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A Classical F.T.M.

Lucian's *The Dialogue of the Courtesans*, from the 2nd Century C.E.

by Andrew Matzner from the F.T.M. Newsletter, U.S.A.

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Megilla, who is very aware of how her male energy dominates her psyche, and is brave enough to act on her feelings.

Is there such a thing as a 'history of F.T.M.

Transsexuality'? And if so, how far back does it go? Some people think that only with the

development of surgical techniques did the 'transsexual' come into being. But if one studies accounts of F.T.M. transgendered people through the ages, it seems likely that some probably would have taken advantage of hormones and/or surgery, had these options existed.

I love reading about ancient Greece and Rome - they were incredibly cosmopolitan societies that remind me a lot of today's world. These complex cultures also had their fair share of sexual minorities - gays, lesbians, cross-dressers. I wondered if people who we'd consider F.T.M. were around back then - is the feeling that you were 'born into the wrong body' something that can occur in any culture, at any time? To me the answer seems obvious - sure, why

not? Yet there are scholars that insist that the 'homosexual' is a nineteenth-century invention and that only the 'patriarchal medical establishment' could have created a transsexual. So I begin reading classical literature to see if I could discover anyone 2,000 years ago who felt some of the same things that some of us are feeling today.

And this is what I found: a male writer named Lucian who lived near Syria in the second century C.E., wrote in ancient Greek, a series of dialogues between female prostitutes. It is not known whether these mini-plays were completely made up by Lucian or if they were based on women he had known or heard stories about. At any rate, in *Dialogue Five* in the work *The Dialogue of the Courtesans* the following scenario unfolds:

One courtesan (Clonarium) is asking her friend (Leaena) about the rumour that Leaena is living with another woman (Megilla), as her lover. Leaena replies that it is true and proceeds to describe how this came about. Megilla and another woman, Demonassa, had given a drinking party to which Leaena had been invited to provide musical entertainment. After the party was over, Megilla asked Leaena to get into bed with her and Demonassa. Leaena did this, and soon found herself being kissed and caressed by her two hostesses. Although Leaena didn't object, she did get a shock when a few moments later Megilla pulled off what turned out to be a wig to reveal the hyper-masculine crew-cut of a male athlete, stated that her name was 'Megillus' (the male version of Megilla) and proclaimed that she was married to Demonassa, who was her 'wife'.

At this point Leaena is confused and thinks that Megilla is really a man. She asks Megilla if she has a penis, to which she replies that she does not need one, for she uses a better method. As Leaena continues to be bewildered, Megilla further claims that she is 'all man' and states "I was born a woman like the rest of you, but I have the mind and desires and everything else of a man. Leaena then asks if those 'desires' are sufficient, since she does not have a penis. But Megilla is quick to reassure Leaena and argues, "you'll find me as good as any man - I have a substitute of my own, just give me a chance and you will see".

Leaena ends up accepting Megilla as her lover and moving in with her, and the little vignette ends.

Some scholars have looked at this dialogue and viewed it as a condemnation of lesbianism and a caricature of masculine women. On the other hand, after carefully studying the dialogue's vocabulary and structure, I feel that, while we will never know whether these courtesans were completely made up or based on real people and events, the author, Lucian, has characterised a woman, Megilla, who is very aware of how her male energy dominates her psyche, and is brave enough to act on her feelings. Megilla is a strong and dangerous figure who has usurped male power prerogatives. After all, the resolution of the dialogue presents no negative outcome for this 'gender-law-breaking' woman - unlike the tales of the Amazons, in which those feminist heroines always end up being subdued and raped by men.

For me it was refreshing to meet so far in the distant past, a woman who perceived her gender to be at odds with her biological sex, was articulate about expressing her feelings, and managed to cope successfully in the only way an F.T.M. 2,000 years ago knew how.

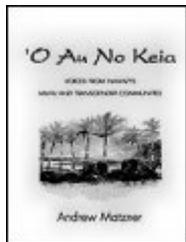
Andrew Matzner

From Andrew Matzner's website:  Andrew Matzner has a Master's Degree in Anthropology and another in Social Work, and is a licensed Clinical Social-Worker, Psychotherapist and Life-Coach. He has also studied Emotional Freedom Techniques (E.F.T.) and Hypnosis, and has completed Reiki I and II training. He has a history of working with people dealing with serious mental-illnesses, starting as a case manager and then moving on to mental-health support services, treating clients in their homes and out in the community. Since being licensed as a psychotherapist in 2006, he has worked with a wide variety of clients in his private practice and specialises in pain management, emotional eating, and gender identity issues.



He is the author of a book about Hawai'i (*'O Au No Keia: Voices from Hawai'i's māhū and Transgender Communities*), and co-author of a book about northern Thailand (*Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives of Thailand's Transgendered Youth*, with LeeRay Costa). His newest book, *The Buddha Diet: A Guide to Creating a Positive Relationship with Food and Eating*, is also now available. He has also appeared several times as an expert commentator on *Taboo*, a television series on the National Geographic Channel in the U.S.A..

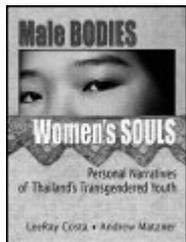
Andrew has been fortunate to spend extended amounts of time living in Japan, Thailand, Australia, and Hawai'i. Originally from New York, he currently lives in Roanoke, Virginia, U.S.A.. [More information about Andrew can be found on his website.](#) 



'O Au No Keia: Voices From Hawai'i's Māhū and Transgender Communities

Author: Andrew Matzner
Publisher: Xlibris (2001)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0738861616

From Amazon Books:  *'O Au No Keia* is a collection of spoken narratives by male-to-female transgendered people and māhū who live on the island of O'ahu. The powerfully moving stories in this book not only reveal the experiences of those who cross the boundaries of sex and gender, but also illuminate what it means to do so in the unique cultural context of Hawai'i.



Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives of Thailand's Transgendered Youth

Author: Andrew Matzner and LeeRay M. Costa
Publisher: Routledge (2007)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0789031143

From Amazon Books:  The Thai term *sao braphet song* (a "second type of woman") describes males who reject the gender of masculinity for femininity. *Male Bodies, Women's Souls: Personal Narratives of Thailand's Transgendered Youth* uses the narrative method, stories in the words of these "second type of women" to analyse these transgendered experiences. This previously ignored perspective of the Thai sex/gender system gained through this theoretical and methodological approach offers students and general readers a rich, more readily accessible foundation of knowledge about gendered subjectivity and sex/gender systems. The book features in-depth, autobiographical life histories from individual Thai transgendered youth. Life stories, told in the participants' own words, provides an engaging, at times touching, always insightful look at Thai culture's sex/gender system.

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