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Lucretia in Livy and Ovid: Genre matters

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Shared domestic space

- “The *atrium* served as avenue both for business and patronage activities such as the *salutatio*, and — *presumably at different times* — for the wool-work of the *materfamilias* and her maids, as well as for children at play.” (Cooper, 2007, 14)
- “[on e.g. the atrium] these spaces were *at certain times of day* used for weaving [...]” (Foxhall, 2010, 124)
- “A major underlying feature of many of the patterns outlined here is an interplay between *activities operating on different timescales*.” (Nevett, 2010, 114)
- “Archaeological evidence shows that the meaning of particular rooms [...] came into being through their usage and changed *over time* depending on who was in a room and what he or she was doing.” (Wilkinson, 2015, 73)

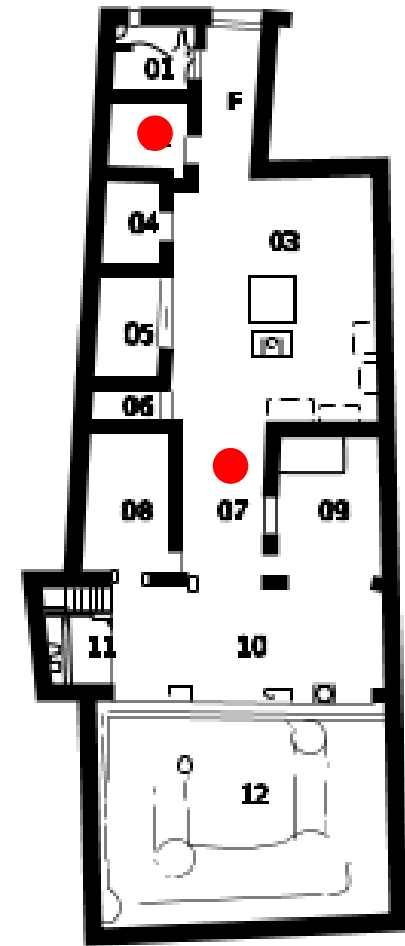
...but when they do coincide

HOW ARE SOFT BORDERS BETWEEN ACTIVITIES MAINTAINED?

Textile work in shared spaces

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 [textricum turba] chatter [commurmurat]: it is announced, meanwhile, that the master has arrived with friends. (Jerome *De Virginitate Mariae* 20)

RIGHT: Casa del Fabbro, Pompeii. Floor plan from the Pompeian Households website, with find locations of textile implements in red.



Women's spaces as determined by time

WHAT HAPPENS AT NIGHT?

Lucretia in Livy 1.57

[...] at early dusk, they then proceeded to Collatinus' home, where Lucretia was discovered very differently employed from the daughters-in-law of the king. These they had seen at a luxurious banquet, whiling away the time with their young friends; but 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. As Collatinus and the Tarquinius approached, they were graciously received, and the victorious husband courteously invited the young princes to his table. It was there that Sextus Tarquinius was seized with a wicked desire to debauch Lucretia by force; not only her beauty, but her proved chastity as well, provoked him.

Livy's Lucretia

- The arrival of Collatinus & C:O is exceptional; their welcome and admittance is not;
- The women discontinue their work on the men's arrival;
- Tarquinius is seized with passion only during the meal;

Lucretia in Ovid's *Fasti* (2.725-774)

Next, they speedily seek out Lucretia, whose baskets of soft wool were set in front of her couch [*torum*]. By faint light [*ad lumen exiguum*] her servants were spinning and she spoke to them in a soft voice: we must send this cloak to my husband as soon as we've finished our hands' work - hurry now, girls, hurry! [...] She lets her work fall and lets go of the thread she has started, curling up in tears. This, too, became her: the tears suited her face, worthy also and equal to her spirit. "Put aside your fears, I am here" her husband said. She revived, a soft weight in her husband's arms. Meanwhile the royal youth [Tarquinius] was caught on furious fire, swept up by blind love and raging. [...] Thus she sat, thus was her dress, thus she spun her thread [*sic stamina neuit*], thus did her hair spread and fall over her neck, such were her looks, such were her words, such her colour, such her face, such the beauty of her mouth.

Ovid's Lucretia

- The word *torus* has elegiac connotations: it could be a dining couch, or bed;
- Lucretia's concern is personal: she cares for Collatinus himself but deplores the campaign as stealing him away;
- Her voice is ventriloquized – this is how the readers gain full access to a female-dominated space;
- She does not act as a hostess but as a lover;
- There is little mention of the contest between the men;
- Lucretia at her work becomes an important image in Tarquinius' erotic fantasy
 - Possible in Livy, spelled out in Ovid

Voicing women

“Ovid’s use of ventriloquized female speech – rather than a continuation of the all-knowing narrator’s discourse – to express the thoughts of Lucretia at her work. [...] its use here also suggests that only a female character could fully enter the circle of wool-working women without fundamentally disrupting its dynamics.” (Öhrman, forthcoming)

Weaving fantasies outside elegy

- Vergil *Aen.* 9.489 (Eurylaus' mother):
curas solabar anilis ('I soothed my old woman's cares')
– cf. also Verg. *Aen.* 8.407-415
- Ambrose *Ad Luc.* 8.11: *bona uxor uirum suum uestit* ('the good wife clothes her husband')

Tibullus *Elegies* 1.3.85-92: Delia among the spinning girls

haec tibi fabellas referat positaque lucerna 85
deducat plena stamina longa colu,
at circa gravibus pensis adfixa puella
paulatim somno fessa remittat opus.
tum veniam subito, nec quisquam nuntiet ante,
sed videar caelo missus adesse tibi. 90
tunc mihi, qualis eris, longos turbata capillos,
obvia nudato, Delia, curre pede.

...she [the old nurse] will tell you stories and with the lamp set up [positaque lucerna] pull down long threads from the full distaff, as by and by the girls around her, stuck at their heavy allotment of wool, tire and let their work fall. Then may I come suddenly, without anyone giving notice beforehand, but rather so that I seem to have been sent from the skies to you. Then run to me on naked feet, just as you are, with your long hair disordered.

Propertius *Elegies* 1.3.39-46: Cynthia spinning

Oh that you got to live through such nights, you scoundrel, as you force me, unlucky woman that I am, to have all the time. For now I tricked sleep with purple thread [*purpureo stamine*], now, exhausted, with song on Orpheus' lyre. All the while I complained softly to myself, abandoned, over your long delays with another love, until around me, tired out, sweet Sleep swept her wings. She it was who finally put a stop to my tears.

Cf. also Arethusa in Prop. 4.3.18 (weaving) and 33 (spinning); Ov. *Epist.* 1.1 (weaving).

In addition to passages discussed here, other eroticised wool-working scenes include Prop. 3.6 (spinning); Ov. *Epist.* 1.7 (spinning); *Ciris* 179 (weaving); Sen. *Phaedr.* 104 (weaving). Cf. also Prop. 4.7 (spinning mentioned in passing).

Follow-up reading

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