

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 6 – Women in Rome

CLCS4007

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Marriage – *Connubium*

- ▣ **Marriage:** secular matter. Its main legal effect was that children born within it were legitimate, Roman citizens and subjects to paternal power.
- ▣ The *connubium* was the capacity of getting marriage once one got the appropriate age (12 girls and 14 boys).
- ▣ *Connubium* only possible among citizens, eventually with Latin and Peregrinae.
- ▣ *Sine manu* – a form of marriage where the women remains under the guardianship of her father.

The Wedding Ritual

- ▣ The marriages needed to be consented by the paterfamilias of both parties
- ▣ a meeting of friends was sometimes held at the house of the maiden for the purpose of settling the marriage-contract, which was called *sponsalia*.
- ▣ The sponsaliae were written on tablets (*tabulae legitimae*), and signed by both parties
- ▣ The ceremony concluded with the man putting a ring on the finger of his betrothed, as a pledge of his fidelity.
- ▣ The wedding day was fixed after consulting the auspices.



The bride was dressed with the tunica recta and was bound round the waist with a girdle (*corona congulum*). The bridal veil, called *flammeum*, was of a bright-yellow colour.

Dowry

- ❑ Spouses property remained distinct – except for the dowry which would be managed by the husband.
- ❑ A dowry was gift or payment given by *paterfamilias* or other friends and relatives.
- ❑ It should reflect the wealth of the family from which the bride had come from.
- ❑ The dowry should usually be returned in the case of divorce.

Berlin Papyrus No. 1,052

“...Thermion [daughter of Apio] and Apollonius son of Ptolemaeus agree that they have come together to share a common life... Apollonius son of Ptolemaeus acknowledges that he has received from Thermion by hand from the house a dowry of a pair of gold earrings weighing three quarters and ... silver drachmas; and from now on Apollonius son of Ptolemaeus shall furnish to his wedded wife all necessaries and clothing in proportion to his means and shall not ill-treat her nor cast her out nor insult her nor bring in another wife, or else he shall straightaway forfeit the dowry increased by half...

Childbirth

- ▣ Children not exposed were acknowledged by the father and raised (*sublatus*).
- ▣ Eight [Boys] and ninth [girls] day children were purified (*dies lustricus*) and then named.
- ▣ Augustan period – *lex Aelia Sentia* and *lex Popia Poppaea* – it was necessary for Roman citizens to register a child's birth within 30 days.

Childlessness and Abortion

- Low rates of child-birth among the elite?
 - *Lex Papia Poppaea* (AD 9) – marriage legislation, designed to discourage celibacy and promote the rearing of children.
 - “She who wants to appear beautiful harms her womb” – [Ovid] *Nux* 23.
- Abortion not a crime until the reign of Septimius Severus – *Digest* 47.11.4.
- Pharmacological recipes for abortion – **Dioscorides** *De Materia Medica* 1.5 – cardamom use to fumigate a foetus.

Guardianship and Independence

- 1) “Our ancestors established the rule that all women, because of their weakness of intellect, should be under the power of guardians.” – **Cicero** *In Defence of Murena* 12.27.
- 2) “...it is only by the right of children that women are freed from guardianship.” – **Gaius** *Institutes* 1.145.194.
- 3) “...women who are honoured with the write of three children to be independent and act without a guardian... I am literate and able to write with a high degree of ease...” – **Oxyrhynchus Papyrus** No. 1,467.

SEG 8. 703

“To the great goddess Leto, Aelia Isidora and Aelia Olympias, distinguished matrons, *naukleroi* and merchants of the Red Sea, together with Apollinarios the *eparch* of... [large lacuna] ... of Olympias and (Isidora) both...dedicated (this).”

Second century AD inscription found at the of temple Medamoud (ancient Madu, 8 km north of Luxor).

Legacy Hunters

“Gemellus is seeking the hand of Maronilla, and is earnest, and lays siege to her, and beseeches her, and makes presents to her. Is she then so pretty? Nay; nothing can be more ugly. What then is the great object and attraction in her? ----Her cough.” – *Martial Epigrams* 1.10.

Benefactresses

“The people of Patara [Lycia] decreed... Junia Theodora, a Roman living in Corinth... Who with full measure and generosity aided many of our citizens from her own means, and welcomed them into her home... declares that it urges her generosity to our native city... For this reason – may good fortune attend – it was decreed to commend her for all that she has done.” – (AD 43).

- *Epigraphica* II No. 8 – H. Pleket (1969).

Status and Appearance

- Important for a woman's own sense of identity and public display of that identity.
 - wearing of jewellery, makeup, adornments.
- Potential means for the elite to attract a suitor.
- Also may convey a moral message – *stola*, garment worn over a tunic reaching the ground – conveys respectability and that married citizen.
- **Pliny NH 9.104-123** - the poor proclaim that pearls are as good as a woman's lictor.

Pliny *Natural History*

9.58.117

“I once saw Lollia Paulina, the wife of the Emperor Caius — it was not at any public festival, or any solemn ceremonial, but only at an ordinary wedding entertainment — covered with emeralds and pearls, which shone in alternate layers upon her head, in her hair, in her wreaths, in her ears, upon her neck, in her bracelets, and on her fingers, and the value of which amounted in all to forty millions of sesterces; indeed she was prepared at once to prove the fact, by showing the receipts...”

Seneca *To Helvia, On Consolation* 16.3–4.

“Lack of chastity, the greatest evil of the century, does not count you in the number of many. Neither gems nor pearls have seduced you. Riches have not glittered for you as the greatest good of the human race. Well brought up in an old and austere home, you have not been tuned aside by imitation of worse people, dangers even to the upright. Never have you been ashamed of your fertility, as it might be a reproach to your time... Never have you stained your face with cosmetics and artificial adornments. Never has a garment pleased you which when taken off would bare your nakedness.”

Occupations

- ▣ Wool-working remained respectable ideal.
- ▣ Midwives, wet-nurses
- ▣ Vestal Virgins
 - “It is unlawful for a girl to be chosen who is less than six, or more than ten years old, she must have both father and mother living... [no bodily defeats of disabilities] ... A daughter of a man without residence in Italy must not be chosen...” – **Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* 1.12.**

▣ Painters

- “There have also been women painters... Iaia of Cyzicus, who remained unmarried, painted at Rome with a brush... A certain Olympais also painted, but about her onl this is recorded, that Autobolus was her pupil.” – **Pliny NH 35.90.147-48.**

▣ Athletes

- ...Tryphosa each time was first in the girls’ single-course race at the Pythian Games... And at the Isthmian Games... Hedeia won the race in armour...” – ***Epigraphica* II No.9 – H. Pleket (1969).**

▣ **Philosopher** – Hypatia of Alexandria (late-third to early-fourth century AD).

Athens and Rome – Differences

- ▣ *Sine manu* – a form of marriage leaving a wife outside her husband's *familia*.
- ▣ Roman law did allow women to own a *domus* encompassing the physical building and residents.
- ▣ Rights of three children.
- ▣ Any non-dotal property a woman inherited after the death of her father remained under her ownership.
- ▣ Women could write wills.
- ▣ Diverse multi-ethnic empire, various regional and cultural differences.