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The Trans Middle Ages: Incorporating Transgender and Intersex Studies into the History of Medieval Sexuality[*]

With the forty-fifth anniversary of the publication of John Boswell's landmark work *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980) rapidly approaching, the study of medieval sexuality is surely losing its claim to the moniker of an emerging field, if indeed that moment has not already long past. Where it was once fighting against a tide of scepticism to justify its academic legitimacy, it now possesses a canon of primary sources and historiography; a firm place on undergraduate and postgraduate syllabi; and growing acceptance within the realm of heritage and public engagement with the Middle Ages. After four decades of historical scholarship, what questions now motivate research in this area?

I contend that medieval trans and intersex studies represents the most important development in the current and future direction of the field of medieval sexuality studies, and that historians of premodern gender and sexuality would do well to become conversant in the contours of its debates. However, it is understandable that its effect on the field, and the discipline of medieval studies more broadly, has yet to be fully realised: the first English-language book-length studies of medieval trans and intersex topics were only published in 2020. Concurrently, the immense professional and personal challenges faced by researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic have meant that the routine work of keeping up to date with new publications has often been side-lined. Hence, as an invitation into the field, this essay will provide an outline of recent work on medieval trans and intersex studies; explain some of its shared assumptions and theoretical underpinnings; and assess its impact on the history of gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages.

Before we can assess the impact of trans and intersex studies, we first need to outline what questions have traditionally governed research in medieval sexuality. In this discussion, I will primarily concern myself with the histories of marginal genders and sexualities: that is, acts and identities which transgress the moral and legal norms of the societies under investigation. Medievalists have applied a wide range of conceptual frameworks to try to define this, each with their own significant methodological drawbacks: homosexuality, gay and lesbian identity, same-sex desire, sodomy, unnatural vice and queerness. For

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convenience, I will use the latter frame, queerness. Following Carolyn Dinshaw's statement that 'a *queer* history focuses on *sex* in particular as heterogenous and indeterminate, even as it recognizes and pursues sex's irreducible interrelatedness with other cultural phenomena', I find that its epistemological flexibility affords it more utility for this kind of wide-ranging discussion than the alternative of drawing on a medieval concept such as sodomy, whose definition was in any case contested during the period.[1]

Throughout this essay, I focus on scholarship which is historical in scope, meaning that it concerns itself with questions of the lived experience of queerness which it seeks to answer primarily (though not exclusively) through an analysis of documentary sources (e.g. legal records, letters) and non-fictional texts (e.g. chronicles and other forms of history-writing; philosophical, medical and scientific treatises; didactic and instructional texts). Work in this mode attempts to recover the biographies of potentially queer historical individuals, whether famous or obscure. Following in the traditions of social, cultural and intellectual history, it seeks to reconstruct popular, legal, philosophical and medical attitudes towards queerness in medieval societies and how they affected everyday queer life. On the other hand, I have elected largely to exclude the question of representation of queerness in fictive visual or textual media. Many of the researchers whose work I discuss here are not historians by training and would conventionally be classified as literary scholars or art historians. However, I have chosen to include their scholarship on the grounds that they engage with questions and sources that are at least partly historical in nature and that they are part of the broader conversations within the field of the history of sexuality.

I

There are three main research questions which have driven research into medieval queer history: identity, community and repression. Beginning with the theme of identity, at its most simplistic level this involves the identification of (potentially) queer lives in the historical record, whether through analysis of textual sources or material culture, or a combination of both.[2] Such efforts can give us

1. C. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC, and London, 1999), pp. 12–13, emphasis Dinshaw's. On the instability of the category of sodomy, see B. Burgwinkle, '*État Présent*: Queer Theory and the Middle Ages', *French Studies*, lx (2006), pp. 79–88.

2. On textual sources, see W.E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050–1230* (Cambridge and New York, 2004), pp. 73–85 (on Richard I); W.M. Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', in G. Dodd and A. Musson, eds, *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 22–47; R.E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses in Male Same-sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 2003), pp. 107–29 (on Richard II). On material culture, see J.M. Bennett, 'Two Women and their Monumental Brass, *c.* 1480', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, clxi (2008),

evidence for sexual, romantic and intimate acts and how they were perceived by outside observers, but almost always tell us frustratingly little about the interior lives of our individual case-studies or how they understood their own desires. Moving towards the conceptual level, historians have sought to understand how theologians and philosophers defined and categorised queer desire using notions such as sodomy and unnatural sin, and the practical consequences of these ideas for law, medicine and pastoral care.[3] The question of individuals' self-perception is trickier by far. Although literary scholars and art historians have led the charge in arguing for reading queer subjectivity into medieval texts and artworks, historians have also begun to explore these themes with the help of archival material, such as in Katherine Zieman's recent reading of the charges against the fifteenth-century English canon John Dey through the lens of clerical masculinity.[4] In this endeavour, queer historians owe a substantial debt to the work of scholars of feminist and women's history, who, as Joan Scott outlines, had in the 1980s and 1990s established gender as a productive category of historical analysis and had begun to explore the relationship between individual identity and broader ideological and political systems of gender.[5]

Moreover, there remains substantial disagreement over whether systems of gender and sexual relations in medieval societies can usefully be described in terms of contemporary feminist and queer notions of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, and indeed whether the idea of a persistent sexual identity is even applicable in this period.[6] Many medievalists hold that premodern European societies had no concept of a fixed binary sexual orientation. As Ruth Mazo Karras writes, 'the identities of medieval people were fundamentally shaped by their sexual status – not whether they were homosexual or heterosexual, as today, but whether they were chaste or sexually active. This distinction created a dividing line between two very different kinds of people in

pp. 163–84; T. Linkinen, *Same-sex Sexuality in Later Medieval English Culture* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 258–80.

3. See J. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 105–227; M. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago, IL, and London, 1997), pp. 29–158; Linkinen, *Same-sex Sexuality in Late Medieval English Culture*, pp. 33–83.

4. On literary and art-historical approaches to queer subjectivity, see G. Burger and S.F. Kruger, eds, *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN, 1999); Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, pp. 27–99; A. Kłosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (New York and Basingstoke, 2005); R. Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2015), pp. 191–297. On John Dey, see K. Zieman, 'Minding the Rod: Sodomy and Clerical Masculinity in Fifteenth-century Leicester', *Gender and History,* xxxi (2019), pp. 60–77.

5. J.W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review,* xci (1986), pp. 1053–75, at 1071.

6. For the standard accounts of these concepts, see A. Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, v (1980), pp. 631–60 and M. Warner, 'Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet', *Social Text*, xxix (1991), pp. 3–17.

medieval society'.[7] Robert Mills argues that medieval thinkers did not make a categorical distinction between the 'normal' heterosexual majority and the 'deviant' homosexual minority, but rather identified the capacity for sodomitical acts within all humans and eschewed object choice for other factors in determining sexual identity.[8] Consequently, these scholars reject the applicability of heteronormativity as an explanatory framework, arguing—as most forcefully exemplified in the work of James Schultz and Karma Lochrie—that it instead distorts the complex and fundamentally alien nature of gender and sexuality within medieval societies.[9] Other scholars, and I count myself among them, argue that while medieval cultural conceptions of sexuality do centre acts rather than identities, they nevertheless, as Amy Burge writes, '[privilege] a relationship between a man and a woman whose desire for each other is represented as both natural and inevitable' in ways which closely resemble the modern organising logics of heteronormativity.[10] In practice, if not in theory, medieval societies are organised along a *de facto* hetero/homosexual binary. Furthermore, this second group argues that we can use the critical lens of heteronormativity to draw out useful observations about the interrelationships between knowledge, power, gender and sexuality in medieval societies in ways that might otherwise be obscured by a total methodological rejection of the concept of heteronormativity.[11]

Community forms another fundamental research theme in medieval queer history. Modern queer communities have historically developed around a set of shared customs, aesthetics, gestures, slang and behaviours. This serves the dual functions of signalling identity to those in the know, therefore allowing for sexual, romantic, social and political connections, while ensuring safety through obscuring queer meanings from potentially hostile outsiders. Historians have explored the extent to which medieval queer people formed comparable subcultures grounded on shared lived experiences (if not necessarily on

7. R.M. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (3rd edn, London, 2017), p. 11.

8. Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 293–7.

9. For some of the most prominent examples of this critique, see J.A. Schultz, 'Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xv (2006), pp. 14–29; K. Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis, MN, and London, 2006); K.M. Phillips and B. Reay, *Sex before Sexuality: A Premodern History* (Cambridge, 2011).

10. A. Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance* (New York, 2016), p. 12.

11. See L.M. Sylvester, *Medieval Romance and the Construction of Heterosexuality* (New York and Basingstoke, 2008) and C.M. Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2018). Although her more recent work characterises medieval Europe as a non-heteronormative society, Ruth Karras has previously drawn on the notion of compulsory heterosexuality in analysing the negotiation of chivalric sexual identity: R.M. Karras, 'Knighthood, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Sodomy', in M. Kuefler, ed., *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2006), pp. 273–86, at 274.

shared identity). John Boswell argued that the rapid growth of cities in the twelfth century permitted the rise of an international gay subculture, grounded in a shared community of letters and collective literary traditions.[12] However, this has remained one of his most contentious claims; few of his successors have wholly accepted the existence of a hypothesised self-conscious queer subculture outside of a limited number of exceptional case-studies.[13] Of these examples, late medieval Florence has been the most extensively analysed. Here, as Michael Rocke argues, queer male sexual and romantic relationships were to a certain extent normalised as a life-cycle stage for young men, tacitly accepted by a substantial proportion of the population though never condoned in law, and subject to sporadic persecution by secular and ecclesiastical authorities.[14] Likewise, the inquisitorial records relating to the subdeacon Arnaud of Verniolle, accused of sodomy in addition to impersonating a priest and falsely hearing confession, tantalisingly hint at informal networks of queer men centred around the schools and universities of early fourteenth-century Languedoc: not least in Arnaud's remark that 'the bishop would have enough on his hands if he were to apprehend everyone in Pamiers who had been infected with that crime [sodomy] because there were more than three thousand persons'.[15] In addition to the universities, historians have suggested that other homosocial environments and institutions such as monasticism and knighthood offered the potential to foster queer relationships, insofar as they inherently promoted physical and emotional intimacy between members of the same sex to the exclusion of heterosocial relations.[16] This notion of queer networks embedded in homosocial institutions has some resonances with the anxieties of medieval commentators such as Peter Damian and the Wycliffites, who identified rampant queer sex acts among the secular clergy, the regular orders and other institutions such as the Knights Templar, though in each instance medievalists

12. J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2015), pp. 207–66.

13. M. Kuefler, 'Homoeroticism in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Acts, Identities, Cultures', *American Historical Review*, cxxiii (2018), pp. 1246–66, at 1259–61.

14. M. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York and Oxford, 1996), pp. 87–191.

15. The relevant documents are translated in M. Goodich, *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), pp. 117–43, with the quoted remark occurring on p. 128. This case is briefly discussed in E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, tr. B. Bray (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 144–9 and J. Cadden, *Nothing Natural Is Shameful: Sodomy and Science in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), pp. 109, 139, and more extensively in D. Elliott, *The Corrupter of Boys: Sodomy, Scandal, and the Medieval Clergy* (Philadelphia, PA, 2020), pp. 202–7, which reframes the case in terms of intergenerational sexual abuse, drawing attention to fraught issues of power dynamics and consent.

16. See Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, pp. 17–100; M. Kuefler, 'Male Friendship and the Suspicion of Sodomy in Twelfth-century France', in Kuefler, ed., *Boswell Thesis*, pp. 179–212; Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*, pp. 26–46; Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 191–242.

retain a high degree of scepticism as to whether these were merely baseless accusations or indicative of a degree of reality.[17]

The third core research theme in medieval queer studies relates to persecution, namely in assessing the extent to which premodern societies attempted to regulate or repress queerness. At one extreme we find scholars such as Bill Burgwinkle, who characterises the Middle Ages as:

> a kind of queer utopia, a historical period in which institutional state regulation as we know it hardly existed, in which marriage practices were not yet controlled entirely either by state or church and varied widely by class and region, in which same-sex segregation was a norm, particularly in intellectual communities, and in which love stories between men were common, if covert.[18]

Scholarship in this mode relies substantially on the hypothesis that heteronormativity as a discursive framework which privileges certain forms of heterosexual intercourse and identity, which seeks to repress other forms of sexual expression, and which is generated and maintained through the ideological consent and active participation of the majority of the population in conjunction with institutions of power such as governments, healthcare and educational systems and mass media, is a distinctly modern phenomenon, emerging from the eighteenth century onwards out of the convergence of industrial capitalism, the growth of the state and the medicalisation of sexuality. As Karma Lochrie argues, medieval societies lacked any ideological impetus or machinery for systematically compelling people to conform to norms of sexual behaviour and gender presentation, since no such norms existed at the time.[19]

On the other hand, many medievalists, influenced by R.I. Moore's 'persecuting society' model, identify a rapid growth in anti-sodomy discourse from the thirteenth century onwards, which manifested in the expansion of judicial powers to detect and prosecute queerness, evidenced through the development of new legislation pertaining to sexual intercourse and its implementation through litigation and inquisitorial process.[20] Historians have identified this trend as occurring within both secular and ecclesiastical legal systems.[21] Different explanations have

17. Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, pp. 45–66; Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, pp. 55–99; Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, pp. 107–29; Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*, pp. 47–70; J.P. Hornbeck, 'Theologies of Sexuality in English "Lollardy"', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lx (2009), pp. 19–44.

18. Burgwinkle, '*État Présent*', p. 79.

19. Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies*, pp. xi–xxvii.

20. R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 2007).

21. M. Boone, 'State Power and Illicit Sexuality: The Persecution of Sodomy in Late Medieval Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxii (1996), pp. 135–53; H. Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago, IL, and London, 2003), pp. 17–30; C. Ekholst, *A Punishment for Each Criminal: Gender and Crime in Swedish Medieval Law* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 151–90.

been offered for this pattern. In Moore's original formulation, queer people were one of the 'out-groups', alongside heretics, Jews, lepers and sex workers, whose persecution 'served to stimulate and assist the development of the claims and techniques of government in church and state, as well as the cohesiveness and confidence of those who operated it'.[22] In this line of thought, the identification of queerness as an existential threat contributed significantly to the late medieval process of centralisation and administrative expansion in terms of ideological justification and the technologies of power which were developed to regulate it. Other historians such as Marc Boone and Helmut Puff emphasise the importance of anti-queer persecution in the formation of late medieval urban identity: civic governments increasingly identified sodomy as an internal threat to the community, as understood within a broader framework of urban moral improvement and amid wider power struggles between secular and ecclesiastical institutions in many European cities, and between cities and their (former or current) political overlords.[23] These differing interpretative models are united in the conviction that the institutional persecution of queerness did not require modernity in order to form, but evolved out of a distinctively medieval set of power relations.

These three research themes of identity, community and repression have shaped the direction of medieval queer studies from the 1980s to the 2010s. To a certain extent, the contours of the debate have remained broadly static since the mid-2000s; after a flurry of monographs and edited collections published in the 1990s and 2000s, the rate of new publications on medieval queer history has subsequently been in decline, although new work on normative genders and sexualities have continued to appear at a steady pace.[24] Many of the conclusions of

22. Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, p. 132. Similar lines of argumentation have been taken by: B.-U. Hergemöller, 'Sodomiter: Schuldzuschreibungen und Repressionsformen im späten Mittelalter', in B.-U. Hergemöller, ed., *Randgruppen der spätmittelalterlichen Gesellschaft* (Warendorf, 1990), pp. 343–7; J. Chiffoleau, 'Contra naturam: Pour une approche casuistique et procédurale de la nature médiévale', *Micrologus*, iv (1996), pp. 265–312; M. van der Lugt, 'L'autorité morale et normative de la nature au moyen âge', in M. van der Lugt, ed., *La nature comme source de la morale au moyen âge* (Florence, 2014), pp. 3–40, at 37–9.

23. Boone, 'State Power and Illicit Sexuality', pp. 152–3; Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland*, pp. 31–49. The notion of an emergent late medieval urban 'bourgeois' ideology of social relations, which placed greater emphasis on marriage and the nuclear family and which intensified action against all forms of sexual deviancy including sex work and adultery, has grown increasingly popular in social history over the last decade. See P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Cherrylips, the Creed Play, and Conflict: York in the Age of Richard III', *Czech and Slovak Journal of the Humanities*, ii (2016), pp. 29–42; M. Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge: Regulating Sex in England, 1470–1600* (Cambridge, 2017); J. Page, *Prostitution and Subjectivity in Late Medieval Germany* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 112–38.

24. Influential recent interventions focusing on normative genders and sexualities include: K.M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270–1540* (Manchester and New York, 2003); S. McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006); C. Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007); C. Donahue, Jr, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages: Arguments about Marriage in Five Courts* (Cambridge, 2007); R.M. Karras,

the early generations of queer medievalists—particularly around the notion of medieval Europe as a 'pre-heteronormative' society and the claim that the Middle Ages lacked a coherent and stable concept of sexual identity—have transitioned from controversy to widely accepted dogmas of the field.

II

In my view, the influx of new scholarship on trans and intersex studies represents the first substantial challenge to this paradigm of medieval queer history. I identify 2020 as the key locus for this 'transgender turn', to borrow M.W. Bychowksi's phrase.[25] In the span of just two years, the field has witnessed an outpouring of new Anglophone scholarship which forms the core of this turn.[26] The first to appear in print was Roland Betancourt's *Byzantine Intersectionality* (2020), which explores sexuality in the medieval Byzantine world and how its experiences and representations were intimately informed by contemporary discourses of gender and race.[27] As the title indicates, Betancourt draws heavily on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, an oft-misused concept which states that a person (in Crenshaw's original analysis, specifically a Black woman) who suffers multiple axes of marginalisation will not experience these discretely, but instead as overlapping and interconnected oppressions.[28] For instance, a white woman and a Black woman will experience their identities as women and suffer sexism in very different and highly racialised ways. Betancourt's use of intersectionality theory has been heavily criticised, firstly for not fully engaging with how systems of marginalisation intersect in the Byzantine world and for tending to silo categories of identity and oppression, and secondly for overlooking important axes of marginalisation based on class and social status.[29] While I do share these concerns, the reception of *Byzantine Intersectionality* within the field of medieval sexuality has

Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia, PA, 2012); B. Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Late Medieval England: Men, Women and Testimony in the Church Courts,* c.*1200–1500* (Woodbridge, 2019).

25. M.W. Bychowski, 'The Transgender Turn: Eleanor Rykener Speaks Back', in G. LaFleur, M. Raskolnikov and A. Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2021), pp. 95–113, at 96–7.

26. This period also includes the publication of C. Maillet, *Les genres fluides: De Jeanne d'Arc aux saintes trans* (Paris, 2020), a key intervention in the history of medieval gender and sexuality that has nevertheless received substantially less attention in Anglophone scholarly circles than in Francophone academia.

27. R. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2020).

28. K. Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, i (1989), pp. 139–67.

29. S. Constantinou, review of R. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2020), *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture*, vii (2021), pp. 363–74, at 363–4.

been significant, particularly in terms of bringing greater awareness of issues in gender and sexuality in the Greek world to Latin European specialists.

The following year saw the publication of Leah DeVun's *The Shape of Sex* (2021), which explores the experiences and representations of intersex people (those who possess from birth primary or secondary sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of male/female sexual difference) in medieval societies, drawing on a diverse combination of literary, legal and historical sources.[30] DeVun argues that intersexuality was broadly accepted as a morally neutral, if unusual and potentially marvellous, form of bodily difference in late antique and early medieval Christianity. Subsequently, however, philosophers, theologians and lawyers after the advent of Scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reframed intersex as unnatural and reified a more inflexible binary model of biological sex. DeVun argues that this ideological shift worsened the material conditions of intersex people in late medieval societies, with negative consequences such as the development of new forms of corrective surgery with the intent of modifying intersex bodies to conform with binary norms. *The Shape of Sex* is an important contribution to the ongoing conversations in the field around the histories of medieval repression; most notably, it historicises endosexism (the political framework which marginalises intersex people) by demonstrating the change in attitudes towards intersex over time and exploring its roots in late medieval culture.

The edited volume *Trans Historical* was also released in 2021.[31] This collection of essays explores various themes and case-studies in medieval and early modern trans history, taking in Latin Christendom, the Greek Orthodox and later Ottoman spheres, and early colonial America. Many of the essays are based on original archival research on formerly obscure figures; however, its most significant contribution to the field of medieval sexuality lies in its contributors' goal to move past the microhistorical approach of many older medieval trans histories towards a structural analysis of the relationship between trans and systems of power and knowledge in premodern societies. Finally, this same year also saw the publication of *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, a collection of essays focusing on reading hagiography thought a trans theoretical lens.[32] The volume provocatively argues that medieval societies associated trans and genderqueer identities with proximity to, rather than distance from, the divine; medieval religion, then, was fundamentally queer, and trans theory is

30. L. DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York, 2021).

31. G. LaFleur, M. Raskolnikov and A. Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern* (Ithaca, NJ, and London, 2021).

32. A. Spencer-Hall and B. Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam, 2021).

therefore an indispensable tool for understanding the connections between gender and faith in the Middle Ages. Consequently, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* is a work of significant importance both for historians of gender and sexuality, and for the field of medieval religion more broadly.

Historical research on medieval trans and intersex topics does predate this turn, such as the trans- and intersex-themed special issues of *postmedieval* (2018) and *Medieval Feminist Forum* (2019).[33] Indeed, as Bychowski notes, as early as 1910 the pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld analysed several medieval case-studies as part of his project of historicising trans identity.[34] More recently, in her influential popular history *Transgender Warriors* (1996), the political activist and author Leslie Feinberg characterised the Middle Ages as a transitional phase between trans-celebratory prehistory and classical antiquity and a hostile, transphobic modernity.[35] However, 2020 serves as a pragmatic, if arbitrary, turning point for our purposes here, firstly on account of the significant acceleration of new work from this year onwards; and secondly on the grounds that this work represents the beginnings of substantial engagement with the trans Middle Ages from a historical perspective.[36]

The tremendous flourishing of medieval trans and intersex studies since 2020 has been achieved despite significant obstacles. Historians of trans experience are severely underrepresented within the discipline.[37] Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt state that, as of the date of their volume's publication in 2021, they were aware of only one out transgender scholar of medieval studies in a permanent academic position,

33. R. Evans, ed., *Medieval Intersex: Language and Hermaphroditism*, special issue of *postmedieval*, ix (2018); D. Kim and M.W. Bychowski, eds, *Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism*, special issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, lv (2019). For a further list of pre-2020 works, see N. Mara-McKay, 'A Bibliography of Medieval Trans Studies' (2021–), at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Sto9yZAO2x6RMl2Do4HcplQtoJnKfN9jUVEn5wr5dqA/ (accessed 18 Dec. 2023)—currently the most comprehensive bibliography of medieval trans and intersex scholarship.

34. M.W. Bychowski, 'The Authentic Lives of Transgender Saints: *Imago Dei* and *imitatio Christi* in the Life of St Marinos the Monk', in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, pp. 245–65, at 245–50.

35. L. Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston, MA, 1996), pp. 61–73. Feinberg used a variety of pronouns for herself throughout her life and writings but indicated a general preference for 'she/her', which I have followed here.

36. See, for example, Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 81–132; B. Gutt, 'Transgender Genealogy in *Tristan de Nanteuil*', *Exemplaria*, xxx (2018), pp. 129–46; M.W. Bychowski, 'Reconstructing the Pardoner: Transgender Skin Operations in Fragment VI', in K. Rupp and N. Nyffenegger, eds, *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer* (Berlin, 2018), pp. 221–50; K. Zarins, 'Intersex and the Pardoner's Body', *Accessus*, iv (2018), pp. 1–63; C. Maillet, *Les genres fluides*, pp. 65–82; L. Colwill, 'The Queerly Departed: Narratives of Veneration in the Burials of Late Iron Age Scandinavia', in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, pp. 177–97; M. Raskolnikov, 'Without Magic or Miracle: The "Romance of Silence" and the Prehistory of Genderqueerness', in LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical*, pp. 178–206.

37. I use 'historians of trans experience' to designate historians who are themselves transgender, and 'trans historians' to designate all researchers, irrespective of gender identity, who work on medieval trans subjects.

anywhere in the world.[38] Of course, trans and/or intersex status is not a prerequisite for conducting trans historical research; cisgender scholars (people whose gender identity conforms with their gender assignation at birth) have produced some of the foundational work in the field. Nevertheless, transgender people bring valuable insights into trans experience and can be better placed to interrogate and overcome cissexist methodological assumptions and biases than their cisgender colleagues, in the same way as Black scholars with histories of race, women scholars with histories of women, disabled scholars with histories of disability, and so on. In any case, whether identifying as cis or trans, most historians working on medieval trans and intersex history occupy a tenuous place within the academy. As Spencer-Hall and Gutt write, 'some of the most important work in medieval trans studies is being done by the most precariously situated scholars: graduate students, early career researchers, those without permanent positions'.[39] Precarity invariably hinders the work of conducting primary research and disseminating findings through publication in traditional channels, meaning that much medieval trans scholarship until recently existed only in the form of conference papers or blogposts. Historians of trans experience—especially trans women—have spoken out about their experiences of receiving significant transphobic hostility at conferences and in online academic spaces.[40] Graduate students and early career researchers are dissuaded from attempting work on trans history by academic mentors and senior colleagues, with the justification that it is simply not a viable topic or could hinder their chances of further career advancement.[41] Many students of trans experience view medieval studies, and academia more broadly, as a space in which they are unwelcome; as members of a socially and economically marginalised community that is disproportionately affected by poverty and where individuals are routinely cut off from networks of intergenerational support, they face substantial practical barriers to accessing postgraduate education and establishing a research career.[42]

III

Research on medieval trans history (and indeed all trans history) is governed by several key axioms. The first axiom holds that gender—in

38. A. Spencer-Hall and B. Gutt, 'Introduction', in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, pp. 11–40 at p. 22.

39. Ibid., p. 23.

40. See the examples listed in M.W. Bychowksi and D. Kim, 'Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, lv (2019), pp. 6–41 at 11–18.

41. Bychowski and Kim, 'Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism', p. 14.

42. Transgender Europe (TGEU), *Trans and Poverty: Poverty and Economic Insecurity in Trans Communities in the EU* (TGEU, 2021), pp. 9–16, available at https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/TGEU-trans-poverty-report-2021.pdf (accessed 13 Dec. 2022).

the sense of a category, following Joan Scott, that comprises both internal identity and how you are perceived by those around you, and how this affects your social relations with society at large—is socially constructed.[43] What it means to be a man or a woman has changed over time, and some societies at different times and places have possessed a normative framework of gender that incorporates other categories of gender besides the male/female binary.[44] This is an fairly uncontroversial notion with a well-established pedigree originating in second-wave feminist thought, but it is nevertheless an essential intellectual foundation for trans studies as it prompts the researcher to historicise gender within medieval societies and pay closer attention to individuals who chafe against their culture's normative framework of gender.[45]

The second and potentially more contentious axiom holds that not only is gender socially constructed, but so too is biological sex. To borrow Michel Foucault's definition, sex is a grouping-together 'in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures'.[46] The criteria that any given society privileges in its notion of what constitutes an endosex male or female body (one that is considered normatively sexed) can vary between cultures, including patterns of facial and body hair growth, physical frame, and size and shape of genitalia.[47] This also changes over time: as Paul Preciado contends, the discovery of hormones and the subsequent development of medical technologies for testing and regulating hormonal levels generated a new norm of sex—a body that produces the 'correct' forms of female or male hormones—that did not previously exist.[48] Bringing this analysis back to the Middle Ages, Joan Cadden and more recently François·e Charmaille have argued that medieval thought recognised a spectrum of sexual difference rather than a discrete binary, meaning that specific humoral interactions within the body could produce a variety of different sexes.[49] Leah DeVun explores how medieval notions of the normative sexed body changed over time, arguing for a gradual shift from more fluid understandings of sex under

43. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', pp. 1067–70.

44. See the literature on third genders in historical and contemporary indigenous American cultures; for example, S.-E. Jacobs, W. Thomas and S. Lang, eds, *Two-spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Urbana, IL, and Chicago, IL, 1997); D.A. Miranda, 'Extermination of the *Joyas*: Gendercide in Spanish California', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, xvi (2016), pp. 253–84.

45. Though for a highly critical medievalist perspective on the social construction of gender, see N.F. Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', *Speculum*, lxviii (1993), pp. 419–43.

46. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I, tr. R. Hurley (London, 1981), p. 154.

47. This concept is more extensively explored in J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London, 2006), pp. 107–93 and J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York, 2011).

48. P.B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, tr. B. Benderson (New York, 2013), pp. 144–235.

49. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 169–227; F. Charmaille, 'Intersex between Sex and Gender in *Cause et Cure*', *Exemplaria*, xxxiii (2021), pp. 327–43.

the Hippocratic/Galenic medical paradigm to a more binary model under late medieval Aristotelianism.[50] Trans studies therefore concerns itself not just with gender, but also with the process of construction of the category of sex and its policing.[51]

The third axiom holds that individuals whose gender identity does not line up with their assigned gender at birth have always existed in all human cultures. These individuals have sought to 'live authentically' within the affordances of the prevailing gender norms of their societies through adopting new names, clothing, occupations, gendered behaviours and social relations, and in some cases through pursuing methods of body modification akin to primitive forms of gender-affirming surgery.[52] It is important to note, however, that transness is no less historically contingent than cisness, since both cisgender and transgender identities exist within, and are shaped by, gender systems that change over time. Furthermore, trans studies asserts that the experiences of historical subjects whose gender identity does not line up with their assigned gender at birth can be usefully interrogated through the category of trans, even if they lived before the invention of the modern diagnostic/political categories of transsexual (coined 1923) or transgender (coined 1965). In this respect, trans studies borrows heavily from the tradition of lesbian history, particularly Judith Bennett's concept of the lesbian-like: each school favours the reflective, critical use of trans or lesbian as a category of historical analysis both out of pragmatism and to confront historiographical biases.[53] Trans historians generally drive a middle path between the poles of biological essentialism and total social constructionism: while they accept that historical subjects' experiences of their gender identity will have been shaped by the societies and eras in which they lived and that trans medieval research must be attentive to specifically historicised forms of trans experience, they assert that gender variance itself is a trans-historical phenomenon worthy of analysis.

At this juncture it is vital to stress that the transgender turn in medieval studies does not seek to discredit or replace older historiographical

50. DeVun, *Shape of Sex*, pp. 103–33.

51. Intersex people have historically been discussed in the language of 'hermaphroditism', both in medieval texts and (until recently) in the majority of modern historiography. The term 'hermaphrodite' is considered derogatory and stigmatising by the contemporary intersex community. While it is essential to engage fully with the language of premodern sources on their own terms, as a category of trans-historical analysis, and especially when referring to living individuals, 'intersex' is preferable. DeVun, *Shape of Sex*, pp. 9–10.

52. Bychowski, 'Authentic Lives of Transgender Saints', pp. 247–50. Roland Betancourt interprets the masculinising physical effects of fasting and ascetic practice on the 'female' sexed bodies of trans male saints, or instances of voluntary castration or mastectomy, as potential forms of proto-GAS: Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*, pp. 102–13.

53. J.M. Bennett, '"Lesbian-like" and the Social History of Lesbianisms', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, ix (2000), pp. 1–24; G. LaFleur, M. Raskolnikov and A. Kłosowska, 'Introduction: The Benefits of Being Trans Historical', in LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical*, pp. 1–24, at 8–12.

approaches to the study of gender and sexuality that are philosophically and politically rooted in feminism, lesbian studies or queer theory. As Spencer-Hall and Gutt note:

> Trans studies is additive, not derivative. The objective is not to replace feminist and queer readings, but rather to expand upon the possibilities that these readings offer. At the same time, trans studies indicates where such readings have overwritten or erased trans potentialities, while continuing to insist on the paramount importance of the availability and co-existence of multiple interpretations.[54]

Indeed, many trans historians integrate queer and feminist methodologies in their work and clearly indicate their scholarly debt to these older traditions of historiography. Trans studies is not the enemy of feminist, lesbian or queer studies; these fields are natural and complementary allies whose shared mission is to broaden the possibilities of historical research on gender and sexuality.

IV

What, then, does the transgender turn substantially add to the historiography of medieval queerness? In the first instance, trans studies entails the reassessment of queer individuals in the historical record in light of new trans possibilities, just as the first waves of gay/lesbian history scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s did with individuals interpretated as gay or lesbian(-like), such as Richard I and Edward II, as well as lesser-known figures such as John Clanvowe and William Neville or Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge. The most notable example is Eleanor Rykener, an individual who was brought before the court of the Mayor of London in 1395 on unclear charges, though she was originally arrested while performing with one John Britby an unspecified sexual act ('committing that detestable, unmentionable, and ignominious vice') for money while dressed in women's clothing.[55] Rykener was named 'John' and gendered male throughout the court record, but she recounted spending extended periods of time dressed as a woman and living under her adopted name of 'Eleanor' while working in female occupations. At various times, Rykener had sexual intercourse with men while dressed as a woman, and with

54. Spencer-Hall and Gutt, 'Introduction', p. 25.

55. R.M. Karras and D.L. Boyd, '"*Ut cum mulier*": A Male Transvestite in Fourteenth-century London', in L. Fradenburg and C. Freccero, eds, *Premodern Sexualities* (New York, 1995), pp. 100–116, at 111. The historiography on Rykener disagrees on what pronouns to use for her ('he', 'she', 'they', and the neo-pronouns 'ze/hir' have all been proposed at various times) and whether to refer to her as John, Eleanor or John/Eleanor Rykener. In line with the most recent trans studies-informed scholarship, and to emphasise the trans reading of the case, I will exclusively use 'her' and 'Eleanor' here except in quotation. A useful survey of work on Rykener can be found in M. Khoury, 'Where Do We Go from Here: Transitivity and Journey Narratives in Eleanor Rykener', in B.A. Price, J.E. Bonsall and M. Khoury, eds, *Medieval Mobilities: Gendered Bodies, Spaces, and Movements* (New York, 2023), pp. 27–47.

women while dressed as a man. Early scholarship on Rykener often positions her as a transvestite or a cross-dresser, denoting a man who situationally adopts a female persona and/or mode of dress, whether for artistic self-expression or for sexual intercourse (usually with other men), but otherwise regards himself as male, as distinct from a trans woman whose female gender identity is persistent and deep-rooted.[56] More recent work informed by trans studies re-evaluates her as transgender: Kadin Henningsen and M.W. Bychowski highlight Rykener's agency in asserting her chosen name Eleanor throughout the judicial process, as well as her periods of living as a woman outside the context of sex work, as evidence that 'Eleanor' was not merely a situational persona but rather a persistent and authentic female identity.[57]

In a similar vein, Martha Newman has reassessed her earlier research on Joseph of Schönau, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk who was revealed at death to have been assigned female at birth and who had 'dressed as a man' in order to enter his community.[58] Although contemporary narratives of Joseph's life share many of the generic conventions of hagiographies of 'trans male' saints such as Eugenia and Euphrosyne, Newman contends that the accounts of Joseph's story in five independent Cistercian sources, as well as their authors' citations of living witnesses who had known Joseph, suggest a greater degree of historicity than the more fantastical and strongly fictive narrative elements of these earlier *vitae*.[59] Newman argues against her initial reading of Joseph as a woman adopting a masculine disguise in pursuit of piety, asserting instead that Joseph's transformation is more fittingly understood as the adoption of an authentic male identity. As well as revisiting better-known historical subjects, trans historians are also performing the urgent work of transcribing and translating

56. See, for example, Boyd and Karras's initial discovery of the case: D.L. Boyd and R.M. Karras, 'The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-century London', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, i (1995), pp. 459–65; as well as Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, pp. 100–112; R. Evans, 'The Production of Space in Chaucer's London', in A. Butterfield, ed., *Chaucer and the City* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 41–56; J. Goldberg, 'John Rykener, Richard II and the Governance of London', *Leeds Studies in English*, new ser., xlv (2014), pp. 49–70.

57. K. Henningsen, '"Calling [Herself] Eleanor": Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, lv (2019), pp. 249–66; Bychowski, 'Transgender Turn', p. 105. Karras herself, in collaboration with Tom Linkinen, has revisited the Rykener case and proposes a possible trans interpretation, though they remain notably more cautious about this line of enquiry: R.M. Karras and T. Linkinen, 'John/Eleanor Rykener Revisted', in L.E. Doggett and D.E. O'Sullivan, eds, *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns* (Woodbridge, 2016), pp. 111–21, at 111.

58. M.G. Newman, 'Assigned Female at Death: Joseph of Schönau and the Disruption of Medieval Gender Binaries', in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, pp. 43–63.

59. Ibid., pp. 45–6. For more typical trans male hagiographies, see, for example, R. Mills, 'Visibly Trans? Picturing Saint Eugenia in Medieval Art', *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, v (2018), pp. 540–64; Maillet, *Les genres fluides*, pp. 99–136; V. Wright, 'Illuminating Queer Gender Identity in the Manuscripts of the *Vie de Sainte Eufrosine*', in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, pp. 155–76; A.V. Ogden, 'St Eufrosine's Invitation to Gender Transgression', in ibid., pp. 201–21.

previously underexplored records relating to more obscure individuals. For instance, Anna Kłosowska's translation and commentary on the trial document of the mid-sixteenth-century trans person Wojciech of Poznań introduces the case, previously discussed only in German- and Polish-language scholarship, to an Anglophone audience for the first time.[60] In this way, the work of trans history enriches both the broader interdisciplinary project of medieval trans and intersex studies, and medieval queer history.

The focus on the trans archive has also breathed new life into discussions of medieval queer identity through bringing closer attention to the question of agency and subjectivity. While social historians such as Jeremy Goldberg, Tom Johnson and Bronach Kane have drawn extensively on personal testimony in documentary sources to address questions of gender and sexuality within a primarily normative framework, queer medievalists have been slow to incorporate this methodology into their own research.[61] By contrast, trans historians have strongly foregrounded the agency of their historical subjects in their analyses. Igor de Souza and Kathleen Perry Long investigate how two intersex individuals, Eleno de Céspedes and Marin le Marcis, advocated for themselves within legal contexts by drawing on their personal understandings of their bodies and gender identities.[62] Likewise, Bychowksi and Kłosowska draw attention to the rhetorical strategies of Rykener and Wojciech in asserting their gender identities and in attempting to win themselves a more favourable legal outcome.[63] Broadening out from the individual to the systemic analysis, Leah DeVun argues that intersex individuals possessed some options for exerting gender self-determination within the limitations of late medieval legal and medical frameworks.[64] Contrary to claims that 'there is, in fact, no testimony on trans identity in the first-person in the Middle Ages', trans historians demonstrate that it is possible to reconstruct medieval trans subjectivity and lived experience through careful analysis of archival material, in concert with theoretical legal and medical sources.[65] This further indicates that such a methodology offers a

60. A. Kłosowska, 'Wojciech of Poznań and the Trans Archive, Poland, 1550–1561', in LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical*, pp. 114–29.

61. J. Goldberg, *Communal Discord, Child Abduction, and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 2008); T. Johnson, 'The Preconstruction of Witness Testimony: Law and Social Discourse in England before the Reformation', *Law and History Review*, xxxii (2014), pp. 127–47; B. Kane, 'Defamation, Gender and Hierarchy in Late Medieval Yorkshire', *Social History*, xliii (2018), pp. 356–74.

62. I.H. de Souza, 'Elenx de Céspedes: Indeterminate Genders in the Spanish Inquisition', in LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical*, pp. 42–67, at 47–54; K.P. Long, 'The Case of Marin le Marcis', in ibid., pp. 68–94, at 68–73.

63. Bychowksi, 'Transgender Turn', p. 107; Kłosowska, 'Wojciech of Poznań and the Trans Archive', pp. 121–2.

64. DeVun, *Shape of Sex*, pp. 102–62.

65. 'Il n'existe pas, en effet, de témoignage sur la transidentité à la première personne au Moyen Âge': C. Tardivel, review of C. Maillet, *Les genres fluides* (Paris, 2020), *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, cxcvii (2021), pp. 345–7, at 346.

fruitful opportunity to expand the discussion of identity and subjectivity within medieval queer history more broadly.

The transgender turn also builds on earlier queer historical thinking on community and sexuality in the Middle Ages. Trans scholars have focused closely on evidence for reconstructing the experience of interpersonal relations for trans people within documentary sources. For instance, Henningsen draws attention to the previously overlooked observation that Eleanor Rykener was part of a network of mutual aid comprised of (presumably cisgender?) women—among them Elizabeth Brouderer and a sex worker known only as Anna—who 'not only accepted her as a woman but helped her live as a woman, providing her with both clothing and a name', and taught her the trade of sex work.[66] As Henningsen writes, 'in modern terms, we might say that Anna and Elizabeth helped Eleanor socially transition', enabling her to adopt a trans female gender identity. Bychowski emphasises Rykener's desirability to John Britby and her numerous other male and female sexual partners, as well as her seemingly peaceful integration into economic and social life at Oxford and Burford: though we cannot know the full extent of her acceptance within the communities she lived in, presenting openly as a trans woman appears to have been at least somewhat possible in fourteenth-century England.[67] Likewise, Kłosowska notes the substantial extent of Wojciech's sexual and romantic liaisons, comprising both men and women, over a dozen named partners (including three husbands) and 'many more' unspecified persons, as well as multiple business associates, suggesting that this may reflect the existence of a 'gender-creative, nonbinary subculture [that] was for the most part collaborative and mutually supportive' in Poznań.[68] On a more conceptual level, building on earlier work on genderfluidity and affective piety by historians such as Caroline Walker Bynum, research by Betancourt, Newman and Bychowksi, among others, demonstrates that qualities of transness and genderfluidity (including both trans masculinity and trans femininity) could be valorised as exemplary models of devotion within normative discourses of medieval Christian asceticism and monasticism.[69] Trans studies demonstrates the potential for medieval transgender persons and their allies to build mutually supportive communities, and indicates the limitations on the ability of ecclesiastical and secular institutions to enforce legal proscriptions of queerness in this period. In this way, it offers new methodological

66. Henningsen, '"Calling [Herself] Eleanor"', p. 252.

67. Bychowski, 'Transgender Turn', p. 108.

68. Kłosowska, 'Wojciech of Poznań and the Trans Archive', p. 118.

69. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*, pp. 89–106; Newman, 'Assigned Female at Death', p. 47; Bychowski, 'Authentic Lives of Transgender Saints', pp. 253–63. For Bynum's work on gender and affective piety, see C.W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

approaches to exploring themes of community within documentary material that can benefit broader enquiry into medieval queerness.

Finally, trans studies contributes new perspectives on the research theme of anti-queer repression in the Middle Ages. Trans historians demonstrate that medieval anxieties around sodomy were fundamentally grounded in transphobia: sexual transgression was inseparable from gender transgression. While this idea has some precedent in earlier scholarship, such as in the work of Robert Mills, its implications are only beginning to be fully articulated.[70] Betancourt argues that transmisogyny (that is, the specific stigmatisation of persons assigned male at birth—whether cisgender men or transgender women—who adopt normatively 'feminine' mannerisms and dress) operated as a distinct form of othering within medieval Byzantine gender frameworks.[71] De Souza further posits that, from a legal and theological perspective, the transgression of queerness lies primarily in the sodomite's failure to perform correctly their expected gender role.[72] This is one of the most important contributions of the transgender turn to the history of sexuality: by demonstrating the interrelationship of sexual and gender transgression, it offers a new perspective to the contentious debates over the nature of queer identity and repression in medieval societies.

Moreover, trans historians have readily acknowledged the interlinked nature of stigmatising discourses on race, gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages.[73] Trans and intersex historians argue that medieval authors identified racial and ethnic difference with transness and queerness, and that this shaped subsequent Latin and Greek Christian encounters first with Jewish and Muslim communities within Europe and the Middle East and, later, with indigenous American and African societies.[74] For example, De Souza identifies the heightened scrutiny of ambiguously sexed bodies in post-*Reconquista* Spain as inexorably linked with anxieties around the pollution of the Christian community by Jews and Muslims; Inquisitorial attempts at policing the categories of gender and biological sex grew out of the same repressive impulse and judicial mechanisms as attempts at identifying and exterminating insincere converts.[75] Similarly, DeVun argues that the Christian discursive identification of Jewish 'inconstancy' and Muslim foreignness with intersexuality played a pivotal role in the subsequent development of medieval Islamophobia,

70. Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 299–303.

71. R. Betancourt, 'Where Are All the Trans Women in Byzantium?', in LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, eds, *Trans Historical*, pp. 297–321.

72. De Souza, 'Elenx de Céspedes', pp. 58–9.

73. LaFleur, Raskolnikov and Kłosowska, 'Introduction', pp. 10–11. Ruth Karras is a notable exception; in a recent article, she explores the relationship between Christian anxieties about sodomy and Islam in the Crusader Kingdoms and its influence on anti-sodomy discourse in the Latin West. R.M. Karras, 'The Regulation of "Sodomy" in the Latin East and West', *Speculum*, xcv (2020), pp. 969–86.

74. Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*, pp. 161–203.

75. De Souza, 'Elenx de Céspedes', pp. 54–8.

antisemitism and endosexism.[76] While early modernists such as Kim Hall and Federico Garza Carvajal have long noted the interrelationship of European concepts of whiteness and cisheteronormativity and their deeper cultural roots in antiquity and the Middle Ages, medievalists—and especially medieval historians of gender and sexuality—have been slower to incorporate this into their analysis, though Iberianists such as Gregory Hutcheson have shown a greater eagerness than specialists of northern and central Europe.[77] In this respect, medieval trans and intersex studies leads the way forward for the field and demonstrates how older models of the 'persecuting society' should be updated to account for new insights on transness and race. Crucially, they demonstrate how systems of transphobia, queerphobia and racism developed in conversation with each other in premodernity, rather than in isolation.

My discussion here has merely sketched out some of the possibilities currently offered by trans studies to the history of medieval queerness; much work remains to be done. There are numerous other case-studies with trans possibilities that are long overdue a reassessment, such as the anonymous 'female' student of Kraków or the fifteenth-century German 'female sodomite', Katherina Hetzeldorfer.[78] Others may lie hidden beneath the veil of archival obscurity or deliberate obfuscation. Eleanor Rykener is well known as a notorious instance of early historiographical censorship. A.H. Thomas substantially abbreviated the record of the case, particularly details relating to Rykener's 'cross-dressing', in his otherwise exhaustive *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London*, and only through an examination of the original roll were Boyd and Karras able to uncover its fuller nature.[79] Medieval trans studies has, for largely pragmatic reasons, tended to stick to well-trodden pathways, relying heavily on published material in translation or edition; the marriage of original archival and special collections research with trans and intersex approaches will yield productive new avenues for the study of gender and sexuality.

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76. DeVun, *Shape of Sex*, pp. 40–101.

77. For early modern perspectives, see K.F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY, 1995); F.G. Carvajal, *Butterflies Will Burn: Prosecuting Sodomites in Early Modern Spain and Mexico* (Austin, TX, 2003). For Iberianist perspectives, see G.S. Hutcheson, 'The Sodomitic Moor: Queerness in the Narrative of Reconquista', in G. Burger and S.F. Kruger, eds, *Queering the Middle* Ages (Minneapolis, MN, 2001), pp. 99–122; J. Blackmore and G.S. Hutcheson, eds, *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Durham, NC, 1999). For northern European perspectives, see C. Beattie and K.A. Fenton, eds, *Intersections of Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2011).

78. M.H. Shank, 'A Female University Student in Late Medieval Kraków', *Signs*, xii (1987), pp. 373–80; H. Puff, 'Female Sodomy: The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477)', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, xxx (2000), pp. 41–61.

79. Boyd and Karras, 'Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute', pp. 479–80.