



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Women in professions (Rome)

Dr Magdalena Ohrman
m.ohrman@uwtsd.ac.uk

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

Latin problems x 2

- Latin (and Greek) grammar (like e.g. French) will describe a group made up of feminine and masculine nouns/people using masculine forms:
 - *filius et filia miseri servi sunt => miseri servi sunt*
- Women's participation in groups of workers are obscured by the grammar - this makes it difficult to trace their participation
 - e.g. in groups commissioning monuments (of varying size)

The wool-working *matrona*

- Then they broke down the doors by force; they threw down the images of his ancestors and they broke into pieces the marriage bed, in the presence of his wife Cornelia [...]; likewise, they pulled down the weave, which, in time-honoured fashion, was being woven in the *atrium*. (Asc. Cic. Pro Milone 13)
- Lucretia, though it was late at night, was busily engaged upon her wool, while her servant girls toiled about her in the lamplight as she sat in the middle of the house [*in medio aedium*]. The prize of this contest in womanly virtues fell to Lucretia. (Liv. 1.57)



Tombstone of Genetiva: Baugy, France. 1st/2nd C CE)

Bias of literary sources

- Most literary sources exhibit both a male and an elite bias: when used for information about women and non-elite members of society, they always need to be compared to other evidence
 - Epigram, letters (incl. late antique letters), satire more likely to approach these topics
- Archaeological evidence (e.g. workshop or tool finds) rarely securely sexed, let alone gendered
 - Cf. Allison *AJA* 119, 2014

Epigraphic evidence including women

- *Selected examples*
- vestiarii (CIL 6.33920)
- gemmarii (CIL 6.9435)
- ferrarii (CIL 6.9398)
- thurarii (CIL 6.9933)
- negotiatrix in beans (CIL 6.9683)
- officinatrix or workshop owner (CIL 6.9715)

CIL IV 8203:

15 July. Earrings deposited with Faustilla. Per two denarii she took as usury one copper as. From a total (?) 30.

Bibliography:

Larsson Lovén, L. 2016. *Women, Trad, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy*. In: M. Flohr, A. Wilson (eds.), *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*. Oxford, 201-221.

Treggiari, S. 1975. *Jobs in the Household of Livia*. "Papers of the British School at Rome" 43, 44-77

Textile work: economic conditions

But she who was faithful to none, once overcome with age and destitute, draws out the twisted threads with trembling hand, and ties firm leashes to a rented loom, and she scours the teased wool pulled from snow-white fleeces. (Tib. 1.6.77-80)

...as if you yourself had done something to make you a noble, so that she who conceived you was one who glories in Julian blood, not one who weaves for hire under the draughty city wall. (Juv. 8.40-43)

Sometimes I get coarse cloaks, protection for my toga, of rough and harsh quality, and badly beaten with the pin of a weaver [*textor*] from Gaul, and thin silver items, second rate. (Juv. 9.28-31)

Textile work: the *textrina* as a professional setting?

- For I have also heard that the women came out of the *textrina* and wounded their bodies with the pins of their looms, and that some cooks poured water on them, while others poured out hot pots on them, and others still pierced their bodies with awls. (Cassiod. *hist.* 6.11, mid 4th C CE)
- Let us take weaving as our starting point, so that the unity of the Trinity may be set out through the yarn balls of dogma. For the women learn to suspend tunic weaves on the bar of the loom as if on the beam of the cross. (Potamius of Lisbon, late 4th C CE)

The frieze in the Forum Nervae



Instruction in
spinning
(Minerva Ergane)
(2nd left of narrative
panel)
(D'Ambra section 4)



Warping or
preparation of
heddl mechanism
(final panel of the
southernmost section
of frieze)
(D'Ambra section 8)



Warping or weaving in
progress
(2nd right of narrative panel)
(D'Ambra section 4)



Inspection of cloth
(left of narrative panel)

Other work processes displayed elsewhere in the frieze: weighing of wool, bringing of wool baskets, winding of yarn

Textile work, slaves, and freedmen

- Nowadays, however, when most women so abandon themselves to luxury and idleness that they do not deign to undertake even the superintendence of wool-making and there is a distaste for home-made garments and their perverse desire can only be satisfied by clothing purchased for large sums and almost the whole of their husband's income, one cannot be surprised that these same ladies are bored by a country estate and the implements of husbandry, and regard a few days' stay at a country house as a most sordid business. Therefore, since the ancient practice of the Sabine and Roman mistresses of households has not only become entirely out of fashion but has absolutely died out, management by a bailiff's wife has of necessity crept in to carry out the duties of the proprietor's wife (Col. 12. praef. 9-10)
- There babies prattle, slaves make a racket, children hang on to her face and word, outlays are totted up, charges prepared. Here, a group of cooks have girded themselves and are tearing at meat, here, the crowd of weavers [feminine form] chatters: it is announced, meanwhile, that the master has arrived with friends. (Hier. *Virg. Mar.* 20)



Women
selling and
inspecting
cloth. Roman
relief from
Hirzweiler
(Germania)
3rd-4th C CE

Textile work: male involvement

- Apprenticeship contracts, particularly from Roman Egypt: “women are far outnumbered by male apprentice weavers of both free and slave status” (Holleran 2013: 315)
- Flax spinning a respectable occupation “even for men” (Pliny *NH* 19.3.18) indicates careful negotiation but some male involvement in flax preparation
- Moeller (1969) argues for 17 male weavers identified in Pompeian inscriptions – but only one confirmed later (cf. Jongman 1988; Monteix 2011; Flohr 2013)



Monument of the
Secundii, Igel,
Germany 3rd C CE



Wall paintings from exterior of the house of Verecundus in Pompeii – most likely a *uestiarius*

Above: The process of felt making, with Verecundus displaying the finished product (right)

Left: A woman discussing wares with a seated customer



Women and (other) retail



Wall paintings with scenes from the Forum, Villa of Julia Felix, Pompeii

Women's enterprise in Ostia

Left:
Sacrophagus relief of Lucius Caecilius and family (Tomb 90, Isola Sacra)



Right:
Female poultry seller,
2nd C CE. American
Academy, Rome.

