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**Hermaphroditus and Iphis
Texts and Images from two Ovidian Myths to Visualize Sexual Ambiguity
in the Early Modern Age**

In the early modern period Greek myths and their figurative translations were sometimes employed to legitimise behaviours considered socially irregular. In this case, we can include in particular some myths telling the homoerotic love between gods and heroes, such as Zeus and Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinth, Apollo and Cypress, which humanists, artists and patrons have often used to justify and in a sense ennoble a sentiment rejected by the society. Similarly, the Ovidian myths of Hermaphroditus and Iphis also explore irregular erotic situations. Using current categories, we might state that they tell the mythical foundation of intersexuality and a case of transgenderism, respectively. In spite of the ancient tradition, which counts numerous examples of Hermaphroditus sculptures with male and female sexual attributes, the early modern iconographic tradition removes the visualisation of what is disturbing and prefers the illustration of the heterosexual encounter between Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, sometimes with tones so explicit as to raise censorship. While this myth enjoyed figurative popularity as early as in the classical age, the same does not apply to the Iphis and Ianthe story, of which an iconographic representation (in Greek and Latin areas) is almost non-existent, since in the modern age, as in the classical one, the relationship between two women appeared inconceivable because it did not contemplate the act of penetration. The aim of this paper is to analyse how modern European culture has used images and texts of these two Ovidian myths to visualize the issue of sexual ambiguity, before the invention of our current categories of intersexuality and transgenderism.