

GENITAL PHOBIA AND DEPILATION*

(PLATES I, IIa, b)

It has recently been alleged that there was, among Greek men of the classical period, a deep-seated fear of the female genitals, and that pubic hair was a focus of that fear. On account of this phobia, it has been suggested, in order to achieve a satisfactory sexual relationship, Greek men required their women fully to depilate their genitals.¹ The thesis has logical problems: if the cause is the sight of the mother's genitals during childhood, the syndrome can affect only one generation. Besides this, it is clear that any depilation would tend to make the vulva more visible, while a heavier growth of hair would tend to hide it.² To put the alleged phobic syndrome further to the test, three questions must be answered: Did Greek women practise total pubic depilation? Did they practise pubic depilation at all? If they did depilate, why did they? As for most questions of daily life, there are two major sources of information: Comedy and vase painting. The evidence presented will show that Athenian women did practise partial genital depilation, and that female genital display—including display of pubic hair—is an important element in Attic erotic painting. These two facts are not compatible with a theory of genital phobia.

EVIDENCE FROM OLD COMEDY³

The difficulties of using Comedy as evidence for daily life have been set out, e.g. by V. Ehrenberg.⁴ Our questions are such that Comedy cannot be expected to provide complete or unequivocal answers, even though the questions themselves are relatively simple.

Two passages of Comedy suffice to show that depilation played some part in Athenian women's toilet. At Aristophanes *Ran.* 516, Aiakos' maidservant refers to dancing girls as ἡβυλλιώσαι κάρτι παρατετιλέμναι, 'in full youthful vigour and just now plucked'. We are not told what part or parts of them have been plucked, but the process is thought of as making them

* The following abbreviations are used: von Blanckenhagen: P. H. von Blanckenhagen, 'Puerilia', in *In Memoriam Otto J. Brendel*, ed. L. Bonfante, H. von Heintze (Mainz 1976). Boardman: J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: a Handbook* (London 1975). Boardman-La Rocca: J. Boardman and E. La Rocca, *Eros in Grecia* (Milan 1975). Brendel: O. J. Brendel, 'The scope and temperament of erotic art in the Greco-Roman world', in *Studies in Erotic Art*, ed. T. Bowie, C. V. Christenson (New York/London 1970). Charbonneau et al.: J. Charbonneau, R. Martin, F. Villard, *Archaic Greek Art*, trans. J. Emmons, R. Allen (London 1971). Dover GH: K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London/Cambridge Mass. 1978). Henderson: J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: obscene language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven/London 1975). Licht: Paul Brandt (pseud. Hans Licht), *Sittengeschichte Griechenlands* (Dresden/Zurich 1925–28). Marcadé RA: J. Marcadé, *Roma Amor* (Geneva/New York 1961). Marcadé EK: J. Marcadé, *Eros Kalos: essay on erotic elements in Greek art* (Geneva/New York 1962). Mulas: A. Mulas, *Eros in Antiquity* (New York 1979). Philippaki: B. Philippaki, *The Attic Stamnos* (London 1967). Robertson: M. Robertson, *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge 1975). Simon: E. Simon, *Die griechischen Vasen*, photos M.

Hirmer, A. Hirmer (Munich 1976). Slater: P. E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera* (Boston 1968). Vorberg Ars: G. Vorberg, *Ars Erotica Veterum* (Hanau 1968), reprint based on *id. Ars Erotica Veterum* (1926) and *Über das Geschlechtsleben im Altertum* (1925). Vorberg Gloss.: G. Vorberg, *Glossarium Eroticum* (1932) (two reprinted editions with substantial differences in illustrations: Rome, Bretschneider 1965; Hanau 1965).

¹ The *locus classicus* is Slater 12–13.

² This fact was pointed out by Paul Brandt (pseud. Hans Licht), Licht ii 223. The English trans. is based on the second, abridged version (1932): *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (New York 1963). It is on this, where the crucial passage is omitted, that Slater (*loc. cit.*) bases his argument.

³ With the exception of *Ach.* 791–2, only literary sources cited by Slater and Licht have been treated here: if these do not support the thesis, further rebuttal should not be required.

⁴ *The People of Aristophanes*² (Oxford 1951) 7–13; G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 232–6. See also K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972) 38–41 on sexual and scatological jokes.

more attractive. At *Ekkkl.* 60–7, the first woman has armpits ‘bushier than a thicket’; the second has thrown her razor out of the house

. . . ἵνα δασυνθείην ὄλη
καὶ μηδὲν εἶην ἔτι γυναικὶ προσφερέης

‘so I’d get bushy all over and no longer resemble a woman at all’. We are given no details of the parts of the body involved, apart from the armpits (exposed when one raises one’s hand to vote in the Assembly). The word ὄλη suggests (with comic exaggeration) other areas of the body as well. There is a further joke since the actors were men (cf. *Thesm.*).

These two passages show that some depilation is standard, and also identify two common methods, shaving and plucking, for general depilation; but neither tells anything specifically about pubic depilation. Specific references to pubic depilation may be divided according to the method suggested, singeing or plucking.⁵

(a) *Singeing*

Lys. 823–8: an old woman threatens to kick an old man; he points out that this will expose her genitals (τὸν σάκανδρον). She comments:

ἀλλ’ ὅμως οὐκ ἴδοις . . .
. . . . αὐ-
τὸν κομήτην, ἀλλ’ ἀπεισι-
λωμένον τῷ λυχνῶ

‘But you wouldn’t see it long-haired: . . . I singed it with a lamp’.

The term used for depilation here, ἀποσιμιλώ, means ‘to strip off hair, make bald’ (LSJ s.v.). Hair singed with a lamp must leave a short stubble. Practically speaking, only the hair of the *mons veneris* can be affected. The expressed contrast is with one which is κομήτης, ‘long-haired’. The lady seems to be short-haired, not bald.

Ekkkl. 13–14, from the paratragic hymn to the lamp:

μόνος δὲ μηρῶν εἰς ἀπορρήτους μύχους
λάμπεις ἀφεύων τὴν ἐπανθούσαν τρίχα.

‘You alone light the forbidden nooks of our thighs, when you singe off the hair that blooms there.’ ἀπορρήτους μύχους clearly means the genital region; it is implied that the pubic hair is singed, but the main interest may be in singeing the tops of the thighs.⁶

(b) *Plucking*

At *Lys.* 87–9, Lysistrata speaks:

νῆ μὰ Δία Βοιωτία,
καλὸν γ’ ἔχουσα τὸ πεδίον. Καλ. καὶ νῆ Δία κομφότατα
τὴν βληχῶ γε παρατετιλμένη.

⁵ Theopompus (*ap.* Ath. xii 517d) cites the Western Greeks’ unusual use of pitch for depilation, saying that they learned it from the Etruscans. This was used on boys’ legs only, and was not adopted in fifth-century Athens.

⁶ See R. G. Ussher, *Ecclesiastusae* (Oxford 1973) *ad loc.* His remarks there refer to general depilation, not specifically to pubic hair. *Thesm.* 590, which he cites to support the suggestion that the two normal methods

were singeing and plucking, could suggest that τίλλειν can mean ‘depilate’ without implication as to method: Mnesilochos had been singed and shaved, not plucked. At *Thesm.* 215–16, ἀποξυρεῖν ταδί, τὰ κάτω δ’ ἀφεύειν, Mnesilochos’ beard (and chest hair?) are to be shaved, his lower parts singed: κέρκος, penis, 239; πρωκτός, anus, 242. See also Dover *GH* 144 on Agathon’s self-depilation.

Lys. 'Yes, by Zeus, Boeotia (or, 'a Boeotian'), for it has such a lovely plain.' (or, 'she has . . .').
Kal. 'And, by Zeus, the one with the very neatly plucked pennyroyal'.

Here, the *πεδίον* is the 'rolling hill' of the *mons veneris*. *βληχῶ*, pennyroyal, *mentha pulegium*, 'is short and bears short, hairy leaves'.⁷ *κομψότατα* indicates refinement, delicacy—something cultivated and cared for, rather than wild. *παρατίλλω*, rather than meaning 'pluck completely' or 'pluck bald' implies either thinning or shaping, or both.⁸ A field which had once grown pennyroyal but was now stripped would be a poor metaphor if that had been Aristophanes' intention. The pennyroyal is rather kept properly spaced—and this also seems a better interpretation of Aristophanes' Greek.⁹

At *Lys.* 151 *δέλτα παρατετιλμένοι*, 'with our crotches plucked', describes a part of the special seductive toilet, along with perfuming and make-up: the echo of line 89 might imply partial, rather than complete, depilation: a garden, not a jungle.¹⁰

Further evidence both for method and for extent of pubic depilation comes from *Ekk.* 723–4, where Praxagora says that the common prostitutes should be made to sleep among the slaves, *κατωνάκην τὸν χοῖρον ἀποτετιλμένας*, 'with their pussies plucked to (resemble) a *katōnakē*'. The *katōnakē* is a coarse wool garment with a sheepskin fringe (LSJ s.v.), related to *νάκη*, a (dressed?) hide with the wool on. The prostitutes will be made to be as careless in their personal care as they have been in their choice of partners. They do not, as Slater and Henderson would have us believe, strip their genitals completely.¹¹ Rather, they are not to be allowed to depilate at all, leaving their pubic hair too long, too thick, or too ragged-edged, or some combination of the three. They will not be allowed, henceforward, to depilate enough to qualify as ladies, thus giving free women one more advantage in competing for young men.

More complex is *Thesm.* 537–43:

First woman: *τέφραν ποθὲν λαβούσαι*
ταύτης ἀποφιλώσομεν τὸν χοῖρον . . .

Mnesilochos: *μὴ δῆτα τὸν γε χοῖρον ὦ γυναῖκες . . .*
διὰ τοῦτο τιλλομένην με δεῖ δοῦναι δίκην ὑφ' ὑμῶν;

First woman: We'll get ashes somewhere and strip this woman's pussy.

Mnes.: Gosh! Not my pussy, ladies . . . are these reasons why I should be punished by you, by having my hair removed?

The circumstances, and the byplay, are complicated. The punishment suggested, rubbing the genitals with ashes, is one associated elsewhere with adulterers (*Nub.* 1083, where the victim is male).¹² The ashes are hot; depilation is a byproduct of an intensely painful procedure. Mnesilochos' use of the verb *τίλλω*, which normally implies plucking, may be intended to

⁷ Henderson 135 no. 146.

⁸ Evidence for shaping could be gleaned from vase paintings; but it would be difficult to distinguish convincingly between artists' shorthand forms, and real fashion. Conclusions could only be tentative. *Pace* Henderson (146 no. 184), the object of such styling is clearly sexual attractiveness; and styling need mean no more than what is required to define shape: no ragged edges. See comments on *Lys.* 151, next in text, and nn. 9, 10. *Cf.* also Henderson 52, 'styles of genital depilation practised by Greek women'.

⁹ The same point is made in Murphy's version of the line (*An Anthology of Greek Drama*, ed. C. A. Robinson, Jr [New York 1949]): 'My word! how neatly her garden's weeded'. This omits the pennyroyal, presumably on the assumption that Murphy's contemporaries do not know what it looks like. Use of the verb to mean 'to weed' (in the med.) is supported by the rather late

Geoponica ii 38.2 (cited LSJ s.v.); this also would imply partial removal. For other short plants and well-tended plots as metaphors for female genitals, see Henderson 46, 47; and nos 128, 130, 131, 133, 137, and 138.

¹⁰ Wilamowitz was surely right to suggest that this refers to a pubic hair style (*Aristophanes Lysistrata* [Berlin 1927] *ad loc.*). Henderson's comment on the 'inappropriateness to the context' (146 no. 184) seems to miss the point. The women intend to excite their men sexually, so that their ultimate refusal of intercourse, or limp compliance, will be as frustrating as possible.

¹¹ Slater 12–13; Henderson 131 no. 111.

¹² See K. J. Dover, *Clouds* (Oxford 1972) *ad loc.* Licht ii 223 mentions use of hot ash as depilatory as though it were on a par with plucking and singeing with the lamp. These two passages—his most likely source—make that improbable.

disarm the ladies by offering an alternative method.¹³ The value of this passage for establishing standard female toilet is clearly limited.

A fragment of Plato Comicus cited in this context (Edmonds *fr.* 174. 13–18) refers to a gift to minor deities of ‘myrtle plucked by hand’ (μύρτων . . . χειρὶ παρατετιλμένων) as the gods do not like the smell of burning lamps. Μύρτων could refer to either leaves or berries of myrtle. Both parts of the plant are used commonly as images of sexual organs, the berries primarily for the female organs, the leaves representing pubic hair of both sexes.¹⁴ Despite difficulties of precise interpretation, the passage clearly supports use of both plucking and singeing as methods of pubic depilation.

As has been noted, singeing by lamp would leave a short stubble, unless one were to singe so closely as to run serious risk of burns.¹⁵ The passages here cited also make it clear that in plucking, the object was not to strip the genitals bald, but to leave a neat and well-defined, but not too thick and bushy, patch of pubic hair.

Some of these passages demonstrate that pubic hair was found sexually attractive on women, at least under some circumstances. This is further supported by one more text from Aristophanes:¹⁶ the Megarian is showing off his second daughter-piglet to Dikaiopolis. *Ach.* 791–2:

αἰ δ' ἂν παχυνθῆ κἀναχνοϊανθῆ τριχί,
κάλλιστος ἔσται χοῖρος Ἀφροδίτα θύειν.

‘When it’s got a bit fatter and blooms with the first hair, she’ll make the loveliest little piggy (pussy) to sacrifice to Aphrodite.’¹⁷ There are two important elements in this remark: the χοῖρος will itself be κάλλιστος—most beautiful, finest, most attractive; and the growth of pubic hair is a major element in its attractiveness. This does not seem an appropriate sentiment, even in Comedy, for a society which fears the female genitals, and particularly pubic hair. The metaphor of blooming, which we are conditioned to expect in the context of down on young men’s cheeks and, less properly, of boys’ pubic hair, is here unashamedly applied to the adolescent girl. The use of the same metaphor in Praxagora’s speech to the lamp (above p. 105), but applied to a mature woman’s pubic hair, can leave little doubt that it could be seen as a positive *desideratum*.

There is room for more investigation of the literary evidence—there is much in lyric poetry and even in tragedy which could be brought to bear, and even the evidence from Comedy has by no means been exhausted—but even this little seems enough to warrant distrust of our opening hypothesis. Some depilation formed a normal part of women’s toilet; it is at least implied that depilation of the genitals, when practised, was only partial. But the evidence of Comedy does not, on its own, allow one to go much farther than that.

¹³ Here, as at *Thesm.* 590 (see n. 6) τίλλειν might mean ‘depilate’ alone, without reference to method. This might also be inferred from *Nub.* 1083 (see n. 12). Slater also cites *Thesm.* 236–9 to support his contention. The implement brought out to depilate Mnesilochos’ lower body is a torch (238), not a lamp, so that conclusions about real life can be only of the most hesitant. It must also be stressed that, at this point in the action of the play, the intention is to improve Mnesilochos’ female disguise by general reduction of his body hair (see n. 6); the parallels to female toilet, though present, should not be taken as straightforward evidence.

¹⁴ Henderson 122 no. 58; 134 no. 125. Edmonds *ad loc.* The minor deities cited are of a sexual nature, so that there is no doubt about the implication of the *double entendre*, though the precise meaning is obscure. Since the myrtle is to be presented on a pinax, a flat dish, detached berries would be impractical. A colleague has suggested ‘a platter of pubic hair’; partially depilated

genitals (some leaves, and perhaps the less desirable berries, removed from clusters of myrtle) are also possible. Probability need not be a strong factor in Comedy.

¹⁵ G. Hermansen has reminded me of the sailors’ habit of singeing the beard with a candle. An essential accessory is a wet towel, applied quickly as the candle is pulled away. This may help to explain some of the sponges which appear as accessories in scenes of women’s toilet on Greek pots.

¹⁶ This to counter Licht i 33, and Slater’s kysthophobia. For some Greek men, the beginning of growth of dark hair in the groin of the beloved boy was the signal for the end of the affair. See *Dover GH* 65. *Id.* 86–7, 144 and elsewhere provide references for the same negative rôle played by the hair of the beard.

¹⁷ The last line contains a religious joke: piglets are sacrificed to Demeter and Persephone, not to Aphrodite. Perhaps there is further play on the theme of prostitutes as ‘priestesses of Aphrodite’.

VASE PAINTING

Our second major source of evidence for daily life is painted pottery. For this question, erotic painting will be most informative. Its *floruit*, from the beginning of red figure to about 450, ends just about at the point at which the evidence from Comedy begins, so that the two may be taken as a continuum provided their evidence is compatible.

In assessing the evidence of erotic vase painting, one must consider the variety of positions in which a woman may be shown during any given sexual act, and the large number of possible angles of view from which the artist can choose. Many positions must totally conceal the female genitals. Far fewer allow even partial exposure. Exposure of the genitals, or even of the pubic region, must then result from the artist's careful choice. If it can be shown that Attic erotic painting commonly uses female genital display as a prominent element, or if female pubic hair is a common element in the erotic symbolism of Attic painting, this could indicate two things: a significant group of individuals found it erotically stimulating to look at female genitals;¹⁸ and pubic hair either was a part of such visual stimulation or, at the very least, was not a deterrent. This would seriously weaken the theory of a widespread and deep-seated phobia.¹⁹

Black figure technique did not allow for much internal anatomical detail. The legacy of black figure was inevitably strong in early red figure, and its influence is as strong in erotica as in any other area of the art.²⁰

A lost cup by Oltos, preserved in a drawing in Gerhard's *Apparatus*, shows what a painter trained in black figure could do with the new technique (PLATE Ia).²¹ Oltos is particularly famous for his 'bathing beauties'—nude young hetairas preparing for the bath, putting on sandals, and the like. These women are normally in profile, in positions involving minimal pelvic display. None seems to show any trace of pubic hair. In our pot, Oltos has chosen a very different, and much more explicitly erotic, subject. A flute girl, nude apart from garland, snake bracelets, and necklace, holds a flute in each hand. Beazley (*ad loc.*) describes her principal activity as 'raping a pointed amphora'. The girl is shown frontally, her legs astraddle, which allows the painter new opportunities, but also presents serious problems: nude breasts seen from the front are not convincingly shown until some thirty years later (*cf.* PLATE Id). Her vulva is concealed by the amphora, but the painter has added a substantial, formalized—and rather drastically misplaced—pubic patch below the navel. These two anatomical problems seem both to be due to the same causes: the newness of the technique which allowed such detailing; and the bold, even unprecedented, attempt at full frontal nudity.

Although others of Oltos' women are erotic—they were not nude because of some asexual or abstract 'aesthetic'—there is a clear and important difference between their implicit eroticism and the explicit eroticism of the flute girl with the amphora. The inclusion of the emphatic pubic patch in this cannot be accidental.²²

¹⁸ An early pelike, akin to the Nikoxenos Painter—Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale, unnumbered, from Tarquinia—shows an ithyphallic man looking at a woman's genitals, which we cannot see: *ARV*² 224, 7; Boardman—La Rocca 106–7; Dover *GHR* 361 (no. ill.); Mulas 50–1. Beazley (*ARV*² *ad loc.*) sums up the pot in two words: (A) Inspection; (B) Penetration.

¹⁹ The majority of Attic erotic pots of known provenance come from Etruria, though statistics could at best be uninformative. A significant number of explicit paintings, however, come from Attic contexts. Vase painters of Greek origin—particularly, one would assume, those from Attica—would have shared the general phobia. How, and why, would they have overcome it? Vases made exclusively for the Etruscan market—e.g. Nikosthenic amphoras—have a high

proportion of erotic content. Almost all of these are black figure pots, and thus cannot help determine an earlier Etruscan penchant for female pubic hair.

²⁰ For a very early red figure bather, with no pubic hair shown despite her exposed pelvis, see a plate at University of California, Berkeley, no. 8.5. H. R. W. Smith, *CVA* pl. 31, 1a and 1b, there attributed to the Cerberos Painter (Paseas). In *ARV*², the museum number appears only in the index of locations, referred to p. 69, which would place it with works 'near Oltos' but unattributed.

²¹ Cup, fragment (whole tondo preserved?), lost, from Vulci. *ARV*² 66, 121; Dover *GHR* 114 (no. ill.); Vorberg, *Gloss.* 334.

²² The occasion shown here needs further investigation. This cup and at least one other, by the Nikosthenes

A second female solo may serve to conclude the period of the earliest red figure. This is a cup by the Nikosthenes Painter in London (PLATE Ib).²³ An hetaira, nude apart from small disc earrings, is shown at the culmination of an erotic dance. In her left hand she holds an olisbos near her open mouth. Her right hand (mistakenly drawn as left) holds a second olisbos, its tip apparently touching her vulva. The vulva is shown clearly, with dark patches to the sides and below emphasized by the same reserved halo effect used to outline the hair of the head. The *mons veneris* has apparently been depilated as completely as possible—which is pretty much what the literary evidence might lead one to expect. Here, vulva and pubic hair are both shown in some detail in what is unarguably an erotic context.²⁴

A cup by the Briseis Painter in Tarquinia (PLATE Ic),²⁵ which has a near-twin in Naples,²⁶ gives further information. To left, near his cloak-draped staff which leans against the wall, stands a man wearing only light laced slippers and a garland. He leans forward, hands on the shoulders of an hetaira who bends down, supporting herself on a striped cushion. The hetaira wears only a garland and garter-amulet (the amulet omitted in Naples). Differences between the two cups are minor, on the whole, but difference in the angle of entry of the penis may indicate that the painter (or painters) intended to show vaginal intercourse on one cup, anal on the other.²⁷ In spite of their pose, and in spite of the full-profile view chosen, both women show dark patches of pubic hair.

A further late archaic example of genital display comes from the Foundry Painter, or at any rate is in his style (PLATE Id).²⁸ A nude hetaira squats, urinating into a large basin shaped like a kotyle. She is shown from directly in front, her legs extended to the sides. The navel, the medial line in the lower abdomen, and the crease of the thighs are shown by dark lines; the pubic triangle is filled with short, thin, dark strokes: these are somewhat like the beard of the komos to left in the Kleophrades Painter's komos in Würzburg, very much like the upper level of pubic hair of the flute girl in the same painting.²⁹

Here, as far as genital display is concerned, the painter has been true to pose and point of

Painter (see PLATE Ib), seem to represent entertainment at the ancient equivalent of a stag party, rather than masturbation for pleasure, which Greek vase painters knew could be achieved by much simpler and more comfortable methods. See also n. 23.

²³ British Museum E815; *ARV*² 125, 15; Brendel fig. 18; Dover *GH* R212 (no ill.). Compare a cup by Epiktetos with very different treatment: Leningrad, Hermitage, no. 14611, from Berezan—*ARV*² 75, 60; Boardman 71 (Beazley drawing); Dover *GHR* 132 (no ill.). A milder version (preparation) is found in a cup from the Lerici excavations, M. Abatone t. 561, in the Cerveteri Museo Nazionale, unpubl.

²⁴ The suggestion of an erotic dance is based on several clues provided by the painting. The posture of the woman, even granting some adjustment required by the bold but unsuccessful treatment of the legs, is compatible only with rapid movement. Muscular torso and arms suggest that the woman is an athlete: an acrobatic dancer with an unusual speciality. The distortion which makes her genitals visible may be attributed to two factors: inexperience in 'life drawing'; and the desire to show them.

²⁵ Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale, from Tarquinia (perhaps formerly no. 2985, though no trace of this label remains: see J. C. Hoppin, *Handbook of Attic Red-Figured Vases* [Cambridge Mass. 1919] i 101); *ARV*² 408, 36; Brendel fig. 23; Boardman—La Rocca 112–13; Dover *GH* R543*; Vorberg *Ars* 17.2. (Under this entry Beazley also cites fig. 18.2. He does not cite the Naples cup [see n. 26] which might well be the one illustrated there: I have not seen this publication.)

²⁶ Naples, Museo Nazionale, Raccolta Pornografica, s.n., provenance unknown; omitted *ARV*²; M. Grant, *Eros in Pompeii* (New York 1975) 102; Mulas 106; Vorberg *Gloss* 686 (not cited *ARV*²); perhaps *id. Ars* 18.2. Brendel (39 n. 41), citing Marcadé's illustration (*RA* 38) of the Naples cup, remarks that it is identical to the cup in Tarquinia; i.e. that Marcadé is wrong to place the cup in Naples. The cup is in Naples, and, though perhaps not by the Briseis Painter, is close to him. The Naples cup is rather careless, and seems derivative of the other.

²⁷ On the difficulties of determining which is intended in specific cases, see Dover *GH* 100. Another variant on this pose by the Briseis Painter is Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1967.306 (ex Beazley), from Cerveteri; *ARV*² 408, 37; *Para.* 371; Boardman 272; Dover *GHR* 545*. The embrace is rather more athletic, and seems to imply vaginal intercourse.

²⁸ Berlin, Staatliche Museen, no. 3757, from Orvieto; *ARV*² 404, 11; *CVA* pl. 24, 2; Dover *GH* R531 (no ill.). The erotic nature of this scene to a contemporary Greek audience is confirmed by a hydria in the Louvre, G51, by the Dikaios Painter or near him: *ARV*² 32, 1; *CVA* 53, 1 and 4. Here a naked woman urinates into a shallow basin; a nude ithyphallic youth, playing the dialos, watches her.

²⁹ Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum, 507; *ARV*² 181, 1; Boardman 129.2; Dover *GH* R309 (no ill.). Closest is the pubic patch of a flute girl by the Foundry Painter in the Lewis Collection, Cambridge University, provenance unknown; *ARV*² 402, 11; Boardman 265.

view as chosen: the vulva itself is not visible. The short, stubbly pubic hair is much what one might expect to see in the first few days after singeing; and this is presumably what is intended.

In this cup there are two major themes: the erotic, which is plain enough—a voyeur's view of an intimate function; and a simple, coarse joke. The drinker can see the picture only after most of the wine in the cup has been drunk; the pot the woman urinates into is of a type often used for cooling wine.

Two classical vase paintings will suffice to establish that there was no substantial change in the attitude towards female pubic hair in that period. Side A of a stamnos by Polygnotos in the Louvre shows the aftermath of a banquet.³⁰ An hetaira, wearing only her fillet, strokes the phallus of a young man who supports her shoulders. A second man, older, lets her down onto his own phallus. By lowering her near leg, the artist exposes her lower abdomen and a patch of pubic hair. There can be no question that this is intentional.³¹

Our final example of explicit erotica is an oinochoë by the Shuválov Painter (PLATE IIa).³² Brendel's discussion of the piece is excellent.³³ A teen-aged boy sits on a high-backed chair. A girl of about the same age, wearing only a headband, stands in front of him, one foot on the chair seat, hands on his shoulders. She is climbing onto his lap, to lower herself onto his penis. This girl shows no signs of professionalism: her hairstyle is modest; she wears no jewelry; she does not wear the garter and amulet which most of the hetairas wear. There is entertainment here; but it is personal and totally private. There are no spectators, and no one is paying for it. The affection between the participants is a major interest of the artist. This oinochoë dates from the last quarter of the fifth century, and is thus roughly contemporary with the texts of Aristophanes cited earlier. Yet, contrary to what the theory under examination would have us expect, the girl, who is a sympathetic character, shows a healthy patch of pubic hair—darker than the boy's, and more concentrated. If pubic hair is frightening and repulsive, one should not show it on a character who is intended to elicit such positive feelings as amused tolerance and nostalgia.³⁴ Clearly, pubic hair continued to be shown on women in erotic contexts through the fifth century.

Pubic hair is also sometimes shown on women wearing transparent chitons; sometimes bunched folds of chiton at the groin give an effective substitute. These both are found most often

³⁰ Paris, Louvre C9682, ex Campana; *ARV*² 1028, 12; Boardman–La Rocca 126–7; Dover *GH* R898 (no ill.); Mulas 58–9; Philippaki 141–2 (no ill.).

³¹ A second stamnos is more problematical. Athens, National Museum, ex Dimitriou. Apparently not cited *ARV*², omitted Philippaki. Boardman–La Rocca 122 (labelled hydria); Dover *GH* R1151 (no ill.); Marcadé *EK* 137; Mulas 54; Vorberg *Gloss.* 42. The subject is unique: two men lower a nude hetaira onto the penis of their reclining friend. The hetaira is frontal, legs wide-spread; and she is blonde. Pubic hair is shown, but conceals nothing: the vulva, slightly misplaced upwards, is shown in considerable, and quite accurate, detail. In published colour photographs damage looks incompatible with normal red figure technique, with red flaking off an underlying glossy black surface. There may be good reason to suspect fairly recent (19th c.?) forgery, perhaps on a genuine Attic stamnos; but one does not lightly attack a piece accepted as genuine by Boardman. The anatomy of the male to left is peculiar: hips, waist, and genitals cannot be reconciled. If the piece is genuine, Boardman's proposed date (c. 430) seems sound; there would be some relation to the school of Polygnotos.

³² Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, F2412 (Marcadé *EK* 152 quotes 2414, whence

Brendel, Dover), from Vulci; *ARV*² 1208, 41; von Blanckenhagen 11b; Boardman–La Rocca 124–5; Brendel figs. 25, 26; Dover *GH* R970*; Mulas 56; Robertson 132c; Simon 211.

³³ 39–42. The relation to the choës, pointed out by Buschor in Furtwängler–Reichhold *Griechische Vasenmalerei* (Munich 1904–32) II ii 316, leads Brendel to associate the event with the Anthesteria. The identification is tempting, and most attractively argued. See also von Blanckenhagen 37–41.

³⁴ At least one other vase painter, later in the same period, the Dinos Painter, found subject and presentation attractive enough to reproduce it with some important changes: bell krater, London, British Museum F65, from Capua; *ARV*² 1154, 35; von Blanckenhagen 10a; Dover *GH* R954*. As von Blanckenhagen points out, the participants are now both boys, their poses somewhat changed. Two spectators have been added: a bearded man, and a woman leaning on the closed lower half of a Dutch door. Dependence on the Shuválov Painter's oinochoë, besides the clear reminiscence of the principal figures, is confirmed by the attempted correction of the perspective of the high-backed chair. This correction is only partly a result of the slight change of viewpoint: there is conscious improvement of the original.

in maenad scenes: Makron gives the best examples.³⁵ But perhaps the most cogent case of pubic hair shown under transparent drapery is the skyphos by Makron and the potter Hieron.³⁶ One side shows Helen, dressed demurely and formally, being led off to Troy by a young, and rather bashful-looking, Paris; Eros flies above them, looking back on Helen. On the reverse is the aftermath: Menelaus, fully armed, his shield decorated with a raging bull, is about to draw his sword. Helen flees from him—slowly—her left hand on his neck, her left foot under his right. She rearranges her mantle (which covers nothing) as she flees: an impossible, theatrical, and totally convincing ploy. Her body faces us, turned slightly to our left; she looks back at Menelaus. Through her transparent chiton's complex folds we see the full outline of her body—and, as if spotlighted, the outline of the abdomen, and a neat, trim pubic patch. Helen used her body to advantage; Makron wants his public to be perfectly clear how.

Helen's erotic exploits had their negative aspect in Greek thought. Nobody really thought that she was cause enough for such a war. But other women who figured in that same war enjoyed almost unqualified sympathy. Cassandra is among those few: she refused Apollo for good reason (she might have suffered more had she accepted); she did not merit rape by the lesser Ajax, slavery to Agamemnon, or murder by the jealous Klytaimestra. Her figure, in the great hydria by the Kleophrades Painter, is surely the most telling evidence available against the proposed kysthophobia (PLATE IIb).³⁷

Kassandra kneels, facing us, on her right knee; her left leg is extended across the Palladion, whose hip she clutches for divine protection. She cowers under Athena's shield, looking towards Ajax and stretching her right hand towards him, begging for mercy. Her cloak falls entirely behind her. Her pose is as vulnerable as any women's could be, and the painter has given her a neat, trim, and very dark patch of pubic hair, still more emphasized by the dark medial line.

The inclusion of pubic hair here has several purposes: it signifies Cassandra's age—she is just about ready for marriage; it emphasizes the sexual nature of the Lesser Ajax's crime. And by these two functions it helps to arouse in the viewer the pity and fear which Aristotle identifies as essential reactions to tragedy. If women's pubic hair is frightening to Greek men, this Cassandra must completely fail.

CONCLUSION

The evidence of Old Comedy, far from supporting the contention that Greek women were expected totally to depilate the genital region in order to allay the fears of their husbands and lovers, shows that the two methods of depilation commonly used for the pubic region, plucking and singeing by lamp, were used not to strip the genitals bald, but to reduce and probably to shape the pubic hair. The result of this must have been to make the vulva more visible; and the literary evidence makes it clear that the point of this was to increase sexual attractiveness.

The evidence of vase painting, conclusive for the late archaic period, can only be suggestive for the rest of the fifth century—reasons for this including changes in style, in taste, and in the types of scenes chosen. Explicit erotic painting became less fashionable (and generally less successful); the female nude is rare apart from bathing scenes. Transparent drapery is outmoded.

³⁵ Pubic hair under transparent chiton: Munich, Antikensammlungen, 2654, from Vulci; *ARV²* 462, 47; Boardman 313; Boardman—La Rocca 30—1; Mulas 22—3. Chiton folds as substitute: New York, Metropolitan Museum, 06.1152, provenance unknown; *ARV²* 463, 52; Brendel fig. 9; Marcadé *EK* 88 (cited as in Munich). Paris, Louvre G144, ex Campana; *ARV²* 462, 43; Brendel p. 18 n. 16 (no ill.); Marcadé *EK* 87; Dover *GHR* 619 (no. ill.) is this, not New York, Metropolitan Museum 06.1152.

³⁶ Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 13.186, from

Suessula; *ARV²* 458, 1; Boardman 308; Charbonneau *et al.* 403; Robertson 79; Simon 166. E. R. Knauer, *Ein Skyphos des Triptolemosmalers* (Berlin 1973) fig. 7, p. 15 and n. 75, notes Beazley's comments on Aphrodite's rôle on the two sides of the skyphos (Beazley, *Boston* iii 34—5); on which see also Simon, note to pl. 166.

³⁷ Naples, Museo Nazionale, 2422, from Nola; *ARV²* 189, 74; P. E. Arias, B. Shefton, M. Hirmer, *A History of 1000 Years of Greek Vase Painting* (New York 1961) 125; Boardman 135; Charbonneau *et al.* 386; Robertson 233—5; Simon 128—9.

The few classical examples cited here (p. 110; n. 31) prove that the tradition carried on after the archaic without important changes in the aspect under discussion, but may give a poor reflection of its extent. Erotic art is very much subject to the whims of fashion.

Vase painting of the late archaic period supports the conclusions reached on the basis of the literary evidence, expands them, and extends them to cover a further period of nearly a century. Greek vase painters of the late archaic period, far from avoiding displays of female pubic hair or of the female genitals, often went out of their way to include them in a variety of situations ranging from highly explicit erotic acts to the rape of *Kassandra*. The only constant is the note of eroticism, always present to some extent when pubic hair is shown; apart from that, the range of responses expected runs from sexual excitement to total, engaged sympathy. This cannot be reconciled with a theory of wide-spread genital phobia.

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ADDENUM

Dr David Bain, of the University of Manchester, has recently published an article dealing *in extenso* with the literary evidence concerning female genital depilation: *LivClassM* vii (Jan. 1982) 7–10. This appeared after the present article was in galley proof, preventing detailed cross-reference; there had been no previous correspondence between the two authors; and it is worth noting that Dr Bain's conclusions from the literary sources are substantially the same as mine, and strongly support the evidence from vase painting as presented here.



(a) Oltos. Lost, formerly Berlin. After Voerberg, *Gloss.* 334 (Courtesy, G. Bretschneider).



(b) Nikosthenes Painter. London. BM E815. Photo BM neg. no. C507 (Courtesy, Trustees of the British Museum).



(c) Briseis Painter. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale s.n. (formerly no. 2985?). Photo M. F. Kilmer.



(d) Style of the Foundry Painter. Berlin 3757 (Courtesy, Antikenmuseum StMPK, Berlin).



(a) Shuválov Painter. Berlin (Courtesy, Antikenmuseum StMPK, Berlin).



(b) Kleophrades Painter. Naples, Museo Nazionale 2422. After Charbonneau *et al.*, 386 (Photo (©) Gallimard—L'Univers des Formes, Paris).



(c) Olpe, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford 224 (C 23) (Courtesy, Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum).

GENITAL PHOBIA AND DEPILATION (a) and (b)
AJAX AND ACHILLES PLAYING A GAME (c)