

# LESBIANTIQUITY

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## VETTIUS VALENS FEVERISH WOMEN

LESBIANTIQUITY © Georgina Barker (Portknockie: Sapphizdat, 2024)

Vettius Valens translation, introduction, and notes © Rachel Hart 2024

Greek text from: Wilhelm Kroll, ed., *Vettii Valentis Anthologiarum Libri* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1908)

Back cover art: 'Astrologer' © Emily Setzer 2024

## THE TRANSLATOR

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Most recently I was a lecturer at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, where I created and taught Classics courses on subjects including Near Eastern literature, food and drink, and warfare. My scholarly research focuses on various aspects of social identity in the ancient world, as well as violence in literary and visual culture. I am currently starting my post-academic life in El Paso with my partner and our son.



## VETTIUS VALENS

Vettius Valens lived and wrote in the second century AD at Antioch. The Latin form of his name tells us he was a Roman citizen, though he describes his own travels throughout the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia. The Greek of his writing is both common (or *koine*) and educated.

His *Anthologiai* ('Anthologies') was completed around 175 AD and is a practical approach to understanding astrology, based on his reading of previous astrologers and his own experiences with interpreting horoscopes for clients.<sup>1</sup> The *Anthologiai* was passed down in nine books, but we cannot be sure these were Vettius' original demarcations; regardless, it is the longest extant astrological text from antiquity.

<sup>1</sup> Brooten (1996) pp. 128–9.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Ormand, Kirk. *Controlling Desires: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Westport (CT): Praeger Publishers, 2009.



## ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore  
a variety of options for the text:  
any variants in the original <Greek  
Latin> texts  
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words  
of the original text, replicating when possible  
word order, root meanings of words, and  
grammatical gender  $\left( \begin{matrix} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{matrix} \right)$  of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

## ANTHOLOGIAI 2.16.76\*

[< <sup>Venus</sup>  
Aphrodite > and Saturn] being eastern and toward the east  
wind, they masculinize women not only in deeds, but also those  
< <sup>going to bed</sup>  
sleeping > [f] with women complete men's < <sup>works</sup>  
tasks >:



ἑῶοι μὲν ὄντες καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀπηλιώτῃ τὰς γυναῖκας ἀρρενοῦσιν οὐ  
μόνον ταῖς πράξεσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺν γυναιξὶ κοιμώμεναι ἀνδρῶν ἔργα  
ἐπιτελοῦσιν·

\* Kroll 2.16 p. 76 ll. 3–5 (numbered 2.17.68 in Pingree's edition).

## NOTES

- *ἑῶοι μὲν ὄντες...* ; *being eastern...* : the subject of this sentence is both Venus and Saturn, to whom 'they' in the following line refers.

- *τὰς γυναῖκας ἀρρενοῦσιν*; *they masculinize women*: oppositional binaries underlie much of ancient astrology, and each celestial body has its own qualities, both inherently and due to its position; here, the position of Venus and Saturn in the east has a masculinizing effect, even on women. The result of this masculinization is outlined in the remainder of this passage.

- *σὺν γυναίξῃ κοιμώμεναι*; *those going to bed / sleeping [f] with women*: the verbal adjective *κοιμώμεναι* is specifically feminine in form, and thus must be describing women. Its literal meaning is 'lying down in bed', but Greek authors of all periods use this phrase as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (e.g. Homer, *Odyssey* 8.295, describing the sexual union of Ares and Aphrodite).

- *ἀνδρῶν ἔργα*; *men's works/tasks*: it is the act of lying with women that allows women to complete these tasks, asserting that it is a man's role to lie with women and, by extension, implying that it is a man's role to take the active role in intercourse, which is what the women described here are doing. This private sexual activity contrasts with *ταῖς πράξεσιν*, 'in deeds', in the previous line, which likely refers to public activities. This standard phrasing also appears in Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 3.15.9 (or 3.14.9).

## ANTHOLOGIAI 2.36.111\*

and [Capricorn] causes <enfeebling blindnesses  
dimming disabilities> because of [its]  
spine, manias, of fluids <disturbances  
troubles>, and also <phrenitis  
brain fever>,  
feverish women [f], *tribades*, (indecent  
licentious  
outrageous) ones [n], servile  
ones [m], shameful doers [m].



ποιεῖ δὲ ἀμαυρώσεις πηρώσεις διὰ τὴν ἄκανθαν, μανίας, δι' ὑγρῶν  
ὀχλουμένους, ἔτι δὲ φρενίτιδας γυναικοκαυσίαι τριβάδες ἀσελγεῖς  
λατρευτικοὶ αἰσχροποιοί.

\* Kroll 2.36 p. 111 ll. 6–8 (numbered 2.37.17 in Pingree's edition).

## NOTES

*Vettius includes inappropriate social behaviors here in a list of physical afflictions that befall those born under the sign Capricorn.*

- *διὰ τὴν ἄκανθαν*; because of [its] spine: a reference to the spines of the sea-goat, the symbol of Capricorn, whose physical qualities likewise affect the physical circumstances of those born under the sign.
- *γυναικοκαυσίαι*; feverish women [*f*]: while the oldest manuscript reads the text this way, *γυναικοκαυσίαι* is not attested elsewhere in ancient Greek, and thus some scholars attempt to 'correct' the text to something more common (e.g. Pingree suggests *γυναικες Καυνίαι*, 'Kaunian women': Brooten 1996, pp. 129–30 n. 50). However, none of the emendations contribute to the overall sense of the passage, and the most widely consulted version of Vettius' text is that of Kroll, which I follow here. I have translated by breaking the word down into its component parts. The first element, *γυναικο-*, is a common prefix in compound words and means 'woman'. The second element, *-καυσίαι*, is most likely derived from *καῦσος*, 'heat' or 'fever'. Combining the root meanings into the phrase 'feverish women' suits this passage perfectly as a bridge between medical afflictions and habitual behaviors; Brooten's (1996, pp. 129–30 n. 50) translation as 'inflamed for women' is more specific than this passage requires.
- *τριβάδες*; *tribades*: there is no satisfactory way to translate this term into English. Etymologically, it is derived from the verb *τρίβειν*, 'to rub' or 'to wear out by rubbing,' and can be defined as 'a woman who played the active role in sex, usually with another woman' (Ormand 2009 p. 19). Ormand's definition highlights an important aspect of the *tribas*: while she is most often described having sexual intercourse with other women, there are instances of the term (e.g. the Latin equivalent in Martial 7.67 – see LESBIANTIQUITY 17) where a *tribas* is said to be taking the active role in sexual intercourse with boys and with girls. Ormand correctly asserts that the more stigmatized aspect of the *tribas* is her assumption of masculine sexual roles rather than the gender of her partner, though both are seen by the ancient male reader as inappropriate.
- *λατρευτικοί*; *servile ones* [*m*]: this adjective typically refers to those who work in servitude for payment, but can also refer to those who are enslaved, and thus seen by most ancient authors (especially those following Aristotle) as naturally inferior.
- *αἰσχροποιοί*; *shameful doers* [*m*]: literally, 'those who act shamefully', but it can also serve as a euphemism for fellatio. The grammatically masculine form of this word and its appearance in this dehumanizing list of behavior supports such a reading here.



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