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From use-wear to user: How literary sources can aid understanding of Graeco-Roman textile tools

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
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Mention of tools by non-users

Arachne and Minerva weaving:

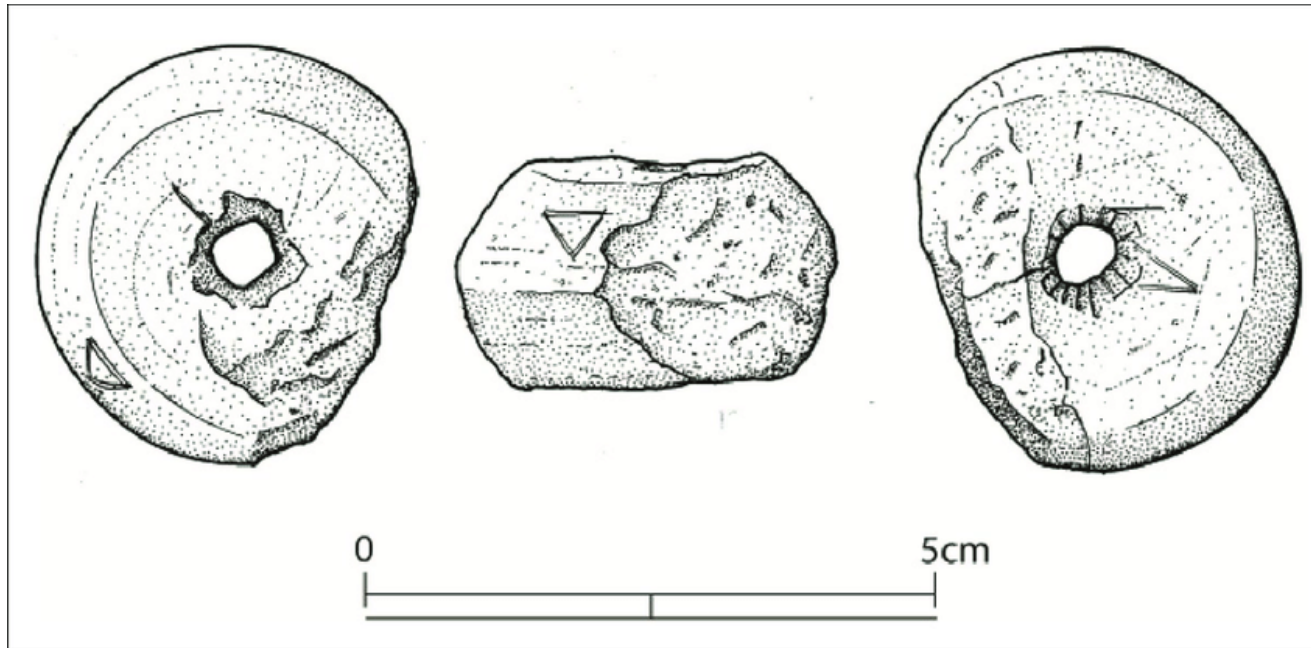
Without delay, they both assemble the various parts and stretch fine warp on twin looms: the web is tied to the cloth-beam, the rod divides the warp, the weft is inserted in between with sharp pin beaters, which their hands guide, and the cut teeth beat the weft thread, pulled through with the sharpened pin beater.

Ov. Met. 6.53-58, 1st C CE

haud mora, constituunt diuersis partibus ambae
et gracili geminas intendunt stamine telas;
tela iugo uincta est, stamen secernit harundo,
inseritur medium radiis subtemen acutis,
quod digiti expediunt, atque inter stamina ductum
percusso pauiunt insecti pectine dentes

Tools given the user's character traits: Claudian *Panegyric on Honorius' 4th consulate* 594; *Rape of Proserpine* 2.41 (both late 4th C CE)

Functionality inscribed



"Figure 6: SF12488 is a shale biconical whorl. The vertex of the triangle shaped graffito, visible on the profile of the whorl, points towards the less worn face. Drawing by Mark Hoyle." (Alberti, 2018)

Image used under CC BY-NC-ND. Available from:

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/SF12488-is-a-shale-biconical-whorl-The-vertex-of-the-triangle-shaped-graffito-visible_fig6_325131669 [accessed 22 Aug, 2019]

Alberti, M. 2018. The Construction, Use, and Discard of Female Identities: Interpreting Spindle Whorls at Vindolanda and Corbridge. *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*, 1(1): 2, pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/traj.241>.

Meanings of use-wear (I)

Ceres finding Proserpine's loom

...wandering through deserted halls, she recognized the half-ruined warp with its disordered threads and the interrupted work of the pin beater...she clasps to her bosom, as if it were her child, the hand-worn pin beaters, the cast aside wool, all the toys scattered in childish play.

(Claud. *Rapt.* 3.155-163, 4th C CE)

...desolata pererrat

atria, semirutas confuse stamina telas

atque interceptas agnoscit pectinis artes.

...

adtritosque manu radios proiecture pensa

cunctaque uirgineo sparsa oblectamina ludo

ceu natam pressat gremio;

Meanings of use wear (II)

κερκίδας ὀρθρολάλοισι χελιδόσιν εἰκελοφώνους, 1
Παλλάδος ἰστοπόνου λειομίτους κάμακας, 2
καὶ κτένα κοσμοκόμην, καὶ δακτυλότριπτον ἄτρακτον 3
σφονδυλοδινήτῳ νήματι νηχόμενον, 4
καὶ τάλαρον σχοίνοις ὑφασμένον, ὃν ποτ' ὀδόντι 5
ἐπλήρου τολύπη πᾶσα καθαιρομένη, 6
σοί, φιλέριθε κόρη Παλλαντιάς, ἡ βαθυγῆρως 7
Αἰσιόνη, πενίης δῶρον, ἀνεκρέμασεν. 8

Philippus, *Greek Anthology* 6.247
2nd C CE

The pin beater that sings like the early-chattering swallows, with whose prongs weaver Pallas softly smooths the thread, the comb that well orders the wool, the hand-worn spindle, swimming with the twirling thread, and the basket of reeds (which the wool she cleaned with her teeth used to fill) to you, Pallatian maid, who loves the loom, did Aesione, now bowed with age, suspend to you as the gift of her poverty.

The Greek Anthology: User comments on tools

Nicarete, who formerly was in the service of Athene's pin beater, and stretched many a warp on the loom, made in honour of Kypris a bonfire in front of her house of her work-basket and spools and the things that go with them, crying 'Away with you, **hunger-bringing works that steal the flower of youth!**' Instead the girl chose garlands and the lyre, and a merry life spent in revel and festivity. 'Kypris', she said, 'I will pay you a tithe from all my gains. Give me work and take your due from it.'

Nicharchus, *Greek Anthology* 6.285

1st C CE

Bitto dedicated to Athene the melodious pin beater, implement of the work that was **her scanty livelihood**, saying: 'Hail, goddess, and take this; for I, a widow in my fortieth year, forswear your gifts and instead take up the works of Kypris; I see that desire is stronger than age.'

Antipater of Sidon, *Greek Anthology* 6.47

2nd C BCE

The Greek Anthology: User comments on tools

Industrious Telesilla, the daughter of **good** Diocles, dedicates to the maiden who presides over workers in wool her weaving pin, the halcyon of Pallas' loom, that sings in the morning with the swallows, her twirling spindle nodding with the weight, the agile spinner of the twisted thread, her thread and this work-basket that loves the distaff, the guardian of her well-wrought clews and balls of wool.

Antipater of Sidon, *Greek Anthology* 6.160
2nd C BCE

We, the **industrious** daughters of Lycomedes, Atheno, Melitea, Phinto, and Glenis, offer from the tithe of our work, as a gift to please you, a little part of the little we have in our **poverty**, the **laborious** spindle, the pin beater that passes between the threads of the warp, sweet songster of the loom, our round spools [...], and our heavy weaving sword. Fill our hands, Athena, ever after, and make us rich in meal instead of poor in meal.

Leonidas, *Greek Anthology* 6.288
3rd C BCE

May she weave many webs, (so that) she may find a **good** husband.
Love the loom weights! We make **happy and fortunate things**.

*Telas multas texat, uirum **bonum** inueniat
Ama lateres facimus **fausta felicia***

