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## The Real Housewives of Ancient Rome: Evidence for the Economic Contributions of Women

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Classics

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## Abstract

The involvement of women in commerce has been a common feature of most economies. However, Roman authors tend to obscure the function of women within the Roman economy. This thesis seeks not only to understand the roles women played in commerce in ancient Rome but also the impact that their social status had on their ability to contribute in a meaningful way to the economy.

Epigraphic and literary evidence is drawn on to provide a complete understanding of the roles women played. It is apparent that social status affected the way a female was able to interact with the economic culture of Roman society. Elite women were much more restricted in their ability to gain financial success than middle or working class women. Ideological expectations for women in Roman society were often upheld in order to preserve family prestige. Non-elite women had also internalized these traditions but were financially unable to abide by them and so they were often represented in commemorative inscriptions and reliefs engaging with the Roman workforce.

## Keywords

Roman women, gender identity, social identity, economy, epigraphy, Roman literature, working women, class structures

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction and Literature Review

### 1.1 Introduction

For most of the history of classical scholarship, attention has primarily been paid to those stories of the great and famous men of antiquity and their battles. It is only within the last forty or so years that scholars have begun to consider seriously the place in history for women and marginalized groups of both sexes such as slaves and the poor. Slowly, gender and social status were realized as important facets of society and by ignoring these two aspects of antiquity, scholars would never fully understand ancient society. In large part, the early focus on the masculine aspects of society was due to the social customs that predominantly allowed men to practice in academic fields. The shift scholarship undertook towards a more comprehensive understanding of antiquity was due to the revolutionary changes modern society experienced throughout the early twentieth century and perhaps more importantly only within the last few decades.

Despite the necessity that likely would have demanded that many women undertake work beyond their domestic duties to allow the household to be financially sustainable, scholars have largely ignored women's work until recently.<sup>1</sup> This thesis seeks to understand the variety of ways women contributed to the socioeconomic culture of

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<sup>1</sup> For example Bradley 1991; Dixon 1990, 2001a, 2001b, 2004; D'Ambra 2007; Gardner 1986, 1988, 1999; Hemelrijk 2012, 2015; Joshel 1992; Kampen 1981; Scheidel 1995, 1996, 2012; Treggiari 1976.

Roman society.<sup>2</sup> Not only does it undertake this task, but this thesis also examines the constraints social status placed on a woman's ability to function within Roman commercial life.

Chapter two situates Roman women in the context of ancient attitudes towards occupations. More specifically, it details what sources modern scholars have available to them concerning ancient attitudes and how this has led to an imbalance in modern understanding surrounding women's place in ancient economic life. Literary sources were composed by aristocratic male writers, who were in the unique position of not typically being required to undertake daily menial tasks in order to sustain their families and lifestyle. Thus, chapter two reveals the stigma surrounding certain types of labour should not necessarily be understood as representing the general Roman population's opinions towards various types of occupations. Moreover, the preference for women to remain inside the home in their traditional feminine roles of domestic industry and chastity is a reflection of elite ideals rather than the practicalities of Roman society. Chapter two elaborates on the types of evidence that can be used to discover women in the Roman workforce and the difficulties involved in interpreting this evidence. It should be noted that any sort of epigraphic or relief evidence is naturally biased. Only the upper and middle classes would likely have been able to afford any sort of representation of their lives. Obviously, the lowest classes of Roman society would have experienced an even greater need to work in order to sustain themselves but evidence for their

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<sup>2</sup> The role women played in the prostitution industry has been extensively analyzed and because this thesis examines the lesser studied economic roles of women, female contributions to the prostitution industry will not be discussed. For examples of such studies refer to McGinn (1998 and 2004), MacLachlan (2013), and Hubbard (2014).

involvement is not apparent in any of the available evidence. A discussion of Scheidel's work on the rural economy takes place in chapter four and further elaborates on the difficulties in accessing these much more silent voices in history.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter three provides case studies of elite women and their functions in Roman commercial life. Despite the aristocratic preference displayed in the literary sources to avoid discussions of wage-earning work, I have found evidence that upper class women engaged with the socioeconomic culture of Rome. These women were more strictly confined in terms of what sort of financial endeavors they were able to undertake because of the stigma associated with the more "lowly" types of occupations that are examined in chapter two. Elite women also sometimes disregarded propriety for the sake of profit as in the case of Ummidia Quadratilla. This chapter will also explore how involved elite women were in the daily running of the large-scale businesses that they invested in such as in the case of the documentary evidence from Puteoli that reveals two women, Domitia Lepida and Lollia Saturnina, owned warehouses and lent financial assistance seemingly without any direct involvement in the business proceedings.

Chapter four examines the commercial lives of non-elite women and the roles they were able to play in the economic sphere. Contrary to what the literary sources lead scholars to believe, women were involved in almost every facet of economic life in Rome. With the exception of an *argentarius* (banker), women seemingly are represented in every avenue of industry. Issues surrounding dedicatory inscriptions and the complications they

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<sup>3</sup> See Scheidel 1995 and 1996 for women's roles in the Roman rural economy.



gender regarding the accurate representation of female industry will also be investigated.

The brief concluding chapter will gather all the data provided in the preceding chapters and analyze the impact a woman's social status had on her ability to function within the socioeconomic culture of Rome. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the complications in accessing female contributions to the Roman economy and the necessity for drawing inferences from the data rather than strictly interpreting the evidence as it is presented. This is not to say that it is difficult to discover Roman women in the workforce; simply that with every piece of evidence available concerning female involvement, there are Roman biases in place that may obscure the true nature of feminine economic contributions.

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Scholarship Focused on Gender

The following section of chapter one will focus on the shift the study of gender identity underwent throughout the twentieth century and why this shift was finally able to occur. Gender theory is such a huge and complex topic that it is not possible to fully explore the interdisciplinary nature of it. I will, instead, select the scholarship that had the most dramatic impact on the development of the theoretical framework as it pertains to the study of the ancient Greco-Roman world. I will discuss specifically how we can access evidence for gender identity in classical antiquity. Primary evidence can be difficult to find and interpret. Gender identity was everywhere in ancient society, as it is now, and so

it seems that it was internalized by individuals and experienced differently. This meant that, to the authors of my sources, there was no need to discuss what would have seemed obvious to them. Instead, ways of accessing gendered roles and identity that do not rely on literary sources will be put forward. Finally, I will consider why the study of gender and class identities remain important to the study of antiquity.

Gender continues to be one of the most fascinating and difficult areas of study in the ancient world. It remains an integral part of everyone's social life and identity. Gender was often thought to be the same as one's biological sex and in this way could be relatively fixed and perhaps even universal across human history.<sup>4</sup> While Roman culture did not have the same concept of gender as modern North American society does, gender identity still permeated and affected Roman society in a way similar to modern society. Since we are linked to past men and women by our biology, and because we are unable to fully detach ourselves from gender identity as we experience society, we must be aware that we are always interpreting ancient gender through the gendered lens of the present.<sup>5</sup> This has also meant the study of gender identity, and the identity of women in particular, has changed dramatically throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as modern society has developed changing views regarding gender.

In the early twentieth century, the attitude that assumed men were superior to women was so embedded in western culture that scholars accepted unquestioningly what ancient authors provided about women. The lack of female presence and importance in the development of classical society seemed natural and such attitudes were preserved

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<sup>4</sup> Foxhall 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Montserrat 2001; Hope 2001; Gardner 2007.

surprisingly late into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Carcopino's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, written in French in 1939 and then translated into English in 1940, appears to adopt fully the viewpoint of his elite male sources but frames his discussion in terms of the issues of his own day. His research on women in ancient society was one of the first comprehensive studies of Roman women. He portrays Roman women as belonging to one of two categories: they were either strong and virtuous women or disgraceful, selfish "haridans" whose uncontrolled behavior contributed to the breakdown of family values and shook the foundations of Roman society.<sup>7</sup> This is one instance where we see an author comparing an ancient and modern situation and allowing modern moral and ideological frameworks to influence the scholar's opinion of ancient women. Carcopino opens his discussion of Roman marriage *sine manu*<sup>8</sup> with a statement about contemporary French legislation. French officials had recently abolished all obstacles to a couple wishing to marry against the wishes of parental authority.<sup>9</sup> He comments on the decrease of parental rights and seems to make it clear that he does not approve of this. He provides a discussion of Roman marriage practices and the ability of a Roman matron to be freed from guardianship by entering into a marriage contract and producing enough children to qualify for Augustus' Julian policies that allowed women more freedom in this sphere.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Carcopino 1940 as an example.

<sup>7</sup> Carcopino 1940, 85-86.

<sup>8</sup> Marriage *sine manu* is a contract in which the woman remains part of her natal family and in the *potestate* (power) of her father. Her property does not belong to her husband and he had no rights over it. Upon the death of the woman's father, she was able to inherit property in the same way as her brother and becomes *sui iuris*. This contract existed early on in the Republic.

<sup>9</sup> Carcopino 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Augustus' *ius trium liberorum* allowed freeborn women who had produced three or more children or freedwomen who had produced four or more children to be exempt from the necessity

His decision to sarcastically call these women ‘emancipated’ makes it clear where he stands on the issue. His opinion of this change in Roman law must have reflected contemporary French politics. In this way, we can see how Carcopino, himself an upper class male, allowed his position in French society to influence him to identify more strongly with the elite male ancient authors. In his following section, entitled “Feminism and demoralization” Carcopino gives an account of Roman marriage tempered by the time and place of his own writing:

“It is easy to cite ‘emancipated’ or rather ‘unbridled’ wives who were the various product of the new conditions of Roman marriage. Some evaded the duties of maternity for fear of losing their good looks: some took a pride in being behind their husbands in no sphere of activity...Some were not content to live their lives by their husband’s side but carried on another life without him at the price of betrayals and surrenders for which they did not even trouble to blush.”<sup>11</sup>

This account of Roman marriage seems somewhat shaky especially considering the sources we have describing the variety of economic endeavors in which women were involved. Later chapters will more fully examine direct and indirect feminine involvement in the Roman economy.

At roughly the same time that Carcopino wrote his early work on Roman women, there were a few women’s colleges developing in North America and Britain producing female

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of a *tutor*. While a *tutor* had become more of a figurehead by this point in Roman history, women who qualified for this new policy did not have any legal guardian. This point will be more fully articulated in chapter two, section two.

<sup>11</sup> Carcopino 1940, 90.

scholars. These women, however, were disinterested in undertaking a study of women or gender identity. This indifference in studies of women and gender identity amongst female scholars can be understood when one considers contemporary politics. In the early twentieth century the women's suffrage movement was in full swing and women were struggling to get the vote. It is understandable that women, who were at this time fighting to be taken seriously politically and socially by their male counterparts, would focus their academic research on topics similar to their male colleagues.<sup>12</sup> This shift in scholarly interests can also be explained by the ever-increasing access to education. No longer were university studies limited to wealthy aristocratic men; women and lower class individuals were slowly creating a larger presence in the academic world. It is not surprising, therefore, to see the shift in the demographics of universities and also new engendered research interests.

Feminist research that pertained to Classics developed in two different ways in France in the first half of the twentieth century. More importantly, French academic thought began to shift towards an interest in the underrepresented figures in history. Initially this research did not focus specifically on Classics, but the trend permeated the field within a few decades (by the 1960's).<sup>13</sup> The first development was advanced by the *Annales* school of historical thought, which sought to represent the underrepresented. The urban poor, rural peasantry, children, and women were among the focuses of this school and specifically these marginalized groups as they functioned within French society. This particular school was influential in creating a research agenda that emphasized social

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<sup>12</sup> Foxhall 2013, 6-7; Harrison 1965, 324.

<sup>13</sup> Foxhall 2013, 7.

themes rather than the political or diplomatic themes that dominated scholarship at the time. Articles directly pertaining to Greek and Roman women did not begin to appear until the 1960s. However, the *Annales* school does demonstrate the growing interest towards examining the lives of those individuals typically ignored by scholars to this point. As this school of thought became more popular outside of France, the research interests expanded to include those regions that lie outside of the traditional research interests of the *Annales* school.

Feminist philosophers, most notably scholars such as de Beauvoir, were responsible for the second advancement of feminist research seen in French scholarship. De Beauvoir's famous work entitled *The Second Sex* (1949, translated into English in 1953) examines prehistoric and classical pasts as part of her articulation of the greater social and political issue of women's oppression. This work is particularly interesting for the purpose of this thesis in that it draws together the two elements of class and gender and sets them alongside one another as a method of oppression. De Beauvoir argues that men, throughout history, have made women into the 'Other' and ascribed to them a "false aura of mystery."<sup>14</sup> This deliberate misunderstanding creates a hierarchy, according to de Beauvoir, where men occupy the upper registers and women the lower, which in turn leads to the oppression of women. This oppression by hierarchy occurs in other facets of identity as well, namely age, ethnicity, class, and religion.<sup>15</sup> Butler writes that de Beauvoir's work first established the concept that one is not born female or male but that one comes to identify with a gender and for the first time, we see a scholar distinguishing

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<sup>14</sup> de Beauvoir 1953.

<sup>15</sup> de Beauvoir 1953.

between ‘sex’ and ‘gender.’<sup>16</sup> Scott’s much later 1986 article follows up this concept by thinking of these terms not as the same but as gender being shaped by other social factors. De Beauvoir also had a huge impact on the so-called ‘second-wave’ feminist writers of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the Francophone and Anglophone worlds.<sup>17</sup>

The feminist movement did not fully surface in the Anglo-American world until the 1970s and 1980s, which followed the rise of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and 1970s in Europe. Foxhall notes the interdisciplinary nature of the scholarship present during this time period. Scholars from all academic fields seem to have discovered the women’s movement as a political and social progression and shared ideas with one another and all drew heavily on the same corpus of literary and social theory.<sup>18</sup> One of the first volumes that dealt with the topic of women in the ancient world specifically was an issue of the Classics journal *Arethusa* (1973) dedicated to the investigation of women in antiquity specifically from a feminist perspective. This volume acknowledged the dearth of scholarship, attempted to “explore systematically the underlying roots of the lowly status of women,”<sup>19</sup> and sought to rectify the matter by including a variety of articles dealing with various aspects of female life in the ancient world as well as sample syllabi for teaching a ‘women in antiquity’ course.

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<sup>16</sup> Butler 1999, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Foxhall 2013, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Foxhall 2013, 5-9; See Seltman 1956; Harrison 1965; Arthur 1973; Balsdon 1974; Pomperoy 1975; Walker 1983. See Foxhall 2013 Table 1.1 for a comprehensive study of all the works published pertaining to feminist research.

<sup>19</sup> Sullivan 1973, 5.

Pomeroy's 1975 book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* adopted women as an object of study and used a feminist perspective to construct them as a part of history in their own right. She posed the question: what did women do while men were active in all the areas traditionally privileged by male classical scholars? Prior to Pomeroy's publication, there had not been a systematic undertaking of the place of women in Greco-Roman society. While Pomeroy's book may now appear dated with its rather generalizing consideration of gender relations, when compared to contemporary scholarship seeking to achieve the same goal, it is clear that Pomeroy took a huge step forward with her historical and theoretical methodologies and frameworks.<sup>20</sup> Despite the presence of such a breakthrough in research, it took a long time for mainstream journals to produce articles pertaining to gender or sexuality.

Foxhall surveyed the three mainstream Classics journals (the *American Journal of Philology*, *Classical Quarterly*, and *Historia*) between 1970 and 1985 and reports that only twenty of the articles published focused on aspects of ancient women and gender. Of these twenty articles, a large part, while focusing on feminist topics, do not incorporate feminist theories in their analyses. More shockingly, the journal *Historia* does not include any articles on these topics prior to 1980. It was not until 1980 that second-wave feminist perspectives began to influence the work being produced in mainstream classical scholarly work.<sup>21</sup>

Scott (1986) was the first to shift intellectual discourse in a meaningful way away from thinking solely about women and towards gender identity as a concept important to

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<sup>20</sup> See Balsdon 1974 for comparison.

<sup>21</sup> Foxhall 2013, 6-14.



understanding ancient society. Her research focused on the recognition that female gender was not a monolithic term for women but was instead a nuanced and variegated concept that also applied to men, and was shaped by a variety of factors including religion, social status, age, wealth, ethnicity, and other facets of identity.<sup>22</sup> Her discussion of the term “gender” developed out of American feminists’ insistence on the fundamentally social quality of distinctions based on sex.<sup>23</sup> Built by those who feared that a women’s studies approach would focus too narrowly on women, it incorporated a relational view into scholarship.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with this relational view, women and men ought to be equally the focus of a study and are defined in terms of one another. Scott called for scholars to scrutinize their methods of analysis, to clarify their assumptions, and to explain how they think change occurs.<sup>25</sup> She elaborates on this by stating, “instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled.”<sup>26</sup> This recalls her comments regarding the interconnectedness of gender, ethnicity, and class; one facet of identity cannot be studied exclusive of other aspects because the experience of one’s identity relies upon other factors. She proposed a two part definition of gender: it is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary field by means of which or through which power is articulated.<sup>27</sup> She

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<sup>22</sup> Scott 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Scott 1986, 1054.

<sup>24</sup> Foxhall 2013, 10-15.

<sup>25</sup> Scott 1986, 1067.

<sup>26</sup> Scott 1986, 1067.

<sup>27</sup> Scott 1986, 1067-1069.

summarizes her argument by stating that gender is a way to interpret meaning and to comprehend the complex connections among various forms of human interactions. Her interpretation of the usefulness of the term gender as a means of understanding antiquity is particularly useful to this thesis, which understands how gender and class influence and play a role in the Roman economy. This thesis particularly seeks to understand how the experiences of elite and non-elite Roman women were different. It will become clear throughout chapters three and four that a woman's social status, not only her biological sex, dictated how a woman was able to participate in the socioeconomic culture of Rome. Scott understood that the way women were able to experience society depended upon a variety of social factors. She sought to make it clear that gender was only one aspect of identity and without a comprehensive understanding of all facets of identity, a society cannot be fully understood.<sup>28</sup>

Scott's work on gender history kicked off an academic discourse that began to integrate post-modern and post-colonial perspectives and situated women in the context of overarching social and political movements. The social and economic history of the ancient world became more nuanced as the understanding of the place and impact of women had in antiquity developed. 'Gender' also came to include men and the different ways that gender may be manifested, performed, and expressed. The theoretical work of Butler in the early 1990s stimulated the concept of gender as something fluid that exists along a spectrum, which in turn led to the development of what is sometimes collectively called the 'third-wave feminism' movement.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Scott 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Butler 1993, 1999; Showden 2009.

The next treatment of gender identity that made an impact was by Lefkowitz and Fant, who published *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* in 1992. Their book developed Pomeroy's ideas further and sought to provide a unique look at the public and private lives, as well as the legal status, of Greek and Roman women of all social levels. Their sourcebook provided excerpts from ancient literature that gave insight into a number of previously unstudied female issues such as women's legal rights and religious roles, as well as female relationships. Even so, Pomeroy, Lefkowitz, and Fant largely based their studies on the idea that there is a homogenous and single, straightforward category called 'women' when considering the lived realities of women in antiquity.<sup>30</sup> Montserrat takes issue with these approaches and believes that such tidy categories can project an incorrect image that there was little difference between the ancient and modern worlds. Instead of taking modern ideas about gender and applying them to ancient society, he advocates building models based on ancient Roman conceptions of gender and when necessary, projecting them forwards for modern applications.<sup>31</sup>

This new approach to scholarship, namely the desire to demonstrate the significance of women in ancient society and to document their oppression and their agency using feminist techniques, led even non-feminist scholars to consider the ancient sources in a different and more critical light. No longer did it seem tenable to many scholars to accept unquestioningly what the ancient literary sources reported. It became increasingly obvious that these sources were the products of biased, elite males in much the same way

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<sup>30</sup> Pomeroy 1975; Lefkowitz and Fant 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Montserrat 2000, 161-163.

that the early modern scholarship had been produced by upper class males and had been subject to similar biases.

With these broader viewpoints, scholars began to explore how gender operated as a metaphor, beyond the interactions between men and women. The manner in which gender could be used as a tool of oppression and objectification became a topic of discussion.<sup>32</sup> How this tool was applied to different groups of people and different situations and the results of this application has been studied by a variety of individuals over the past two decades. Montserrat in the early 2000s applied the trope of negative feminization to depictions of ‘bad’ emperors and subjugated peoples in literature and art.<sup>33</sup> Montserrat launched his discussion with a quote on dream interpretations from Artemidorus of Daldis’ *Ways of Interpreting Dreams*.<sup>34</sup> This initially appears to be a rather strange starting point for a discussion pertaining to gender but it quickly becomes apparent what dream interpretation can say about the Romans’ thoughts on gender, a concept for which they did not have a term. The meanings of dreams, at least according to Artemidorus, are nuanced and shift depending on one’s gender, age or social status.

Female individuals who dream that they have a beard are supposed to become

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<sup>32</sup> Montserrat 2000, 153-155.

<sup>33</sup> Montserrat 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Artemidorus. *Ways of Interpreting Dreams* 1.30 “To dream of having a beard that is long and thick is auspicious for an orator, a philosopher, and people who are about to undertake a business transaction. It makes the former dignified and the latter formidable. If a woman dreams that she has a beard, she will marry again if she is a widow, but if she has a husband she will be separated from him. . .if a very young child dreams that he has a beard, it signifies death for him, because the beard has come before the proper time. But for someone who is an adolescent and who will soon grow a beard of his own, whether he is now a slave or a free man, it signifies that he will be his own master, since the beard shows that he is full-grown and responsible for himself. If a man dreams that his beard has fallen off, or that it has been forcibly shaved off or ripped off by anyone, it signifies harm together with shame.” Translation taken from Montserrat 2000. All other translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

empowered or, alternatively, if a male dreamer loses his beard he will then suffer a loss of power. Thus, Artemidorus invites us to understand male attributes in terms of empowerment and powerlessness. Montserrat believes we should understand the Roman conception of gender as being produced “at the place where anatomical sex is intersected by social relations, especially power relations.”<sup>35</sup> This conclusion becomes especially important when this thesis later considers the variety of positions women had in the Roman economy and the opportunities their social statuses allowed them.

Based on this conclusion we can see that Roman gender was not a fixed state but a shifting category that had almost more to do with one’s social category than one’s biological sex. De Beauvoir’s famous dictum ‘one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one’ seems much more in line with the Roman conception of gender than it is perhaps to the modern audience.<sup>36</sup> Turning back to Montserrat’s interpretation of the social meanings embedded in Artemidorus, we can see how external features (in this case, beards) situated people on a body hierarchy of social importance constructed in accordance with the views of ancient medical writers.<sup>37</sup> The presence of facial hair, which women lacked, was (according to ancient belief) a visible indicator of internal body heat, which is a marker of man’s inherent claim to superiority and authority over women and other subordinate groups.<sup>38</sup> For the Romans the beard symbolized power and operated as a gauge of the different states of authority or powerlessness that were undetermined by anatomical sex (so those states of subjugation or slavery). Within

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<sup>35</sup> Montserrat 2000, 154.

<sup>36</sup> De Beauvoir 1973, 301

<sup>37</sup> Montserrat 2000, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Montserrat 2000, 154; Zanker 1995, 217-226; King 1997, 621.

Artemidorus' dreamscape, the presence of a beard can sometimes bestow the dreamer with (male) power and authority; when a male slave dreams of having a beard it means he will soon achieve autonomy and an end to his oppression.

Conversely, when a man dreams that he loses his beard it can foretell the loss of some level of autonomy.<sup>39</sup> If gender can be said to be the relationship between biological sex and power and agency, then Artemidorus' interpretation of this dream is an articulation of a Roman conception of gender. Montserrat summarizes his thoughts on Roman gender by stating that the process of transforming anatomical sex into a cultural category (gender) is primarily concerned with creating "meanings about power" along with the creation and maintenance of power hierarchies.<sup>40</sup> His conclusion seems reasonable; the application of opposite biological features on an individual or group of people bestows on them a position within the social hierarchy. For instance, emperors who were treated with contempt by ancient authors often have effeminate features applied to them. This serves to lessen them in the eyes of the contemporary audience. Likewise, groups of provincials or those groups living outside the Roman borders have biological features applied to them that are meant to construe some sort of message about their agency or power within Roman society.

The second century CE writer Polemo practiced physiognomics which believes that the external appearance of a person could be interpreted to reveal internal traits. He says:

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<sup>39</sup> Montserrat 2000,154-158.

<sup>40</sup> Montserrat 2000,155.

“You may obtain indications of masculinity and femininity from your subject’s glance, movement, and voice, and then, from among these signs, compare one with another until you determine to your satisfaction which of the two sexes prevails. For in the masculine there is something feminine, and in the feminine something masculine, but the designation masculine or feminine is assigned according to which of the two prevails.”<sup>41</sup>

Based on this statement it seems that gender can be applied according to not only the body but also behaviour. A trope in ancient literature of writing about ‘bad’ Roman emperors is to show that they have excessive relationships with male partners and these relationships culminated in an attempt to transform one of the bodies, either the emperor himself or the lover, into a woman. Suetonius writes of Nero, a roundly disliked emperor, that he not only once, but twice, castrated the body of a young boy in order to make a woman of him and thus be able to marry him.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, Cassius Dio writes about the emperor Elagabalus and how he performed many traditionally female activities such as spinning wool, wearing eye makeup and other female attire and how he eventually fell so in love with a young man that he demanded that his court physicians change his body into a female body.<sup>43</sup> These two examples offer a demonstration of how the Romans had a constructed quality to their conception of gender. It was not something that was natural; rather it was constructed through social customs, practices, ideals, and individual desires. Dio, perhaps more strongly than Suetonius, appears to believe that

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<sup>41</sup> Polemo, *On Physiognomics* 2.1.192. Translation taken from Montserrat 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Suet. *Nero* 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> Dio. *Roman History* 80.16.2-6.

gender could be temporary and that biological sex was changeable by human or even divine intervention such as occurs in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>44</sup>

The point of considering gender in ancient Roman society is perhaps not to find or access men's or women's voices or lives but instead to attempt to understand how gender was a process of constantly renegotiated meanings which structured Roman life and manifested themselves in Roman culture. Gender and status respond to each other and configure themselves in accordance to that discourse. Roman historians may provide an example of a historical figure who shifted gendered roles. As discussed above, Roman authors sometimes applied male or female characteristics to individuals to demonstrate a particular point or to justify Roman actions. Since gender was not necessarily commensurate with biological or physical sex in a Roman context, when applied to a certain character in literature it should not be taken to mean that this character was meant to be 'good' or 'bad.' Instead, these applications of gender attributes should be carefully examined to understand what role the character undertook at that point and how the audience was perhaps meant to identify with (or against) them.

Boudica, the first-century British queen who led her people to significant rebellion in 60/61 CE, is a prime example of how class (or ethnicity) as well as gender could play a role in how Roman culture defined an individual's character, and how the Roman authors who recorded her history framed her in ways to make the audience sympathize with or reject her.<sup>45</sup> Her rebellion led to the sacking of three Roman cities and the deaths of tens

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<sup>44</sup> See Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9.666-797: the story of Iphis and Ianthe has Juno ordering Isis to change the body of Iphis into a male so that she was able to marry the female Ianthe.

<sup>45</sup> Adler 2011, 136; Braund 1996, 145; Crawford 2002, 26.



of thousands of Romans and allied peoples. Perhaps as a way to justify Roman military failure, Dio Cassius described Boudica with male and female attributes. He focused on her terrifying height, her fierce gaze, and her tendency to address her people while holding a spear.<sup>46</sup> These male attributes allowed Boudica to access the male values of military leadership that, as a woman, she would not naturally have in the view of a Roman audience. Indeed, L'Hoir argues that authors often characterized female leaders with masculine attributes to display them as usurpers of masculine Roman authority.<sup>47</sup>

Conversely, Tacitus chose to focus on Boudica's maternity, a particularly feminine attribute.<sup>48</sup> By moulding her into the traditional Roman *matrona*, Tacitus encouraged his audience to identify with the struggles endured by Boudica and her daughters, rather than to focus on the (potentially threatening or inappropriate) maleness of Boudica's character, as Dio chose to do.<sup>49</sup> Marriage was thought to complete a woman and endow her with social status and purpose.<sup>50</sup> Honourable women were women who accomplished this duty, while single women were often considered dangerous in Roman society. Women who secured this status were placed in the marital category of *matrona*; this was considered the ideal state and was a category that included motherhood.<sup>51</sup> Boudica, in

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<sup>46</sup> Dio Cass. 62.2.2-4.

<sup>47</sup> L'Hoir 1994.

<sup>48</sup> Pettigrew 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Tac. *Annals* 14.31.3 "Iam primum uxor eius Boudicca verberibus adfecta et filiae stupro violatae sunt: praecipui quique Icenorum, avitis bonis exuuntur, et propinqui regis inter mancipia habebantur." 'Now first his wife Boudicca was weakened by floggings and his daughters were violated. All the leaders of the Icenii were deprived of ancestral estates and the relatives of the king were made as slaves.'

<sup>50</sup> D'Ambra 2006, 12.

<sup>51</sup> D'Ambra 2006, 46.

Tacitus' account at least, is initially described in terms of her *matrona* status. She is married, she has children, and she is loyal to her husband. Roman sources frequently admired and esteemed women who fit into this *matrona* category. Elsewhere, Tacitus applauded the image of the *matrona* which makes his application of this trope to Boudica all the more interesting and potentially important. He remarked in his *Dialogue on Oratory* how important it was for women to raise and interact with their own children rather than have a nurse take care of their upbringing and education. He recalled women he considered to be good mothers; Caesar's mother Aurelia, Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and Atia the mother of Augustus.<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly, Tacitus situated his discussion of Boudica and her dedication and pursuit of justice for her children only a few chapters after his discussion on the questionable relationship between Nero and his mother Agrippina.<sup>53</sup> It seems that motherhood is an

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<sup>52</sup> Tac. *Dial.* 28.4-7. "nam pridem suus cuique filius, ex casta parente natus, non in cellula emptae nutricis, sed gremio ac sinu matris educabatur, cuius praecipua laus erat tueri domum et inservire liberis. eligebatur autem maior aliqua natu propinqua, cuius probatis spectatisque moribus omnis eiusdem familiae suboles committeretur; coram qua neque dicere fas erat quod turpe dictu, neque facere quod inhonestum factu videretur. ac non studia modo curasque, sed remissiones etiam lususque puerorum sanctitate quadam ac verecundia temperabat. sic Corneliam Gracchorum, sic Aureliam Caesaris, sic Atiam Augusti matrem praefuisse educationibus ac produxisse principes liberos accepimus." 'For long ago every citizen's child, the child of a chaste mother, was reared, not in the chamber of a purchased nurse, but in the mother's bosom and embrace, for whom it was the particular glory to protect the home and to be devoted to her children. Moreover it was usual for an elderly relative to be chosen for the other children, in whose presence it was not right to speak a disgraceful word or to do a dishonourable deed. With a certain sanctity and modesty she regulated not only the studies and cares of the boys but also their recreation and games. Thus we accept that Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, thus Aurelia, the mother of Caesar, thus Atia, the mother of Augustus, presided over the education of their sons and produced the greatest of sons.'

<sup>53</sup> Tacitus' discussion on the Boudican revolt spans book 14.30 through to book 14.37. His discussion of Nero and Agrippina begins at 14.10 and continues through to 14.15. Of course these accounts are not directly situated next to each other in the *Annals* but the lack of maternal qualities found in Agrippina, an elite Roman, and her perverse relationship with her child is situated close enough to the Boudican account that perhaps the Roman audience was meant to consider Boudica in light of Agrippina the Younger.

integral part of Tacitus' representation of Boudica. Roman authors apparently struggled with the correct way to account for a powerful, authoritative matron who was by her very nature, a contradiction for a society in which a good woman was to be modest, demure, and dutiful.<sup>54</sup> There was a fine line between women who warranted praise because of their political skills and others who are viewed as contemptible because of their ambition. This was very much the case in Tacitus' *Annals*. Agrippina the Younger was relegated to the degraded status of a conniving mother and deserving victim, whereas Boudica, who was presented in a positive light in terms of her dedication to her children, was perhaps not so worthy of her untimely demise.<sup>55</sup> A female character who fulfilled her proper social role could receive praise in times of crisis even if she exceeded the boundaries of her gender.

### 1.2.2 How can we access ancient gender?

As discussed above, Latin authors might apply a combination of male and female attributes to an individual in order to prove a point or to make the Roman audience more or less sympathetic to him or her. While some ancient authors directly addressed gender difference, other texts require a more nuanced understanding in order to fully comprehend how gender actually functioned within Roman society. While elites may have portrayed it ideally, their prescriptions for properly gendered behavior likely differed from how people actually lived. Social roles based on gender were ubiquitous and often left undiscussed in the ancient world, as they are in our own society, which

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<sup>54</sup> D'Ambra 2006, 143.

<sup>55</sup> D'Ambra 2006, 143.

means they can be difficult to find and to interpret.<sup>56</sup> In the same way that we do not feel the need to constantly articulate our gender but still continuously perform it, the ancient world similarly internalized its principles.<sup>57</sup> Our evidence for the enactment of gender in the ancient world is problematic because it was generated for elite, or at least relatively elite, adult men. We generally lack the voices of women or even lower class men, but also the voices of foreigners, criminals, children, and the elderly are typically silent. Therefore, a variety of sources must be carefully examined and drawn from to create a comprehensive understanding of not only gender but also its intersections with class in the ancient world.

Archaeology and material culture play an important role in creating this comprehensive picture of gender in the ancient world. As far as we know, most evidence that remains, from temples to theatres, wall paintings, sculptures, and even vases, were conceptualized and created by men. Representational art and iconography as well as the conventions of depiction provide significant insights into the attitudes towards gender beyond what written texts are able to provide. Some of these insights are particular to a certain time and place, but many conventions became much more widespread and long-lasting and can be used as representative of the gender ideals and ideologies of particular individuals and types of peoples.<sup>58</sup> However, the problematic nature of this evidence, as mentioned above, lies in its restriction to only certain classes of individuals: some degree of wealth was required in order to produce the majority of the artefacts and products used to

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<sup>56</sup> Foxhall 2011, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Foxhall 2011, 14-16.

<sup>58</sup> Foxhall 2011, 19-21; Montserrat 2001, 145.

investigate women's economic roles. The lowest classes, the enslaved and the working poor, had little power to produce, commission, or influence cultural representations. This thesis works towards an understanding of women's place in the Roman economy with this bias in mind.

Spaces in private homes or public areas can tell us much about social life. Who used what space in a home and how they used it was dictated by social conventions. Where homes were set in the spatial context of the street, market, bath, and agricultural landscape impacted the way men and women of all ages and social status engaged with them. The archaeology of these homes and settlements can allow us to reconstruct the gendered movements of people through them.<sup>59</sup>

This thesis utilizes evidence for non-elite classes as much as possible, but problems in the interpretation of this evidence still remain, such as our imposition of modern interpretations of artefact use onto material remains. Allason-Jones cautions strongly against simply assuming that because an artefact is used in a modern situation by a certain gender that the same can be said of the Romans.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Gardener advocates taking a step back from modern preconceptions and situating the artefact in its archaeological context as well as drawing comparisons from across the empire to gain a full understanding of all the contexts in which the artefact was found and how its purpose and meaning can shift depending on the location and time.<sup>61</sup> As an example for the ways in which an artefact can be taken as indicative of a certain gender's presence, Allason-

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<sup>59</sup> Nevett 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Allason-Jones 1995 and 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Gardener 2007, 15-17 and 128-130.

Jones discusses how scholars have often associated brooches with a female presence despite the overwhelming evidence for men wearing brooches in Roman Britain.<sup>62</sup> She points out that almost every military and civilian tombstone on which the deceased is shown wearing a cloak clearly has a brooch fastening the garment.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the sexual determinations of burials have shown that at a number of sites males were often provided with a brooch, while the evidence at a variety of sites in Britain indicates that brooches were buried equally with males and females.<sup>64</sup> Allason-Jones summarizes her argument by questioning whether it is possible to assign any artefact category to strictly one gender. She points out that certain medical instruments could create a rare female category and also that items of jewelry made from jet may have had special significance for women.<sup>65</sup> This is all to say that very rarely and only in certain cases can an artefact class be assigned to a specific group of people.

There is substantial evidence that differences in status were visually articulated. For example, seats in the amphitheatre and theatre were ranked and certain methods of dress were restricted to specific groups of people. Likewise, in several excerpts from ancient literature we can see that individuals would rank their own guests according to their status.<sup>66</sup> Such dividing and ordering of the Roman population served to underline that the Roman world was full of inequalities.<sup>67</sup> The assessment of status in Roman culture by

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<sup>62</sup> Allason-Jones 1995.

<sup>63</sup> Allason-Jones 1995, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Philpott 1991, 123; Allason-Jones 1995, 1999, 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Allason-Jones 1995, 29.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Plin. *Letters* 2.6; Mart. *Epigrams* 9.2; Juv. *Satires* 5.24-155..

<sup>67</sup> Hope 2001, 126.

other Romans conferred power and influence on the individual but this conferred status could be challenged by chronological or geographic factors.

Most societies exhibit multiple forms of hierarchy, which usually changed with context.<sup>68</sup>

Variations in the material evidence such as homes, public monuments, tombs, and personal possessions suggest these inequalities but are themselves not the basis, but rather the results of inequalities.<sup>69</sup> There is no surviving description of social or class groupings within Roman society and thus our evidence is secondhand, drawn primarily from literature and inscriptions.<sup>70</sup> The problem is much the same as deriving information about gender from ancient texts; Roman literature was produced by and for elite, urban men and so does not provide a perspective that is representative of a minority.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the evidence for class divisions that we do have, we do not have the figures and demographic studies for the ancient world that we possess for modern populations. We do not know with any high degree of certainty the actual population count of the Roman empire, nor the average level of income, nor how many people were free or enslaved. Not only do these things hinder our full understanding of status in the ancient world but to employ the modern language of class is problematic as well.<sup>72</sup> There are no labels in Roman culture corresponding precisely to our notions of upper, middle, and lower classes and to try to create these groupings can be as problematic as trying to impose a particular

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<sup>68</sup> Berreman 1981, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Hope 2001, 125-130.

<sup>70</sup> Garnsey and Saller 1987, 109.

<sup>71</sup> Hope 2001, 126.

<sup>72</sup> Alföldy 1988, 148-150; Garnsey and Saller 1987, 109.

gender on an individual living in a culture which constantly renegotiates what that gender means.

This does not mean that it is futile to undertake a study focused on status. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on understanding that the basis for status distinctions could be diverse and could be changed in response to the presence of social markers of identity, such as age, gender, or the end of enslavement. A very cautious approach is needed when asking questions regarding gender and class. Modern conceptions cannot be applied to the ancient world, especially when dealing with a group of people such as the Romans who had a much more fluid and interchangeable opinion towards gender and identity.

In this chapter, I have shown how the attitudes concerning ancient women and the study of women has shifted dramatically over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. There are many valid and feasible ways to understand gender in the ancient world but for the purposes of this thesis the historical and material aspects of Roman culture will be the most useful. Literary sources will be drawn on when needed.



## Chapter 2

### Roman Attitudes Concerning Work

#### 2.1 Introduction

In recent years, many scholars have attempted to undertake an explanation of the female contribution to the ancient Roman economy by examining both the literary and archaeological remains of Roman culture.<sup>73</sup> These contributions to scholarship have sought to identify groups of working women mainly in isolated contexts. This thesis seeks to examine Roman women as a whole and to investigate particularly the role that one's social status played in terms of what options were open to her regarding commercial activities. Many of the issues outlined in the preceding chapter regarding the preference of modern scholars to study aristocratic elite men has impacted the study of the Roman economy.<sup>74</sup> As the study of Roman women developed, so too did the study of the Roman workforce. Attention began to shift away from unquestioningly accepting what the ancient literature reported regarding occupations and towards understanding how all facets of the Roman workforce really functioned regardless of ancient elite attitudes. This chapter provides a brief understanding of, first, the privileged ancient attitudes that has prevented much study on the Roman economy and second, embedded within that discussion an analysis of how the ancient workforce can be investigated and understood based on epigraphic and literary evidence.

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<sup>73</sup> E.g. Treggiari 1979, 1981; Kampen 1982; Dixon 1984, 1988, 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Groen-Vallinga 2013; Holleran 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Joshel 1992, 1-15.

Dixon notes that the Roman matron's primary role as a mother was the transmission of traditional moral values and Latin speech to the children of both sexes and training their daughters in the female skills and virtues, namely chastity and domestic industry.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, Roman women are given praise in biographies, funeral eulogies, and epitaphs for their skills and dedication to their children and family which in turn attests to the importance of these roles in Roman culture. It was not, however, just that elite men imposed these ideologies upon the women about whom they wrote. Ideologies of gender expectations likely permeated society in such a way that these traditional virtues became internalized by most men and women alike. In much the same way that scholars realized that gender categories could only be explored properly by understanding how men and women together created differing social expectations for each other, we must also realize that women often strongly accepted and upheld these values, however restrictive they may appear to us today. However, not all women would have had the luxury of maintaining a strictly domestic lifestyle. In reality, it seems more likely given the small percentage of elite households in comparison to the wider population of the empire, that a larger proportion of women would have been required to work outside of the home in order to sustain their families.<sup>76</sup> This concept will be further explored in chapter four which has a focus on non-elite women and their involvement in the economic culture of the Roman empire.

Moreover, there are difficulties in recreating the economic culture of Rome and, by extension, women's role in that culture. The strong moral tone found in many of the

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<sup>75</sup> Dixon 1988.

<sup>76</sup> Garnsey 1970, 221 and 267; Kampen 1981, 20-32; Dixon 2004, 57.

surviving sources obscures the true features of the commercial nature of the empire. The men who dominate our literary sources, those of the senatorial elite, chose to represent themselves to their contemporaries in their political and military roles and to a lesser degree in their roles as businessmen and merchants. It seems obvious that they would have been compelled to engage in some sort of profit-orientated activity in order to further these more appealing pursuits but the maintenance of their self-image demanded that they often exclude these activities from their accounts of history and society.<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, the daily activities of women are likely to be obscured in many of the surviving sources because of the preference for a focus on the 'proper' or 'preferred' activities for women rather than their actual functions within society.

It becomes even more challenging to retrieve the attitudes of the middle and lower classes towards their own commercial activities. Roman authors, that is to say elite male Romans, evoked the peasantry often in romantic settings for rhetorical purposes and largely ignored the work of the lower classes, deeming it lowly and distasteful.<sup>78</sup> With judicious use of what Skinner terms 'controlled inference,' historians can retrieve some trace of women's and the lower classes' contributions to the Roman economy.<sup>79</sup> Wealth and work figured as moral categories in Roman constructions of their society. From these, one may interpret Roman lamentations about wealth and its effect on Roman culture. Land capitalism and urban investment surely became a significant part of the

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<sup>77</sup> Scheidel 2012, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Vivenza 2012; Skinner 1987, 3. Dixon (2004) further elaborates on Skinner's original idea. She believes that real women and other 'muted' groups are not so much to be found in the explicit text of the historical record as they are in the gaps and silences. This requires the application of Skinner's 'controlled inference.'

<sup>79</sup> Dixon 2004, 57; Skinner 1987, 3.

elite Roman culture after 146 BCE but they were still not considered topics fit for literary discourse and as a result accounts of women's or men's avenues of profit are sparse in the surviving literature.<sup>80</sup> References to women, when they do occur, often serve as literary stereotypes.<sup>81</sup> Conversely, tombstones continued to praise mothers and wives for their devotion to their household duties.<sup>82</sup> By maintaining a careful reading of the sources and by implementing 'controlled inferences', we may gain insights into the more ordinary economic roles.<sup>83</sup> The following chapters examine a variety of evidence (both material and literary) and uses that evidence to understand women's place in the Roman economy. I note instances where the ancient evidence may be used to gather inferences about women's activities despite any direct confirmation. Pliny's obituary of Ummidia Quadratilla is one such example where the ancient author alludes to the financial activities of an aristocratic woman regardless of Roman society's view of the impropriety of her financial endeavors and this will be discussed in chapter three.

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<sup>80</sup> In 146 BCE after the third Punic War, Rome finally sacked Carthage and gained control of that region of North Africa and in the same year, Corinth, and created the province of Achaea.

<sup>81</sup> Consider Columella's claim (*Rus.* 12.10) that the traditional Roman housewives have disappeared and it now falls to the *vilica* to fulfill the duties of the lady of the house. Compare this with Juvenal's account (*Sat.* 6.287-90) of the ancestral women who were too exhausted by their domestic industry to commit adultery. See chapter 1 for instances when the application of female characteristics can be used to describe the negative morals or customs of male literary figures.

<sup>82</sup> *CIL* 6, 11602 *Hic sita est Amymone Marci optima et pulcherrima / lanifica pia pudica frugi casta domiseda*. Here lies buried Amymone, (wife) of Marcus, best and prettiest, wool-working, dutiful, virtuous, frugal, chaste, and stay-at-home.

<sup>83</sup> Skinner 1987, 3.

## 2.2 Women's Legal Rights

Laws regarding women's ability to manage their finances changed significantly during the period from the second century BCE to the end of the second century CE.<sup>84</sup> The weakening of *tutela mulierum*<sup>85</sup> allowed women more control of their money and by extension their own businesses. Women who were *sui iuris*<sup>86</sup> had the legal ability to conduct business on their own, although their freedom to conduct business was technically confined by the legal requirement of a *tutor*'s authorization for specific transactions.<sup>87</sup> For a female adult, the *tutor*'s function was to give or withhold their *auctoritas* (authority) for transactions involving *res Mancipi* (for instance, land or slaves) but not for *res nec Mancipi* (such as cash or jewellery).<sup>88</sup> The degree to which the *tutor* took his duty seriously appears to have varied and depended heavily on the individual and type of *tutor*. For example, agnatic *tutores* may have had an interest in the women's property, because they were likely to inherit that property, while testamentary *tutores* may have been more acquiescent to what women wanted because they had no claim to the property.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Dixon 1984 and 2001a, 73-80; Treggiari 1991.

<sup>85</sup> The *tutela mulierum*, or 'guardianship of women', is argued by Dixon to have been implemented to safeguard family property and that adult women were subject to it because they were likely to transfer their birth-right to a different family unit. See Dixon 1984, 1988, 2001a, 2004; cf. Crook 1986.

<sup>86</sup> Meaning women who were not subject to the *potestas* of a *paterfamilias* or the *manus* of a husband. See Dixon 1984, 1988, and 2001a; Crook 1986; Gardner 1988; Treggiari 1991.

<sup>87</sup> D'Ambra 2007, 93-140.

<sup>88</sup> Gardner 1988, 234; Treggiari 1991; Dixon 1984, 1988, 2001b, 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Gardner 1988, 233-236; Hope 2000, 125-134; Dixon 2001b, 89-112; D'Ambra 2007.

While *tutela mulierum* had been weakened considerably throughout the last two centuries of the Republic by successive amendments until it was nothing more than a formality, women were still technically subject to male guardianship once they became *sui iuris*.<sup>90</sup> The point at which a woman became *sui iuris* depended on the type of marriage contract she entered into. In the case of a marriage *cum manu* the female transferred herself and her property from her father's household to her husband's family. Upon her husband's death and the death of the husband's *paterfamilias* the woman inherited her share of her husband's estate but also acquired for herself a *tutor* who was responsible for overseeing her financial affairs. If the woman was to enter into a marriage *sine manu*, then she did not transfer herself and her property into her husband's family but remained subject to *patria potestas*. In the event of her father's death she inherited her share of his property but again acquired a *tutor*. The primary advantage of a marriage *sine manu* was that women often became *sui iuris* sooner because *patresfamiliae* were more likely to predecease husbands on account of their relative ages.<sup>91</sup> This sort of marriage became the more popular contract by the first century BCE.

With the introduction of the Julian marriage laws in the late first century BCE and early first century CE,<sup>92</sup> Augustus released women who had had three children (or four children if the woman was a freedwoman) from the largely symbolic *tutores* and gave

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<sup>90</sup> Dixon 1984, 1988, 2001a. See Call. *Dig.* 2.13.1 for references to laws.

<sup>91</sup> Hopwood 2009.

<sup>92</sup> Augustus brought forth legislation in 18 BCE and 9 CE but it is not clear precisely which aspects of the laws were set in place in each reform. The *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* incorporated the *ius trium liberorum* (the right of three children) and the *ius communium liberorum* (the right of having a child in common). See Hopwood 2009 for a summary and particularly for how these laws applied to Livia, wife of Augustus.

them free control of their own financial endeavors. The Julian laws also changed the way women were legally able to actively participate in the Roman economy.<sup>93</sup> The subsequent *senatus consultum Velleianum*<sup>94</sup> sought to restrict the actions of women in order to preserve property for the families and children of these women and to prevent them from being taken advantage of in their business ventures.<sup>95</sup> This ban excluded women from financial involvement and ensured that no one would accept a female as a surety on behalf of someone else, since no creditor would have been able to sue a woman guarantor for recovery. In light of the seeming severity of this law, the praetor was given the power to grant *exceptio* at his discretion. This meant that a creditor might be able to recover losses from a female should it be proven that the woman involved was aware of the consequences of what she was doing.<sup>96</sup> Crook persuasively argues that the provisions instituted by the *senatus consultum Velleianum* were meant to protect both parties; the creditors were protected from deliberate fraud by women trying to evade (or helping others to evade) liability and women were protected against undue influence by their male associates.<sup>97</sup>

Aside from a job as an *argentarius*, women were legally able to work in most industries.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, apprenticeship contracts from Egypt and epitaphs, which will be examined in greater detail throughout the rest of this thesis, reveal how women were

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<sup>93</sup> Grubbs 2002, 46-60; D'Ambra 2007.

<sup>94</sup> This law prohibited women giving financial security or undertaking liability on behalf of others as a way to restrain the financial activities of women. See Justinian's *Dig.* 16.1.

<sup>95</sup> Crook 1986a, 1986b; Dixon 1984, 1988, 2001a, 2004; Yue 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Groen-Vallinga 2013, 299-301.

<sup>97</sup> Crook 1986a and 1986b; Groen-Vallinga 2013; Scheidel 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Call. *Dig.* 2.13.12.

involved in almost every facet of economic life. Within ancient literature, women generally were praised for their domestic industry while authors such as Cicero disparaged most manual labour and classed it as a type of paid slavery.<sup>99</sup> These summaries of elite attitudes did not necessarily reflect the views of the non-elite classes of society as the middle and working classes would have imposed their own moral and social categories on representations of work, regardless of whether or not they were legally allowed to involve themselves in various types of business.<sup>100</sup> Freeborn men were seldom inclined to commemorate their occupation because of the disdain for manual labour that had been internalized even by the lower classes. Perhaps, as a result of this women are underrepresented as participants in commerce in our written sources, both legal and literary, even though they were legally allowed to participate in almost every facet of commerce.<sup>101</sup> Although the epigraphic record tends to prefer to commemorate male occupations and female domestic virtues, it still reveals that working women were not a rarity.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the apparent allowance for women to participate in Roman commerce, it appears that the Roman ideal of women remaining outside of commercial life affected women further down the social scale. The ideal is pervasive in many of our sources and so has had a profound influence on the scholarly output on Roman women and their work.

Groen-Vallinga does not find this particularly surprising in light of the continued

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<sup>99</sup> Cic. *Off.* 1.150, 2.87-90.

<sup>100</sup> Dixon 2001b, 114.

<sup>101</sup> Holleran 2013, 313. In the same way the epigraphic record does not provide information about the activities of the lowest classes, as discussed above.

<sup>102</sup> *CIL* 6 cites 1262 men with an occupation listed compared to 208 women (Joshel 1992, 69).



gendered differentiation of the work force that is a common feature of economies even in the present day.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it is highly likely that women contributed to the family income in a variety of ways. Freeborn women may not have had ample access to job training but this lack of access does not appear to be the same for the enslaved or freedwomen. The following chapters will systematically analyze the two different social classes (elites and non-elites) and how women were able to function within the economy from the margins of their social categorization.

## 2.3 Ancient Attitudes Regarding Occupations

It has already been mentioned that there is a markedly derogatory attitude towards remunerated work in general in ancient literature. This stance on wage work further problematizes the search for working women in antiquity. The negative representation of work recurs in specific themes and patterns. Roman authors depicted professionals, servants, and tradesmen, of any gender, as dangerous or offensive.<sup>104</sup> For example, according to common narrative, doctors killed their patients, teachers corrupted their students, businessmen cheated their partners and clients, and men involved in trade were usually unflatteringly materialistic.<sup>105</sup> Tradesmen, according to literature, had to be adept at blandishment and be willing to do what others wanted them to do in order to be successful. In the view of the freeborn author, such willingness to please for profit or personal gain evoked the image of an enslaved person, who had no choice but to please

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<sup>103</sup> Groen-Vallinga 2013, 295-296.

<sup>104</sup> Joshel 1992, 63.

<sup>105</sup> See Mart. *Epi.* 1.30, 1.47, 6.53 for references to doctors and teachers and Juv. *Sat.* 1.26-33, 10.222 for references to businessmen.

his or her masters.<sup>106</sup> References, therefore, to occupation then became a means of dishonouring the wealthy tradesmen and weakened any social claims they asserted.<sup>107</sup> The tradesman may have been able to purchase a privileged seat in the theatre or equestrian status, but because of the manner in which he amassed his fortune, he remained lowly.<sup>108</sup>

Authors such as Martial or Juvenal used tradespeople, or people who use wealth to compensate for foreign origin or a servile past, as objects of humor. Juvenal's freedman, who is well aware that his foreign origin—betrayed by his pierced ear—excludes him from higher society, asserts that no senator's stripe could do more for him than his five shops, which earned him 400 000 sesterces.<sup>109</sup> By asserting this, the freedman tried to replace the claims of birth with money earned in commerce. Elite disdain for social mobility obtained through commercial success is apparent in ancient literature but, as this chapter will reveal, non-elite's pride in their own social mobility or financial success often motivated them to commemorate their successes in dedicatory inscriptions. These inscriptions reveal much about how men and women contributed to the socioeconomic culture of Rome.

Political invective also drew fodder from social and moral denigrations of paid work.<sup>110</sup> The perspective of the aristocrat placed artisans and merchants among the lowly. Since

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<sup>106</sup> MacMullen 1974, 115-116; Joshel 1992, 149-150.

<sup>107</sup> Joshel 1992, 64.

<sup>108</sup> Joshel 1992, 63-65.

<sup>109</sup> *Juv. Sat.* 1.101-106.

<sup>110</sup> Dixon 2001b, 112-114.

aristocrats claimed privilege based on birth and wealth derived from land, contempt for wealthy non-aristocrats could be perpetuated by accusations that one's family descended from shoemakers and fullers rather than consuls and conquerors. Indeed, the family of Octavian, the first emperor of Rome, was slandered on all sides. His greatest political rival, Mark Antony, claimed that Octavian's paternal grandfather was a banker, that his great-grandfather was a ropemaker and a freedman, and his maternal great-grandfather the owner of a perfume shop and, later, a bakery.<sup>111</sup> Despite the political power Octavian had amassed, Antony was still able to undermine his credibility by establishing Octavian's roots in lowly trade rather than a politically prominent family such as Antony's. Similarly, Pliny highlighted the reasons why Ummidia Quadratilla's shameful involvement with pantomime performers should *not* affect the social standing of her grandson, Pliny's protégé. Presumably, the grandson Ummidius had faced some social or political issues because of his grandmother's involvement with pantomime performers and Pliny uses her obituary as a platform to decry these (not extant) accusations against Ummidius.<sup>112</sup> Thus, Romans used the occupations of their rival's ancestors to undermine the social acceptability of a family or individual.

These Roman standards of occupational assessment were based on a simple dichotomy of 'good' or 'bad,' honourable or dishonourable. Cicero's well known catalogue of trades and occupations brought together these standards of assessment by reviewing which livelihoods were considered respectable or base.<sup>113</sup> Tax collectors or moneylenders were

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<sup>111</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 2.3, 4.2.

<sup>112</sup> Sick 1999, 302.

<sup>113</sup> Cic. *Off.* 1.150-151.

objectionable because they incurred the ill-will of others. *Mercennarii* were low-status because they sold their labour, not their skills. Retail merchants were dishonourable because they told lies in order to make a living. Lastly, trades that satisfied sensual desires ranked as the least respectable. Here, Cicero cites Terence's list that fishmongers, butchers, cooks, fishermen, perfumers, dancers, and all those involved in a lowbrow forms of entertainment held the least respectable occupations.<sup>114</sup>

Cicero then turns to respectable avenues of business. Professions such as medicine, architecture, and teaching receive more favourable consideration because they benefitted society and require intelligence. In this way, Cicero diverged from the satirist's opinions of doctors and teachers. This does not mean that anyone engaged in such activities was fully respectable. Such vocations were suitable only for those to whose social rank the occupations were appropriate. Retail trade was vulgar but commerce on a large scale, as we shall see in the following chapters, was not to be extensively criticized. Moreover, wealth gained in commerce could be reinvested in agriculture, an avenue of profit for which Cicero and older authors (Cato and Varro for example) had the highest respect. At the point where a merchant became a landowner is the point at which he engaged in an enterprise that was worthy of a free man.<sup>115</sup> From these distinctions, Romans distinguished honourable occupations from dishonourable ones via specific set of criteria: the behaviour required, the degree of dependence, the nature of the workplace, the amount of intelligence required, and finally the social utility of the occupation.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Cic. *Off.* 1.150-151; see also Joshel 1992, 66.

<sup>115</sup> Cic. *Off.* 1.151.

<sup>116</sup> Joshel 1992, 67.

Cicero's standards delineate what is respectable for freeborn citizens. He found unrespectable any trade whose characteristics had servile associations—falsity and dependence—and were thus shameful for a free man to engage in. In this way, the polarity between honourable and dishonourable work became the polarity between free and slave. This dichotomy is broken by a third social group—the freedman.<sup>117</sup> The freedman is not held to the same standards as a freeborn Roman and so could engage in activities that would be deemed unworthy of a freeborn individual. Based on this, the modern scholar could expect to see an overrepresentation of “honourable” occupational commemorations. This is not the case. Chapter four will provide multiple examples of individuals who do not perform occupations that would be acceptable in the view of elite writers. It would appear that pride in one's work overcame any social disdain that may be found in the type of occupation and so the ‘dishonourable’ occupation was still commemorated.

## 2.4 Understanding Status from Occupational Inscriptions

Despite elite disregard for service work in the ancient world, men and women acknowledge occupations that would be considered servile in their epitaphs. Unlike the wealthy, who were able to use their money to purchase external symbols of their prestige, freedmen and women had to rely on their professional success and the flaunting of that success to demonstrate their own prestige. Juvenal's freedman made claims regarding his

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<sup>117</sup> Joshel 1992, 66-69.

social status based on the success of his five shops.<sup>118</sup> It appears that it was a matter of pride to commemorate the upward social mobility achieved over the freedman's lifetime.

Occupation was not only the source of prosperity but also the way the male ex-slave could create normative order in his social life. The use of conventional language in the epitaphs often conveyed this regularity. Joshel draws on the example of the freed pearl setter C. Ateilius Serrani l. Euhodus and his epitaph, which commemorated him as being good, compassionate, loving, and poor.<sup>119</sup> The necessity of convention also dictated that women be commemorated frequently based on their feminine virtues rather than their occupations. A discussion of the probability that non-elite women functioned in occupations similar to those of the men alongside of whom they were commemorated alongside will be discussed in chapter four.

Unlike tradespeople, professionals apparently responded to the attitudes about work in Roman literature in a different way, and expressed their commemorations with fewer references to money and particular occupations. Using the example of Cicero, who praised the activities of teaching, architecture, and medicine, it would seem that comments such as these by various authors provided the grounds for a sense of self-importance because the individuals practicing these occupations were often well-educated and valued by those they served. *Dispensatores* and *procuratores* had to be literate and needed intelligence to handle extensive property and funds appropriately, especially in wealthy households. Joshel argues that the complaints about doctors killing their patients

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<sup>118</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 1.101-106.

<sup>119</sup> Joshel (1992, 84) draws on the example from *CIL* 6, 9545 ...*ossa hominis boni misericordis amantis / pauperis*...

and teachers corrupting their students does not belittle these professionals; indeed it is the opposite, they indicate fear about the power wielded by doctors or teachers.<sup>120</sup> The stereotypical nature of complaints surrounding various professional occupations reflects a social apprehension about the control that these individuals had.

The motives of the families who dedicated the epitaphs of professional people were, of course, not explicitly articulated. Nonetheless scholars often consider status consciousness as a motivation.<sup>121</sup> Treggiari observed that slaves and freedmen used job titles for their prestige value. In her study of Livia's domestic staff, Treggiari argues that the slaves and freed slaves with job titles represented the upper and middle grades of domestics rather than the lower status "scrubbers and scullions."<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Flory suggests that the absence of titles recording menial work and the records of job titles for only about half of Livia's staff shows that slaves and freedmen without titles lacked clearly defined work, or their occupations did not qualify as status symbols worthy of commemoration.<sup>123</sup> Flory's statement that those without a job title lacked defined work is undermined by an observation made by Treggiari: the standards of organization made specialization and defined duties normal in wealthy households.<sup>124</sup> Joshel points out a further issue with Treggiari's suggestion: the jobs named by slaves include occupations such as attendant and litter bearer that were not prestigious, although she concedes that it

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<sup>120</sup> Joshel 1992, 85-86.

<sup>121</sup> Treggiari 1975, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Treggiari 1975, 57.

<sup>123</sup> Flory 1978, 80.

<sup>124</sup> Joshel 1992, 87.

is possible that they were still ranked in some sort of hierarchy from which “scrubbers and scullions” were omitted.<sup>125</sup>

Consideration of the neutrality of the concept of prestige is necessary. Prestige as a concept is inherently not neutral. Occupations can have different meanings and impacts on a society depending on the time and place. It is necessary then to consider what sort of hierarchy was in place in ancient Rome. In literature, the steward may appear more powerful or important than the spinner, yet the spinner still chose to commemorate his or her occupation. Literature identifies different sorts of work either as honourable or dishonourable, and relying on literature will make occupational titles either a function of pride or shame. It is important to keep in mind that these hierarchies were constructed by those who did not work and therefore such persons could not have understood the level of pride an ordinary individual could have taken in their work.

In epitaphs, the individuals in all fields share social status and work environment; that is to say, slaves and freedmen predominate in each field and many can be associated with elite households.<sup>126</sup> Initially, epitaphs may appear to reflect the values expressed in literature, namely that they appear to suggest a more valuable position for administrators, financial agents, and assistants than for servants and general labourers by their volume alone. However, one must account for the probable wage discrepancy between the two different categories of occupations. The dedications of the *dispensatores* indicate that they had certain material resources at their disposal that servants and labourers and the

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<sup>125</sup> Joshel 1992, 87.

<sup>126</sup> See Joshel 1992 Table 5.1 for the percentage of slaves, freedmen, and uncertain slaves and those individuals associated with elite households.



‘lower’ classes of occupations did not.<sup>127</sup> This, in part, will account for the simpler and more sparse dedications of the latter group of occupations. Yet the occupation of the servant defined him or her just as much as it defined the *dispensator*, regardless of the relative material comfort of the *dispensator*’s life. Joshel convincingly argues that neither shame nor pride can provide an adequate explanation for the use of occupational titles in commemorations. Individuals with higher paying occupations simply had the luxury of using their funds to build a monument that was superfluous to daily life in a way that individuals with lower paying jobs did not.<sup>128</sup>

## 2.5 Conclusion

Since the introduction of the Julian laws by Augustus and the systematic weakening of *tutela mulierum* throughout the Republic and into the Principate, women were able to freely distribute and invest their wealth with little to no male intervention. Not only did wealthy women participate in the socioeconomic culture of Rome, but it appears that lower status women were often just as active in the economy as men were, despite what the elite prescriptive literature suggests. The ways in which women participated in the economy will be further elaborated below. Case studies of specific women will illuminate the ways in which women had an impact on the economy and illustrate how a women’s social status affected her ability to participate in the economy and commemorate her economic roles.

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<sup>127</sup> Consider the dedications in *CIL* 6, 9320-9322 as examples of the more extravagant dedications of *dispensatores*.

<sup>128</sup> Joshel 1992, 62-91.

All of these opinions regarding ancient occupations dictate what modern scholars are likely to see in literary sources and the epigraphic record. The elite Roman predilection for elite members of Roman society to commemorate 'respectable' avenues of profit meant that often the true nature of the deceased's financial success was obscured by a preference to disclose what was socially more acceptable. For women of all social classes this was likely an even more common occurrence. Not only did women need to consider the appropriateness of the occupation, but they had to be more concerned with projecting an image of female propriety in the commemorations of their lives. This has resulted in the record of female occupations being more obscured than that of men.

## Chapter 3

### Elite Roman Women in the Economy

#### 3.1 Introduction

Elite Roman women were bound by and had internalized social convention to a higher degree than non-elite women; after all their families had more to lose and farther to fall. Aristocratic women were therefore much more restricted in the ways they could interact with the Roman economy than were non-elite women. These restrictions, however, did not mean that aristocratic women were absent from Roman commercial life. Legally, they had every right that non-elite women did. By the late Republic the impact that *tutela mulierum*<sup>129</sup> had on women's actions in business had become largely symbolic and women were able to act in their own business interests essentially without the consent of their husbands or *tutores*.<sup>130</sup> References in Cicero and Pliny make it clear that women in their own elite social circles were apparently able to acquire, exploit, and transfer their wealth apparently as freely as their male peers without any obvious limitations by *tutores*. Cicero's own wife Terentia was clearly not strictly held by his *manus* as he was unable to prevent her from selling a property in an effort to restore him from exile.<sup>131</sup> Likewise Pliny gives an account of the will and lifestyle of Ummidia Quadratilla that depicts an elite Roman woman doing as she pleased with her fortune without the interference of a

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<sup>129</sup> See chapter two section 2 for a discussion on the meanings of the term *tutela mulierum*.

<sup>130</sup> Gai. *Instit.* 1.190-91; cf. Paul. *Dig.* 34.2.32.4. See also Treggiari 1991, 442-6; Dixon 1984, 2004; Crook 1967, 113-115.

<sup>131</sup> Cic. *Att.* 2.4.5, 2.15.4.

*tutor*.<sup>132</sup> He paints a portrait of an old woman gambling away her fortune while being entertained by the actors she maintained for the amusement of herself and her friends much to the dismay of her family.<sup>133</sup>

Although women who entered the public sphere of commerce in Roman literature often served as cautionary tales of the costs of female lasciviousness, even elite women sometimes stepped outside the confines of the domestic sphere to undertake commercial activities. The use of literature that seeks to present positive female exempla to discover the actual activities of women is an example of using controlled inferences in the manner that Skinner recommends.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, examples of female munificence in the Roman empire can be used to infer that some women distributed their wealth in ways intended to increase their own prestige, just as men did. Civic munificence benefitted Roman society economically, and it was a way for elites to demonstrate their prestige and public standing.

## 3.2 Elite Women in Trade

Amphorae and amphorae sherds have provided scholars with some insight into what occupations aristocratic Roman women held. Stamped amphorae sherds found in shipwrecks and dumps have given us the names of such female figures as Calvia Crispinilla and Caedicia Victrix, women who were apparently engaged in some sort of

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<sup>132</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.

<sup>133</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.

<sup>134</sup> Skinner 1987, 3.

viticulture or wine export business on a large scale.<sup>135</sup> Romans had considered the cultivation of vines highly respectable and profitable since the Republic, but in order to do it successfully, a substantial investment and extensive land holdings were required. Thus, only the elite typically had the resources to grow grapes and make wine.<sup>136</sup> Ventures such as producing the amphorae necessary for wine production was seen as a natural extension of viticulture and so it appears that elite Romans did not have the same level of disdain for that particular branch of commerce.<sup>137</sup> We also find the names of women associated with the imperial family stamped on bricks.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, this sort of business venture was free from the taint of common commerce because factories required land holdings and possessing extensive land was a mark of one's elite position within Roman society.

Documentary evidence from waxed wooden tablets discovered in Puteoli reveal the names of two female estate holders whose lands housed grain warehouses.<sup>139</sup> Both

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<sup>135</sup> Calvia Crispinilla appears in *ILS* 8574a and b; *CIL* 3.12020 and 3.14371 and in Tac. *Ann.* 11.36 as the woman whose husband was implicated in Messalina's downfall. Caedicia Victrix appears on the amphora stamp *ILS* 8573 and may be the one discussed in Tac. *Ann.* 15.71 who was exiled from Italy in 65 CE.

<sup>136</sup> Var. *Rus.* 3.2.14-15; Dixon 2004, 62.

<sup>137</sup> Dixon 2004, 60.

<sup>138</sup> The two Domitiae Lucillae; one of whom was the mother-in-law and the other the mother of Marcus Aurelius.

<sup>139</sup> *TPSulp.* 46 and 44: C. Laecanio Basso Q. Terentio Culleone cos. [...Marti]as (*sic*). Nardus P. Anni Seleuci servus scripsi coram et iussu Seleuci domini mei quod is negaret se litteras scire me locasse C. Sulpicio Fausto horreum vicesimum sextum quod est in praedis Domitiae Lepidae Barbatianis superioribus in quo repositum est tritici Alexandrini millia modium decem et tria pro q. L. Marius Iucundus HS XX (millia) mutuatur. Dominus meus a C. Sulpicio Fausto ex hac die in mensibus singulis sestertis centenis nummis recipiet. Actum Puteolis. "In the consulship of Caius Laecanius Bassus and Quintus Terentius Culleo, on the Ides of March (?), I, Nardus, slave of Publius Annius Seleucus, have written in the presence of and on the order of my master, because he denies that he knows the alphabet, that I have leased to Caius Sulpicius Faustus warehouse twenty-six on the upper Barbatian estate of Domitia Lepida, in which 13 000 modii of

women are mentioned only in name and do not act as mediators in the financial transaction discussed. Gardner raises the interesting question of how much control the women in these tablets had and whether these women were more or less actively involved than men engaged in analogous dealings.<sup>140</sup>

*TPSulp.* 53 is a *chirographum* (a document personally written by the debtor), in which he acknowledged receiving a loan from C. Sulpicius Faustus and had made a verbal contract to repay the amount. Two days later, in *TPSulp.* 69 we see Iucundus pledging as a security for the loan 13 000 *modia* of Alexandrian wheat, “which are stored in warehouse twenty-six on the upper Barbatian estate of Domitia Lepida.”<sup>141</sup> The Domitia Lepida

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Alexandrian wheat, on the security of which Lucius Marius Iucundus is borrowing 20 000 sesterces. Effective today my master shall receive 100 sesterces per month. It is done at Puteoli. See also *TPSulp.* 69 for another mention of Domitia Lepida. Likewise *TPSulp.* 73 reveals another woman loaning money: L. Vitellio filio Messalla Vipstano Gallo cos. XII K. Septembres. C. Sulpicius Cinnamus scripsi me accepisse ab Gnosto Lolliæ Saturninae servo nomine M. Lollio Philippi sestertia... “On Augustus 21 in the consulship of Lucius Vitellio, the son, and Messalla Vipstanius Gallus, I, Caius Sulpicius Cinnamus, have written that I have received from Gnostus, slave of Lolliæ Saturnina, on the account of Marcus Lollius Philippus (amount lost) sesterces.

<sup>140</sup> Gardner 1999, 11.

<sup>141</sup> *TPSulp.* 69: C. Laecanio Basso Q. Terentio Culleone cos. Idibus Martiis. L. Marius Didæ I. Iucundus scripsi me dedisse C. Sulpicio Fausto pignoris nomine tritici alexandrini modium decem et tria millia plus minus quae sunt posita in Domitiae Lepidae praedis Barbatianis superioribus horreo XXVI ob HS viginti millia nummum quae per chirographum scripsi me ei daturum. Si Idibus Mais primis ea HS viginti milia q. s. s. non dederō solvero satisve fecero tum liceat tibi id triticum quo de agitur sub praecone de condicione pignoris vendere. Si pluris venierit omne quod superesset reddas mihi heredive meo; si quo minoris venierit...reddam tibi heredive tuo. Utique id triticum quo de agitur omni periculo esset meo heredisve mei: haec mihi tecum ita convenerunt pactusque sum. Actum Puteolis. “ In the consulship of Caius Laecanius Bassus and Quintus Terentius Culleo, on the Ides of March, I, Lucius Marius Iucundus, freedman of Dida, have written that I have given to Caius Sulpicius Faustus more or less 13 000 modii of Alexandrian wheat, which are stored in warehouse twenty-six on the upper Barbatian estate of Domitia Lepida, as a pledge for the 20 000 sesterces which I have written in a *chirographum* that I will give him. If by the next Ides of May I shall not have given, paid, or made satisfaction for the previously mentioned 20 000 sesterces, then it shall be permitted for you to sell the wheat in question at the auction under the terms of the pledge. If it sells for a higher sum, then you are to return all the surplus to me or my heir; if it fetches less...I shall repay to you or your heir. That responsibility for the wheat in question shall be mine and my heir’s: I have agreed accordingly these things with you and made a pact. Done at Puteoli.”

mentioned in the tablets is none other than the aunt of Nero and mother of Valeria Messalina. According to Tacitus, these were not her only properties. She had large landholdings in Africa, in Calabria, and gardens on the Esquiline.<sup>142</sup> In this particular tablet Domitia herself appears to have no direct involvement in the proceedings of the pledge or loan. The lease is issued by a slave of a P. Annius Seleucus which suggests that Annius was an independent contractor, most likely simply hiring out the warehouses from Domitia's representative in return for a flat fee.<sup>143</sup>

The second aristocratic woman we see in these tablets is Lollia Saturnina who is similarly absent from the actual financial proceedings.<sup>144</sup> This situation is complicated by the lack of knowledge surrounding who Lollia is. It could be that Lollius had conducted some business on behalf of Lollia and had acted as her agent. It is, therefore, possible that he was unable to carry through some necessary payment, so Lollia had to intervene and pay directly. If Lollius had been her mandatary, that is to say an individual who receives and carried out a mandate, then Lollia would have been ultimately liable to provide the money to carry out the deal. Gardner believes it is more straightforward: Lollius was probably a client of Lollia's and given the evidence for his previous business difficulties,

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<sup>142</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 12.65.

<sup>143</sup> Gardner 1999, 13. See also *TPSulp.* 46 and 44 for the interactions of Annius with Sulpicius.

<sup>144</sup> See the footnote above for a tablet regarding Lollia but also *TPSulp.* 54: Isdem cos. V Nonas Octobres, C. Avilius Cinnamus scripsi, interrogante C. Sulpicio Cinnamo, es HS ((I)) ((I)) millia nummum, q. s. s. sunt, fide et periculo meo esse iussi pro M. Lollio Philippo C. Sulpicio cinnamon: fateor autem et iuravi per Iovem et numen divi Aug. me hoc anno pro eodem nulli ali fide me esse iussisse. Actum Puteolis. "In the same consulship, five days before the Nones of October, I, Caius Avilius Cinnamus, have written that, on the enquiry of Caius Sulpicius Cinnamus, I instructed that the previously mentioned 20 000 sesterces should be at my risk and guarantee; also I declare and have sworn before Jupiter and by the *numen* of the Deified Augustus that I have not undertaken in the present year to be guarantor to anyone else on behalf of the same person. Done at Puteoli."

she had simply been lending assistance to a needy client as a patroness.<sup>145</sup> Lollia's absence from the financial proceedings is not unusual. The distancing from personal involvement in the practical details of business is not gender-specific; it is typical of upper class Romans and even Romans further down the social scale. In this instance, it seems that women operated in the same way as their elite, male counter-parts; their absence from actual business proceedings is determined by their elite status rather than their ability to function within the socioeconomic culture of the society.<sup>146</sup>

Elite Roman women largely functioned in the socioeconomic culture of the empire in a different way than the lower classes did as we shall see below. Both elite men and women were often not bound by necessity to work as the lower classes were and so were able to engage in activities that were deemed appropriate for their position within society. This did not mean that elite women abided strictly by the moral virtues as dictated by the ancient sources. We see women engaging in trade on a large scale and lending money at interest in the same way elite males did.

### 3.3 Female Munificence

There are numerous attestations of women dispensing with their property in order to benefit the public. While this is not a direct feature of women participating in commercial Roman life and it may seem strange to include this element in a discussion of female interactions with the Roman economy, it reflects the Roman conflation of social and

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<sup>145</sup> Gardner 1999, 14.

<sup>146</sup> Gardner 1999, 27.



economic categories.<sup>147</sup> As has previously been mentioned, elite women were much more restricted in the ways they were able to engage with Roman economic life and so they sought different ventures that would still garner them a high level of social prestige in the same way that a large fortune might enable them to purchase the trappings of an elite lifestyle. Civic munificence was a way that women could demonstrate their financial success along with their families' wealth and status. It was also a way to garner public favour.

Specifically, evidence for civic munificence considered in conjunction with ancient literature can reveal how a woman was able to gift extravagant structures to a town. Pliny's discussion of Ummidia Quadratilla reveals that she participated in the elite trend of public munificence, but, more interestingly, reveals how Ummidia amassed a large enough fortune to provide significant structures for the town of Casinum. He does this while still critiquing her subscription to traditional Roman matron roles.

Pliny masterfully manipulates Ummidia Quadratilla's weaknesses, or characteristics that were not appropriate for her gender, until they may be interpreted as a source of strength.<sup>148</sup> She does not subscribe to the role of the ideal wife that we see so often rendered in Pliny's *Epistulae* but he still represents her as a woman of redeeming qualities. Her primary quality seems to be her ability to do with her fortune as she pleases, as was her legal right, but perhaps not her moral right according to the ideal virtues and standards imposed on Roman women by their elite male peers. Pliny finds her association with pantomime performers distasteful but seemingly respects that she was

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<sup>147</sup> Dixon 2001, 89.

<sup>148</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.

able to maintain a distance between her performers and her association with them and her grandson Ummidius, Pliny's protégé.

Ummidia was the grandmother of one of Pliny's most promising protégés and was the matriarch of a very wealthy family with a senatorial past and future imperial connections. Her family had roots in Casinum, as is attested by several inscriptions found there that indicate that she funded an amphitheatre and the repair of a temple.<sup>149</sup> What is most interesting about her character is her ability to be connected with wealthy and important political figures and still maintain the ability to dispense with her finances as she apparently saw fit. Of course, Pliny had reasons to salvage the character of Ummidia in order to redeem her reputation and by extension the reputation of her grandson. Nevertheless, Pliny's exposé of Ummidia provides the modern scholar with an interesting insight into the financial activities of wealthy Roman women.

The letter is an obituary and begins with the curious use of her name in the nominative, perhaps meant to be reminiscent of honorific building inscriptions carrying her name.<sup>150</sup> He reports her death at the surprising age of eighty years old and then embarks on a physical description. He follows up with a description of her as the 'leading woman' (*princeps femina*) of the town and considers her popularity with the people because of their common love for pantomime, but Hemelrijk firmly believes that the main cause of her local renown was her public munificence projects.<sup>151</sup> It is this feature of her nature that is the primary attraction of Ummidia's character in Pliny's letters.

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<sup>149</sup> *CIL* 10, 5183; *AE* 1946, 174.

<sup>150</sup> Hemelrijk 2013, 66.

<sup>151</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.4; see also Hemelrijk 2013, 65-66.

Carlson points out that it is interesting that Ummidia Quadratilla is the only woman in Pliny's letters to have written a proper will before she died.<sup>152</sup> All other female testators in the corpus have difficulty assuring the proper dispersal of their estates, despite it being their legal right to do so. They are subject to captation and manipulation and are guilty of writing wills that were unclear or that disinherited close family members. In some of these ways, women with wills were used by ancient authors to reveal dishonourable behaviour or behaviour not worthy of the ideal matron. Having a proper will was a masculine virtue that may be aspired to by women but not expected of them.<sup>153</sup> Regardless of how women with wills were viewed in antiquity, Ummidia made her grandchildren her heirs, with two-thirds of her considerable estate going to her grandson and one-third to her granddaughter. By doing so, she demonstrated to her elite male peers her intellectual and financial acuity.<sup>154</sup>

Ummidia's most troublesome pastime, for Pliny at least, was her involvement with pantomime performers. Any association with such a performer was a problem for individuals of senatorial rank because they were seen to embody moral turpitude.<sup>155</sup> Sick has suggested that Ummidia's connection with pantomime performers may not have been only for her personal enjoyment but had been a lucrative source of income for her.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Carlson 2009, 206.

<sup>153</sup> Sherwin-White 1966, 431; Carlson 2009, 206-207.

<sup>154</sup> Carlson 2009, 207.

<sup>155</sup> The connection between pantomime performers and bad character is attested by the Younger Seneca (*Ep.* 47.17) and Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 7.184). There were legal restrictions on associations with pantomime performances as described by Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.77). Jory 1984 and Slater 1994 elaborate on circumstances surrounding pantomime performances causing riots.

<sup>156</sup> Sick 1999, 342-343.

Despite how easy it may be to dismiss Ummidia as a character who was prone to extravagance, it should be kept in mind that pantomime was extremely popular during the early empire.<sup>157</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that Ummidia had a financial interest in maintaining such a large number of pantomime performers. The use of pantomimes for Ummidia's financial gain cannot be positively proven, but given Roman prejudice towards pantomime and women, it is fitting to try to provide an equally plausible alternative to Pliny's assessment of her reasons for associating her family with pantomimes at risk of decreasing their moral standing.<sup>158</sup>

Numerous ancient accounts describe in detail how valuable a slave trained as a performer could be. Cicero's *Pro Q. Roscio Comoedo* provides a case study of the economics of training a slave to be a performer. In this study we can gather that the famous actor Roscius and Gaius Fannius Chaerea held joint ownership of the slave Pannurgus. The slave had originally been owned solely by Chaerea but he had divided ownership with Roscius on the grounds that he trained Pannurgus in the art of performance.<sup>159</sup> The agreement failed when Pannurgus was murdered. Roscius had managed to settle with the murderer separately and from there a long legal battle between Roscius and Chaerea ensued, instigated when Chaerea tried to get a share of the settlement.<sup>160</sup> In the course of his defense of Roscius, Cicero suggests the original value of the slave and his value after his training with the actor. With the discussion of the increase in value a slave could have with specialized training, this document becomes invaluable for considerations of profits

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<sup>157</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 43.1; Dio. *Rom.* 56.47.2.

<sup>158</sup> Sick 1999, 336.

<sup>159</sup> Cic. *Q. Rosc.* 27.

<sup>160</sup> Cic. *Q. Rosc.* 32.

to be made from trained slaves. Cicero claims that the untrained slave was worth 6000 sesterces, but having completed training with Roscius his value increased to 600 000 sesterces. Furthermore, this increase in Pannurgus' value would have been supplemented by his income as an actor which would have been roughly 100 000 sesterces a year. Naturally, Cicero would have manipulated these figures to his advantage and it is likely that the figures have suffered in the manuscript tradition. Nevertheless, when considered in conjunction with other sources we have an idea of the large profits an owner stood to gain by training his or *her* slaves in the entertainment industry.

Not all slaves could have been trained by as famous an actor as Roscius and so it is unlikely that many slave owners could have profited so greatly as in the above case study. Moreover, Cicero likely exaggerated the monetary amounts in order to benefit his client most. Regardless, Sick believes that Ummidia's slaves must have had a exceptional reputation to fund the numerous family funerary monuments.<sup>161</sup> The quantity of these monuments would attest to the economic affluence of her *familia*. Moreover, despite Pliny's qualms about the morality of pantomime, he describes the participation of her mimes in recent sacerdotal games.<sup>162</sup> These pantomime performers seemingly appeared in previous public performances when Pliny comments that Ummidia's grandson

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<sup>161</sup> Sick 1999, 340.

<sup>162</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.6: *productis in commissione pantominis*, "with the pantomimes having been brought out for the event." Sick points out that the lack of possessive adjective may indicate that not all of the performers belonged to Ummidia. Then Quadratus comments: *scis me hodie primum vidisse saltantem aviae meae libertum?* "Do you know that today is the first day I have seen one of my grandmother's dancing freedmen? Again, Sick (1999, 340) finds this interesting. With the mention of only one pantomime performer he believes that this performer could have been given the lead role in the show. Generally there was only one main performer and a chorus of other pantomimes. If this is the case, Sick believes that this would explain why Quadratus only mentions one performer and why the crowd fawns over Ummidia after the performance, as if it were a major victory for the woman.

Quadratus did not watch the pantomimes in the theatre or at home but had at some point witnessed them performing.<sup>163</sup> If there had been a single public performance, there would be no need for this comment.

The restoration of the stage and the financing of the theatre at Casinum displayed her involvement more generally in the theatrical sphere in Italy. Presumably, her pantomime performers would have enjoyed special privileges on stages built with her funds. At the very least, Ummidia would have been given the privilege of selecting the performers for the inaugural performances.<sup>164</sup> Certainly, if she owned performers or had invested significant funds in pantomimes, she could have increased their reputation by having them appear on the stages that she had endowed. As their fame increased, having appeared on her stages, they might have been hired out for other public and private performances. Even if Ummidia's performers never appeared on the stages in Casinum, we know from Pliny's letters that they did appear on stages and at events outside of Ummidia's home and that they did develop a following. Thus, they would have been profitable in two ways: their value as enslaved persons would have increased and they would have also collected a performance income. From this, it seems that we may be able to view Ummidia's interest in pantomime not just as an idle or extravagant pastime but perhaps as a sound economic investment.

It was not only the profit that could have been gained from maintaining pantomimes, but also political power. If, as we can see from a variety of ancient sources, the popularity of pantomimes could incite rioting and instigate emergency sessions of the senate, the

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<sup>163</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.5: hos (pantominos) Quadratus non in theatro non domi spectabat.

<sup>164</sup> Sick 1999, 340.

political advantage of owning pantomimes is clear.<sup>165</sup> It is easy to imagine Ummidia's upper-class friends appealing to her for the use of her pantomimes at private and public events to influence a positive opinion from the plebeians. Ummidia may have been able to acquire forms of power not traditionally accessible to Roman women by owning such popular pantomime performers. Roman political figures would have wanted the most popular pantomime performers to entertain at the games and events they sponsored and if Ummidia provided these performers then she would have been in a position to make a demand for an economic or political reward.<sup>166</sup> Definite evidence for such an exchange is not extant but it is easy to imagine how an affluent woman such as Ummidia could have developed financial and political profits from her pastime.

The social stigma associated with the performing arts may have given an opportunity to elite women because of the disinterest conservative elite men had in associating themselves with such activities. Ultimately, this association seems to have turned Ummidia into the *patrona* of her family and town. While her moral standing as a Roman *matrona* may have been threatened by her close association with pantomime and the entertainment industry, the economic and political advantages that she was able to secure through her associations must have allowed her to overcome any questions surrounding her moral character.

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<sup>165</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.77; Dio. *Rom.* 56.47.2; Suet. *Tib.* 34.1. When a popular pantomime refused to perform at games in honour of Augustus because he thought the payment was not enough, the senate was quickly convened to find more funds to satisfy the demands of the performer and to keep the crowds from rioting further.

<sup>166</sup> Sick 1999, 346.

Hemelrijk poses the question whether we should assume that the social enhancement of the family and the political advancement of their male relatives were the main causes for female munificence.<sup>167</sup> The scholars who support these reasons for female munificence postulate selfless motives. Hemelrijk disagrees. Civic munificence allowed benefactresses to enhance their own social prestige and, by extension, the prestige of their families.<sup>168</sup> For instance, Mineia was a woman of senatorial rank in Paestum in the late Republic. At this time (during the Republic) benefactors were allowed to put up statues of themselves in buildings they donated and so Mineia put up statues of herself, her husband, her two brothers, her son, and her grandson in the basilica she had donated to the city. At the same time as this, she was granted a public statue elsewhere in the town and the local senate minted small bronze coins in her honour with her portrait and the legend *Mineia M(arci) f(ilia)* and on the reverse, the basilica.<sup>169</sup> With this combination of munificence, Mineia enhanced her personal status but likewise the status of her family and descendants.

Civic munificence incorporated women in public life and gave them a way to acquire *dignitas* at a local level. It allowed women to achieve social recognition and authority. This was of particular importance to elite women who were more constrained by traditional ideals than the lower classes of women, who could not access social recognition through their acquired skills and so had to find alternative routes to gain

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<sup>167</sup> Hemelrijk 2013, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Hemelrijk 2013, 76.

<sup>169</sup> Hemelrijk 2013, 76-77. See also *ILPaestum* 163 for an inscription suggesting she also donated the portico and the pavement in front of the basilica. Refer to *ILPaestum* 81085 and *AE* 1975, 248-250 for the statues of herself and her relatives.



social admiration. Ironically, through the traditional feminine constraints women were able to change the notion of exemplary womanhood. Elites used esteemed women from Roman history as models of motherhood, modesty, and domesticity, whereas the women who were held up as the model of matronhood in the imperial period were high-ranking wealthy women who were able to engage in acts of civic munificence. By comparison, records include few elite women who engaged in other financial activities, which perhaps would have brought shame or disrepute to their families. Thus, it appears that women such as Ummidia Quadratilla were the exception rather than the rule in Roman society. More often, in order to demonstrate their own financial success and that of their families, elite women bestowed gifts of civic munificence to increase public goodwill towards their families and to garner political support.

### 3.4 Women Dispensing Loans, Favours, and Investments

Both Pliny and Cicero mentioned their female friends lending at interest, which was a more common exchange between upper-class men.<sup>170</sup> Pliny the Younger recorded sharing an inheritance with Corellia and benefitting from the wills of Pomponia Galla.<sup>171</sup> Of course, these letters do not reveal the financial interactions of women with anyone other than Pliny or Cicero but these examples demonstrate that elite women were wealthy in their own right and were able to bequeath their properties in the same way that their

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<sup>170</sup> Verboven 2002, 189-96.

<sup>171</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 1.4, 7.11.

male peers did.<sup>172</sup> This evidence implies that women were actively involved in borrowing and lending and participated in the social exchanges of the upper class in the same ways as men did.<sup>173</sup> Upper-class women would have held audiences of petitioning *clientes* and accepted the financial obligations of patronage to their former slaves just as often as their male colleagues.<sup>174</sup>

In modern societies with a meritocratic ethos, Dixon argues that the word “patronage” has negative connotations—individuals become indebted to another person—whereas the word “business” has positive implications stemming from industry and merit-based success.<sup>175</sup> The situation was very different in the classical world; patronage and friendship were respectable, while commerce was not an activity in which respectable aristocrats participated.<sup>176</sup> This makes it challenging to interpret our ancient sources because they masked commercial activities with terms of patronage and friendship. Our sources for women’s involvement in personal elite patronage come mainly from Cicero, Pliny, and Seneca and naturally these men were more inclined to discuss *their own* generosity rather than the generosity they experienced from their female friends. Still, these letters make it clear that both sexes were involved in exchanges of benevolence.

A significant purpose of the Roman patronage system was for wealthy members of Roman society to dispense financial aid to their clients. Loans represent an intersection of

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<sup>172</sup> Verboven 2002; Saller 1982.

<sup>173</sup> Dixon 2004, 60-62.

<sup>174</sup> Dixon 2001a, 100-12.

<sup>175</sup> Dixon 2001a, 100.

<sup>176</sup> Dixon 2001a, 100.

social and economic relations. Professional usury was frowned upon by the senatorial class but, nevertheless, loans were a sound and respectable source of income and socio-political capital.<sup>177</sup> The examples given in Cicero's *De Officiis* and Seneca's *De Beneficiis* are almost exclusively male but their letters refer to their female contemporaries as debtors and creditors. Cicero documents that he borrowed a large sum of money from Caerellia and that the wealthy Sassia of Larinum set up her freedman doctor in a shop with a capital loan.<sup>178</sup> In the terminology of Roman patronage her capital loan or investment in the shop would constitute a favour to him. Her freedman was expected to repay her with interest and with services in kind. Both of these repayments were classed as *officia* and marks of lifelong respect and gratitude (*obsequium*).<sup>179</sup> The stress on patronal relations made such arrangements morally acceptable to the elite owners, who had a professed distaste for commerce. Dixon remarks that this sort of arrangement served the double-duty of also distancing the patron from the business venture should it become a failure.<sup>180</sup>

A celebratory statue and inscription describes Eumachia as *patrona* of the fullers of Pompeii. She had donated a building to them and in return the fullers' *collegia* had commissioned a statue of her.<sup>181</sup> Eumachia must have been a citizen of significant social standing if she was in the position to donate a building on behalf of a guild. There are no

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<sup>177</sup> Loans were termed *beneficia* or *bene merita* in letters in the same way that material gifts or personal favours were. See Saller (1982, 20-21) and Dixon (2001a, 101).

<sup>178</sup> Caerellia: Cic. *Ad Att.* 12.51.3. Sassia: Cic. *Pro Clu.* 178.

<sup>179</sup> Dixon 2001a, 104.

<sup>180</sup> Dixon 2001a, 100-112 and 2004, 61.

<sup>181</sup> *CIL* 10.810, 813. Moeller (1972) and Jongman (1988, 179-184) discuss the function of the building.

known female fullers and no guild was open to women in Pompeii. But cloth processing was a significant part of the Pompeian economy and so it is not unusual that a woman would have taken the opportunity to render the fullers of Pompeii indebted to her. By maintaining the distance of patronage, she would not have opened herself up to critique as an intruder into a masculine sphere. The display of texts and of statues in public spaces incorporated these distinguished women within the ranks of community benefactors. Likewise, tombs outside the town walls bore references to donations to freed slaves and contributed to the community image of such patronesses as beneficent.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Elite women were much more restricted in the ways they could interact with the economy than less elite or working women were. Elite women were more likely to be expected to uphold the ideal feminine virtues and morals that the lower classes were financially unable to hold (and may have rejected as cultural ideals). Thus, elite women had to either step outside of the normal female boundaries, as Ummidia Quadratilla did, and ignore propriety for the sake of economic profit or they could dispense with their finances in a way that benefited the public and ensured a return that was political and social as well as perhaps financial, as was the case with Mineia. A different exchange was implemented among upper class Roman women. Instead of providing services in exchange for financial gain, elite women could become public benefactors and in exchange for their provisions of civic munificence, they could secure religious positions, the goodwill of their civic peers, and good standing for their families.

While elite women could not gain, in the same way men could, the same sort of political renown or social prestige that could come from pursuing financially feasible avenues, elite women were able to gain individual prestige through their civic munificence. If economic success is a way to gain social prestige through the procurement of those items that indicate elite social status, elite women were more often than not forced to turn to alternate avenues of displaying their social prestige. The engendering of social prestige became a motivation for their projects of civic munificence. It was not only benefactresses of the elite orders who utilized public munificence to demonstrate their success and the success of their families; this chapter has shown that the sub-elites and even the newly wealthy freed families used displays of munificence to remind the public of their financial successes.

Simply because traditional values demanded that women refrain from business ventures, and because elite Roman women were in the unique position of not being required to work in order to sustain daily life, this does not mean elite women lacked any economic role. Rather, the need to protect their elite standing shaped the ways in which elite women navigated commercial ventures. The two examples of women from the wooden tablets in Puteoli reveal that elite women, and even women closely associated with the imperial family, had significant land investments. With the weakening of *tutela mulierum*, women were much freer than they were before to dispense with their property as they saw fit. Accordingly, it stands to reason that women would be able to act as patronesses as freely as their male peers would act as patrons. Documents of women such as Lollia appear to reveal women functioning in the same financial role as men did in Roman society.

While Roman aristocratic women were perhaps held more closely to traditional ideals it does not appear that these women were hindered from functioning fairly freely within Roman economic life. While we do not see elite women acting as spinners or retailers, most likely because they had no financial need to perform these occupations, we see elite women acting similarly to elite men in positions of benefactress and patroness.

## Chapter 4

### Non-Elite Roman Businesswomen

#### 4.1 Introduction

The search for women's contributions to the Roman economy becomes easier when considering non-elite Romans in general, but still presents challenges when it comes to uncovering female contributions to commerce. The non-elite classes were more prone to commemorating their occupations through dedicatory inscriptions, especially in the cases of ex-slaves who had been able to purchase their freedom through their own acquisition of a high level of occupational skill. However, what complicates this seemingly easier way of accessing female involvement in Roman commerce is the frequent application of an occupational title to only the male partner if the dedication has been created for a couple. Non-elites had also internalized traditional Roman gender norms of domestic industry and chastity for women and so families often commemorated non-elite women according to their domestic achievements rather than their economic contributions.

In the modern world, occupational titles have been constructed and are assigned for a particular job. These job titles are reflected in national statistics and advertisements. Moreover, the duties of the job can be quantified by national job banks and be shown to have clear definitions and responsibilities. The application of these same modern job titles to ancient economies presents a host of issues. Occupational titles in antiquity may not have had the same narrowly defined functions within commerce that they have in a modern context. Dixon advocates for a reading of ancient occupational titles with due

acknowledgement of their ideological biases and exclusions and of the original purpose for which they may have been in use for specific genres of literature.<sup>182</sup> Initially, a modern scholar may be encouraged by the apparent abundance and variety of occupational terms even in just the textile industry. For instance, titles such as *pectinarii*, *cardones*, *lanipend(i)ae/i*, *quasillariae*, and *fullones* are just a small sample of the plethora of occupations apparently associated with the production of textiles. However, despite this apparent abundance of information, there is much uncertainty about the precise meanings of many of the titles. For example, words ending in *-fex/fica* are generally understood to indicate production; an *aurifex* or *aurifica* are therefore goldsmiths or goldworkers, a *lanifica* may have been a woman who spins or weaves wool.<sup>183</sup> But the *-arius/a* ending is much more ambiguous; *clavarii* might be producers or sellers of nails or perhaps serve double duty and both produce and sell nails. Likewise, *vestiarii* may be sellers or producers of cloth or again may do both. Without a clear definition of what tasks were demanded of an individual who identified with a particular job title, it becomes difficult to fully comprehend in what capacity women acted. Were they more likely to be retailers or producers or both? This chapter will examine previous theories about women performing retail duties rather than acting as producers, as well as drawing on reliefs revealing women seemingly acting as a sole proprietor.

The trends we see in the records of occupation is somewhat distorted by a variety of factors. There was a tendency by Romans to commemorate women based on their status as a mother or wife rather than their paid or servile job titles as has already been

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<sup>182</sup> Dixon 2001a, 7.

<sup>183</sup> Dixon 2001a, 7-11.



mentioned in chapter two. Likewise the tendency of freedmen to celebrate their jobs and social mobility more often than freeborn men or freeborn women means that there is an overrepresentation of freed individuals in dedicatory inscriptions which may not reflect actual proportions of working individuals.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, there will be rare occasions, if indeed any at all, where a member of the lowest social group will have been able to be commemorated after their death. This means that the data represented in the epigraphic and material remains represents only those individuals who had disposable wealth.

In dedications to couples it appears that men were proud to portray themselves as workers while they preferred to display their wives in the feminine domestic setting that was favoured by their social superiors.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, the perplexing issue regarding occupational titles means that in general women are underrepresented in part because of the common use of the masculine plural noun in Latin occupational titles, which further makes inferring any solid trends or themes difficult.<sup>186</sup>

In some sectors of the economy, slavery was a passing phase necessary to produce skilled freedmen; an investment in human resources yielded the most fruitful situation after manumission for the former owner.<sup>187</sup> Freedmen generally remained attached to the family to whom they had once been enslaved. By investing in the development of slave skills, the family who owned the slaves could ensure that the slaves, once freed, would be

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<sup>184</sup> Kampen 1981, 130-136; Joshel 1992; Dixon 2001a, 13.

<sup>185</sup> Kampen 1981, 130-136.

<sup>186</sup> For a summary of the issues surrounding job titles refer to Dixon 2001a and Joshel 1992 as well as Kampen 1982. The basic issue is the use of the masculine plural to describe a collective of workers or the inability to distinguish the gender of a third declension. Without the clear usage of the feminine noun, scholars are unable to positively confirm the identity of female workers.

<sup>187</sup> Verboven 2012, 88.

obligated to the family and continue to use the specialized skills in a way that would financially benefit the family.<sup>188</sup> The challenge remains to find working women amongst the freedpeople whose families, more often than not, commemorated them by their female virtues regardless of any particular skills they developed while enslaved. However, if the focus remains on women who were former slaves, it seems likely that women would have been trained in specialized skills to be put to use for the profit of the family who once owned them. The task faced by modern scholars is to take into consideration the ideological trends that still may have obscured all the functions a woman performed.

Not only do ideological trends sometimes obscure the function women had in the Roman economy, but the inadmissibility of women to *collegiae* makes it difficult to distinguish women in the same way that we identify men's contributions from *collegiae* records. Membership conferred prestige and status and was often referred to in dedicatory or commemorative inscriptions.<sup>189</sup> However, women were not allowed to be members of trade-based associations and so we will not see commemorations of their place within these guilds in the same way men were prone to commemorating their social prestige by means of their memberships in these groups. Simply because women were excluded from guilds does not mean that women would not have performed the same jobs as the men who were included in the *collegiae* records. Turning now to examples of the variety of business ventures women could be engaged in, this chapter will display how social status

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<sup>188</sup> Verboven 2012, 88-93.

<sup>189</sup> Hopkins 1983, 211-217; Dixon 2001b.

as well as gender played a role in dictating what avenues of business were open to women.

## 4.2 Women in Manufacture and Commerce

The explicit contempt for commerce readily exhibited in the literary sources obscures the fact that the Roman economy accommodated a broad spectrum of businesses. Moreover, women were not as removed from the daily running of these businesses as the elite sources acknowledge. Accordingly, there is a multitude of epigraphic remains, material remains, literary remarks, and even wall paintings, which reveal Roman women interacting in daily commerce. The remainder of this chapter will focus on brief case studies, which disclose a number of women working alongside their male colleagues or even in their own businesses.

Modern assumptions about gender and feminine roles presume that women were primarily concerned with retail. Although there is definite evidence for women acting as retailers (for example, the paintings flanking the workshop of Verecundus in Pompeii indicate that women were retailers), one cannot assume that the male/female pairings on inscriptions should be taken to indicate that women acted as retailers and men as producers.<sup>190</sup> Holleran does not believe that it is accurate to assume that Roman society relegated women to the retail sphere. Latin terminology is often ambiguous and it appears that occupational titles can often refer to either the manufacturer or seller and so intentional placement of equivalent titles for both partners marks them out as doing the

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<sup>190</sup> Le Gall (1970) and Evans (1991) believe that when inscriptions commemorate what is presumably a married couple, the female would have sold what the artisan male produced.

same or very similar jobs.<sup>191</sup> Women such as Fulvia Melema who is of uncertain legal status is commemorated as a *brattiararia* (a female gold-worker) alongside Gaius Fulcinius Hermeros, who is a freedman and *brattiararius* (a male gold-worker) from Rome. Likewise, from Turin a female *clavaria*, Cornelia Venusta, is documented alongside Publius Aebutius, a *clavarius*. The deliberate inclusion of the comparable terms surely indicates that both the male and female workers were acting in the same occupational capacity.<sup>192</sup>

A workshop in Pompeii belonging to an individual called Verecundus features two paintings flanking the main entrance. In one of these paintings we see a scene meant to represent the actions occurring within the workshop. In the bottom register, we most likely see an image of a woman, presumably his wife because of her prominence in the image, selling the products and a male figure, presumably Verecundus, holding up the finished products. The artisan who retailed his products in his own workshop has been a common figure in the pre-industrial world and likely in the Roman era as well.<sup>193</sup> In this instance, it may have been commonplace for wives to engage in the retailing side of the business. This area of business was more accessible to freeborn women who had limited access to apprenticeships and required little or no formal training beyond basic numeracy.<sup>194</sup> A relief in a second century butcher shop reveals how women may have assisted with the general management of businesses. The relief depicts a man butchering

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<sup>191</sup> Holleran 2013, 315-316.

<sup>192</sup> Holleran 2013, 316.

<sup>193</sup> Holleran 2012, 13

<sup>194</sup> Holleran 2013, 316. See Hemelrijk (1999, 20-23, 30-56) for a comprehensive discussion of the education available for women in the ancient world.

meat while a woman in formal attire is shown sitting to one side with wax tablets in her hand, seemingly interacting with the shop accounts.<sup>195</sup>

These two reliefs feature freeborn women engaging in work, if indeed they are correctly interpreted as the wives of the men likewise depicted, so it seems that married women were still able to engage in business. Nor does it appear that freeborn women were even strictly confined to the domestic sphere in the way that the literary sources would lead readers to believe.<sup>196</sup> The commercial and domestic spheres were not strictly defined in the ancient world and so it stands to reason that a woman could participate in commerce while still acting in her domestic role. We see *tabernae* lining the streets in urban centres in Roman Italy, which often included living space that was located in a back room, on a mezzanine floor, or in the shop itself.<sup>197</sup> This meant that women and children could simultaneously be at home and at work contributing to the business. A relief of a potter and his wife shows him engaged in work and the woman in her domestic role, holding a fan and some bread. This may not have reflected the general reality but more the ideal.<sup>198</sup> In practice, it seems reasonable to expect that the woman contributed her labour to the family business in addition to performing her domestic duties.

Moreover, since women were almost certainly underreported in our sources because of ideological considerations, it is probable that most women simply worked within family

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<sup>195</sup> D'Ambra 2007, 135-137.

<sup>196</sup> Joshel 1992, 125.

<sup>197</sup> Holleran 2012, 99-113, 152-157; Holleran 2013, 317.

<sup>198</sup> D'Ambra 2007, 24 Figure 11; Holleran 2013, 317.

businesses with little or no formal recognition of the role they played.<sup>199</sup> So in instances where both a man and woman are named in funerary dedications or literature, but only the man is given an occupational title, it should at least be considered that the woman functioned in the same role but lacked the same commemoration because of a Roman preference to commemorate her traditionally gender appropriate roles. For instance, in *CIL* 6, 33423 Lepida is named alongside Apollonius, who is a freedman, but Apollonius is given the occupation title *faber eborarius*. It seems reasonable to imagine that Lepida would have figured into the family business in some capacity, either as retailer if not a producer or labourer.

Women also appear to work outside the home and in an economic sphere that is completely distinct from their husbands. Examples of women such as Nostia Daphne, who is a freedwoman *ornatrix* (hairdresser) and commemorated alongside one Marcus Nerius Quadratus, also a freedman and probably her husband, who worked as a goldsmith.<sup>200</sup> Similarly, a woman called Cleopatra is named as an *ornatrix* and was from the same street as Nostia Daphne. More interesting is that Treggiari suggests that Cleopatra is possibly a freedwoman of Nostia Daphne who herself was freed.<sup>201</sup> Nostia Daphne had obviously reached a level of success that allowed her to have her own slaves and to train them in her skill set. These slaves were then successful enough to either purchase their own freedom or had simply been freed by Nostia Daphne at her death.

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<sup>199</sup> Saller 2003, 191.

<sup>200</sup> *CIL* 6, 37469; see also Holleran 2013, 318.

<sup>201</sup> Treggiari 1979, 75.

We also see representations of women acting as artisans or dealers in their own right.

Pollecla sold vegetables on the Via Nova in Rome and Abudia Megiste was a *negotiatrix* in grain at the Middle Stairs.<sup>202</sup> A woman called Sellia Epyre is commemorated by her husband as an *auri vestrix* and as is also the case with Abudia Megiste, neither husband seems to have been involved in the same occupation. The occupational title for both women is in the feminine and can therefore only refer to female participation.<sup>203</sup>

Two small fragments from Ostia feature the image of a *sutrix*, a shoemaker, and an inscription. The inscription reveals that it was erected for Septimia Stratonice by a male friend, Marcus Acilius, in return for a favour she had done for him. In this relief Septimia is shown last in a series of shoemakers and merchants, indicating, in accordance with Roman relief convention, that she was the producer of shoes rather than a merchant.<sup>204</sup> Septimia Stratonice is pictured not only last but also holding an object that resembles a shoemaker's *forma*. Both Greek and Roman evidence show that the *forma* was a persistent and logical symbol for shoemakers.<sup>205</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that women would never have provided their services as retailers in the variety of establishments known as *cauponae* or *popinae*. These establishments played a central role in food distribution and some provided lodgings as well in Italian urban centers.<sup>206</sup> Fantham describes a relief which features a woman

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<sup>202</sup> Pollecla: *CIL* 6, 9684. Abudia Megiste: *CIL* 6, 9683.

<sup>203</sup> Holleran 2013, 318; Treggiari 1979, 77.

<sup>204</sup> Holleran 2013, 319; Joshel 1992, 70. For issues surrounding the identification of Septimia as a shoe producer see Kampen 1981, 64-69. See *CIL* 14, supp. 4698 for the relief.

<sup>205</sup> Kampen 1981, 66.

<sup>206</sup> Kampen 1981, 89.

serving two male customers in a bar scene.<sup>207</sup> Likewise a female server is depicted in a painting in the so-called ‘caupona della Via di Mercurio’ in Pompeii.

In antiquity, street trading was a prominent method of retail. Various Latin words denote street trading: *ambulator*, *circitor*, *circumforaneus*, *circulator*, and more often *institor*.<sup>208</sup> *Institor* is a specific legal term used to denote a business manager, but is also used to refer to street traders. The use of the term in the context of street trading implies a level of organization and formality within some sectors, with retailers sent out to sell by others. Ancient evidence indicates that women not only retailed their goods in established shops or taverns, but they were also seen in the streets or open spaces hawking their wares.<sup>209</sup> We see examples of women performing this task in literature such as Petronius’ *Satyricon* where the characters encounter an elderly woman selling vegetables. Not only is she endeavoring to sell her vegetables but she also attempts to procure business for a nearby brothel.<sup>210</sup>

We do not have to rely solely on literature to provide us with examples of female street sellers. Roman paintings and reliefs feature many female retailers in open urban spaces. Ostia provides a relief of a female poultry vendor, which clearly indicates the involvement of women in the sale of fresh food.<sup>211</sup> An interesting feature of this relief is the presence of a presumably male retailer who is positioned behind the woman and is

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<sup>207</sup> Fantham 1994, 336-337.

<sup>208</sup> Holleran 2012, 198.

<sup>209</sup> Holleran 2013, 321.

<sup>210</sup> Pet. *Sat.* 7.

<sup>211</sup> Kampen 1981, 52-59.



smaller in stature. Due to her prominence and physical size, it seems reasonable to imagine that she was the proprietor of the stall and the man behind her was a worker or slave.<sup>212</sup>

### 4.3 Women in the Textile Industry

The role of the *matrona* was to produce clothing for both the free and slave members in her household and this, as has already been mentioned, came to symbolize female Roman virtues. There was a chain of cultural transmission which encouraged mothers or older generations to pass down to their children the practices involved in spinning and weaving cloth. Augustus himself boasted that his clothing had been made by the women of his family as part of his own moral image-making.<sup>213</sup> This duty was not only ascribed to wealthy, elite women but to regular women who had no real interest or need to advertise their moral virtues to garner public prestige or respect in the same way elite women did (for example, to gain public support for any sort of political endeavor). The women concerned with the process of turning wool into cloth ranged far across the social spectrum. Representations of their work vary according to the status of the woman designated. For wives, participation in the process symbolized the female virtues of industry and devotion to the household and were publicly proclaimed in funeral *laudationes* and epitaphs.<sup>214</sup> There have been attempts to argue away the role of the freeborn elite *matrona* in the process of cloth production but such arguments rely on modern assumptions about appropriate status roles and economic distinctions which were

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<sup>212</sup> Kampen 1981, 57.

<sup>213</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 64,73.

<sup>214</sup> Dixon 2001a, 65-69.

not necessarily applicable in an ancient context.<sup>215</sup> The majority of references support the contention that both slave and free women continued to be involved in the provision of cloth for domestic and commercial needs. Scholars who write about the Roman economy tend to pay little attention to women, but when they do they often associate women's work with the domestic sector. Interestingly, they lean towards the view that the more specialized and industrialized production of cloth was undertaken by men, especially slaves, with only a few enslaved and freed women playing minor and subordinate roles.<sup>216</sup>

Dixon argues that such a view stems from a reliance on 'hard data', which is to say non-literary sources such as occupational inscriptions and records of *collegia* and apprenticeships. She advocates for a critical appreciation of the principles of selection—and therefore of exclusion—which governed each format in the ancient world.<sup>217</sup> She points to the example of occupational titles first. Spinning is mentioned more often in literary and legal sources rather than in epigraphic evidence. The slave practitioners who are mentioned in these sources are typically subsumed into more general terms—*lanificae* (female wool-workers), *ancillae* (slave-women), or the *familia rustica* (the farm-based slave collective)—while the involvement of free women as participants or supervisors is likely to be referred to only in passing or for its moral connotations of domestic virtue.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> See Dixon 2004 for a summary of the argument surrounding the elite *materfamilias*' involvement in cloth production.

<sup>216</sup> There is much debate regarding the extent to which cloth production was 'industrialized'. See in particular Moelle 1976 and Jongman's 1988 response. Regarding the issue of how involved freeborn women were involved in the 'industrialized' cloth process, see Dixon 2001a.

<sup>217</sup> Dixon 2001b, 7.

<sup>218</sup> Dixon 2001b, 8-9.

Jashemski's archaeological evidence would seem to indicate that women of all social classes participated in the production of cloth. During her excavations of gardens in Pompeii and Herculaneum, she discovered loom weights in every garden she excavated regardless of the social position the owner of the home held.<sup>219</sup> Jashemski contrasts this evidence with the reticence of the written sources on this widespread, commonplace activity. If Roman women of all standings were not equally engaged in cloth production it seems more likely that loom weights would be found in sections of the home that were associated more with slaves or production than with the family quarters, if we are to believe the ancient authors.

Conventions of the Latin language once again hinder scholars in their attempts to discern which gender and social status generally undertook specific tasks. The textile industry has an abundance and variety of occupational terms, which initially may seem to indicate a high level of organization. Inscriptions, Pompeian graffiti, and legal and literary references distinguish occupational terms such as *textrices/textores*, *fullones*, and *purpurarii* among a plethora of others.<sup>220</sup> But this wealth of information is spoiled by the uncertainty of many of the terms. Without understanding the exact duties of each occupational title, it is difficult to distinguish how women were able to interact with the textile industry. For instance, there does not appear to be a record of a woman being commemorated specifically as a *lanaria* and the references in the plural are always masculine, as is grammatically correct in Latin. This does not necessarily mean that the

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<sup>219</sup> Jashemski 1979, 150-155.

<sup>220</sup> *Fullones* refers to a cloth fuller, *purpurarii* to producers of purple/scarlet cloth and *textores/textrices* to a weaver. For more job categories and their likely meanings, see Treggiari 1976 and 1979, as well as Joshel 1992.

work of the *lanarii* was performed solely by men.<sup>221</sup> The female term *vestiaria* is not found in Roman inscriptions but *CIL* 6, 33920 features a woman grouped in with the *libertini* and *vestiarii* who commemorate their patron.<sup>222</sup> Likewise *CIL* 6, 9435 features a group of *gemarii* from the Via Sacra but a woman, Babbia Asia, is amongst this group.<sup>223</sup>

Outside of the direct cloth production industry, women were still active participants in the economy. Avillia Philusa appears as a *vestiarii* along with a number of other male Avillii from the area of the Cermalus Minusculus in Rome.<sup>224</sup> As freedmen and women, these workers most likely learned their trade as slaves, which indicates that there were no barriers to female slaves learning artisanal skills. Training a slave was a sound investment for slave owners since a skilled slave was more useful in a domestic context, generated more profit for the owner, and would be worth more if sold.<sup>225</sup>

Bradley reviews thirty contracts for weaver apprentices from Egypt created during the first three centuries of Roman rule and discovers the complete absence of freeborn girls recorded in them.<sup>226</sup> He records one instance of a girl of dubious birth and maintains that she was a slave, but van Minnen argues that she was freeborn.<sup>227</sup> Regardless of whether she was indeed freeborn or enslaved, it can be said that based on the small sampling it

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<sup>221</sup> Masculine plurals were routinely employed in Latin to denote a mixed-sex group. See Gardner 1995, 378 for legal rulings on this use of the masculine.

<sup>222</sup> Dixon 2001b, 9.

<sup>223</sup> Treggiari 1979, 67.

<sup>224</sup> *CIL* 6, 33920.

<sup>225</sup> Holleran 2013, 314-314.

<sup>226</sup> Bradley 1991, 109.

<sup>227</sup> Bradley 1991, 120 cf. van Minnen 1998, 202.

appears that the majority of contracts featured slave children and freeborn boys rather than freeborn girls. This would support the idea that slaves and freeborn males were more often involved in industrialized cloth production rather than freeborn women, as was mentioned above. Van Minnen elaborates on Bradley's survey of apprentice contracts and discovers two more apprentice contracts for freeborn girls.<sup>228</sup> Holleran does not believe that simply because there is an apparent lack of freeborn girls being apprenticed to learn specialized skills that freeborn girls were unable to learn a craft. She points to the commemoration of Viccentia by her parents who was described as an *auri netrix*, or spinner of gold, who died when she was only nine. She believes that this indicates the potential role of children within production and their ability to learn trades at home regardless of sex or social position.<sup>229</sup>

## 4.4 Rural Labour in the Ancient World

The sources for rural labour in the ancient world are much more convoluted and scarce than they are for other aspects of women in the workforce. In particular, evidence for the participation of free born women or freedwomen in rural labour is almost completely absent. Scheidel reminds his reader how naïve it is to believe the picture our sources draw concerning a woman's ability to remain inside the house for most of the time and to shun manual or outdoor labour.<sup>230</sup> The majority of the population would have lived at or near subsistence level and furthermore a comparably large proportion of the labour force was

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<sup>228</sup> Van Minnen 1998, 203.

<sup>229</sup> Holleran 2013, 315.

<sup>230</sup> Scheidel 1995, 207.

likely involved in agriculture.<sup>231</sup> The relatively low level of agricultural productivity and the high degree of local or regional self-sufficiency in the production of the basic foodstuffs meant that even in urbanized areas, it is unlikely that less than two thirds of the population was engaged in agriculture.<sup>232</sup> These two points alone should make it clear that women were unlikely to have been barred from agricultural labour. Whatever limitations had been imposed on the social life of women, economic necessity apparently gave women the ‘freedom’ to work out of doors.<sup>233</sup>

The degree of the division and differentiation of labour is a crucial factor in determining the extent to which a woman would have engaged in agriculture. The likelihood of women engaging in agricultural labour depended, primarily, on the size of the agricultural holding and on the strength of the available work force. Owners who could afford to employ additionally hired slave labourers would not have required the efforts of female members of the household in the same way that small family units of peasant households did.<sup>234</sup> Varro was clearly aware of this basic fact when he discussed the *pauperculi* (the working poor), who had to work the land “*cum sua progenie*”.<sup>235</sup>

Likewise, although a Greek source, Aristotle observes that “the poor have to use their wives and children as servants since they cannot afford to keep slaves.”<sup>236</sup> It seems obvious that slave women would be involved in agricultural labour and indeed we see

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<sup>231</sup> Garnsey and Saller 1987, 43.

<sup>232</sup> Scheidel 1995, 207.

<sup>233</sup> Scheidel 1995, 209.

<sup>234</sup> Scheidel 1995, 210.

<sup>235</sup> “With their offspring.” See Var. *Re.Rus.* 1.17.2.

<sup>236</sup> Aris. *Pol.* 1323a 5f.

several references in the ancient authors to slave women's participation. Columella notes in passing that "on rainy days, or because of frost, slave women could not perform agricultural labour out of doors, they should be put to wool work inside the house."<sup>237</sup> Likewise, Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* speaks of several women who had gathered to collect grapes and olives.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, occasional references to the presence and the tasks of slave children on Roman estates also points to the existence of a considerable number of unfree women on these holdings who had to be kept busy.<sup>239</sup> Apart from references to slave women, little is heard about the legal status of the women who engaged in field labour. Although it seems natural to assume that free women would have assisted in manual labour as required, we simply do not have any evidence for the actions of these women in the agricultural economy. The lack of interest of the ancient authors in the daily lives of the free rural populace no doubt plays a role in this.

Regarding animal husbandry in the ancient world there are unspecified remarks about women who tended sheep, goats, cattle or other livestock.<sup>240</sup> There does not appear to be any specific information on tasks that were performed solely by women as there is in the Middle Ages (such as shearing sheep).<sup>241</sup> Apart from fictional characters such as Chloe, free herdswomen are by and large missing from our sources. We are left with a few ambiguous references: Dio Chrysostom recalls an elderly lady he met in the Peloponnese

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<sup>237</sup> Col. *RR* 12.3.6.

<sup>238</sup> Long. *Daph.* 2.1.3; 2.2.1.

<sup>239</sup> Bradley 1991, 114.

<sup>240</sup> Var. *RR*. 2.10.6f; Verg. *Ecl.* 7.14f; Ov. *Fast.* 4.511; Dio Chrys. 1.54.

<sup>241</sup> Scheidel 1996, 3.

who was the mother of a herdsman.<sup>242</sup> This woman could have been freeborn or equally could have been a slave. Again, slave women take up significantly more room in the sources.

A realistic assessment of women's role in ancient agriculture can hardly be based on those few scarce and imprecise testimonies available in our sources. For this reason, general considerations of social and economic conditions will have to serve as a substitute for non-existing quantitative data.<sup>243</sup> The ancient evidence leaves us with just a few general impressions. The fact that many of the female agricultural labourers mentioned in our sources were slaves or wage-labourers can be explained by the interest the members of the literate classes took in these groups. Conversely, the daily life of women among the independent peasants and tenants could be passed over by these sources in almost complete silence. To make matters more difficult, archaeological material for the daily lives of rural peasant farmers is extremely scarce. Farmsteads are rarely found and when they are, it is generally an accident rather than a preconceived methodological investigation. Ancient literature leaves us with two extremes regarding the depiction of women at work in rural sectors. The authors chose to depict agricultural labour of women as a pitiable recourse of the poor and bereaved, or as a strange custom of uncivilized peoples.<sup>244</sup> The opposite is represented by the idealization of rural women in a bucolic setting and the praise for the simple peasant. Their status as outsiders in

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<sup>242</sup> Dio Chrys. 1.53f.

<sup>243</sup> Scheidel 1996, 8.

<sup>244</sup> Var. *RR.* 1.17.5; see also Scheidel 1996, 8.



society who were not expected to uphold its values meant that female slaves could have their labour discussed in a straightforward manner.

## 4.5 Conclusion

There is more epigraphic and relief evidence for non-elite women functioning within the Roman economy than for elite women. However, this is not to say that uncovering these women's roles in commerce is straightforward as this chapter has made clear. Issues regarding social ideology, ambiguous occupational titles, an overrepresentation of freed individuals commemorating their upward social mobility, and the inadmissibility of women to *collegiae* records make uncovering the contribution of non-elite females an onerous task.

The same sort of ideological traditions that obscure the economic involvement of elite women can complicate analyzing the economic contributions of non-elite women. Non-elite women were not in the same economic position as elites, nor could they uphold the idealized female virtues of domesticity; non-elite women often needed to contribute financially to their families in order to provide a basic subsistence. It seems likely that the poorer classes of Roman women worked in some sort of capacity, although societal norms shaped their commemorations as wives, mothers, and daughters based on their domestic virtues rather than occupational achievements.

Reliefs may be of some help in this regard but are sometimes unable to reveal the social status of the women featured in them. We know that women actively participated in the economy as retailers and producers, but unless the relief is labeled we are unable to

precisely determine what social groups of women were likely to be engaged in depicted activities. The prominence of women in occupational reliefs demonstrates that it was not unusual for a woman to be a proprietor of a shop. We can look back to the relief of the poultry seller from Ostia, which shows a woman apparently as the main retailer of her shop.<sup>245</sup> Kampen's work with the reliefs in Ostia has revealed a number of women depicted in various occupations.<sup>246</sup>

Further, it may be that modern presumptions about gender and feminine roles have encouraged scholars to read such women as the retailers of their husband's or male associates' products rather than as retailers and producers in their own right. The ambiguity of Latin terminology, (i.e. the use of the male plural in instances of a mixed gender group), does not help in this regard. In instances where a title is applied to both the male and female partners, scholars have traditionally ascribed the role of the retailer to the female and the role of the producer to the male. This chapter has argued that the deliberate inclusion of comparable terms in a dedicatory inscription makes it seem likely that both partners were functioning in similar roles. Evidence also exists for women having jobs completely separate from those of their husbands. For instance, Nostia Daphne is commemorated as a hairdresser by a male, probably her husband, who is said to have been a goldsmith.

Differences in status between freedwomen and freeborn women may have influenced their ability to function within the economic culture of Rome. Enslaved women appear to

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<sup>245</sup> Holleran 2013, 318-320; Fantham 1994, 336.

<sup>246</sup> Kampen 1981.

have had more access to apprenticeships and training than freeborn women did.<sup>247</sup> These enslaved women could have become skilled enough to become financially successful and purchase their own freedom. Simply because freeborn women did not have as many opportunities to learn a skilled trade does not mean they could not have assisted in the running of a family business. Given that the domestic sphere and commercial spheres were often blurred (shops were often located in the same building or families lived in a workshop) women could simultaneously perform their domestic and commercial duties. Images found in workshops, such as at the workshop of Verecundus, show women keeping accounts, in this case presumably Verecundus' wife. Likewise, we see a second century relief of a butcher shop featuring a woman with a tablet and stylus in hand, probably also keeping shop accounts, which may be idealizations.

Despite ideological influences in the commemorative records which sometimes make it more difficult to distinguish working women if they are commemorated alongside a male partner, other categories of evidence can be used to discover the contributions of non-elite Roman women to the economy.

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<sup>247</sup> See Bradley's argument in section three of this chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This thesis has shown that despite aristocratic male tendencies to discuss occupations in terms that reflect societal ideologies rather than the practical conduct of commerce, women were actively engaged in commercial life and evidence of their involvement can be found from a variety of sources. The biases of this evidence, such as the preference to commemorate women based on their domestic rather than occupational skills or the inherent bias toward wealthier classes in the epigraphic record, means that scholars should approach the evidence with caution. For instance, the surviving literary sources would lead us to believe that it was preferential for women to remain in the home and not partake in commercial life. However, continuously weakening laws regarding *tutela mulierum* as well as the institution of Augustus' Julian laws allowed women to gain more financial independence and to engage in commercial activities in a variety of ways free from tutorial restriction or consent.

Elite women were more constrained by traditional values and so had to act in a manner that reflected the social prestige of their families. In this way, elite women were constrained in the same way that elite men were; both genders had to consider how their economic endeavors could impact the social standing of not only themselves, but their families as well. Non-elites had less status to preserve, and such concerns likely impacted their decisions to engage in commercial activities to a lesser extent. Despite these constraints, elite women, such as Calvia Crispinilla and Caedicia Victrix, still engaged in commerce on a large scale as was considered acceptable in accordance with values that

had been established in the Republic.<sup>248</sup> But not all women chose to be considerate of propriety. Ummidia Quadratilla apparently disregarded decorum in favour of financial gain. Pliny's account of her life does not explicitly state that she maintained pantomime performers for personal gain, but it seems reasonable to at least consider the profit she stood to gain by owning well-known pantomimes.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, the political influence elite women could acquire by being in control of a product that could garner public support for politicians was a unique opportunity. Roman politicians often provided games or performances as a sort of bribe to encourage the public to vote for them. By providing performances that featured Ummidia's popular pantomimes to the plebeians, politicians could have increased their public favour but also remain indebted to Ummidia due to her provision of these entertainers. Elite men were able to use their finances to purchase the external badges of prestige and political support in a way that women were not able to do directly. Women could, however, access this sort of political influence by being in control of, as was possibly Ummidia's case for example, a popular pantomime performer.

The trends in scholarship that led to the disregard for women's place in history discussed in chapter one ought to be considered when approaching this subject. Shifting interests motivated by contemporary political and social issues led to a new interest in understanding the lived reality of women in antiquity. It slowly became clear to scholars that by ignoring the function women served in antiquity, a comprehensive understanding of the ancient world would not be possible. The ancient sources had a significant role to play in the development of women's scholarship. The aristocratic male authors

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<sup>248</sup> See chapter three, section one.

<sup>249</sup> See chapter three, section two.

responsible for the vast majority of extant sources led scholars to believe that women were meant to remain in the domestic sphere and the political, social, and commercial spheres belonged to men. Material evidence to the contrary was ignored for a significant period of time. Once the sphere of women was considered a worthy topic of discussion, advances in scholarship were made over a period of the last few decades.

At the same time, the complicated nature of and potential biases in the evidence for working women must always inform research questions. Ideological considerations had a major impact on the dedicatory inscriptions recording women's lives. This thesis suggested ways that evidence for the occupations of women could still be obtained from these inscriptions that may have commemorated the occupation of a husband but only the traditional virtues of the wife. The ambiguity that stems from occupational titles in the plural further complicates uncovering women who may have been working in a mixed gender group and therefore would have been commemorated or described by using a plural masculine noun. Nevertheless, there are bodies of evidence that help us reconstruct the possibilities open to women in the economic sphere.

We are able to explore elite women's ability to garner social prestige in instances where they were not engaging in business ventures by way of their gifts of public munificence. If economic success was a way to acquire public prestige through the ability to procure those items that indicate social status, then gifts of civic munificence was an option for women wishing to display their social prestige to the public. Elite women were shown by Cicero and other ancient authors to have engaged with the public as patronesses and to have loaned money at interest in much the same way as their male peers did.

The evidence revealing how non-elite women engaged with the Roman economy is also skewed by cultural biases. Trends towards commemorating men according to their occupation but women according to their domestic virtue necessitate a closer reading of the evidence before drawing conclusions regarding female involvement in commerce. Likewise, arguments given by scholars which argue that in cases of a male/female pairing on a dedicatory inscription where both individuals are commemorated by the same occupational title, the male was more likely the producer of goods and the female the retailer of those goods were shown to be likely untrue. Fulvia Melema is one such example of this. She was commemorated as a *brattiararia* alongside a man who was presumably her husband, Gaius Fulvius Hermeros, and was likewise commemorated as a *brattiararius*. Holleran argues that in cases such as this where comparable terms are used, both individuals acted in the same capacity.<sup>250</sup> Indeed this seems like a natural conclusion to draw. With the abundance of occupational titles available to the Romans, it seems unlikely that the same title would be used in instances where the individuals were performing different tasks. It was modern presumptions that dictated that the women be considered the retailers while the men were the producers.

Reliefs and paintings reveal women working in a variety of settings, not only working alongside a spouse but sometimes they appear to operate as a sole proprietor. The workshop of Verecundus and a second century butcher shop relief both feature women apparently engaged with the shop accounts. Stone fragments from Ostia reveal a woman, Septimia Stratonica, at the end of the line of shoe workers indicating that she was also a producer of shoes rather than simply a retailer of shoes. A relief from Ostia again

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<sup>250</sup> Holleran 2013, 316.

displays a woman selling poultry. She is the foremost character in the relief and so it seems reasonable to imagine that she was the proprietor of the shop rather than a worker.

A primary theme of this research was to explore the notion that social status impacted the way a woman was able to interact with the Roman economy. Elite women were constrained by concerns of projecting the appropriate virtues that would enable their male peers to maintain their social and political positions. Some elite women, Ummidia Quadratilla for example, disregarded convention in favour of financially feasible avenues of profit that would lead to her ability to acquire forms of power not traditionally available to women. Elite women such as Ummidia seem to be the exception rather than the norm and in most instances elite women engaged in commerce on a level that was considered appropriate for their social status.

Non-elite women were more often required by necessity to take part in the economic and commercial culture of Rome and were not of a social status that was able to strictly subscribe to traditional female roles. Nevertheless, non-elite women and men still internalized these domestic ideals and sought to represent their wives, mothers, and daughters in dedicatory inscriptions more often in these domestic roles rather than in occupational roles. This preference of commemoration complicates the search for working women, but by supplementing epigraphic evidence with reliefs and paintings found throughout Roman Italy and apprenticeship contracts found in Roman Egypt, it becomes apparent that women were indeed fully functioning members of the Roman economy.



Social attitudes about class and gender influenced depictions of work, just as they do in modern society. Certain modern occupations come with a higher level of prestige, most often those jobs that reward the worker more financially, as has been imposed by arbitrary social constructions. This sort of cultural bias towards certain occupations being more socially acceptable was likewise a trend in antiquity. The ancient sources were more inclined to find large scale business ventures more reputable than the more mundane tasks that were just as necessary to have a fully functioning society. Individuals who, in a modern context, are able to attain some degree of upward social mobility often commemorate their achievements more than individuals who have maintained the same level of social status. In antiquity this was the same. Romans who were once enslaved but were able to acquire a skill that allowed them eventually to purchase their freedom and attain a high level of financial success appear overrepresented in the epigraphic record. In these ways, attitudes towards occupations have not changed greatly since the Roman empire.

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