



**Big Era Four**  
**Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter**  
**1200 BCE – 500 CE**



**Closeup Teaching Unit 4.5.3**  
**Women's Life in Ancient Rome**  
**200 BCE – 250 CE**

**[PowerPoint Presentation](#)**  
**[Women's Life in Ancient Rome](#)**

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## Why this unit?

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Women in republican and imperial Rome had few rights. Among other things, they could neither vote nor hold magistracies (public offices). Yet, on occasion, some of them influenced politics, either individually or collectively.

Women's contribution to the economy was not negligible. Some elite women owned and ran large businesses, and others were benefactors of their communities. More than a few non-elite women owned small stores. And many free and slave women labored in economically-productive jobs.

Whatever historical era or society students address, they should remember that women made up half the population, and they should be encouraged to ask the question: "What were women of all social classes doing?" In surveying the lives of free and slave women in ancient Rome from 200 BCE to 250 CE, students may consider changes that have occurred between that era and our own in the legal, social, political, and cultural position of women.

## Unit objectives

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*Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:*

1. Explain the contradictions in the ways both the law and the population generally viewed women within and outside their families.
2. Evaluate the roles of women of different classes in the economy, society, and religion.
3. Describe how some women participated in public life and the significance of this involvement.
4. Assess the reliability of [primary sources](#) as historical evidence.

## Time and materials

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This unit should take 5 to 7 class periods to complete, depending on the length of the class and whether teachers choose to teach all parts of each lesson.

Materials required are textbooks and an LCD projector to show the PowerPoint presentation. For some activities students may need access to library books or the Internet.

## Author

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## The historical context

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Rome was a patriarchal society in which women had few rights. They could neither hold magistracies (public offices) nor vote. They could own property but needed a male guardian to sell some types of real estate. Their children “belonged” to the father and went to live with him in case of a divorce. Women did not even have names; instead, they received the feminine form of their father’s name. For example, a man named Julius would name his daughter Julia. If he had two daughters, he would distinguish them by calling one “the Elder” and the other one “the Younger.” If he had more than two daughters he could add numerals to their names: Secunda (second), Tertia (third), and so on.

The law and medical writers stress women’s inferiority and subordination to men. The literary sources, produced by elite males, often portray women as immoral, shallow drunks who are not to be trusted even with the pantry keys. Only occasionally do we find a “good” woman, such as Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus and mother of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus. According to ancient sources, she was devoted to her family and did not forget to spin wool, like a good matron should.

Some women could read and write, but little of what they wrote has been preserved. Therefore, since we cannot rely on information produced by women, it is necessary to look at other sources in order to get a more accurate picture of the life of elite and non-elite women in ancient Rome.<sup>1</sup> Inscriptions that commemorate a dead female relative often help fill in gaps; so do material remains, such as papyri (writing material made from the papyrus plant).

Elite and non-elite women, despite their legal limitations, played an important role in the economy and society of ancient Rome. Either as business owners or as workers, free or slave, they helped keep the Roman economy going. As mothers, they produced and raised one generation of Romans after another, transmitting values, skills, and language.

This unit covers a period of 450 years. The condition of women did not remain static during this period. In fact, although some of the legal limitations remained on the books for centuries, the lives of many women began to change during the early second century BCE owing to the wars of expansion. Some Roman women of all social levels started to manage their own affairs. Because they had lost their husbands, fathers, or brothers in war, they had no guardians. Therefore, these independent women had to enter into contracts and arrange their daughters’ marriages. Some wealthy matrons owed their independence to the fact that they chose their own guardians.

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<sup>1</sup> Elite women were those who belonged to the aristocracy. Their fathers, husbands, and sons were the ones who held all the magistracies, or public offices. Non-elite women were not necessarily poor; indeed, some of them, even former slaves, could become wealthy.

**Private life**

Elite Roman writers thought that a matron should be virtuous. To them this meant that the woman should be devoted to her family and household. She should be submissive and frugal and should spin and weave wool. A good wife should also have several children who would inherit the man's family name and his property.

It is difficult to estimate how many elite women were educated. But it is known that, starting in the first century BCE, girls attended school. They learned reading, writing, and mathematics and might later continue with other subjects. Some of them had friends who taught them philosophy. Some matrons, such as Agrippina the Younger, wrote memoirs and letters. Non-elite women did not attend school when they were young, although some did learn to read and write.

Most elite girls married young, probably in their teens. Male relatives arranged their marriages with men from other elite families in order to create political alliances. For example, Julius Caesar married, in sequence, the daughter or cousin of three influential Roman politicians (Cinna, Pompey, and Piso). His own daughter, Julia, married Pompey. In the case of non-elite women, they usually married when they were close to the age of twenty. It is uncertain whether their families arranged their marriages, but they did not make alliances like elite families did.

When Augustus became sole ruler of Rome (27 BCE), he passed several laws regulating marriage. Rome was still feeling the consequences of recent civil wars. Because these wars had cost many lives, one of the consequences was **demographic**: the citizen body had been greatly reduced. Yet, it appears that many people were reluctant to marry, so Augustus imposed heavy assessments upon unmarried women and men and offered prizes to those who married. He also allowed marriage between individuals belonging to different social classes. In addition, he gave certain privileges to the mothers of three or more children.

According to Roman law, when a woman married, she passed from her father's authority (*potestas*) to her husband's if she married *cum manu* (literally, "with her husband's controlling hand"). If a couple entered into this type of marriage, the woman always needed a guardian to sell some of her property. The second-century BCE wars, however, had ensured that many women had no living male relatives to serve as guardians. Consequently, many women had legal and financial independence. Marriage *cum manu* began to decline in the late republic, and in the early empire it virtually disappeared. Therefore, the written law notwithstanding, many women were independent.

**Public life**

Women of all walks of life were legally excluded from holding magistracies and from voting. But some of the functions of wealthy matrons as benefactors of their communities brought them into the public sphere and allowed them to earn recognition for themselves. During the early days of the empire some of them held magistracies. Even if most of these offices had no real executive importance anymore, they allowed the women who held them to stand out in their communities and offer public service.

At various stages of Rome's history, some elite women held public demonstrations that were usually successful. One well-known demonstration took place in 195 BCE. Elite women gathered in the forum to try to repeal the Oppian Law, which had been passed during the Second Punic War. Among other things, this law limited the amount of gold women could own, and it forbade them from wearing purple garments unless they were participating in religious ceremonies. By doing so, the law tried to limit conspicuous consumption by elite women at a time when Rome's imperialistic expansion was leading to a steady influx of wealth. But the matrons had earned the privileges decades earlier, when they had provided funds to the treasury to help support wars. After the successful conclusion of the Second Punic War, the Oppian Law was not struck down. Two tribunes of the people proposed to have the law abrogated, but they were opposed by two other tribunes and by Cato the Elder, one of the consuls. Thanks to these elite women's efforts, the tribunes desisted in their attempts, and the thirty-five tribes repealed the law by a unanimous vote.

Later, in 42 BCE, the triumvirs, in order to raise money for the civil war, ordered 1,400 of the richest matrons to pay a percentage of their property. These women went to the forum, and one of them, named Hortensia, delivered a speech in which she argued that it was unfair that those who could hold no magistracies or serve in the army had to pay for the war. The triumvirs reduced to 400 the number of women who had to pay and ordered wealthy Roman men to make up the difference.

There were other elite women who took part in the public life of the Romans. In the first century CE, Livia advised her husband, Augustus, and sponsored building projects. Later, Agrippina, who was directly descended from Augustus, used her knowledge of politics to arrange her own marriage to the emperor Claudius. This was the first step toward bringing her son Nero to the throne. Then she convinced Claudius to adopt the boy, introduced him to public life, and made him popular with the masses. It is uncertain whether Agrippina murdered her husband, but in any case, in 54 CE Nero succeeded to the throne. Agrippina was the seventeen-year-old emperor's adviser for some time.

What about non-elite women? There is no evidence that they participated in public life as elite matrons did. However, they showed a lively interest in elections, as graffiti from Pompeii shows, even though they could not vote.

### **Occupations**

Elite women had to work some of the time. In addition to running their urban households, they also had to supervise their rural estates. Both in the city and in the country they needed the services of large numbers of slaves and free workers. Some elite women owned large businesses and were involved in large-scale trade. Although all these women were likely to have trusted managers, they still had to make some of the important decisions and give orders.

Non-elite women could own and manage small shops, and some worked in shops owned by their husband or someone else. They could also work at a variety of occupations. Some of these were highly specialized, as is the case of physicians and painters. Many other women, especially

slaves, were employed in domestic service and, if they lived in the country, they did some agricultural work. In many occupations, slave and free women could be found working side by side.

Most non-elite women, like their male counterparts, started working when they were as young as five. Numerous contracts have been found that refer to the training of young people, free and slave, in crafts such as weaving. The children who worked in unskilled jobs, such as helping in the kitchen or tending small animals on a farm, learned by observing others.

Little is known about the length of the work day, but most Romans started their activities early in the morning. The numerous festivals in the Roman calendar ensured that everyone got days off work. Even slaves were granted holidays by their masters.

### **Religion and magic**

Roman religion was polytheistic, that is, the Romans worshiped many gods and goddesses. In a process known as **syncretism**, they adopted, and often adapted, many deities. This process, which began in the early days of Rome's history, continued during the period of expansion and beyond.

There were officials serving as priests of the different deities and cults. There was one major group of priestesses, the Vestals. They were in charge of keeping alive the sacred flame in the temple of Vesta, which represented the Roman state. Unlike many of their male counterparts, these priestesses served full-time and for a period of thirty years. They were drawn from elite families when they were between the ages of six and ten, but in the first century CE, Augustus extended eligibility to the daughters of freedmen. Once they entered into the service of the goddess, the girls acquired many privileges, for example, the right to own property and dispose of it without the need of a guardian.

With few exceptions, such as Mithraism, women were not excluded from participation in religious cults. There were some cults that were exclusively for women, such as that of the goddess Ceres. In many cases, slaves were allowed to participate in ceremonies and festivals alongside the free population. One example is the festival of Juno Caprotina that was held on July 7.

Regarding Christianity, women from all walks of life, elite through slave, belonged to the early Church. And although women never held priesthoods, they played important roles. For example, they allowed Christians to meet in their houses, donated money, and served as group leaders. Some of them taught as prophetesses. By the second century CE, however, Church leaders began to limit the leadership opportunities of Christian women.

Concerning magic, nearly everyone in the ancient world believed in its efficacy. One popular form of soliciting the aid of supernatural powers was the use of curse tablets. These were often written by professionals, and their clients included women and men, free and slave. Once

inscribed, they were placed in strategic places, such as tombs or bodies of water. There is evidence that women used these tablets for many purposes. Some of them commissioned a tablet in an attempt to recover stolen property. Others wanted to get their husband back or wished to protect themselves from curses.

Sources: Anthony A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Mother of Nero* (London: Batsford, 1996), *passim*; Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 26, 54, 194, 202, 260; Franz Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom*, Vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981), *passim*; Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 18; John K. Evans, *War, Women, and Children in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1991), 23-9; Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 5-18, 22-5, 233; Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20; Emily A. Hemelrijk, "Women's Demonstrations in Republican Rome," in *Sexual Asymmetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, ed. Josine Blok and Peter Mason (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987), 221-7.



**The Getty Villa in Malibu, California, is a reconstruction of a villa owned by a wealthy family from Pompeii.**

© J. Paul Getty Trust

Source: <http://www.getty.edu/visit/events/villa.html>

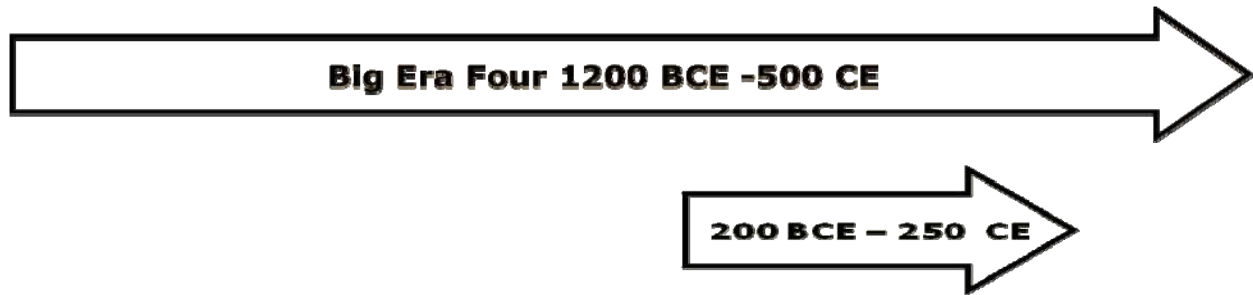


**Remains of a multi-level *insula* (island) near the Capitoline (Rome), which housed non-elite families.**

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Campitelli\\_-\\_Insula\\_romana\\_1907.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Campitelli_-_Insula_romana_1907.JPG)

## This unit in the Big Era Timeline

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**Funerary inscription of Agrippina the Younger, Nero's mother**

**First century CE**

**Rome, Museo della Civiltà Romana.**

Photo by Ingrid de Haas



## *Lesson 1*

### *Women in Rome: Several Views*

#### **Preparation**

Make a copy of Student Handouts 1.1 and 1.2 for each student. Divide the class into small groups, trying to mix student abilities and interests.

#### **Introduction**

Share with students the relevant information from the Historical Context section. Tell them that they are going to read different views (from the law, satire, funerary inscriptions) on women in ancient Rome.

#### **Activities**

1. Distribute Student Handout 1.1 (Primary Sources: Several Views). Terms in boldface are defined below the primary source documents. Give students enough time to read the primary sources.
2. Distribute Student Handout 1.2 (Questions). When students have finished answering the questions, have them share their answers with the class.

**Extension activity:** Little of what Roman women wrote has survived. We have some writings of the first-century CE Chinese writer Ban Zhao (Pan Chao). Either in the library or on the Internet, find her *Lessons for Women*. After you read this work, write a three-paragraph statement showing the similarities and differences between Chinese society and Roman society. Suggested source: Internet East Asian History Sourcebook, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/banzhao.html>

#### **Assessment**

Write a short interview with a Roman matron asking for her opinion on the legal and medical views of women. You can also interview her regarding the satires of Martial and Juvenal.



**Medallion with the image of Julia, daughter of  
the first-century CE emperor Titus**

Source:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Julie%2C\\_Intaille\\_CM\\_01.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Julie%2C_Intaille_CM_01.JPG)

## Lesson 1

### *Student Handout 1.1—Primary Sources: Several Views*

#### Document A

The Laws of the Twelve Tables were the earliest written laws of the Romans. They were passed in 451 BCE.

Table V.

1. Our ancestors wanted women, even if they were of full age, to be in **guardianship** ...

Source: Carl Bruns, ed., *Fontes Iuris Romani Antiqui* (Aalen, Germany: Scientia Antiquariat, 1958), 22. Translated from Latin by Ingrid de Haas.

#### Document B

This selection is from the second-century-CE jurist Gaius. It confirms that in his day the limitation placed on women was still in the books.

Where the head of a family has children in his power he is allowed to appoint guardians for them by will. That is, for males while under puberty but for females however old they are, even when they are married. For it was the wish of the old lawyers that women, even those of full age, should be in guardianship as being scatterbrained. ...

There seems, on the other hand, to have been no very worthwhile reason why women who have reached the age of maturity should be in guardianship; for the argument which is commonly believed, that because they are scatterbrained they are frequently subject to deception and that it was proper for them to be under guardians' authority, seems to be specious rather than true. ...

Source: Gaius, *Institutes* 1.144 and 1.190, trans. W. M. Gordon and O. F. Robinson (London: Duckworth, 1988), 97, 117.

#### Document C

In this passage, Gaius refers to Augustus' first-century CE legislation.

It is only under the Julian and Papian-Poppaeon [laws] that women are released from guardianship by the privilege of [having three or more] children.

Source: Gaius, *Institutes* 1.145, trans. W. M. Gordon and O. F. Robinson (London: Duckworth, 1988), 97.

**Document D**

In this selection by Gaius we read that, in the second century CE, women did not always comply with the law.

For women of full age deal with their own affairs for themselves, and while in certain instances that guardian interposes his authorization for form's sake, he is often compelled by the praetor to give authorization, even against his wishes.

Source: Gaius, *Institutes* 190, trans. W. M. Gordon and O. F. Robinson (London: Duckworth, 1988), 117.

**Document E**

In this selection by Gaius we read about another one of women's limitations.

Again we have in our power [*potestas*] the offspring of a Roman law marriage. ... But women cannot adopt by any method, for they do not have power even over their real [biological] children. ...

Source: Gaius, *Institutes* 1.55 and 1.104, trans. W. M. Gordon and O. F. Robinson (London: Duckworth, 1988), 47, 73.

**Document F**

Galen was a second-century-CE physician from Pergamum, in the Roman province of Asia (present-day Turkey). In this selection we read about a medical reason for women's inferiority.

The female is less perfect than the male for one principal reason, because she is colder, for if among animals the warm one is the more active, a colder animal would be less perfect than a warmer. ...

Source: Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 14.6, qtd. in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 244.

### Document G

Juvenal was a first- and second-century-CE writer of satires. In this selection we read about many complaints against elite women.

... [The wife] is in favor and in charge, asking her husband for shepherds, **Canusian sheep, Falernian vineyards**—such tiny requests! ... [A]nything her neighbor has and she doesn't, must be bought. Then in the month of winter ... she'll carry off large crystal vases, the most enormous pieces of agate too, along with a legendary diamond. ...

“Crucify that slave!” [says the wife]. “But what crime has he committed to deserve punishment? [asks the husband] ... “All right, let's accept that he hasn't done anything. But it's my wish and my command. Let my will be reason enough.” That's how she orders her husband about. ...

There's almost no lawsuit where a woman didn't start the dispute. ...

But no less insufferable is the woman who grabs hold of her lowly neighbors and [beats them], cursing all the while. If her sound sleep is disturbed by a dog barking, you see, she ... gives the order that first the owner, then the dog is to get a thrashing. She's formidable to meet, with an utterly hideous face. ...

Juvenal, *Satire* 6, trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 247, 253, 255.

### Document H

Martial was a first-century-CE writer of satires. In this selection we read about women's subordination in marriage.

You all ask why I don't want to marry a rich wife. I don't want to be my wife's wife. The **matron** ... should be below her husband. That's the only way man and woman can be equal.

Source: Martial, *Epigrams* 8.12, Vol. II, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993), 169.

### Document I

*CIL* 6.25580 is an undated inscription from the city of Rome. A husband commemorates his dead wife.

Here lies Ephesia Rufria, a good wife, a good mother, who died of a malignant fever which outlasted the doctors' expectations. This is a consolation, nor is the story of the alleged crime true: I think a woman so sweet died because she was thought more worthy of the company of the gods.

Source: *CIL* 6.25580, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 263.

**Document J**

*CIL* 1<sup>2</sup> 1206 is a first-century BCE inscription on a tomb located outside the city of Rome. The baker Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces, a freedman who became very wealthy, set it up for himself and his wife:

... Atistia was my wife. She lived as an excellent woman.

The remains of her body are here in this bread basket.



Source: *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup> 1206, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 380; image source: Livius.org, [http://www.livius.org/a/italy/rome/porta\\_maggiore/eurysaces04.jpg](http://www.livius.org/a/italy/rome/porta_maggiore/eurysaces04.jpg)

**Document K**

*CIL* 6.15346 is a second-century BCE inscription from the city of Rome set up by the family of a dead woman.

Friend, I have not much to say; stop and read it. This tomb, which is not fair, is for a fair woman. Her parents gave her the name Claudia. She loved her husband in her heart. ... She was pleasant to talk with, and she walked with grace. She kept the house and worked in wool. That is all. You may go.

Source: *CIL* 6.15346, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 16.

**Document L**

The *Laudatio Turiae* is the longest of all first-century BCE inscriptions. A husband, who had been forced to go into exile when his political enemies persecuted him, praises his dead wife. She, like other wives, had chosen loyalty to her husband over loyalty to the state at the time of the civil war **proscriptions**.

... Marriages as long as ours are rare, marriages that are ended by death and not broken by divorce. For we were fortunate enough to see our marriage last without disharmony for fully 40 years. I wish that our long union had come to its final end through something that had befallen me instead of you ... Why should I mention your domestic virtues: your loyalty, obedience, affability, reasonableness, industry in working wool ... You provided abundantly for my needs during my flight and gave me the means for a dignified manner of living, when you took all the gold and jewelry from your own body and sent it to me ... You begged for my life when I was abroad ... What you have achieved in your life will not be lost to me. The thought of your fame gives me strength of mind and from your actions I draw instruction so that I shall be able to resist Fortune. Fortune did not rob me of everything since it permitted your memory to be glorified by praise. ... I pray that your **Di Manes** will grant you rest and protection.



Source: *ILS* 8393 in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 135-9; image source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Laudatio\\_turiae\\_2.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Laudatio_turiae_2.jpg)

**Document M**

Valerius Maximus was a first-century-CE Roman historian. Here he writes about another loyal wife.

Sulpicia was held in close custody by her mother Julia to prevent her following Lentulus Cruscellio, her husband proscribed by the **Triumvirs**, to Sicily. Nonetheless she reached him in a secret flight dressed as a servant along with two slave girls and as many [male] slaves. She did not balk at proscribing herself in order to maintain her fidelity to her proscribed husband.

Source: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 6.7.3, Vol. II, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), 73.

**Document N**

Pliny the Younger was a first- and second-century-CE writer. During his lifetime he published 247 private letters. This is a part of a letter he wrote to his wife's aunt.

You are a model of family affection, and loved your excellent and devoted brother as dearly as he loved you; you love his daughter as if she were your own, and, by filling the place of the father she lost, you are more than an aunt to her. I know then how glad you will be to hear that she has proved herself worthy of her father, her grandfather, and you. She is highly intelligent and a careful housewife. ...

Source: *The Letters of Pliny* 4.19, Vol. I, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 297.

**Document O**

Valerius Maximus was a first-century-CE writer. In this selection he writes about Cornelia who gave her family its proper value.

... Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi [Tiberius and Caius], had a Campanian matron as a guest in her house, who showed her jewelry, the finest in existence at that period. Cornelia kept her in talk until her children came home from school, and then said, "These are *my* jewels." ...

Source: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 4.4 preface, Vol. I, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), 385.

**Terms**

<b>Canusian sheep</b>	Sheep from Canusium with dark wool
<b>Di Manes</b>	Spirits of the dead
<b>Falernian vineyards</b>	Vineyards on Mt Falernus that produced a fine wine
<b>guardianship</b>	The management of the affairs of a person who is legally unable to do so on her or his own
<b>matron</b>	An elite, adult woman
<b>proscription</b>	During the civil wars, a way to get rid of political enemies and take their property
<b>Triumvirs</b>	Three powerful individuals dominating Rome



**Woman with an elaborate hairstyle**  
**First or second century CE**  
**Rome, Vatican Museum**

Source: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/flavianhair5.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/flavianhair5.jpg)



**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.2—Questions***

After you read the primary sources in Student Handout 1.1, answer the questions that follow. Don't forget to write your *nomen* (name) on the scroll!

1. How would you explain the variations in the views about women in ancient Rome?
2. Which of the views would you be willing to accept as most accurate? Which as least accurate? Explain.
3. Do we have the voices of women in these documents? Why or why not?
4. For each document, who do you think was the author's intended audience? Why do you think so?

## *Lesson 2*

### *Private Life*

#### **Preparation**

Make a copy of Student Handouts 2.1 and 2.2 for each student. Divide the class into small groups, trying to mix student abilities and interests.

#### **Introduction**

Share with students the relevant information from the Historical Context section. Tell them that they are going to read about marriage and the education of women in ancient Rome.

#### **Activities**

1. Distribute Student Handout 2.1 (Primary Sources: Marriage and Education). The terms in bold appear at the end. Give students enough time to read the primary sources.
2. Distribute Student Handout 2.2 (Questions). When students have finished answering the questions, have them share their answers with the class.

**Extension activity:** In republican and imperial Rome, no formalities were needed for marriage, but it was customary to hold a wedding ceremony. In the presence of witnesses, the man and the woman held each other's right hand and made a pledge. After a banquet at which offerings were made to the gods and songs were sung, the spouses, holding torches made of pitch-pine and scattering nuts, went to their new home in a procession that included their guests. Write a three-paragraph statement in which you compare and contrast the Roman marriage ceremony with a modern one.

#### **Assessment**

Write a diary entry in which you describe a day in the life of a Roman family.



**Portrait of an elite girl, Ostia**  
**Second century CE**

Source: Museo Ostiense, [http://www.ostia-antica.org/vmuseum/marble\\_3.htm](http://www.ostia-antica.org/vmuseum/marble_3.htm)

## Lesson 2

### *Student Handout 2.1—Primary Sources: Marriage and Education*

#### Document A

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection we read about the minimum age at which girls could marry.

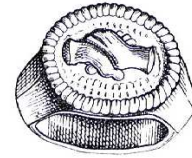
... girls are held to have reached the marriageable age on the completion of twelve full years.

Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.16.7, Vol. VI, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 325.

#### Document B

Pliny the Younger was a first- and second-century-CE writer. In this letter, addressed to his friend Aefulanus Marcellinus, he reports the death of a young bride-to-be.

I am writing to you in great distress: our friend Fundanus has lost his younger daughter. ... She had not yet reached the age of fourteen ... She was already engaged to marry a distinguished young man, the day for the wedding was fixed, and we had received our invitations. Such joy, and now such sorrow! No words can express my grief when I heard Fundanus giving his own orders ... for the money he had intended for clothing, pearls, and jewels to be spent on **incense, ointment, and spices**. ...



Source: *The Letters of Pliny* 5.16, Vol. I, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 379-81; source of image of betrothal ring: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/sandysdexjunct.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/sandysdexjunct.jpg)

#### Document C

In this letter by Pliny the Younger to his friend Junius Mauricus we read that marriages could be arranged by someone outside the family.

You ask me to look out for a husband for your brother's daughter, a responsibility which I feel is very rightly mine; for you know how I have always loved and admired him as the finest of men. ... I should have had a long search if Minicius Acilianus were not at hand, as if he were made for us.... His native place is Brixia, one of the towns in our part of Italy which still retains intact much of its honest simplicity along with the rustic virtues of the past. ... [He] has held the offices of **quaestor, tribune, and praetor** with great distinction ... I am wondering whether to add that his father has ample means ...

Source: *The Letters of Pliny* 1.14, Vol. I, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 43-5.

**Document D**

Metellus Macedonicus was censor in 131 BCE; he began a speech with these words.

If we could survive without a wife, citizens of Rome, all of us would do without that nuisance; but since nature has decreed that we cannot ... live in any way without them, we must plan for our lasting preservation [and marry].

Source: From a collection of speech fragments, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 103.

**Document E**

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. Here we read about another one of Augustus' laws.

[Augustus] laid heavier assessments upon the unmarried men and upon the women without husbands, and on the other hand offered prizes for marriage ...

Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.16.1, Vol. VI, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 323.

**Document F**

Columella was a first-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection he remembers the "good old days" when every woman was devoted to her household and family.

For both amongst the Greeks, and afterwards amongst the Romans down to the time which our own fathers can remember, domestic labor was practically the sphere of the married woman, the fathers of families betaking themselves to the family fireside, all care laid aside, only to rest from their public activities. For the utmost reverence for them ruled in the home in an atmosphere of harmony and diligence ... 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 ...

Columella, *On Agriculture* 12, preface 7, 9, Vol. III, trans. E. S. Forster (London: William Heinemann, 1955), 177-9.

**Document G**

Pliny the Younger was a first- and second-century-CE writer. This is a part of a letter he wrote to Calpurnia Hispulla, the aunt of his much younger wife Calpurnia.

If I am giving a reading [of my work] she sits behind a curtain nearby and greedily drinks in every word of appreciation. She has even set my verses to music and sings them, to the accompaniment of her lyre ...

Source: *The Letters of Pliny* 4.19, Vol. I, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 299.

**Document H**

Musonius Rufus was a first-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection we find the reason why he believes women should be educated.

Women have received from the gods the same ability to reason that men have. ... In the first place a woman must run her household and pick out what is beneficial for her home and take charge of the household slaves. In these activities I claim that philosophy is particularly helpful, since each of these activities is an aspect of life, and philosophy is nothing other than the science of living ... Now, wouldn't the woman who practices philosophy be ... devoted in her responsibilities towards her husband and her children?

Source: Musonius Rufus, *Discourses* 3.4.13a, qtd. in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 50-1.

**Document I**

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection he writes about the wife of the emperor Septimius Severus.

For this reason she began to study philosophy and passed her days in company with sophists. ... she devoted herself more and more to the study of philosophy ...



Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 76.15.7, 78.18.2, Vol. IX, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 233 and 327; image source: De Imperatoribus Romanis, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/sev julia.htm>

**Document J**

Tibullus was a first-century-BCE Roman writer. In his *Elegies* he preserved parts of the work of one of his contemporaries, the poet Sulpicia.

    Birthday Juno, accept these holy heaps of incense  
        from the soft hand of an educated girl. ...  
    That hateful birthday's near, which must be sadly spent  
        in tedious countryside and without Cerinthus, ...

    That dreary journey's lifted, you know, from your girl's heart.  
        Now she can be in Rome for her birthday.  
    Let the day that chance now brings you unexpectedly  
        be spent as a birthday by us all. ...

    Do you feel real concern, Cerinthus, for your girl  
        now that [I am ill]?  
    Ah, I would not choose to conquer wretched illness  
        unless I thought that you too wished it. ...

Source: Tibullus, *Elegies* 3.8-18, trans. Guy Lee (Leeds, UK: Francis Cairns, 1990), 101-3.

**Document K**

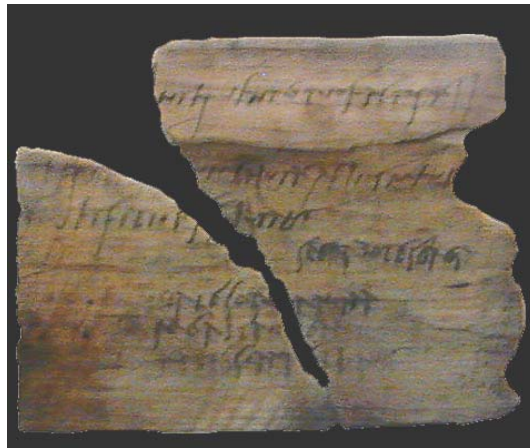
Juvenal was a first- and second-century-CE writer of satires. In this selection we read that not all elite men liked educated women.

But she's much worse, the woman who as soon as she's taken her place at dinner is praising **Virgil** and forgiving **Elissa** on her deathbed, who pits the poets against one another and assesses them, weighing in her scales [Virgil] on this side and Homer on the other. The schoolteachers give way, the teachers of rhetoric are beaten, the whole party falls silent, there'll not be a word from any lawyer or auctioneer—and not even from another woman. ... Don't let her know the whole of history. Let there be a few things in books that she doesn't even understand. ...

Juvenal, *Satire* 6, trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 275-7.

**Terms**

<b>Elissa</b>	Dido, the tragic heroine of Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i>
<b>incense, ointment, and spices</b>	materials used in funerals
<b>quaestor, tribune, and praetor</b>	three kinds of magistrates
<b>Virgil</b>	first-century-BCE author of the <i>Aeneid</i>



**Detail of a letter from the Vindolanda tablets, Britain. 97-103 CE  
This is the earliest extant example of writing in Latin by a woman's own hand.  
London, British Museum.**

Source: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/claudiaseveraletter2.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/claudiaseveraletter2.jpg)

**Lesson 2*****Student Handout 2.2—Questions***

After you read the primary sources in Student Handout 2.1, answer the questions that follow. Don't forget to write your *nomen* (name) on the scroll!

1. For each of the selections in this lesson, what reasons can you give for considering it reliable historical evidence, and what reasons for questioning its reliability?
2. Which of the selections do you consider most reliable as historical evidence, and why?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages as historical evidence of written documents? Of inscriptions? Of laws?
4. It is known that some Roman writers edited their letters when they decided to publish them. Can they be trusted to give information on the social and political life of elite Roman women and men in their days?



## *Lesson 3*

### *Public Life*

#### **Preparation**

Make a copy of Student Handouts 3.1 and 3.2 for each student. Divide the class into 7 groups. Each group should read document A. Assign one of the other documents (B-H) to each of the 7 groups.

#### **Introduction**

Share with students the relevant information from the Historical Context section. Tell them that they are going to read documents in which reality contradicts the law.

#### **Activities**

1. Distribute Student Handout 3.1 (Primary Sources: Public Life). The terms in bold appear at the end. Give students enough time to read the primary sources.
2. Distribute Student Handout 2.2 (Questions). When students have finished answering the questions, have them share their answers with the class.

**Extension activity:** In the library or on the Internet, read the complete debate of the repeal of the Oppian Law (Livy, *History of Rome*, 34.1). In three paragraphs, summarize the debate. Discuss it with the class.

#### **Assessment**

Write an editorial intended to appear in next week's issue of the *Acta Diurna*, the Roman newspaper, with the title: "Should Roman matrons lead demonstrations in the forum?"



**Messalina, third wife of Claudius, with her son Britannicus**  
**First century CE, Louvre, Paris**

Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/Messalinaandbritannicus.jpg>

### Lesson 3

#### *Student Handout 3.1—Primary Sources: Public Life*

##### Document A

Ulpian was a second- and third-century-CE jurist. In this selection we read about one of women's limitations and their comparison to children.

Women are debarred from all civil and public functions and therefore cannot be judges or hold a **magistracy** or bring a lawsuit or intervene on behalf of anyone else or act as **procurators**. Likewise, someone who is not grown up must abstain from all civil functions.

Source: *The Digest of Justinian* 50.17.2, Vol. IV, trans. Alan Watson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 957.

##### Document B

Valerius Maximus was a first-century-CE writer. Here he reports a speech by Hortensia.

Hortensia, daughter of Q. Hortensius, pleaded the cause of women before the Triumvirs resolutely and successfully when the order of matrons had been burdened by them with a heavy tax and none of the other sex ventured to lend them his advocacy. Reviving her father's eloquence, she won the remission of the greater part of the **impost**. ...

Source: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 8.3, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), 213.

##### Document C

In this selection by Valerius Maximus we read about one woman advocate.

Maesia of Sentinum pleaded her own case as defendant with Praetor L. Titius as president of the court and a great concourse of people, going through all the forms and stages of a defense not only thoroughly but boldly. She was acquitted at the first hearing and by an almost unanimous vote. ...

Source: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 8.3.1, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), 211.

**Document D**

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. Here we read about some public functions of Livia, wife of emperor Augustus and mother of the future emperor Tiberius.

Tiberius ... had overcome the Dalmatians and Pannonians ... and he had celebrated the **equestrian triumph**, and had feasted the people, some on the Capitol and the rest in many other places. At the same time Livia, also ... had given a dinner to the women. ...

[Tiberius, to celebrate another triumph] gave a banquet to the senate on the Capitol, and [Livia] gave one on her own account to the women somewhere or other. ...

Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.2.4 and 55.8.2, Vol. VI, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 383, 399.

**Document E**

*CIL* 4.171 and 4.3291 represent two examples of electoral graffiti from Pompeii. Women could not vote, but that did not stop them from backing their favorite candidates.

Caprasia along with Nymphius—her neighbors too—ask you to vote for Aulus Vettius Firmus for the **aedileship**; he is worthy of the office.

Pyramus, Olympionica, and Calvus ask your support for Marcus Casselius Marcellus.

Source: *CIL* 4.171 and *CIL* 4.3291, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 152.

**Document F**

This third-century-CE inscription from the island of Paros in the Aegean shows the citizens were grateful for the favors they received from a wealthy matron, Aurelia Leite.

To the most renowned and in all respects excellent Aurelia Leite, daughter of Theodotus, wife of the foremost man in the city, Marcus Aurelius Faustus ... She was **gymnasiarch** of the gymnasium which she repaired and renewed when it had been dilapidated for many years. The glorious city of the Parians, her native city, in return for her many great benefactions, receiving honor rather than giving it, ... has set up a marble statue of her.

Source: Pleket 31.g, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 160-1.

**Document G**

Junia Rustica was a prominent first-century-CE woman from Cartima, in Spain. In this inscription we read about the ways in which she supported her community.

Junia Rustica ... priestess for life and the first priestess in the town of Cartima, rebuilt the public porticoes ruined by age, gave a parcel of land for the baths, paid the public taxes on the town, set up a bronze statue of Mars in the forum, gave as a gift at her own expense porticoes at the bath on her own property with a fish pool ... with a public banquet and spectacles having been given at her own expense. ...

Source: *CIL* 2.1956, in John F. Donahue, "Junia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West," *Latomus* 63:4 (2004), 875.

**Document H**

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection we read about Agrippina's role in Nero's accession.

As soon as Agrippina had come to live in the palace she gained complete control over Claudius. Indeed, she was very clever in making the most of opportunities, and, partly by fear and partly by favors, she won the devotion of all those who were at all friendly toward him. ... She made [Nero] the son-in-law of Claudius at this time and later brought about his adoption also. She accomplished these ends partly by getting the freedmen to persuade Claudius and partly by arranging beforehand that the senate, the populace, and the soldiers would join together in shouting their approval of her demands on every occasion. Agrippina was training her son for the throne and was entrusting his education to Seneca. She was amassing untold wealth for him, overlooking no possible source of revenue, not even the most humble or despised, but paying court to everyone who was in the least degree well-to-do and murdering many for this very reason. ...

Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 61.32.1-3, Vol. VIII, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 15-17.

**Terms**

<b>aedileship</b>	a magistracy
<b>equestrian triumph</b>	an ovation, a ceremony to honor a victorious general
<b>gymnasiarch</b>	a magistrate
<b>impost</b>	a tax
<b>magistracy</b>	public office
<b>procurators</b>	magistrates

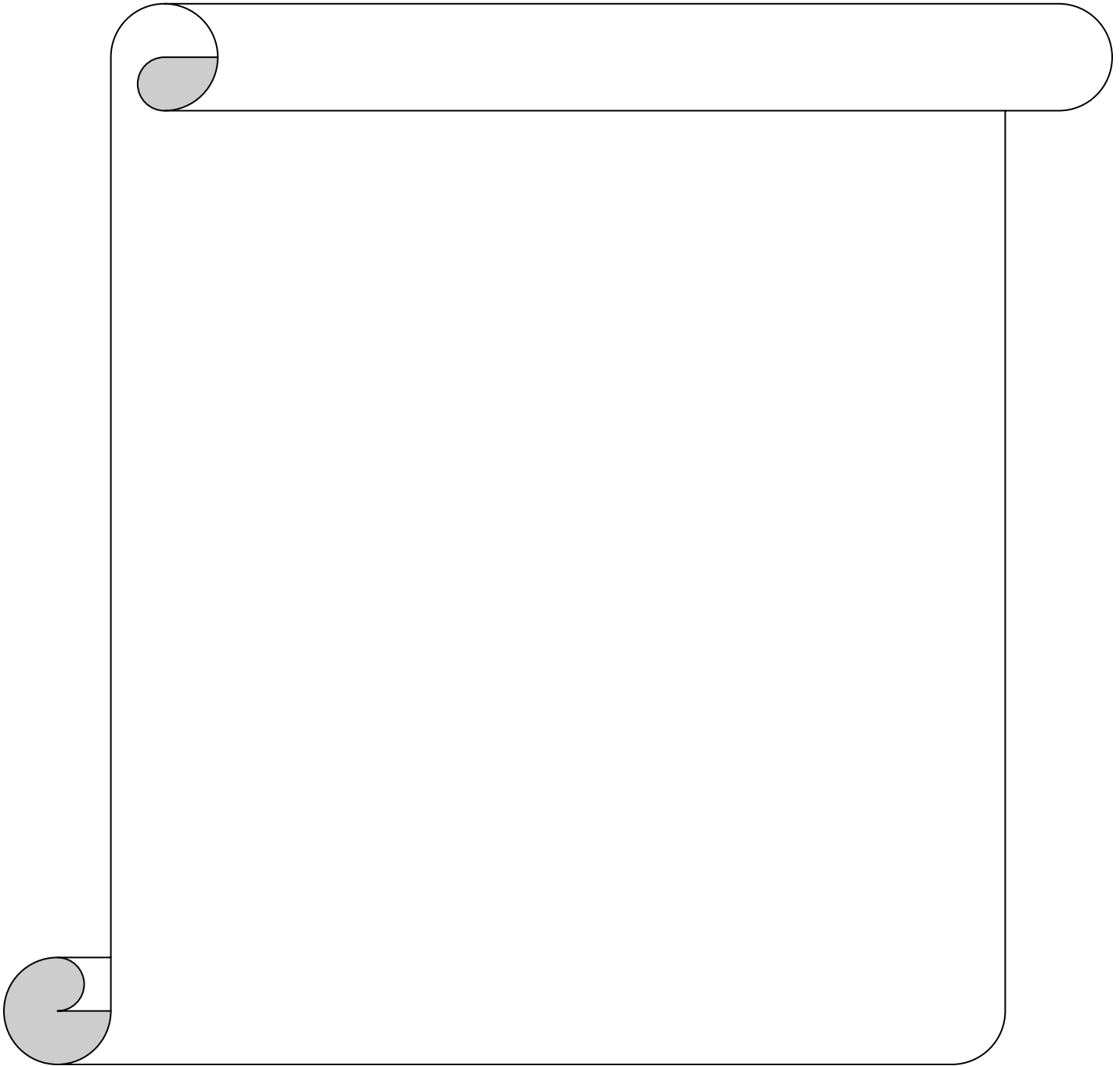


**Statue of a woman wearing a mantle draped over her head  
Second century CE, Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi.**

Source: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/loggiawoman1.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/loggiawoman1.jpg)

**Lesson 3*****Student Handout 3.2—Questions***

After you have finished reading Document A and the second document assigned to your group, discuss both with the other students in your group and write an analysis in which you show how one woman participated in public life. Don't forget to write your *nomen* (name) on your scroll!



## *Lesson 4*

### *Women's Occupations*

#### **Preparation**

Make a copy of Student Handout 4 for each student. Divide the class into small groups, trying to mix student abilities and interests. Ask students to bring the Classifieds section from their Sunday paper.

#### **Introduction**

Share with students the relevant information from the Historical Context section. Tell them that they are going to read documents that show different kinds of occupations of women in ancient Rome.

#### **Activities**

1. Distribute Student Handout 4. Give students enough time to read all the documents and discuss them with their group.
2. Ask students to look through the Help Wanted pages in the Classifieds section of their paper. Have them list the jobs for women that appear in those pages. Then have them compare them with the jobs for women in ancient Rome. They may then compare their work with the other groups'.



**Funerary inscription for Septimia Stratonice, a shoemaker  
Rome, undated**

Source: [http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/septimia\\_stratonice.html](http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/septimia_stratonice.html)

## Lesson 4

### *Student Handout 4—Primary Sources: Women’s Occupations*

#### Document A

CIL 6.7581 is a first- or second-century-CE inscription from the city of Rome commemorating a female doctor.

To my holy goddess. To Primilla, a physician, daughter of Lucius Vibius Melito, she lived 44 years, of which 30 she spent with Lucius Cocceius Aphthorus without a quarrel. Aphthorus built this monument for [her].

Source: CIL 6.7581, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 264.

#### Document B

Suetonius was a first- and second-century-CE writer. In this selection we read about women gladiators, who were most probably slaves.

Besides [the emperor Domitian] gave hunts of wild beasts, gladiatorial shows at night by the light of torches, and not only combats between men but between women as well. ...



Source: Suetonius, *Domitian* 4.1, trans. John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1914), 347; source of image of women gladiators: <http://www.bmimages.com/index.asp>

#### Document C

Pliny the Elder was a first-century-CE writer. Here we read about several painters.

Women, too, have been painters. Timarete, the daughter of Micon, painted a Diana on a panel of the very archaic painting in Ephesus. Irene, daughter and student of Cratinus, painted a girl at Eleusis, a Calypso, the old juggler Theodorus, and the dancer Alcisthenes. ... Iaia of Cyzicus, who never married, worked in Rome during the youth of Marcus Varro. She used both the painter’s brush and, on ivory, the graving tool. She painted women most frequently, including a panel picture of an old woman in Naples, and even a self-portrait for which she used a mirror. No one’s hand was quicker to paint a picture than hers; so great was her talent that her prices far exceeded those of the most celebrated painters of her day, Sopolis and Dionysius, whose works fill the galleries.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 35.40.147, qtd. in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 216-7.



**Document D**

*ILS* 9347 is an undated inscription from Rome, outside the Porta Salaria, commemorating two singers.

Thelxis Cotia; Chelys Cottia (still alive), beloved twin sisters, singers, both dear to their loved ones.

Source: *ILS* 9347, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 218.

**Document E**

*CIL* 6.9231 is an undated inscription from the city of Rome set up for a young worker.

Viccentia, sweetest daughter, a weaver of gold, who lived 9 years, 9 months.

Source: *CIL* 6.9231, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 219.

**Document F**

*CPR* XIII is a papyrus from Egypt during the Roman imperial period. The woman, whose name has not been preserved, did a little bit of everything.

Flute-player. Scribe. Olive-oil seller. Ibis-feeder. Barber. Wool-seller. Dancer.

Source: *CPR* XIII, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 220.

**Document G**

*CIL* 6.8959 is a first-century-CE funerary inscription from the city of Rome set up for a hairdresser.

To the gods of the dead. To Telesphoris, who lived 25 years, 3 months, and 11 days, hairdresser of Domitia [wife] of the emperor Domitian.



Source: *CIL* 6.8959, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 222; source of image: [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/toilette2.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/toilette2.jpg)

**Document H**

*CIL* 6.9980 is a funerary inscription from Rome during the early imperial period. It commemorates a slave-woman.

To Italia, dressmaker of Cocceia Phyllis. She lived 20 years. Acastus, her fellow slave, put this up because she was poor.

Source: *CIL* 6.9980, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 223.

**Document I**

*CIL* 9801 is a first- or second-century-CE funerary inscription from Rome. This woman was a fishmonger.

Aurelia Nais, freedwoman of Gaius, fishmonger in the warehouses of [the emperor] Galba. ...



Source: *CIL* 9801, in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 223; source of image of Aurelia Nais' funerary inscription: [http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/Aurelia\\_Nais.html](http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/Aurelia_Nais.html)

**Document J**

*AE* 1975.197 is an undated inscription found in Italy near the location of a sanctuary of Venus. Four female ex-slaves had been granted a franchise to run an eating house.

Flacceia Lais, freedwoman of Aulus, Orbia Lais, freedwoman of Orbia, Cominia Philocaris, freedwoman of Marcus, Centuria Thais, freedwoman of Quintus, set up a kitchen [*culina*] for Venus, at their own cost; concession revocable.

Source: *AE* 1975.197, in Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 249.

**Document K**

Columella was a first-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection we read about the many tasks of a slave-woman who oversees a farm.

... she must send out of doors those slaves who have some work to do in the fields, and keep within the walls those for whom it seems that there is some duty to perform in the villa ... She must carefully inspect everything that is brought into the house to see that it is not damaged, and receive it after it has been examined and found intact; then she must set apart what has to be consumed and guard what can be placed in reserve, so that the provision for a year may not be spent in a month. ... [I]n order that she may have recourse to wool-work on rainy days or when, owing to cold or frost, a woman cannot be busy with field-work under the open sky, there should be wool prepared and combed out ready, so that she may be able more easily to carry out the task of spinning and demand this work also from others. ... In a word, it will be her duty to remain as little as possible in one place, for hers is not a sedentary task; but at one moment she will have to visit the loom and impart any superior knowledge which she possesses, or, failing this, learn from one who understands the matter better than she does; at another moment she will have to look after those who are preparing the food for the family. Then too she will have to see that the kitchen and the cowsheds and also the mangers are cleaned ... But she must also be there when the sheep are being sheared and keep a watchful eye on the wool and count the fleeces, comparing them with the number of sheep. ...

Source: Columella, *On Agriculture* 12.1.5, 12.3.6, 12.3.8-9, Vol. III, trans. E. S. Forster (London: William Heinemann, 1955), 183, 191, 193.



**Bronze stamp of Coelia Mascellina, an importer of wine and oil.  
Rome, second century CE.**

Source: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/signaculum.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/signaculum.jpg)

## *Lesson 5*

### *Religion and Magic*

#### **Preparation**

Make a copy of Student Handouts 5.1 and 5.2 for each student.

Divide the class into small groups, trying to mix student abilities and interests.

#### **Introduction**

Share with students the relevant information from the Historical Context section. Tell them that they are going to read about the involvement of women in religious and magical activities.

#### **Activities**

1. Distribute Student Handout 5.1 (Primary Sources: Religion and Magic). The terms in bold appear at the end. Give students enough time to read the documents in it.
2. Distribute Student Handout 5.2 (Questions). When students have finished answering the questions, have them share their answers with the class.

**Extension activity:** Using your textbook or library books, research one of the Roman deities and write a three-paragraph statement in which you describe the characteristics of the deity, her or his temple(s), and the cult.

#### **Assessment**

You have been named as a consultant to a publisher and asked to work on the chapter about the participation of women in Rome in religion and magical activities in the textbook she is about to bring out. Which 5 documents drawn from this lesson would you recommend should be included in that chapter? Why?



**The goddess Isis. Second or third century CE.**

Source: Petit Palais, Paris,

[http://www.paris.fr/portail/Culture/Portal.lut?page=multimedialist&id=308&pnumber=20&page\\_id=6228&pop=0](http://www.paris.fr/portail/Culture/Portal.lut?page=multimedialist&id=308&pnumber=20&page_id=6228&pop=0)

## Lesson 5

### *Student Handout 5.1—Primary Sources: Religion and Magic*

#### Document A

The Romans believed that the safety of the state depended on proper piety toward the gods. The first-century-BCE antiquarian Varro tried to preserve the memory of all deities. We know about some of his work thanks to a fourth-century-CE Christian writer.

But how is it possible in one passage of this book to record all the names of the gods and goddesses that [Roman writers] were scarcely able to find room for in the huge volumes in which they divided up the services of the deities among the departments, assigning each to his own? ... They did not reach the conclusion that they should put some god in charge of all their land, but assigned fields to the goddess Rusina, mountain peaks to the god Jugatinus, hills to the goddess Collatina, and valleys to Vallonia. Nor could they even find a single Segetia who was worthy to be entrusted once for all with the grain in the fields, but as long as the seed was under ground they chose to have the goddess Seia in charge, then when it was above ground and moving toward harvest, the goddess Segetia, and when the grain was harvested and stored away, they gave the goddess Tutulina the job of guarding it safely. ...

At any rate, these are the gods which Varro commends as select, discussing them in the compass of a single book: Janus, Jupiter, Saturn, Genius, Mercury, Apollo, Mars, Vulcan, Neptune, Sol, Orcus, Liber pater, Tellus, Ceres, Juno, Luna, Diana, Minerva, Venus, Vesta. ...

Source: Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 4.8 and 7.2, Vol. II, trans. William M. Green (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963), 31, 375.

#### Document B

Tacitus was a first- and second-century-CE writer. There were several disasters during Nero's reign, including a fire that destroyed much of the city of Rome, and women had to **propitiate** some of the gods.

... the next thing was to seek means of propitiating the gods [and] prayers were offered to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too, was entreated by the matrons, first, in the Capitol, then on the nearest part of the coast, whence water was procured to sprinkle the **fane** and image of the goddess. And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. ...

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, trans. Alfred John Church (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 168.

**Document C**

Livy wrote during the late first century BCE and the early first century CE. In this selection we read about one priesthood created by Numa, the second king of Rome.

So that these priestesses [of Vesta] should be able to devote their whole time to temple service, he provided them with an income from public funds; he conferred a special sanctity on them by ritual obligations ...

Source: Livy, *The History of Rome* 20.3, qtd. in Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 5.

**Document D**

Cassius Dio was a second- and third-century-CE Roman writer. In this selection we read about another one of Augustus' laws.

And since the noblest families did not show themselves inclined to give their daughters to be priestesses of Vesta, a law was passed [in the first century CE] that the daughters of freedmen might likewise become priestesses. Many vied for the honor, and so they drew lots in the senate in the presence of their fathers ...

Source: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.22.5, Vol. VI, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 451-3.

**Document E**

*CIL* 6.32414 is an inscription from the city of Rome dating to 247 CE. It commemorates a Vestal.

To Flavia Publicia, daughter of Lucius, senior Vestal ... most holy and most pious. Her most holy and scrupulous charge of her religious duties, which she showed through all the grades of her priesthood with praiseworthy devotion, the divine power of Vesta Mater [mother] has acknowledged. Aemilia Rogatilla, of senatorial family, her niece, along with Minucius Honoratus Marcellus Aemilianus, of senatorial family, her [Rogatilla's] son, erected this on account of her outstanding loyalty towards them. ...



Source: *CIL* 6.32414, in Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 204; source of image of Vestal: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/raia\\_images/woman\\_head.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/woman_head.jpg)

**Document F**

Apuleius was a second-century-CE novelist. In this selection, the goddess Isis addresses the hero, Lucius.

Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements ... Now by my providence your day of salvation is dawning. So, therefore, pay careful attention to these commands of mine. The day which will be the day born from this night has been proclaimed mine by everlasting religious observance: on that day ... join the procession ... [A]nd when you have completed your life's span and travel down to the dead, there too, even in the hemisphere under the earth, you will find me ... I will favor you and you will constantly worship me. ...

Source: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5-6, Vol. II, trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 299-303.

**Document G**

Paul was a second- and third-century-CE Roman jurist. In this selection we read that certain practices are illicit.

Those who are knowledgeable in the art of magic are to receive the supreme penalty, that is, to be thrown to the beasts or crucified. The magicians themselves are burnt alive. No one may possess books on the art of magic; and those found in possession have their property confiscated and their books burnt in public; they are deported to an island or, if of inferior rank, executed. Not only the practice of this art, but also the knowledge of it, is prohibited. ...

Source: Paul, *Opinions* 5.23.14-19, qtd. in Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 262.

**Document H**

Pliny the Younger was a first- and second-century-CE writer. When he was governor of the province of Bithynia, in Asia Minor, he wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan asking how to proceed in the case of some Christians, including slave-women.

[Some Christians whom I interrogated] declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses ... After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind; but they had in fact given up this practice since my edict, issued on your instructions, which banned all political societies. This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. ...

Source: *The Letters of Pliny* 96.8, Vol. II, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 289.

### Document I

In 203 CE, the twenty-two-year-old elite woman Perpetua, who had become a Christian, was arrested during one of the persecutions. In this passage she describes her trial.

Another day as we were at meal we were suddenly snatched away to be tried; and we came to the forum. Therewith a report spread abroad through the parts near to the forum, and a very great multitude gathered together. We went up to the tribunal. The others being asked [if they were Christians], confessed. So they came to me. And my father appeared there also, with my son, and would draw me from the step, saying: Perform the Sacrifice [to the Roman emperor]; have mercy on the child. And Hilarian the **procurator** ... said: Spare your father's grey hairs; spare the infancy of the boy. Make sacrifice for the Emperors' prosperity. And I answered: I am a Christian. ... Then Hilarian passed sentence upon us all and condemned us to the beasts ...

Source: *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, trans. W. H. Shewring (London: 1931), Internet Medieval Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html>

### Document J

This bronze tablet from about 200 BCE was found in Bruttium, in Italy. A woman uses magic to recover her stolen property.



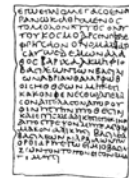
... Kollura dedicates to the priests of the goddess the three gold pieces that Melitta took and has not returned. Let her dedicate to the goddess twelve times the amount with a measure of incense ... Let her not breathe freely until she dedicates [it] to the goddess. ...

Source: *Defixionum Tabellae* 212, in John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 192; source of image of a curse tablet: VRoma, [http://www.vroma.org/images/raia\\_images/defixio\\_tretia.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/defixio_tretia.jpg)

### Document K

This first-century-CE amulet, a small silver tablet rolled up inside a bronze case, comes from Amisus in the Roman province of Asia. The owner seeks protection from evil.

... Let evil no longer appear. Drive away, drive away from Rufina the curse. And if someone harms me, let it turn on him. Nor let poison harm me. ...



Source of text and drawing of amulet: Richard Wünsch, "Deisidaimoniaka," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 12 (1909), 25; translated from ancient Greek by Ingrid de Haas.



**Document L**

This third-century-CE funerary inscription is from Lambaesis, in Numidia (Africa). A tribune in the Third Legion set it up for his wife.

... Here lies Ennia Fructuosa, most beloved wife ... She did not receive the kind of death she deserved—cursed by spells, she long lay mute so that her life was rather torn from her by violence than given back to nature. Either the infernal gods or the heavenly deities will punish this wicked crime which has been perpetrated. ...

Source: *CIL* 8.2756, in John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 246.

**Document M**

This second-century-CE inscription is from Lydia, in the Roman province of Asia. Tatia was suspected of placing a curse on Ioukoundos and tried to exonerate herself.

The 241<sup>st</sup> year, the month of Panemos, the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. ... Because Ioukoundos fell into a condition of insanity and it was noised abroad by all that he had been put under a spell by his mother-in-law Tatia, she ... placed curses in the temple in order to defend herself against what was being said about her ... The gods sent punishment on her which she did not escape. ...

Source: John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 247-8.

**Document N**

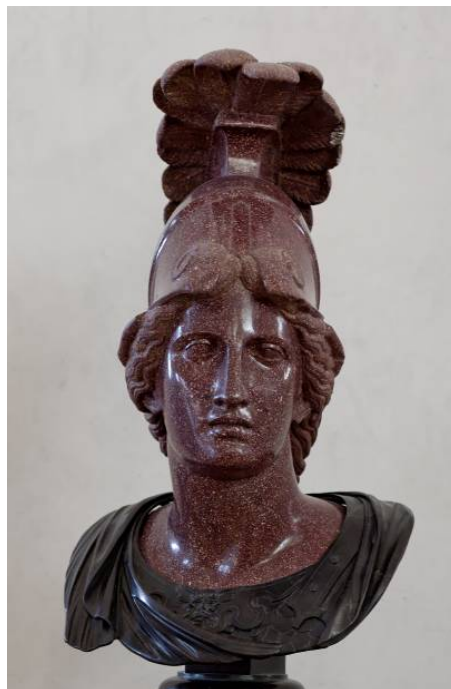
Apuleius was a second-century-CE novelist. Although professional magicians could be men or women, the latter appear more often in literature. In this selection we read about Pamphile's workshop.

Pamphile ... climbed up on to the shingled roof. There is a place on the other side of the house, exposed to every breeze that blows and providing an open view toward all eastern and other directions, which she secretly employs as the fittest workshop for those arts of hers. First she arranged her deadly laboratory with its customary apparatus, setting out spices of all sorts, unintelligibly lettered metal plaques, the surviving remains of ill-omened birds, and numerous pieces of mourned and even buried corpses ...

Source: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.17, Vol. I, trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 157-9.

**Terms**

<b>fane</b>	temple
<b>procurator</b>	an official acting as governor of a province
<b>propitiate</b>	appease



**The goddess Minerva. Second century CE. Louvre, Paris.**

Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b8/Minerva\\_Alexander\\_Mazarin\\_Louvre\\_Ma3385.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b8/Minerva_Alexander_Mazarin_Louvre_Ma3385.jpg)




**Lesson 5*****Student Handout 5.2—Questions***

After you finish reading the primary sources in Student Handout 5.1, answer the questions that follow. Don't forget to write your *nomen* (name) on the scroll!

1. What do you find most surprising about the documents and the information in them? Why?
2. Why did the Romans forbid some practices?
3. Why did the Romans adopt some deities and not others, like the Christian god?
4. What was the role of magic?

## This unit and the Three Essential Questions

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	<p>Some elite Roman women owned large shipping companies. Besides merchandise, ships can carry infected rats and fleas and spread the plague. The plague hit the Roman empire at least twice in the second and third centuries CE. Using information in library books, write a three-paragraph summary of one occurrence of the plague in imperial Rome.</p>
	<p>Compare and contrast the social and economic roles of elite and non-elite women in ancient Rome with the roles of women in classical Athens, Sparta, or Persia.</p>
	<p>In this unit you read about some of the arguments used by Roman writers to justify the subordination of women. Research the arguments (religious, etc.) used in other societies to justify women's subordination to men.</p>

## This unit and the Seven Key Themes

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This unit emphasizes:

Key Theme 3: Uses and Abuses of Power

Key Theme 4: Haves and Have-Nots

Key Theme 5: Expressing Identity

Key Theme 7: Spiritual Life and Moral Codes

## This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

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Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (E) read historical narratives imaginatively, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved—their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (A) compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.

**Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities**

The student is able to (D) identify the gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place in order to elaborate imaginatively upon the evidence, fill in the gaps deductively, and construct a sound historical interpretation.

**Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making**

The student is able to (A) identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation.

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**Resources**

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***Resources for teachers***

Apuleius. *Metamorphoses*, trans. J. Arthur Hanson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.

Augustine. *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. William M. Green. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963.

Barrett, Anthony A. *Agrippina: Mother of Nero*. London: Batsford, 1996.

Beard, Mary, John North, and Simon Price. *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Bömer, Franz. *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom*. Vol. 1. Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981.

Bradley, Keith R. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Bruns, Carl, ed. *Fontes Iuris Romani Antiqui*. Aalen, Germany: Scientia Antiquariat, 1958.

Cassius Dio. *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960.

Columella. *On Agriculture*, trans. E. S. Forster. London: William Heinemann, 1955.

*The Digest of Justinian*, trans. Alan Watson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

Donahue, John F. "Iunia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West," *Latomus* 63:4 (2004): 873-91.

- Evans, John K. *War, Women, and Children in Ancient Rome*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Gager, John G., ed. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Gardner, Jane F. *Women in Roman Law and Society*. London: Croom Helm, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_ and Thomas Wiedemann, ed. *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Hemelrijk, Emily A. *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women's Demonstrations in Republican Rome," in *Sexual Assymetry: Studies in Ancient Society*, ed. Josine Blok and Peter Mason. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987: 217-37.
- Juvenal. *Satires*, trans. Susanna Morton Braund. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004.
- Lefkowitz, Mary R. and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.
- Martial. *Epigrams*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, trans. W. H. Shewring. London: 1931; Internet Medieval Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html>
- Pliny the Younger. *The Letters of Pliny*, trans. Betty Radice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972.
- Shaw, Brent D. "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations." *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 30-46.
- Shelton, JoAnne. *As The Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Suetonius. *Life of Domitian*, trans. John C. Rolfe. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1914.
- Tacitus. *Annals*, trans. Alfred John Church. Chicago: William Benton, 1952.

Tibullus. *Elegies*, trans. Guy Lee. Leeds, UK: Francis Cairns, 1990.

Valerius Maximus. *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.

Wünsch, Richard. "Deisidaimoniaka." *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 12 (1909): 1-45.

### ***Resources for students***

MacDonald, Fiona. *Women in Ancient Rome*. New York: Peter Bedrick, 2000. Arranged topically, the book briefly discusses such subjects as the role of women at home and at work, health and beauty, and famous individuals.

Williams, Brian. *Roman Women*. London: Heinemann, 2002. This book emphasizes home and family life and employs a large-print format featuring short, double-page spreads, and many color illustrations.

## **Correlations to National and State Standards**

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### ***National Standards for World History***

Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires, 1000 BCE-300 CE. 3A: The student understands the causes and consequences of the unification of the Mediterranean basin under Roman rule. Therefore, the student is able to describe the political and social institutions of the Roman Republic and analyze why Rome was transformed from republic to empire and assess ways in which imperial rule over a vast area transformed Roman society, economy, and culture.

### ***California: History-Social Science Content Standard***

Grade Seven, 7.7.1: Study the early strengths and lasting contributions of Rome

### ***Georgia Performance Standards***

SSWH3, c: Analyze the contributions of Hellenistic and Roman culture; include law, gender, and science.

### ***New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards***

Standard 3, Strand A: 6.2.8.A.3.b Compare and contrast the rights and responsibilities of free men, women, slaves, and foreigners in the political, economic, and social structures of classical civilizations.




### ***New York: Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum***

Unit One: Ancient World – Civilizations and Religions (4000 BC – 500 AD): C. 6. The status and role of women in classical civilizations.

### *Pennsylvania Academic Standards for History*

8.4.9: C. Analyze how continuity and change throughout history has impacted belief systems and religions, commerce and industry, innovations, settlement patterns, social organization, transportation, and roles of women before 1500.

### Conceptual links to other teaching units

	<p><b>Big Era Four Panorama Teaching Unit</b>  <b>Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter, 1200 BCE – 500 CE</b>          Whether in Afroeurasia or the Americas is this Big Era, complex societies invariably emerged with males exerting the preponderance of power and authority in public life. The same was true in pastoral nomadic societies, though men and women were likely to treat one another with greater equality in daily life. Egalitarian behavior was even more evident in hunter-forager communities, where there was little specialization in daily labor or social roles and where the labor of men and women had to be equally valued. However, the proportion of the world’s population that practiced full-time hunting and foraging significantly declined during these 1,700 years.</p>
	<p><b>Big Era Four Landscape Teaching Unit 4.5</b>  <b>Giant Empires of Afroeurasia, 300 BCE - 200 CE</b>          The large states and empires of those 500 years all had complex social systems. All of them were patriarchal, that is, men dominated almost all aspects of public life. In-depth study of particular complex societies, however, would reveal significant differences in gender relations and women’s social roles.</p>
	<p><b>Big Era Four Closeup Teaching Unit 4.5.3</b>  <b>Women’s Life in Ancient Rome, 200 BCE – 250 CE</b>          The Roman empire had a complex system of political authority, social classes and occupations. Though women had few rights in Rome, their lives depended partly on the circumstances of class, income, and privilege into which they were born.</p>