

Latin

Research

Dossier

Research Question- How were women in Roman society depicted in literature and inscriptions?

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Word Count: 751 ✓ C.C.

Q.I. = Quality of Ideas
K.U. = Knowledge & Understanding
C.C. = Coherence & Clarity of argument

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✓ C.C.

Research Question

How were women in Roman society depicted in literature and inscriptions?

Abstract

I wanted to research women in Roman society to see how the Romans viewed women and whether women in the Roman world were able to have a multitude of roles, or whether all Roman women led a similar lifestyle. I am going to look at different pieces of Roman literature and inscriptions to see if women were expected to be mothers and at what age, whether they were educated and whether they were allowed to take part in businesses alongside men.

✓Q.I.

✓Q.I.

✓C.C.

Ovid's Amores 1.5 lines 9-14 and 19-26- Source and Translation

The Loose Woman

ecce, Corinna venit, tunica velata recincta,
 candida dividua colla tegente coma—
 qualiter in thalamos famosa Semiramis isse
 dicitur, et multis Lais amata viris.
 Deripui tunicam—nec multum rara nocebat;
 pugnabat tunica sed tamen illa tegi.
 quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos
 forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi
 quam castigato planus sub pectore venter
 quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur
 Singula quid referam nil non laudabile vidi
 et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.
 Cetera quis nescit? lassi requievimus ambo.
 proveniant medii sic mihi saepe dies!

1

Look, Corinna comes, dressed in a loosened tunic, her
 parted hair covering her fair neck,
 In the same way it is said that beautiful Sameramis
 went into her bed chamber, and Lais loving many men,
 I ripped off her tunic, not that the thin thing was
 concealing much, she fought to keep herself covered.

What shoulders, what arms I saw and touched,
 the shape of her breasts that were fit to be pressed,
 how flat her stomach under her well-formed bosom
 how great and excellent her flanks, how youthful her
 thigh. Why do I report every feature? I found
 nothing that was not worthy of praise
 and I pressed her naked body up to mine.
 Who doesn't know the rest? tired, we both rested.
 May the middle of my days often be this prosperous?

Q I.

A woman's hair was supposed to be up, for respectability, yet Corinna's is down which could symbolise her looseness in nature. "They parted it in the centre and gathered it behind the head in a bun"² Ovid goes into great detail about the physical appearance of Corinna, symbolising the importance to a man for a woman to have a "castigato planus" (flat stomach) and "forma papillarum" (shaped breasts). This may mean that a woman's appearance was more important to men than anything. Ovid describes his escapades in such a way that he will not harm the reputation of Corinna as he leaves much to the imagination.

✓K.U.

✓Q.I.

✓K.U.

✓K.U.

✓C.C.

Bellum Catilinae

Sallust, 25- Source and Translation

The Fortunate, Educated Woman

Haec mulier genere atque forma, praeterea viro atque liberis satis fortunata fuit; litteris Graecis et Latinis docta, psallere et saltare elegantius, quam necesse est probae, multa alia, quae instrumenta luxuriae sunt.

Verum ingenium eius haud absurdum; posse versus facere, iocum movere, sermone uti vel modesto vel molli vel procaci; prorsus multae facetiae multusque lepos inerat.

3

In birth and beauty, in her husband and her children, she was extremely fortunate; she was skilled in Greek and Roman literature; she could sing, play, and dance, with greater elegance than became a woman of virtue, and possessed many other accomplishments that tend to excite the passions.

But her abilities were by no means despicable; she could compose verses, jest, and join in conversation either modest, tender, or licentious. In a word, she was distinguished by much refinement of wit, and much grace of expression.

✓Q.I.

Sempronia was a diverse Roman woman, who displayed many different talents. She could read, write, sing and play music, "litteris Graecis et Latinis docta, psallere et saltare elegantius" which gives the impression of some form of education amongst Roman women. However, this may be due to the fact that she was fortunate in her birth to be born into an upper class family. She is said to have a family yet she is also loose in nature, just like Corinna. This is seen by her qualities that, "instrumenta luxuriae sunt", excite the passions.

→ I think this is Sallust's point exactly. Sempronia's partner, Calpurnius, is a villain of the piece.

Tacitus' Agricola 4- Source and Translation

A Caring Mother

Mater Iulia Procilla fuit, rarae castitatis. In huius sinu indulgentiaque educatus per omnem honestarum artium cultum pueritiam adulescentiamque transegit.

4

His mother was Julia Procilla, a lady of singular virtue. Brought up by her side with fond affection, he passed his boyhood and youth in the cultivation of every worthy attainment.

Even though this passage is about Agricola, it shows the character of his mother, Julia Procilla. She is seen to love and adore her son with "indulgentia". She shows the typical values of motherhood that are seen in society today and through her effort and love towards Agricola, he grows up to be a well rounded individual. Such values have been instilled in him by his mother, who therefore must also be a well rounded character.

✓C.C.

The translation on the tombstone of Claudia. CIL 6.15346

A Woman of The Family

5

She bore two sons; one of these she leaves here on earth, the other she has already placed in the earth. She was charming in speech, yet pleasant and proper in manner. She managed the household well.

✓Q.I.

3.C. ✓ This epitaph, found on the tomb of a Roman woman called Claudia shows that there were a variety of different types of women in Roman society. Like Sempronia, Claudia seems to have been a woman who was elegant in her communication with others. The fact that it is mentioned on her tombstone that "she managed the household well" signifies that to a Roman man it was of great importance for his wife to maintain the house.¹

✓K.U.

✓K.U.

✓K.U.

✓Q.I.

✓C.C.

¹ CIL stands for *corpus inscriptionum latinarum* and the main database of these pieces of work is in Berlin. Unfortunately I was unable to get the original pieces of Latin from the tombstones of Claudia and Veturia, so these have not been included.

✓C.C.

The translation on the tombstone of Veturia. CIL 3.3572

A Young, Married Woman

6

Here I lie, a matron named Veturia. My father was Veturius. My husband was Fortunatus. I lived for twenty-seven years, and I was married for sixteen years to the same man. After I gave birth to six children, only one of whom is still alive, I died.

✓Q.I.

From this tombstone inscription, it can be learnt that women in Roman society tended to marry at a young age and would stay with their partner for life, in most cases.

✓K.U.
evidence for this?

However, source 1 shows that not all women fall into this category, as Corinna was loose in nature, in comparison to Veturia. The inscription, along with information from sources

2 and 4, indicates that it was typical for Roman women to have more than one child,

however, this tombstone and source 4 shows that in some cases, women in Rome had to bury their children.²

✓K.U.

✓Q.I.

✓C.C.

² CIL stands for *corpus inscriptionum latinarum* and the main database of these pieces of work is in Berlin. Unfortunately I was unable to get the original pieces of Latin from the tombstones of Claudia and Veturia, so these have not been included.

✓C.C.

Catullus 62 Lines 57-65- Source and Translation

A Respectful Daughter

7

cum par conubium maturo tempore adepta est,
 cara uiro magis et minus est inuisa parenti...
 Et tu ne pugna cum tali coniuge uirgo.
 non aequom est pugnare, pater cui tradidit ipse,
 ipse pater cum matre, quibus parere necesse est.
 uirginitas non tota tua est, ex parte parentum est,
 tertia pars patrest, pars est data tertia matri,
 tertia sola tua est: noli pugnare duobus,
 qui genero suo iura simul cum dote dederunt.

8

If, when she is ripe for marriage, she enters into
 wedlock, she is even dearer to her husband and less
 hateful to her parents... So do not reject such a
 husband, little girl. It is not right to reject the man to
 whom your father and mother gave you. You must obey
 them. Your virginity is not entirely yours. One-third
 belongs to your father, one-third to your mother, and
 only one-third to you yourself. Don't fight against your
 parents who have surrendered to your husband a
 dowry and their rights over you.

✓Q.I.

This passage shows that a woman would marry out of respect for her parents, however,
 it also highlights that the decision is not entirely hers. This is seen when Catullus
 writes "uirginitas non tota tua est" as a woman's virginity in Roman society didn't
 solely belong to her, the majority of it belonged to her parents. Just like in sources 2-

✓K.U.

✓K.U.

✓C.C. 5, it can be seen again that it was expected that a women was to marry and build a
 family with her husband.

✓C.C.

Livy's A History of Rome Book 34- Source and Translation

A Businesswoman

9

maiores nostri nullam, ne priuatam quidem rem agere feminas sine tutore auctore uoluerunt, in manu esse parentium, fratrum, uirorum: nos, si diis placet, iam etiam rem publicam capessere eas patimur et foro prope et contionibus et comitiis immisceri.

10

Our ancestors were not willing to let women conduct any business, not even private business, without a guardian. They wanted them to remain under the control of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. We, for heaven's sake, now allow them to take part in politics and to mingle with us in the Forum and to attend assemblies.

✓Q.I.

This passage of text shows the differing attitudes towards women between the times when Livy was writing and the times of his ancestors. Previously, women weren't allowed to run a business yet at the time of writing, women ^{✓K.U.} a greater opportunity to integrate themselves into Roman society. Roman women in the passage are seen to have similar ^{✓K.U.} societal rights as today's women. They were allowed to take part in business alongside men, and although they were not supposed to by law, some women also took an interest in "rem publicam" (political matters or state affairs), however, they were unable to vote. Although Roman women had more rights than the Livy's ancestor, they were not allowed complete freedom in the political and business world.

✓C.C.

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free!!

E.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that in literature and inscriptions, there are many different depictions of Roman women. There are women such as Corinna and Sempronia who were loose in nature, yet Sempronia was also a loving mother to her children, just like Julia Procilla and Claudia. This indicates that in Roman society it was important for women to have a husband and bear children with him. This was also the will of the daughter's parents and in some cases, women married their husbands at a very young age which meant that it was possible to have more children as they would be married for a longer period of time. Roman women were also seen to be able to take part in businesses alongside men; however they were not allowed to have a business of their own.

✓ C.C.

Bibliography and References

¹ This particular translation was my own translation.

² Roman Headwear, 2010, Fashion Encyclopaedia, [http://www.fashionencyclopedia.com/fashion costume culture/The-Ancient-World-Rome/Roman-Headwear.html](http://www.fashionencyclopedia.com/fashion%20costume%20culture/The-Ancient-World-Rome/Roman-Headwear.html) (accessed 27/02/2010)

³ Conspiracy of Cataline, 2007, About, http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_sallust_catiline_1.htm (accessed 05/01/2010)

⁴ Agricola, 2004, Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum, http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/tacitus/agricola_e.html#4 (accessed 05/01/2010)

⁵ Jo-Ann Shelton, 1998, As The Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, 2nd Edition, New York, Oxford University Press

⁶ Jo-Ann Shelton, 1998, As The Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, 2nd Edition, New York, Oxford University Press

⁷ Catullus 62, 2006, The Latin Library, <http://thelatinlibrary.com/catullus.shtml#62> (accessed 17/02/2010)

⁸ Jo-Ann Shelton, 1998, As The Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, 2nd Edition, New York, Oxford University Press

⁹ Livy Book XXXIV, 2006, The Latin Library, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/livy/liv.34.shtml#2> (accessed 26/01/2010)

¹⁰ Jo-Ann Shelton, 1998, As The Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, 2nd Edition, New York, Oxford University Press

✓ C.C.

Quality of Ideas (Q.I.)

The quality and range of ideas is good, drawing on sources which demonstrate a large number of roles of women. There is considerable personal engage as demonstrated in the introduction and in the lively style of writing in the annotations. I like the way you use

Sample E

Classical languages Internal assessment SL

Title: How were women in Roman society depicted in literature and inscriptions?

Marks

Criterion	A	B	C	Total
Marks available	8	8	8	24
Marks awarded	8	7	7	22

Moderator comments

Criterion A - Sources:

The sources selected are relevant to the research question and contribute to a broad coverage of the topic.

Criterion B - Annotations:

All annotations are related to the research question, but the analysis does not always show deep understanding of each source, mainly because the socio-historical-literary context of the sources is not really taken into account.

Criterion C - Argument:

The argument is consistently organized thematically, even if it is more difficult to see a clear logical progression. This could have been easily achieved by considering each source in its context.