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Gender Identities Outside of the Binary Existed in Ancient Rome

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There is **physical, biological** and **textual evidence** for differing gender identities in **Rome**.



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Gender identities outside of the binary existed in Ancient Rome.

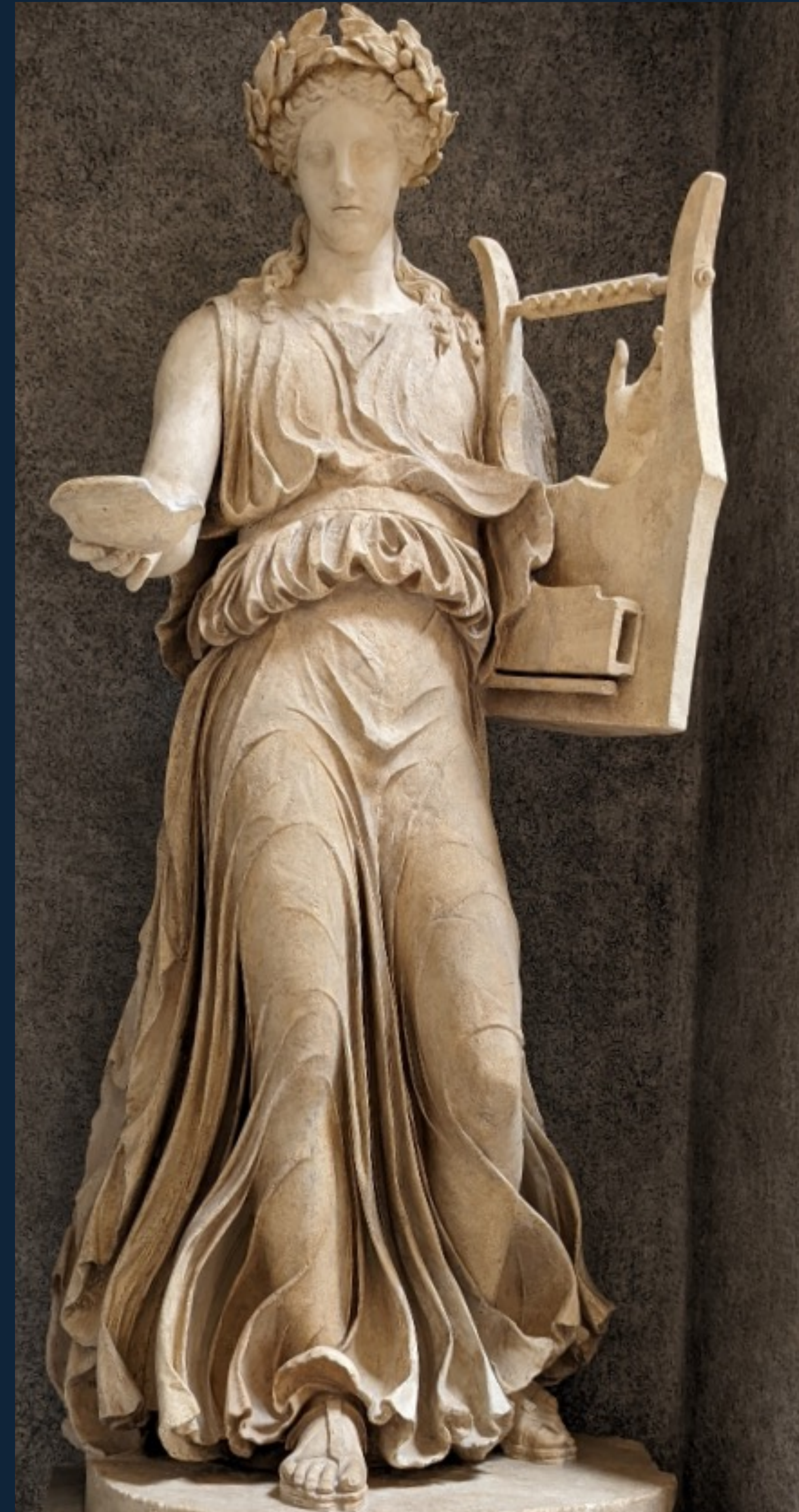
Transgenderism in Ancient Rome

The Romans understood the concept of transgender individuals despite their lack of an official noun, and Greco-Roman artists represented them within their work. Clothing from this period does not last, so the best place to look is their artwork.

My goal is to identify these ancient gender non-conforming people in artwork made during their time, specifically looking at marble sculptures of Apollo. Apollo is sometimes associated with traditionally “feminine” qualities and features from healing and music, to his beardless face and affinity for women’s clothing.

Research abroad

In May to June of 2022, I travelled to Rome and Naples, Italy. I analyzed 3 different statues of “Apollo Citharoedus” or “Apollo with a lyre”. I compared the statues of Apollo to other statues on display within the museums, including those statues of men, women and those between like Hermaphroditus and Dionysus.



Apollo Citharedo. Roman copy of 5th c. BCE Greek Original. Marble. Vatican Museums, Vatican City, Rome, Italy



Woman Wearing a Chiton. Roman. Parian Marble. Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy.

Who are you wearing?

Clothing in Rome was diverse in construction, quality and colors. These things, along with social status, age and gender, determine what was acceptable to wear in antiquity. Women of all social classes commonly wore attire that reached their feet, along with head coverings. Married women covered their hair to show their marital state and modesty.



Apollo seated with a lyre. Porphyry and Marble, 2nd c.CE. National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy.

Present-day impacts

Over 150 laws targeted towards transgender people were proposed in 2021, 13 of which were enacted into law. Two laws in Utah were proposed the following year. This research could help curb the othering of transgender people by showing history of those outside the gender binary.



Selene. Marble. Early imperial copy of 4th c. BCE. Capitoline Museums, Rome, Italy



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