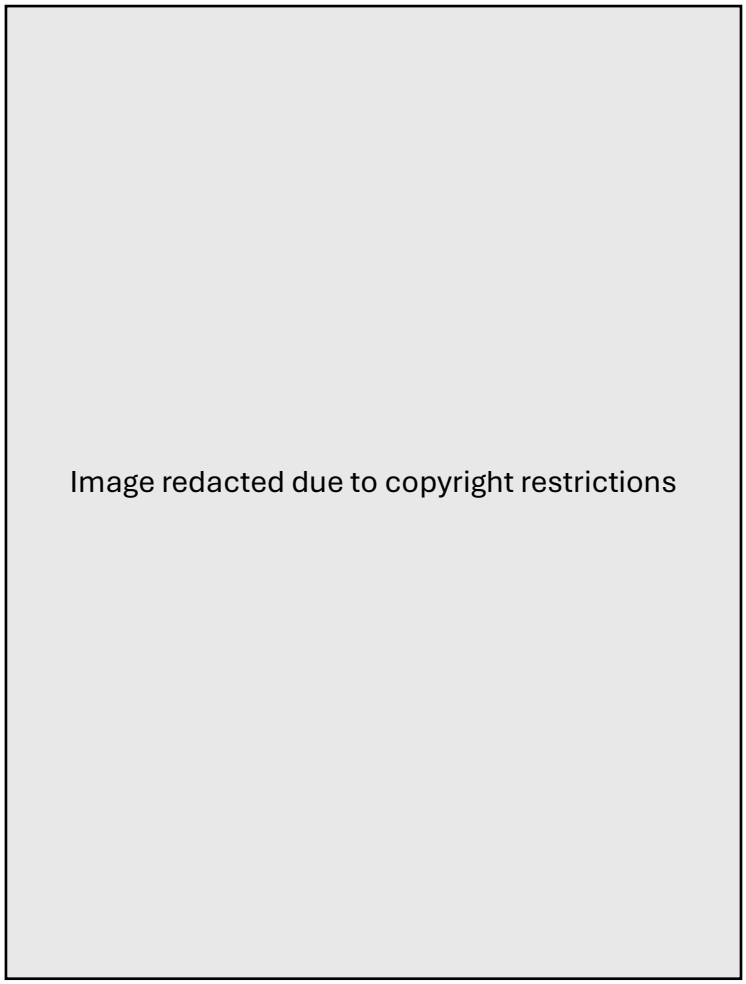


Figure 93: Carving. A phallus; an inscription reading HIC HABITAT FELICITAS. *Stone. C. first century BC-first century AD. From a bakery in the insula of the Casa di Pansa, Pompeii, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27741. Source: Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli online collection https://www.museoarcheologiconapoli.it/en/portfolio-item/secret-room/ (accessed 19/09/24).*

against the Evil Eye, a negative force of envy (*phthonos*/*invidia*) believed to inflict dire consequences on its subjects, such as material loss, physical harm or illness. Many of the images seen in this chapter were originally located in baths, a place of inherent vulnerability where the Evil Eye was believed to dwell. Nudity naturally enhances physical vulnerability, but also would have left a person more susceptible to be targeted by envy, perhaps because of their beauty or physical superiority.[650] A potential consequence of the Evil Eye could be physical harm, which was an

[650] Dunbabin 1989: 33.

inevitable risk of the hot environment of the *caldarium*; images of sandals are frequently found as a reminder for patrons to protect their feet against the heat.[651]

There were various deterrents against the Evil Eye, including using specific phrases or living a generous or humble lifestyle.[652] A more relevant type of deterrent is that which can be found in physical form through symbolism in material possessions. Many apotropaic elements can be found in artwork, such as the phrase ΚΑΙ ΣΥ ('and you') in the Jekmejeh mosaic above (figure 92), but a notably popular protective symbol is the phallus.[653] Commonly discovered in entryways, baths, and other vulnerable areas, the phallus can be seen in many forms as a means to deter the Evil Eye. This can be attached to a person, once again like in the Jekmejeh example, or disembodied like this stone carving from a bakery in Pompeii (figure 93).[654] This simple relief of a phallus and testicles is inscribed with the phrase HIC HABITAT FELICITAS, meaning 'happiness lives here', making the positive connotations of the imagery clear. Another common form of apotropaic protectant which uses phallic imagery is the *tintinnabulum*, a metal chime comprised of a large phallus, a phallic object, or a person with an exaggerated phallus, often decorated with other features such as legs or wings, as seen in this bronze example (figure 94).[655] The combination of phallic imagery and sound was believed to make these

[651] Ako-Adounvo 1999: 109.
[652] Elliott 2016: 153-170 explains the different forms of protection against the Evil Eye.
[653] Johns 1982: 62-75; Clarke 1998: 131, 133; Clarke 2002b: 156; Bartsch 2006: 138-152; Clarke 2006b: 159-160; Clarke 2014: 531-532; Elliott 2016: 161-163; Parker 2021; Blanton IV 2022, esp. 172-173.
[654] Stone carving from a bakery in the insula of the Casa di Pansa, Pompeii, Italy. 25 x 40 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 27741. Fiorelli 1875: 104-105 no. 17; Johns 1982: 64, pl. 42; Clarke 2003: 99, fig. 68-69.
[655] Bronze *tintinnabulum*, unknown provenance. Length 13.45 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. 1856,1226.1086. Johns 1982: pl. 13; Parker 2018: 57-58, fig. 6.1; Parker 2021: 184-185, fig. 11.7.



Figure 94: Tintinnabulum. Bronze. C. first century AD. Unknown provenance. The British Museum, London, inv. 1856,1226.1086. Source: The British Museum online collection https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1856-1226-1086 (accessed 21/09/24). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

objects particularly effective at deterring negative forces. Apotropaic phalli are also found in mosaics and other decoration from baths, such as this black-and-white geometric patterned floor from the women's *tepidarium* at the Forum Baths in Herculaneum (figure 95).[656] The meandering tesserae produce squares at regular intervals, each of which holds a motif. Examples of motifs include numerous types

[656] Mosaic floor, from the Forum Baths at Herculaneum, Italy.



Figure 95: Mosaic. Meandering pattern with motifs. C. first century BC. From the women's tepidarium *at the Forum Baths, Herculaneum, Italy. Source: HerculaneuminPictures https://herculaneum.uk/Ins%206/Herculaneum%206%2008%20p2.htm (accessed 23/09/24). © Klaus Heese, courtesy of Jackie and Bob Dunn.*

of vessels, a ladle, and a trident. Most notable of the small images here are a tintinnabulum and a disembodied phallus (a close up of which can be seen in figure 96). The tintinnabulum was certainly apotropaic in nature, and the situation of the phallus motif in a bath complex has the same implication. Interestingly, as also seen in the bath attendant mosaic of the Casa del Menandro, the glans of the phallus has been depicted in a distinct red colour, the only hint of colour in an otherwise

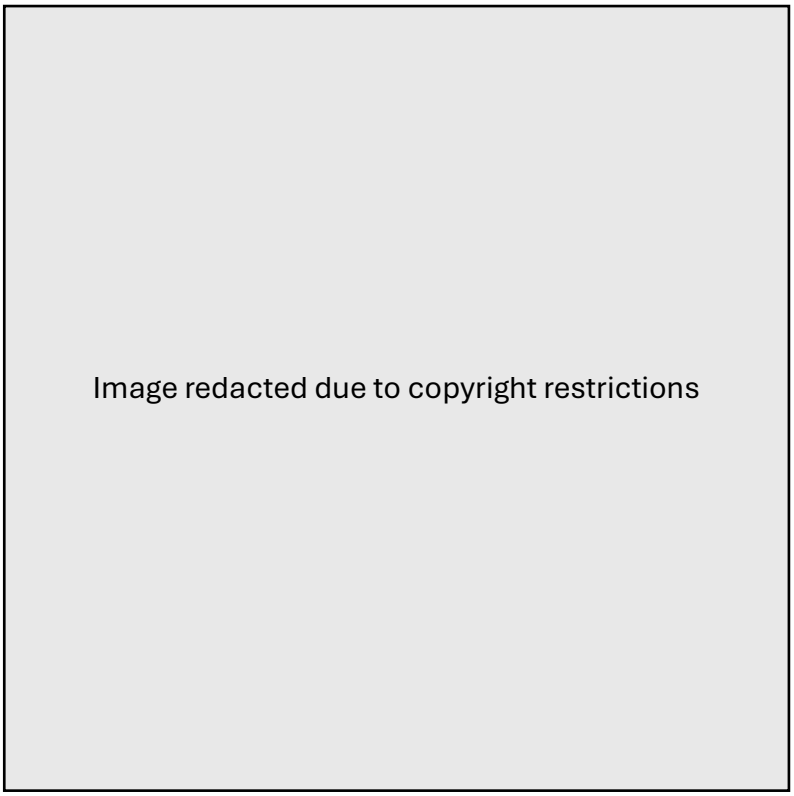


Figure 96: Mosaic. Close up of phallus motif. C. first century BC. From the women's tepidarium *at the Forum Baths, Herculaneum, Italy. Source: cernysjourneys.com https://cernysjourneys.com/europe/herculaneum-italy (accessed 30/12/24).*

completely black and white mosaic. This may be to indicate that it is erect, circumcised, or simply to draw the (Evil) eye to this particular motif.

The association between phallic imagery and apotropaic protection has naturally led to the conclusion that these depictions of macrophallic or ithyphallic African males belong in this category of protective imagery, particularly given the situation of many of these images in bath complexes. However, this is not the only factor in their categorisation as apotropaic; it has also been suggested that their race (or skin colour) contributes to their protective qualities. Clarke has argued that their black skin colour or African race creates humour based on their 'physical peculiarities' from the normative Mediterranean perspective of most Roman art,[657]

[657] Clarke 2007a: 66. Cf. Levi 1941; Clarke 1998: 131; Clarke 2007a: 74.

and the relation between their dark skin tone and the danger of heat in the *caldarium*.[658] The play on skin colour and heat seems a likely connection, especially given that the Romans adopted the Greek term Αἰθίοψ, meaning 'burnt face', to describe certain Black Africans. Clarke's notion of 'physical peculiarity', on the other hand, is less convincing. Though their genitalia are exaggerated and likely apotropaic, and their ethnicity is distinctly non-Roman, the portrayal of their bodies largely conforms to the 'norm' in Roman art, with most examples depicted in usual proportions with defined musculature. This is in contrast, for instance, to the depictions of individuals with physical disabilities which are distinctly apotropaic as a result (e.g., the male in the Jekmejeh mosaic seen in figure 92). Others have pointed to the believed association between evil itself and dark colours, even specifically the anthropomorphism of bath demons in the form of Ethiopian men.[659] However, associations between blackness/Blackness and evil are largely influenced by Christianity and developed later than the time period in question. So, while it seems likely that (at least some) of these images had an apotropaic function, earlier scholarly arguments are flawed and have some crucial omissions which may help us understand further how they function as apotropaic pieces and the impact that this has on the perception of African masculinity and sexuality.

[658] Clarke 1998: 131-132; Clarke 2002a: 17; Clarke 2007a: 74-75.
[659] Bonner 1932: 205; Dunbabin 1989: 42; Ako-Adounvo 1999: 110.

Out of control: the construction of African male sexuality in antiquity and modern society

These depictions of macro- and ithyphallic African males display a curiosity with the African male body and, crucially, sexuality. This curiosity around their sexuality is mirrored in a passage from Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, an astrological work from the second century AD. On the people of μέση Αἰθιοπία ('middle Ethiopia'), amongst others, he says the following:

> πολυγύναιοι δὲ καὶ πολύανδροι καὶ καταφερεῖς καὶ ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς συναρμοζόμενοι, καὶ πολύσποροι μὲν οἱ ἄνδρες, εὐσύλληπτοι δὲ αἱ γυναῖκες ἀκολούθως τῷ τῆς χώρας γονίμῳ.[660]

Here, Ptolemy makes a connection with being from this region of the world and being sexually out of control; these people have multiple partners, including family members, and are *too* fertile, qualities which he strongly condemns. He continues:

> πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀρρένων σαθροὶ καὶ τεθηλυσμένοι ταῖς ψυχαῖς.[661]

Ptolemy implies here that their sexual promiscuity also makes them effeminate, highlighting a long-held association between masculinity and sexual control. Finally, Ptolemy suggests the following:

> οὗτοι κρεοφάγοι τε καὶ ἰχθυοφάγοι καὶ νομάδες εἰσίν, ἄγριον καὶ θηριώδη βίον ζῶντες.[662]

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[660] Ptol. *Tetr*. 2.3.72: 'But they are polygamous and polyandrous and inclined even toward marrying their sisters. The men are very potent, the women extremely fertile, just as the land is fertile.' (Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 108).
[661] Ptol. *Tetr.* 2.3.72: 'Many of the males are unsound and womanly in their souls.' (tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 108).
[662] Ptol. *Tetr*. 2.3.72: 'they are carnivorous, fish-eating, and nomadic. They live a savage and harsh life.' (Tr. Kennedy, Roy and Goldman 2013: 109).

For Ptolemy, a crucial part of painting such an animalistic way of life and an inherently uncivilised people was speculation about their sexuality, characterising it as necessarily Other. The associations made between savageness, emasculation, and sexual uncontrollability paint a picture for the potential characterisation of the males in the images at the centre of this chapter; perhaps they were similarly seen as out of control, unmasculine, and savage.

A painted frieze from the Casa dello Scultore (figures 97 to 100),[663] which does not seem to be primarily apotropaic but rather belongs to the artistic tradition of semi-mythological Nilotic landscapes, plays into this fantastical conception of sub-Egyptian African animalistic sexuality. The frieze spans three out of four walls of the house's peristyle,[664] originally totalling around 50 metres of decoration, around 20 metres of which survives today.[665] Notably, this is the longest Nilotic frieze surviving from the city.[666] Maiuri dated the frieze to the late Republican or early Augustan period based on the *opus incertum* structure beneath the stucco,[667] a practice popular in Pompeii in the first century BC, while Versluys and Voltan have more convincingly argued for a later date of around AD 70 due to the fashion of the painting, which is in the Fourth Style,[668] and the 'grotesque character of the picture (which has no parallels in the Augustan era)'.[669] The north wall, through which a

[663] Wall paintings from the Casa dello Scultore (VIII.7.24), Pompeii, Italy. In situ. Maiuri 1955: 65-80; Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 718-731, esp. figs 1-3; Versluys 2002: 140-142 no. 060; Clarke 2006b: 160; Clarke 2007a: 91-96; Voltan 2023: 123-125, CPNR 35, fig. 3.70-3.72.
[664] No traces of painting have been discovered on the west wall (Maiuri 1955: 65-80; Clarke 2007a: 91).
[665] Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 719; Voltan 2023: 123.
[666] Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 719.
[667] Maiuri 1955: 65-80; Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 719.
[668] Versluys 2002: 142, 448 table 2; Voltan 2023: 123.
[669] Versluys 2002: 142.



Figure 97: Wall painting. Nilotic scene: ducks (left); pygmies dancing on a phallic boat (right). C. AD 70. From the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, Italy. Source: PompeiiinPictures https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2007%2024%20p7.htm (accessed 17/1/25). © Giuseppe Ciaramella, courtesy of Jackie and Bob Dunn.

visitor would have entered, displays pygmies dancing upon an ejaculating phallic boat, which floats on the Nile alongside a pair of ducks (figure 97).[670] To the left, the east wall displays further depictions of pygmies in energetic action, including boxing and capturing wild animals native to the continent of Africa, and other figures such as gladiators.[671] The painting of the south wall, which would confront a viewer upon entry, is most relevant to this discussion. While the majority of figures on other walls of the frieze have been identified as pygmies, members of a mythological race believed to have lived on the furthest stretches of the Nile and generally characterised as being short in stature, these figures on the south wall are distinct. Their depiction in dark colour and the bobbled texture across the tops of their heads, which may indicate tightly curled hair, point towards a portrayal of African ethnicity, while their body composition indicates that they are not to be seen as pygmies, but

[670] See Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 721-725, fig. 4-9.
[671] See Baldassarre and Pugliese Carratelli 1998: 725-731, fig. 10-24.

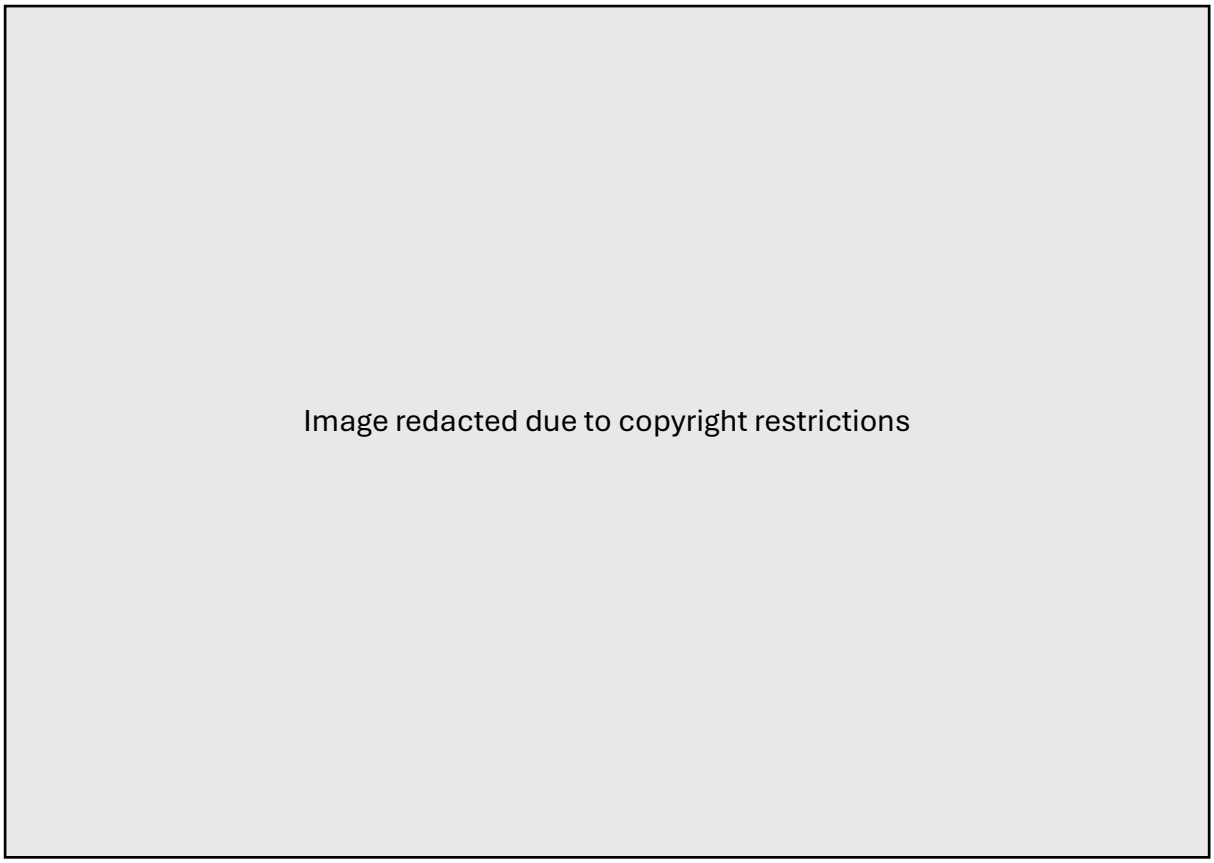


Figure 98: Wall painting. Nilotic scene: musician playing an aulos (left); macrophallic figures (centre); crocodile (right). C. AD 70. From the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Maiuri 1955: tav. I, 2. Cf. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2007%2024%20p7.htm (accessed 12/09/24).

rather as another race of dark-skinned Africans who lived on the Nile, perhaps Ethiopians. Sub-Egyptian Africans were often seen on fantastical depictions of the Nile, as seen in the famous Nile mosaic from Palestrina.[672] The fantastical nature of images of African males, which were not meant to reflect reality but rather the conception and construction of the African male in the Graeco-Roman imagination, is perhaps most apparent here, where portrayals of African men have been coupled with that of mythological pygmies, whose very existence in the artistic repertoire was one of imaginary exoticism. The specific depiction of pygmies here on a phallic

[672] Mosaic from Palestrina, Italy. 585 x 431 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Palestrina. Steinmeyer-Schareika 1978; Panayides 1994; Meyboom 1995; Siebert 1999; Andreae 2002; Clarke 2007a: 89-90; Salari 2012; Thomas 2021: 41-88.



Figure 99: Wall painting. Nilotic scene: macrophallic figure. C. AD 70. From the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Maiuri 1955: tav. III. Cf. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2007%2024%20p7.htm (accessed 12/09/24).

ship also highlights the symbolism of sex and fertility associated with pygmies and Nilotic imagery and,[673] here, extended to their African counterparts.

The south frieze of the Casa dello Scultore presents a festive scene. On the left, an altar is depicted with two storks nesting on its roof, another indication of the Nilotic setting. In the centre (figure 98), a female aulos player entertains two African males with exaggerated genitalia. On their right a crocodile lunges out of the river baring its teeth. Inspired by both the music and the oncoming danger of the

[673] Versluys 2002: 276.



Figure 100: Wall painting. Nilotic scene: defecating macrophallic figure (left); aulos player and macrophallic figure (centre). C. AD 70. From the Casa dello Scultore, Pompeii, Italy. Source: Maiuri 1955: tav. II.1. Cf. https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2007%2024%20p7.htm (accessed 12/09/24).

crocodile, the males are shown energetic movement, a frenzied combination of dance and surprise. While their nudity and the exaggerated size of their phalli and testicles makes concealment impossible, this movement only draws further attention to their genitalia, which swing uncontrollably through their legs. Both males are depicted urinating, while the figure on the right is also shown defecating, possibly out of fear. To the right of the crocodile is another male with exaggerated genitalia (figure 99). His penis and testicles hang below his buttocks as he squats down, a deliberate position to utilise his faecal incontinence to target the crocodile. The right of the scene is comparatively peaceful (figure 100). Though a small girl plays an aulos, the atmosphere is calm as a figure reclines above. Below, another macrophallic African male strolls forwards, surrounded by vessels suitable for banqueting.



Figure 101: Wall painting. Nilotic scene of banqueting pygmies. C. AD 70. From the Casa del Medico, Pompeii, Italy. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 113196. Source: pompeiiinpictures.org https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R8/8%2005%2024%20p4.htm (accessed 30/12/24).

The African males in this scene, depicted as wild, surrounded by nature and exotic creatures, and out of control of their bodies, are reminiscent of the Ethiopians whose lives are described by Ptolemy as ἄγριον. Their portrayal as exaggeratedly macrophallic with large, swinging testicles immediately makes a viewer consider their sexuality, which is characterised as out of control, while their association with the equally macrophallic pygmies and their ejaculating phallus boat on an accompanying fresco associates them with symbolism of fertility and sex. Other painted scenes of pygmies are even more explicit in their sexual association, such as this fresco from the Casa del Medico, Pompeii which depicts a male and female pygmy engaging in a 'symplegma', or sexual intercourse (figure 101).[674] The sexualisation of the African males in this fresco is conspicuous through both its context in a Nilotic landscape and the depiction of non-ideal male genitalia.

With this in mind, the representations of non-ideal genitalia in images of African males seen here and above can similarly be seen to characterise non-ideal African male sexuality. Returning to the macrophallic enslaved boys of chapter 3,

[674] Wall painting from the Casa del Medico (VIII.5.24), Pompeii, Italy. 71 x 123 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, inv. 113196. Versluys 2002: 138-139 059B; Clarke 2006b: 163-164, figs 4 and 5.



Figure 102: Statuette. Crouching African boy, macrophallic. Bronze. C. second century AD (?). Unknown provenance. Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, Barcelona, unknown inventory number. Source: Artstor (Image of the Black in Western Art) https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/stable/community.14777567?searchUri=%2Fsite%2Fartstor%2FImageoftheBlackinWesternArtIBWAHarvardUniversity-100141607%2F%3Fso%3Dold%26searchkey%3D1728316202050%26pagemark%3DeyJwYWdlIjoxOCwic3RhcnQiOjQyNSwidG90YWwiOjkyODR9&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3Adce4aad0fd1c9a13ce8b936c7403f429&searchkey=1728316202050 (accessed 30/12/24). © The Menil Foundation / Hickey & Robertson, Houston, TX.

their exaggerated genitals symbolise a fetishisation of the (young) African male body and its malleability in artistic creation. They are overtly sexualised where other young boys are subtly eroticised. A further, unusual example of a young African boy kept in the Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya is notably macrophallic, the size of

his phallus exaggerated by his crouching position (figure 102).[675] The iconography of this bronze remains elusive, though there is no certain indication of enslaved status.[676]

The images of clumsily exposed macrophallic bath attendants seem to present a different type of sexualisation. The bath attendant of the Casa del Menandro is depicted as macrophallic and circumcised, his genitalia spilling out from underneath his ineffective loincloth as he lunges forwards. This conforms to distinctly apotropaic images discussed above. The combination of an exaggerated phallus and the element of surprise may have made a suitable apotropaic deterrent. However, it also bears remarkable similarity to other depictions of African bath attendants which are not believed to serve any apotropaic purpose. The bronze statuettes depict African servants in a comparable pose, carrying the same objects. Just as the Pompeii attendant's genitals fall beneath his clothes, the penises of these males are exposed in the same way, though they are not macrophallic. Clearly, part of this iconography involved a lack of control over one's own body, as also seen in the later mosaic of the urinating bath attendant from Timgad and the defecating African males from the Nilotic frieze in the Casa dello Scultore.

However, the lack of control seen in these depictions of exposed, sometimes macrophallic African males does not seem only to be a humorous clumsiness or incontinence. I suggest that these depictions also indicate a loss of control over

[675] Bronze statuette of unknown provenance. Height 6.7 cm. Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, Barcelona, unknown inventory number. Unpublished.
[676] The Image of the Black in Western Art archive suggests that his arms are positioned to shoot an arrow, meaning that this boy would be some sort of warrior. However, there is a lack of comparative evidence to support this conclusion.

one's own sexual experience. The bath attendant from the Casa del Menandro is not only exposed, but the use of red colour on his penis naturally catches the viewer's eye, pulling their gaze towards his genitalia. Unlike other deliberately nude examples, he wears a loincloth, indicating that he was supposed to be covered, yet instead he has been depicted as accidentally exposed. This combination of iconographic elements transforms the viewer into voyeur; they are not supposed to see his body in this way, yet their intrusive gaze is cast upon him. The non-consensual exposure of the attendant's phallus and the forced gaze of voyeurs relate directly to the sort of non-consensual sexual abuse experienced by enslaved persons, as seen in the depictions of African *pueri delicati*. Such voyeurism of enslaved persons also appears in the literature, such as that in Petronius' *Satyricon*, which sees Quartilla, a lustful priestess of Priapus, spy upon Giton, the narrator's enslaved boy, and Pannychis, a seven-year-old enslaved girl, as they consummate their 'marriage': *in primis Quartilla per rimam improbe diductam applicuerat oculum curiosum lusumque puerilem libidinosa speculabatur diligentia*.[677]

Further, if one views the mosaics of the Casa del Menandro in succession, as they would have been viewed by someone entering the *caldarium*, they would have been confronted with a sudden subversion of sexual characterisation. Unlike his servant counterpart, the African swimmer is in a deliberate state of nudity and permanently erect. The erect phallus has inherently sexual connotations; rather than simply being a part of the body, like a flaccid penis may be, it connotes arousal

[677] Petron. *Sat*. 26.4-5: 'Quartilla quickly attached her wanton eye to a chink in the door she had wickedly slit and spied with prurient interest on their childish play.' (Tr. Schmeling 2020: 109). Cf. Gill 1973: 173.



Figure 103: Relief. Horse-legged phallus with an erection; Evil Eye. Stone. C. second century AD. From Leptis Magna, Libya. In situ (?). Source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bas-relief_of_fascinus.jpg (accessed 30/09/24). Author: SashaCoachman. Used under CC BY-SA 3.0.

and participation in sexual activity. Moreover, it implies activeness in sexual activity as the penetrator rather than passivity as the penetrated.[678] Reconsidering the function of the apotropaic phallus, specifically that of the erect phallus, its effectiveness as a protective symbol often relies on this characterisation as sexually active, foreshadowing penetration and, in some cases, ejaculation.[679] This sexual activeness is made particularly clear in a stone relief from Leptis Magna dating to the second century AD (figure 103).[680] This relief shows a horse- legged phallus with its own smaller (but still exaggeratedly large) erection. The erection points towards and ejaculates into a rendering of the Evil Eye. Of course, the images in question for

[678] Walters 1997: 30-31 explains that the 'active' partner would have always had a phallus, even in homosexual relationships between females (at least in the imaginations of male authors).
[679] On depictions of the ejaculating phallus, see Parker 2021.
[680] Stone relief from Leptis Magna, Libya. Unknown dimensions. In situ (?). Parker 2021: 177-178, fig. 11.3.

this chapter are not as explicit as this, but this depiction does give an indication of the implication behind erections in supposedly protective imagery.

Also crucial to the depiction of the apotropaic erection is the specific means of protection provided by the symbol. As Parker notes, 'the phalli may be regarded as *aggressive*…in attacking the Eye'.[681] In other words, the erect phallus could pose a threat of non-consensual penetration.[682] Threat of non-consensual penetration was often used as a deterrent in ancient Rome, made abundantly clear by this poem narrated by the permanently erect god Priapus:[683]

> *Percidere puer, moneo, futuere puella.*
>
> *Barbatum furem tertia poena manet.*[684]

This poem, designed to act as a threat to trespassers, details three different acts of penetrative rape aimed at different people based on gender and age, reserving the 'worst' act of penetration, irrumation, for the adult male. Another poem is even more graphic in its threat of rape:

> *Quod sum ligneus, ut vides, Priapus*
>
> *et falx lignea ligneusque penis,*
>
> *prendam te tamen et tenebo prensum*
>
> *totamque hanc sine fraude, quantacunque est,*

[681] Parker 2021: 127. Emphasis my own.
[682] Slane and Dickie 1993: 488-490; van de Wiel 2019: 204-207.
[683] Richlin 1992: xvi-xvii discusses Priapus as an embodiment of the phallocentrism of Roman culture (and patriarchal societies in general): 'male, aggressive, controlling boundaries.' Cf. van de Wiel 2019: 205-207. Richlin also presents an interesting critique of the term 'patriarchy' which is directly relevant to this thesis (1992: xvii-xviii).
[684] *Priapea* 13: 'Girl, watch your cunt; boy keep your ass from grief. Another threat awaits the bearded thief.' (Tr. Hooper 1999: 56).

tormento citaeraque tensiorem

ad costam tibi septimam recondam.[685]

This latter example associates itself with a physical depiction of the god, specifying how objects displaying an erect phallus could be seen to function as apotropaion.[686] In the case of the mosaics in question, should they truly have served a protective purpose, the ithyphallic African males have been placed in the same role as Priapus, i.e., as penetrative rapists. However, it was also the (presumably nude) viewer of the mosaics who would be perceiving this characterisation of African male sexuality. The unique vulnerability of bath dwellers – exposed through nudity to the elements, the Evil Eye, and the lustful gaze – make them suitable targets for a sexual aggressor. So, not only does the specific sequence of images in this bath complex show a sudden and perhaps humorous subversion of the characterisation of African male sexuality – from accidentally exposed, necessarily submissive attendant to sexually active and deliberately nude participant – the representation of a permanently erect phallus illustrates African male sexuality as aggressive and out of control, at least in these instances.

It is interesting to consider here the lack of control that certain African males may have faced over their own sexuality and gender identity as a result of images and ideas like these. The depiction of the accidental exposure of the bath attendant's phallus highlights this. The artist/commissioner of the mosaic made the choice to show his penis falling out from the bottom of his clothes, but a viewer

[685] Priapea 6: 'Though I'm just a wood Priapus / with a wooden cock and sickle, / I'll still get you in my clutches / and (no kidding) I'll insert this – / every single fibre tauter / than a catapult or lyre – / right up to your seventh rib bone.' (Tr. Hooper 1999: 50).
[686] On the *Priapea* and the threat of rape, see Richlin 1992: 121-122.



Figure 104: Sculpture. Elderly male. Black marble. C. AD 125-175. From the Esquiline area of Rome, Italy. Louvre, Paris, inv. Ma 1354. Source: Louvre online collections https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010275490 (accessed 22/09/25). © 2010 Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Thierry Ollivier.

would presume that it is his own clumsiness that allowed this to happen. As a consequence, the figure in the mosaic and those he represents is condemned to be seen in a negative light for a decision out of his control.[687] This condemnation of subject through 'accidental' exposure of genitals can also be seen in the more widespread 'fisherman' image type of the late Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman period, illustrated by a particularly striking black marble example from the Esquiline

[687] This concept is adapted from Berger 1972: 51, who comments upon a painting called *Vanity*. This painting shows a nude woman, painted for the pleasure of the artist and her voyeurs. However, she is shown holding a mirror to highlight vanity, "thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness [the artist] had depicted for [their] own pleasure".

district of Rome (figure 104).[688] In this instance, the exposure of the phallus contributes to the pathetic and perhaps sympathetic characterisation of this figure's age, status, and his body's fragility. Though there is no suggestion that this figure would have been seen as sexualised, perhaps in contrast to the recurrent sexualisation of African males in Hellenistic and especially Roman art, the accidentally exposed phallus is similarly used here to invoke some kind of negative response in the viewer, be it pity, repulsion, or a stark reflection of the reality of aging and the lack of control over one's body associated with lower or enslaved status.

This also applies to the ithyphallic swimmers, who have been freely depicted as aroused and, therefore, not in control of their own sexual feelings, which are also possibly seen as aggressive. The artists have fetishized these African males, allowing for viewers to see them in a non-consensually erotic light, and, in return, African males are cursed to be seen as overly sexual people. The characterisation of their sexuality is paradoxical: they are both permanently sexually dominant which, in this situation, is a negative characteristic which denotes aggression, and also forced into sexual submission through their lack of control over their own sexual narrative, another negative characterisation. Finally, the macrophallic depictions of African males from the Casa dello Scultore are explicit in their animalistic illustration of uncontrolled bodies and, as a result, sexuality.[689]

This consideration of the formation of sexual and gender identity by others is paralleled in modern stereotypes held in the white imagination about Black males,

[688] Black marble sculpture from the Esquiline area of Rome, Italy. H. 121 cm. Louvre, Paris, inv. Ma 1354 (MR 314; N 706). Laubscher 1982: 99-100 no. 1b, Taf. 3. Cf. Laubscher 1982: 99-103 nos 1a-1q; Smith 1998: 253-255 for more examples of the type.
[689] On the non-ideal phallus as a means of 'Othering', see McNiven 1995.

originating from the mistreatment of enslaved Black males during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This mistreatment was evident in physical abuse, such as sexual assault by white men and women and forced relationships and 'breeding programmes' with enslaved Black women, but also came in the form of fetishisation of their bodies and sexualities in white fantasy.[690] On the one hand, Black males were seen as exotic and desirable; on the other, they were hypersexual and aggressive. Males were forced by their (male) masters to work with no clothes on their bottom halves,[691] an oppressive tactic which served to both degrade the enslaved and satisfy erotic curiosity of white men and women. Describing some young Black waiters in Virginia, Lieutenant William Feltman wrote in a 1781 journal entry 'I can Assure you It would Surprize a person to see these [damned] black boys how well they are hung.'[692] In fact, the macrophallism of Black males was often speculated about by whites,[693] a mythology unfortunately still prevalent today,[694] which embodies the sexual fetishisation and abuse of Black males as well as the widespread belief that they were aggressive rapists. As bell hooks writes, '[t]he history of the black male body begins…with projections, with the imposition onto that body of white racist sexist pornographic sexual fantasies. Central to this fantasy is the idea of the black male

[690] hooks 2004, esp. 63-65; Foster 2011; Davis 2014; Curry 2018: 13-14. I must note here that sexual abuse of enslaved persons has historically not been limited to the abuse of enslaved Black Africans. As Elbourne (2014: 1) writes, '[t]he obligation to provide sexual labour was a critical feature of enslavement…in almost every society in which slavery existed. Control of the bodies of the enslaved was central to slavery, no matter the theological or legal underpinnings of particular societies.' Cf. Huemoeller 2016: 2, '[w]e know of no historical slave system that did not involve sexual exploitation'. I have chosen to focus on the treatment of Black males due to the specific demonisation of their sexuality and mythologies around their bodies which, unfortunately, continue today.
[691] Kitossa 2021: 17.
[692] Jordan 1968: 159, quoting an entry from the 22nd of June, 1971 from the military journal of William Feltman (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 'The journal of Lt. William Feltman, 1781-82).
[693] Jordan 1968: 158; Lemelle 2010: 38.
[694] Kitossa 2021; Russell 2021.

rapist.'[695] Black men were framed in white consciousness as animalistic and out of control, sexually uncivilised due to their skin colour and origins. They were seen as rapists of white women, another stereotype which continued even after the abolition of slavery.[696]

In the ancient context, it has already been seen how African males, particularly young boys, were subject to sexual fantasy and abuse under enslavement. What is especially notable here, however, is that there is also a stereotype of hypersexual aggression which is mirrored in a completely different historical and geographical context. Enslaved Black males in the US faced a similarly paradoxical characterisation of their sexuality: imagined to be hypersexual aggressors, perpetrators of rape against white women, yet in reality they were forced to have sex under the fantasies of their masters and eroticised by white women. As Foster describes, '[t]he sexual exploitation of enslaved black men took place within a cultural context that fixated on black male bodies with both desire and horror.'[697] These fictitious beliefs around Black male sexuality were used to excuse their abhorrent mistreatment by white people, and as motivation for the continued exclusion from and mistreatment of Black males within society, ensuring that they were and are continually perceived as low status. This combined fascination and disgust is reflected in the treatment of African males in antiquity. They are depicted in art as perhaps the most (sexually) desirable enslaved boys, but their bodies are also subject to gross caricaturising, their genitalia constructed on the whims of the

[695] hooks 2004: 63.
[696] hooks 2004, esp. 74-75; Curry 2018: 1-2, 'Black men, specifically hetero-sexual Black men, remain isolated to the categories of violence, deviance, and sexual pathology.'
[697] Foster 2011: 448.

artist who could depict them as ideal passive boys, clumsy macrophallic enslaved males, or sexually aggressive animals. In any of these cases, the portrayal of their sexuality serves to subdue. The need to subdue enslaved 'Others' through exoticization and negative construction of sexuality is a continued characteristic of societies which benefited from slavery.

While this transhistorical comparison of the characterisation of the bodies and sexuality of enslaved and other marginalised peoples is fruitful, a crucial distinction must be made between that of ancient Africans and that of modern Black men. The mythology around Black male sexuality and genitalia has been widespread in the modern white (and other non-Black)[698] imagination(s) since the trans-Atlantic slave trade; they were and are perceived as macrophallic, hypersexual, and aggressive, and continue to be frequently portrayed as such in modern media.[699] Unlike these widespread modern stereotypes, most of the depictions of macro- and ithyphallic African males from antiquity are contained within this chapter. While it was an iconographic device that *could* be employed by artists in the construction of African male bodies and sexuality, it was *not* a stereotype of their race,[700] unlike, for instance, their tightly curled hair, which appears in almost all depictions, or furrowed brow, which appears across many different image 'types'. Furthermore, throughout the research undertaken into the conception of African sexuality for this chapter, I did not discover any references to African genitalia in ancient literary sources, whereas other physical features are

[698] See Russell 2021 for a discussion on the perception of the genitalia and sexuality of Black males in modern Japan.
[699] Kitossa 2021.
[700] Contra. Thompson 1989: 107, 'the macrophallic black is a traditional theme in Roman iconography'.

discussed, and Ptolemy is the only relevant literary source which directly speculates about the sexuality of Africans. So, while it is interesting to consider the context and impact of these images, it cannot be said for certain that this context and impact was widespread. Rather it seems to have been limited to these few instances (and any that have not survived). Once again, they give an indication as to how African male gender and sexuality could be characterised in art and the impact that this could have, but not an indication of stereotype. In the same way that the construction of African male gender meant that they *could* be portrayed as acrobats, or *pueri delicati*, the construction of African male gender meant that they *could* be portrayed as macrophallic, ithyphallic, or more broadly hypersexual. And, once again, this characterisation existed in *fantasy*, not as a reflection of reality.

Despite this, generalising statements about the genitalia and sexuality of African males in the ancient world have historically been made. Balsdon, in his *Romans and Aliens* (1979), suggests that 'Ethiopians were naturally thought to share the common African quality of being over sexed and in consequence to have a sinister fascination for women.'[701] Thompson, in his *Romans and Blacks* (1989), recognises the modern perception of Black sexuality and links it to the ancient world:

> The stereotype associating blacks with hypersexuality (which recalls the similar image current among Europeans of the sixteenth

[701] Balsdon 1979: 218.

> and seventeenth centuries) no doubt had considerable currency and vitality among Romans of all social classes.[702]

Each of these authors frame African sexuality in the ancient world along the lines of modern stereotypes but do not refer to Ptolemy or any source which directly relates to the sexuality of Africans. Instead, they both rely on sources which seem, in actuality, to frame Roman women as hypersexual and African males as the targets of their desires,[703] in what Thompson describes as 'xenophilic promiscuity'.[704] Their bodies have been subject to a similar characterisation by Snowden. Discussing the physical characteristics of Ethiopians in Graeco-Roman art, Snowden states that 'there can be little doubt that the Greeks and Romans were well acquainted with types we today call Negroes' and that 'their artists left us a rather accurate picture'.[705] Under this preface, he implies that macrophallism is one of these 'accurate' characteristics, despite its absence from literary sources.[706] These generalised statements about the sexuality and bodies of African males lack significant evidence, instead mirroring contemporary stereotypes of Black male sexuality using limited and tenuous evidence, an inaccurate reflection of the ancient evidence.

[702] Thompson 1989: 107. Balsdon (1979: 218 n. 19) makes this link more subtly in his notes, stating '(In the days of slavery in America, it was believed that the negro possessed outstanding sexual potency.)'
[703] E.g., Calp. *Decl.* 2; Juv. 6.598-601.
[704] Thompson 1989: 107.
[705] Snowden 1970: 22.
[706] Snowden 1970: 23.

Epilogue: 'Galen' and the 'Black phallic fantastic'

Kitossa's chapter on the 'Black phallic fantastic' and the portrayal of Black male genitalia and sexuality in 'Western' popular culture begins with a discussion of the ancient Mediterranean. Citing the Timgad mosaic as evidence for the Roman world, and associating earlier Greek portrayals of satyrs with African ethnicity, he essentially argues that the dominant cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, namely Greeks and Romans, conceived of Black genitalia in the same way as the modern racist stereotype perpetuated in the white imagination,[707] that 'Black men…are hypersexual, priapic, and prone to be rapists'.[708] This claim, however, lacks significant evidence, much like the generalisations discussed above. Despite this, Kitossa states the following:

> …as early as the second century CE, Galen, the Greek and Roman slave physician so highly esteemed by the West and restored to the West by enterprising early Medieval Jewish intellectuals…presaged the race "science" of the nineteenth century. Galen, as Chaikh Anta Diop (1991) observes, "reduced the characteristic traits of the

[707] Kitossa 2021: 7-13.
[708] Kitossa 2021: 3.

> Black person to two, 1) inordinate length of his penis, 2) hilarity, strong propensity for laughter".[709]

Notably, Kitossa does not directly cite Galen, nor does his source, Diop. Brackman, whom Kitossa goes on to quote, similarly makes unsubstantiated references:

> In all hot countries, Galen concluded [Black] men suffer from an excess of overheated 'black bile' that causes them to grow up 'dry, slender, and as it were skeletonized' – and which also accounts for their tendency toward intellectual and emotional instability. The Negro, however, suffers from this debilitating syndrome in its most extreme form. To it are attributable his crinkly hair, meager growth of beard, large nostrils, and thick lips, as well as his frivolous disposition, hypersexuality, and lack of cultural attainments.[710]

An ancient reference to the macrophallism or hypersexuality of African (or Ethiopian) males of this kind would be directly relevant to this chapter as an indication that it may have been some kind of established mythology about African male bodies and their attributed sexualities, rather than an inference from a few particular image types.

However, while Galen does refer to the physiognomic characteristics of different ethnic groups, which he believed to be influenced by climate, nowhere in the corpus of his published work does he make such a reference to African genitalia or sexuality. Instead, this reference first appears in *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-*

[709] Kitossa 2021: 6, quoting Diop 1991: 216.
[710] Kitossa 2021: 6, quoting Brackman 1977: 86. Brackman does reference known Galen texts (e.g., Galen *UP* 2.161) but none which discuss 'hypersexuality' of any kind.

jawāhir (*The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*), a tenth century Arabic text by geographer and historian al-Masʿūdī. Translating this reference, Lewis says the following: 'On the blacks in general, Masʿūdī quotes Galen, who, he says,

> mentions ten specific attributes of the black man, which are all found in him and in no other: frizzy hair, thin eyebrows, broad nostrils, thick lips, pointed teeth, smelly skin, black eyes, furrowed hands and feet, a long penis and great merriment. Galen says that merriment dominates the black man because of his defective brain, whence also the weakness of his intelligence.'[711]

A characterisation of this kind does not appear elsewhere in the published works of Galen, and nowhere in these works does he use such derogatory language to discuss the physical appearance or mental character of Africans. While it is certainly a possibility that this passage refers to a now unknown work of Galen, it is also a possibility that it is entirely fabricated. Furthermore, the socio-political context of this passage must be considered; al-Masʿūdī would have undeniably been influenced by the contemporary Arabic slave trade of the 'Zanj', the name given to the Bantu population of the Swahili Coast, and the racist sentiments expressed towards this group at this time. Parallels can be found in other tenth century Arabic texts, such as one by Ibn al-Faqīh who suggests that Black Africans are born as 'black, murky, malodorous, stinking, curly-haired, with uneven limbs, deficient minds and depraved passions.'[712] Consequently, any discussion of African characteristics by Galen known to al-Masʿūdī may have been twisted and

[711] Lewis 1971: 34.
[712] Lewis 1971: 27, translation of Ibn al-Faqīh al Hamadānī, *Mukhtasar Kitāb al-Buldān*.

caricatured to fit the contemporary negative stereotypes. Given this context, it cannot be used as a reliable representation of the characterisation of African ethnic characteristics from antiquity.

More concerning than the questionable origins of this supposed quotation by Galen is its continued use by white supremacist groups to further their cause.[713] As recently as 2019, the misattributed quotation was used in an article titled 'What Did the Ancient Greeks Think of Blacks?', published by alt-right internet magazine *American Renaissance*.[714] The article's author, writing under the pseudonym Hippocrates, claims that 'Galen's observations were remarkably accurate', specifically that 'black men typically have large penises'. They support this claim with pseudo-scientific records and state that higher levels of testosterone and androgen 'are responsible for penis size…the stronger sex drive and greater aggressiveness of blacks'. Reflected here are the racist attitudes discussed above which have historically directly led to the mistreatment of Black men based upon inaccurate characterisations of their genitalia and sexuality. In this instance, the study of antiquity has been directly and inaccurately co-opted to further the white supremacist cause, highlighting why it is so important to continue the academic dialogue around the presence of Black Africans in the ancient Mediterranean and to dispel racist fantasies about antiquity. The material evidence suggests that, while

[713] *Pharos*, a blog dedicated to researching the 'appropriations of Greco-Roman antiquity by hate groups' ('Introduction to Pharos', https://pharos.vassarspaces.net 26/09/24), documented one such case from 2006 (*Pharos* 2018, 'Ancient Greek doctor Galen cited to authorize racist IQ "data"', https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2018/10/05/ancient-greek-doctor-galen-cited-to-authorize-racist-iq-data/ 26/09/24).
[714] *American Renaissance* 2019, 'What Did the Ancient Greeks Think of Blacks?, https://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20191120005841/https://www.amren.com/news/2019/11/what-did-the-ancient-greeks-think-of-blacks/ (26/09/24). Please note that I have included a link to an archived version of the original post in order to prevent traffic to the original page.

African males *could* be portrayed as macrophallic or hypersexual, it was not a prevailing stereotype, nor was it exclusive to the characterisation of African men. Further, the few instances where this type of characterisation does occur do not speak of the sexuality or gender of African males, but rather of the unrestrained fantasy of the dominant group; the construction of African male gender in art reveals far more about the imagined viewer than it does the imagined subject.

Conclusion

> ...race and gender exist in tandem to transform profoundly the ways that each works alone... Race itself is gendered, marking distinctions by way of rules of sexual proximity and ideologies of sexual being. Constructed through gendered representations, race in turn reconstructs gender identities... [Racialised gender] assumes differences based on race among women and men and differences based on gender among groups defined by race, ethnicity, or nationhood.[715]

Racial and gender identity are synchronous and intertwined. The construction, performance and perception of each influences the construction, performance and perception of the other, forming a complex mesh of identity which cannot be separated; attempts to separate the constituent parts of this mesh lead to erasure and misunderstanding. The qualities of race and gender are also inherently interwoven with other complex qualities such as sexuality and status.

For the African males at the centre of this study, a separation of race and gender and subsequent erasure of gender has been repeated in the scholarship, forming in the modern imagination a distinctly racialised yet ungendered perception. Contributing to this characterisation has been the scholarly treatment of images of African males, reduced only to their 'African' or 'Black' race, which have almost exclusively been used as evidence for or against racial discrimination and as support for discussions regarding the social position of Africans in antiquity based

[715] Boris 2003: 10.

on their perceived race. This thesis has proven the necessity and value of adopting an intersectional lens through which to view the material, conducting analysis from a 'multi-axis' perspective in order to develop a fuller, richer understanding of the artistic construction of African males in the Hellenistic and early Imperial periods. This necessity was made clear from the outset through the preliminary study conducted in chapter 1, which combined historiographic and iconographic analyses to revisit two images of African youths which have typically been mischaracterised as enslaved. A gender-focused analysis of the iconography revealed that they were more likely to have been athletes than enslaved males, and demonstrated that the construction of status significantly alters the perception of their gender. This initial introduction to intersectionality highlighted the importance of revisiting these objects, many of which have already been studied at great length in earlier research.

Applying a multi-axis, intersectional framework to the iconography of African males in Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman art has brought to light the complexity of the construction of their racialised gender. Depictions of African males as athletes, though disparate, epitomise an ideal construction of masculinity within the sphere of the gymnasium, a space which was necessarily reliant on the intertwined relationship between status, gender and race/ethnicity, highlighting further the importance of an intersectional approach. This idealised construction of gender seems somewhat lost elsewhere in the case studies identified for this study, where African male gender is largely pushed beyond the Graeco-Roman hegemonic, masculine norms. For instance, African male gender was subject to feminisation thorough its iconographic construction in a series of images of thaumatopoietic

acrobats. The θαυματοποιοί, or 'wonder-makers', of chapter two straddle dichotomised iconographies from antiquity, each exclusively linked to male or female gender. On the one hand, they are related to a roughly contemporary series of bronze statuettes which portray male athletes performing handstands. On the other, they can be associated with the traditionally feminine iconography of girls as thaumatopoietic entertainers, found commonly in earlier art from Magna Graecia.

Also revealed in the thaumatopoietic imagery is an exoticized eroticisation of the African male body, a means to construct a non-ideal, distinctly racially-'Othered' male gender which emerges across the remaining thematic groups. The juxtaposition of an athletic form and a contorted body composition invites the gaze, promotes fantasy, and suitably combines 'Otherness' with desirability in the eyes of a Roman viewer. The depiction of African males as thaumatopoietic entertainers likens their status to that of sex workers, selling their bodies for the pleasure of others and, crucially, demeaning themselves. Yet, a lack of corresponding evidence to suggest a reality of African males as entertainers reveals that this artistic trend may, in fact, instead represent a fantasy, a construction of African male gender existing only in the Roman imagination, rather than a reflection of a subjugated position held by African males in ancient Roman society. Should this have been the case, these images actually represent a *desire* for the othering of African masculinity through the unrestrained medium of art.

A sexualisation of African males and their bodies shifts from implicit to overt in the two remaining case studies, which focus on young boys as *pueri delicati* and the non-ideal depictions of genitalia respectively. The first, which constitutes a

particularly popular fashion for the depiction of African males across the period in question, depicts African males as desirable sexual subjects, but with a crucially undesirable construction of their male gender distinct from that of the idealised self. They epitomise a fetish for young, foreign boys whose admiration from older males hinged entirely on their subjugation into low status. Crucially, their literal objectification in artworks immortalises their youth, preventing the aging process feared by the real owners of enslaved boys yet necessary for the ability to become men, which was fundamental in the construction of ideal masculinity. The popularity for artistic depictions of African males in this role reflects both their practical suitability as naturally bronze-skinned, distinctly racially 'Other' subjects, and the unique position held by African males in the Roman sexual fantasy.

Finally, the non-ideal depictions of genitalia highlight the flexibility of African male sexuality in the Roman imagination. As suggested by the *pueri delicati* and, to an even greater extent, the orally penetrated head-lamps, artistic representations of African males often relied on the implication (or, in the case of the latter, explicit depiction) of sexual submission to construct a distinctly un-Roman male gender. Macrophallic and, even more so, ithyphallic representations function similarly to construct a non-ideal, low-status masculinity, yet they rely on sexual activeness or aggression. Here the characterisation of African males as sexually submissive subjects to be dominated, as seen in the perception of *pueri delicati*, is lost. Instead, we see an antithetical characterisation of African male sexuality, presented as animalistic, out of control, and aggressive. Yet, despite the apparent contradiction between these two characterisations, each functions in its own way to construct a non-ideal male gender.

Chronological and sometimes geographical patterns seem to emerge in the iconographies, though the lack of secure provenance for many artefacts naturally obscures the strength of any possible conclusions of this nature. The most identifiable pattern seems to appear in the iconography of young enslaved boys, who remained a popular visual theme throughout the Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman periods. However, a shift in fashionable iconography occurs over the course of the period in question. Initially, young enslaved African boys are found most predominantly as emaciated, pathetic, skeletal figures in an iconography most commonly found on Hellenistic vessels. However, another iconography, which seems to originally emerge already in the Hellenistic period, becomes far more popular in the first and second centuries AD. The latter iconography, that of semi-idealised, nude *pueri delicati*, appears predominantly in bronze statuettes or sculptures, and presents an entirely different conception of African male gender, though still reliant on their subjugation. The popularity of this iconography coincides chronologically with the less prevalent trend for depicting African males as acrobats, perhaps signifying a curiosity with the form and limits of the African male body at this time. A more localised trend can be found in Pompeii in the late first century BC to early first century AD (though examples are also seen elsewhere), where African males are depicted as having non-ideal genitalia, either through animalistic or clumsy macrophallism or sexually uncontrolled ithyphallism. Despite the largely localised nature of this iconographic fashion, it is probably significant that this trend emerged concurrently with others which sexualised African males in some way, for instance the orally penetrated head lamps which I have argued depict irrumation, or the sexually desirable, submissive enslaved boys who have been

immortalised in bronze. Notably, one lamp displaying the orally-penetrated, disembodied head of an African male was discovered in Pompeii, perhaps an indication of local taste.

Also shown in this thesis are thematically linked artefacts which do not seem to represent an iconographic trend. Though some examples of African males as athletes appear in the Hellenistic period, no image 'type' emerges, and the evidence remains disparate and unrelated. Similarly, the few surviving depictions of African jugglers from the Hellenistic period are stand-alone artefacts, and do not show a propensity for African males as thaumatopoietic entertainers at that time. The case studies presented for these superficially linked groups provide interesting suggestions of how African male gender *could* be constructed, though they do not represent any considerable trend for the construction of African male gender in the collective Graeco-Roman imagination.

Notable also is the inconsistency between the artistic repertoire, which reveals a taste especially for young African males throughout late Hellenistic and early Imperial Roman art,[716] and the literary or epigraphic evidence, where they are paid relatively little attention. As far as is possible to tell, the artistic trend may reflect a collective fantasy, a construction of African male gender which exists predominantly in the imagination rather than one grounded in reality. However, this conclusion is speculative given the incomplete nature of surviving evidence and the fact that the literature is subject to its own fantasies and biases.

[716] On the notable presence of young males, see Bell 2022: 434.

Clearly, there was not a single formula for iconographically constructing African male identity, and consequently there is not a single way to characterise African male gender as it was formed in the Graeco-Roman imagination. Rather, artistic constructions of African male gender were fluid, changing across time and space and also dependant on the intent of the artist and/or owner. More often than not, it was presented as non-ideal in some capacity, and we can see how gender and sexuality could be pushed outside the ideal, masculine norms in order to subjugate this particular racial group.

Moving forward

This thesis has mostly eschewed consideration of the construction of African *female* gender in Graeco-Roman art. Intersectionality as an analytical framework has its foundations in the erasure of the Black female experience in both race and gender equality movements, founded upon the groundbreaking work of Black women such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and her predecessors and applied to Classical studies most evidently by the Black female academic Shelley Haley. Further, racialised gender as a concept has its roots in Black feminism. A natural point of progression in the study of the construction of African gender in Graeco-Roman art following this thesis would be to extend this intersectional lens to the consideration of African females. However, a practical complication may inhibit this particular avenue for progression: securely identifiable images of African females are rare, almost non-existent, in the extant Hellenistic and early Imperial art,[717] a marked

[717] Bell 2022: 434.

contrast to their popularity in earlier Classical vase painting. While an intersectional approach to the construction of African female gender would be a fruitful addition to our understanding of their place in the Graeco-Roman imagination, such an analysis must rely on the nature of their *omission* from the artistic trends, comparative to the popularity of images of African males.

More broadly, this thesis provides a justification for the application of an intersectional lens to the study of art in antiquity and beyond. Such an intersectional framework only enhances our understanding of the construction of race and gender, as well as sexuality, status, and more, and a multi-axis approach should be considered fundamental in the study of images of any group to gain the richest possible understanding of intertwined constructions. To reiterate the words of Shelley Haley, '[w]e must keep moving forward.'[718]

[718] Haley 2025: 663.

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