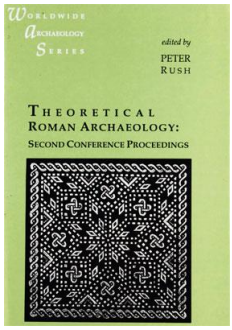

Paper Information:

Title: Women and Gender Relations in the Roman Empire
Author: Eleanor Scott
Pages: 174–189

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC1992_174_189
Publication Date: 31 March 1995

Volume Information:

Rush, P. (ed.) (1995) *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: Second Conference Proceedings.* Worldwide Archaeology Series, vol. 14. Aldershot: Avebury/Ashgate.

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14

Women and Gender Relations in the Roman Empire

Eleanor Scott

Introduction

The paper I delivered at TRAC 92 has been largely reproduced elsewhere (Scott 1993a: 5–22), but I am grateful for the opportunity to expand on and consolidate a particular theme which I have raised previously and all too briefly, namely that women continue to be invisible within Roman archaeology and ancient history. This situation is dependent partly upon an uncritical over reliance on the ancient literary sources with archaeology relegated to the role of 'handmaiden' (i.e. there to support not to challenge). It has also been mooted that classical philologists are not best trained and equipped to interpret the human cultures of antiquity (MacMullen 1990: 25), yet the views, interests and perspectives of philologists often continue to hold sway with many historians and classical archaeologists. This leads us to the most important and intriguing reason for the invisibility of women in Roman studies, which is the lack of explicit use of feminist social theory in Roman archaeology and ancient history.

Recently, I was assured that comments such as those above are simply 'abstractions' which while easy to rant about vaguely are difficult to demonstrate formally, the implication being that my allegations of androcentrism in Roman studies are unfounded. I would like, therefore, to support and illustrate my contentions more specifically, using examples from Romanist mainstream literature, within a framework of feminist critique.

My interest in feminist critique grew rapidly during the period of my doctoral research (Scott 1988) when it became increasingly clear that vari-

ous authorities' assertions regarding Roman period infant burials seemed to be based on little more than their own bizarre and prurient notions about the alleged universal prevalence of baby-dropping (Cocks 1921: 150; Johnston 1983: 11; Watts 1989: 373). Indeed, these scholars seemed to envisage naughty Romano-Victorian serving wenches stuffing the illegitimate results of concealed pregnancies into sundry nooks and crannies about the house and yard. This in itself reveals one of the attractions of Roman archaeology for many: the undiluted opportunity for the telling of the ripping yarn. Whether the story is actually appropriate to any specific historical and social context under study would appear to be of little importance. This sleek and slack approach, as we will see later, is nowhere more evident than in discussions of women.

FEMINIST SOCIAL THEORY

There is now extensive literature on feminist social and political theory. There is also a rapidly expanding 'backlash' literature, which seeks to persuade women that too much equality, opportunity, feminism etc. is bad for them, or contrary to 'nature' (Faludi 1992). Thus we see the appearance of tracts from the Institute of Economic Affairs asserting that 'women . . . are genetically predisposed to have other priorities than paid work' (Quest 1992: 2) and further that 'changing nappies does, in fact, have a significant genetic component' (Levin 1992: 20). A significant part of this New Right's argument is underpinned by an idea of 'traditional values' and 'historic precedent', and history and historical archaeology have been much misused within the anti-feminist domain. It is imperative that we begin to write real women into our archaeological narratives and examine the cultural constructions of gender within various historical contexts. I have outlined the political reasons for doing so, but there are also mainstream intellectual reasons, as Ruth Tringham recently noted in a description of her own 'conversion' (Tringham 1991: 94):

> And then it dawned on me . . . until, as an archaeologist, you can learn to give imagined societies faces, you cannot envisage gender. Or, in somebody else's terms (Conkey's?) you cannot engender prehistory. And until you can engender prehistory, you cannot *think* of your prehistoric constructions as really human entities with a social, political, ideological, and economic life. Ahaaaa!

(N.b. It is quite alright to substitute 'prehistory' with 'history' or even 'Roman history'; the world will not come to an end).

Making Women Invisible in Social Analyses: 'Tricks of the Trade'

It is commonly held by feminists, and with good reason, that historical, social and political narratives and theory were, and for the most part still are, written by men, for men and about men (Thiele 1992: 26). This has been dubbed 'male-stream theory' (O'Brien 1981: 5). A number of feminist scholars have investigated women's disappearance from male-stream scholarship by identifying the forms their invisibility takes in androcentric sociology. The three main forms of invisibility identified are *exclusion*, *pseudo-inclusion* and *alienation* (March 1982; Thiele 1992: 26–28). These forms of invisibility are not mutually exclusive, but rather tend to be used in combination; and they can clearly be identified in mainstream Romanist scholarship.

Exclusion

Invisibility of this form is brought about by women being completely ignored or neglected because the subjects of such theories are explicitly male or male-dominated institutions and activities. Women are excluded by default. They are invisible because they are disregarded. The general narratives and theories set priorities in subject matter and data which focus attention on social processes and activities in which women were only marginally involved, if at all (Thiele 1992: 26). Thus, many volumes sporting the titles *The Roman Empire* or *The Roman World* are in fact accounts of the Roman army, its imperial politics and Roman provincial administration. This is clear from the contents pages of many volumes, two which are reproduced here:

The Roman Empire by Professor Colin Wells (1984):

I The new order
II The sources
III The work of Augustus
IV Italy under Augustus: the social and political climate
V The consolidation of the Principate
VI The army and the provinces in the first century AD
VII 'Emperors made elsewhere than at Rome': Galba to Trajan
VIII The state of Italy from Petronius to Pliny
IX The orderly government of the Empire: Hadrian to Marcus Aurelius
X 'The immeasurable majesty of the Roman peace'
XI An age of transition: from Commodus to Maximinius the Thracian

Even the most promising sounding chapters disappoint with their exclusionary language. Thus, in 'Italy under Augustus: the social and intellectual climate' we are told (Wells 1984: 87):

> A motif of Augustan propaganda was the restoration of stability. Just as his legal powers were based on Republican precedent, just as he revived obsolete or obsolescent religious ceremonial, just as those who shared his views, like Livy and Horace, looked back to the good old days of uncorrupted simplicity, so too Augustan art and architecture followed traditional models.

Not one word does he write about women, at whom, as we shall see below, the Emperor Augustus's 'traditional values' campaign was largely directed.

The Roman Empire by Professor Chester G. Starr (1984):

I Augustus
II The imperial succession
III The Roman aristocracy
IV Governing the Empire
V The cities of the Empire
VI Army, roads and frontiers
VII The first test (AD 211–330)
VIII The final test (AD 330–476)

Starr too uses exclusionary language, such as in the passage subheaded 'Cultural and religious changes' (Starr 1982: 136):

> If there was no inner sustenance to be gained from the models of the past, then it was time to carve a new approach to the inner nature of mankind which had once animated these models; this was the achievement of the third and fourth centuries after Christ, one of the great turning points of Western civilization. To define succinctly – and so with dangerous precision – the character of these new ideas, man came to visualize himself as an entity independent of state and community. He was sharply distinguished from all other human beings and was also clearly set off from the physical world about him, unlike in the pantheistic view of the classical world. Nonetheless he had vital links to two outside forces: the divine power above, and his fellow men; for he now advanced to the capability of intimate, truly spiritual union with his brothers. So he might work for common aims in a group without sacrificing his individuality, and while separated from the physical world he was certain that it too was divinely governed.

Starr's passage demonstrates a far less subtle form of exclusion, in which women are, for no given reason, simply dropped from the discourse. Thiele notes the work of Hobbes as a prime example, for he presents a Commonwealth entirely inhabited by men. Comparisons with Starr's *Roman Empire* are perhaps inevitable. Thiele stresses that the exclusion of women is an active process rather than a result of passive neglect (Thiele 1992: 27):

> It is not a simple case of lapsed memory: these theorists don't just forget to talk about women; rather, women are structurally excluded from the realm of discourse or, for the sake of theoretical preoccupations and coherency, they are deliberately dropped.

Pseudo-Inclusion

Pseudo-inclusion differs from exclusion in that the theory appears to take women into account but then marginalises them. Women become defined as a 'special case', as anomalies, exceptions to the rule which can be noted and then forgotten about. What is normative is male (ibid.: 27–28).

This is particularly true of the treatment of burial data by many Roman archaeologists. Imbalances in the sex ratios in cemeteries tend to be 'explained away' or dismissed with imaginative stories, and sociological discussion is absent. Sometimes skeletons are even sexed on the most dubious of grounds. Thus Frere viewed the Hambleden infant burials (unsexed) as evidence of 'the exposed unwanted female offspring of a slave-run establishment' (1967: 266–67) with no further discussion. Frere has created an interesting story but in so doing has actually dismissed these burials, and this type of interpretation has become embedded in many secondary sources. When Perring (1991: 121–22) discusses the cemetery data for Roman London and the surrounding area, he *concludes* with the remark, 'Where are the women?' This remark could have been a useful starting point for discussion, but unfortunately it brings the passage to a close and the burial data is explained away in terms of an incomplete sample, which in effect categorises the female burials as a deviation from the norm. The opportunity for discussion of the profound social implications of the burials is lost.

We can also see pseudo-inclusion in operation in *Who Was Who in the Roman World* (Bowder 1980; reviewed in Scott 1993a: 9–10). In brief, the authors endeavoured 'to include all historical and cultural figures of im-

portance' (Bowder 1980: 9). A sample of the large A-D section reveals that only about 7% of these figures are women, though interestingly a much higher percentage appear in the supplementary index of persons alluded to in the text but 'not important enough to be given their own entry' (ibid.). This statement begs (unanswered) questions about whether this number is a fair, proportionate and useful representation of the available material evidence, how 'importance' has been assessed here, and the relationship of this 'scholarship' to the biases of the ancient sources. There is a real disparity between the lengths of the entries of women and men, irrespective of their renown, and women are frequently dismissed in a few lines. Julia Domna receives only 17 lines, whereas relatively obscure male military figures receive two to three times as much. One repeatedly gains the impression that the editorial line incorporates the unspoken belief in the secondary importance of women to men.

Alienation

This form of invisibility refers to those theories which are 'extensionally male' (Clark and Lange 1979: ix). They include women as subjects, but they do not speak of the parameters of women's lives without distortion. Women's experience is interpreted through male categories because the methodologies and values of the theorists remain androcentric. Despite any commitment they may have to the subject of women, their perspective interferes with their interpretation of women's experience, especially in their selection of those parts of women's lives which are deemed significant (Thiele 1992: 28).

Thus we have Matthews (1988: 357) giving women specific space – a whole page no less – in his chapter on 'Roman life and society' in *The Roman World* (Boardman et al. 1988). He deems as worthy of discussion only three categories of women's lives, the roles of helper, prostitute, and mother/homemaker – Man's helpmeets, whores and madonnas (Scott 1993a: 10–11).

Returning to *Who Was Who in the Roman World*, one can see that the entries of the few women who are included tend to incorporate certain common themes, a core of androcentric mythology about women. They were renowned for their beauty; they were renowned for their chastity or their promiscuity; they were the wives, mothers and daughters of important men; they were the victims or perpetrators of violence; they were very fertile or they were barren; or they were the 'real power behind the throne' (ibid.: 9).

MAINSTREAM ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WRITING

The Effects of Reliance on the Ancient Sources

A major part of the appeal of Roman archaeology is widely held to be that the Romans themselves documented their own society. Ancient writers such as Pliny, Cato, Columella, Varro, Juvenal and Martial wrote about Roman culture, and modern archaeologists and ancient historians have made prolific use of this window on the past. The ancient sources are thus cited on many subjects. If we want to know all about women in the Roman empire, we need look no further than Pliny. Garnsey and Saller did not look much further, at any rate, when illustrating the 'Family and the household' chapter of their generally well-received, if not seminal, study, *The Roman Empire: economy, society and culture* (1987). They express the usual token caution about accepting the ancient sources too uncritically, and indeed one would hope so when to illustrate the widespread happy subordination of the Roman wife in marriage they cite an absolute gem from the pen of Pliny (131–32). Pliny, in his forties, had married the teenage Calpurnia, and wrote to his aunt thus (Pliny *Ep.* 4. 19):

> I do not doubt that it will be a source of great joy to you to know that [Calpurnia] has turned out to be worthy of her father, worthy of you and worthy of her grandfather. Her shrewdness and frugality are of the highest order. She loves me – a sign of her purity. To these virtues is added an interest in literature, which she has taken up out of fondness for me. She has, repeatedly reads, and even learns by heart my works. What anxiety she feels when I am about to speak in court! What joy when I have finished! She arranges for messengers to tell her of the approval and applause I win as well as the outcome of the case.

Having cited Pliny's letter, what conclusions might we draw? Does this give us a priceless window on the past? On the contrary, one might be inclined to dismiss it as the rantings of a rather unpleasant, arrogant, defensive, pompous, mean, dishonest man – so surely we can't extrapolate from this about Roman marriages in general? Garnsey and Saller would appear to believe that we can, and their rather unsubtle reading of this passage is presented as evidence for women's behaviour and of the widespread cheerful subordination of wives to their husbands, by their subsequent references to Pliny and Calpurnia's 'companionate marriage' and Calpurnia's role as 'youthful admirer'.

This is an example not so much of deliberate *exclusion* of women from the analysis, but rather of the techniques of *pseudo-inclusion* and *alienation*, where women are mentioned or discussed but are then marginalised, set aside from what the authors perceive as the normative and more important male experience, or they are only discussed in terms of selected categories.

Garnsey and Saller's remarks are perhaps simply naive, but nevertheless they deeply flaw their discussion, for although they accept that Pliny has found in Calpurnia the traditional ideal of an aristocratic wife, they are judging her entirely within the very idealised framework created by the Roman writers like Pliny. They have, in effect, fallen for Pliny's rhetoric. So we are presented not with an analysis of Pliny's idealised world, but rather with a self-conscious and uncomfortable series of anecdotes gleaned from the pens of various male aristocrats which are intended to shed light on the actual lives of women; but their comments are at times astonishingly uncritical. For example, Pliny's remark that Calpurnia took up literature 'out of fondness' for him is used to support the thesis that (1987: 134):

> Though some women displayed literary talent, they were not as a rule educated to the same level as their husbands.

That Calpurnia may have had a motive other than pleasing her husband in taking up literature seems to have eluded our two classical scholars, just as it eluded Pliny.

Ancient Literature as Material Culture

There is no need to be entirely negative about these ancient sources. Certainly inferences can be made, so long as it is understood that dependence on literary sources as 'objective historical text' is inherently problematic because the texts are themselves material culture, and the authors – such as Pliny – were human agents acting within and through social and ideological structures, and whose works must therefore be interpreted through reference to these structures. This is a difficult task because these structures have not yet been identified for the Roman world. The ideological realm is not hot property and indeed is not normally discussed in Roman archaeology, which sees its subject matter very much in terms of 'common sense' or early modern explanations. Romanists like to feel that they really can understand the Romans. Thus we have Professor Donald Dudley (1970: 46) arguing in his book, *Roman Society*, that:

> A recent study of Roman women has compared their status to that of women in Victorian England. And in that period, before emancipation, in the full sense, it was usually her own fault if a woman let herself be repressed.

Clearly such a disturbing off-the-peg comparison contributes little to an archaeology of women and gender relations. Yet the ancient literary passages which have been used to bring about such disgraceful interpretations can have value, if they are used – as I indicated above – as material text from their specific historical, cultural and ideological contexts. Of course we do know from ancient sources some of the basic legal edicts issued in Rome concerning the status of women regarding marriage and property ownership. A woman and a man could enter into one of three forms of marriage, the most popular of which (*usus*) was more easy to dissolve than the others, and within which the woman could own and inherit property. Legally a women either passed from the *potestas* or authority of her father to that of her husband, or remained in the authority of her father after marriage. She had no political rights (Balsdon 1962: 179–80). It should be stressed that the laws described here, and in fact the writings of the ancient authors generally, were issued for the landed Mediterranean classes, and did not apply to slaves. The general descriptive and judgemental writings in particular cannot be applied to peasants, particularly those in the far-flung provinces of the empire such as Britain, if indeed they can be confidently applied to any real women, anywhere.

What is interesting about the laws and their accompanying social customs is how they were manipulated, negotiated and renegotiated by men such as the Emperor Augustus to control the lives of women. It would be useful if Roman archaeologists and ancient historians would discuss what all these ancient literary passages, and the social complexities that led to their production, actually meant in the Roman world in terms of images and propaganda – in terms of the everyday rhetoric and visual images with which women would have been confronted. Because the women of the empire have no direct voice, what we have been hearing up until now has been a noise which has been distorted first through the politics, minds and pens of ancient writers and secondly through the politics, minds and pens of modern historians and archaeologists. The voice is distorted out of all recognition, not surprisingly after such double editing, such double alienation: women's experience has been interpreted twice over through male categories because the methodology and the values of the theorists remain

androcentric. Thus to find the women of the Roman empire, we must turn to archaeology and the ideological realm, to images in material culture, and look at female ideals and resistance to those ideals that were in operation.

IDEALS AND IMAGES VERSUS REALITY

The Acceptance of Myths

Ideal images of women were carried of course in literature, as we have seen regarding Pliny's ideal wife, and there was plenty more rhetoric and propaganda put out by male writers for the literate classes.

It is interesting to note the types of story which have been selected for recent retelling in general works on the Roman empire. A somewhat disturbing trend appears to be the highlighting of 'suicide pact' narratives, where the wife selflessly precedes the husband in death. The modern authors seem to find this rather heroic of the wives, such as Griffin (1988: 1) on the general marvellousness of the Roman empire:

> The idea of Rome has given the West several distinct myths, each full of resonance. There is the image of . . . generals and consuls . . . [and] great conquerors . . . . Their wives were women like . . . Arria Paeta, who when the Emperor ordered her husband to commit suicide showed the way by stabbing herself with the words 'Look, it doesn't hurt.'

If we return to Garnsey and Saller, we find them still trying to illustrate the 'companionate marriage' with passages from Pliny, this time with the tale of a wife who precedes her terminally ill husband in jumping off a cliff into Lake Como (1987: 134). They do point out that we never hear of a husband bolstering his wife's courage by joining her in death; but they have nevertheless told the tale to illustrate their concept of the 'companionship ideal' in Roman marriage, without exploring the meanings of these myths further. At the very least these stories raise questions about the ideologies of representation and their correspondence with what women 'really' did (see Pollock 1991: 366).

The Augustan Age of 'Traditional Values'

Other ideal images of women were carried in literature, and it is of interest here to note the poem of Horace, commissioned by the Emperor Augustus, written to accompany a fertility festival which acted as the in-

auguration of the Brave New World and ushered in a new golden age (Balsdon 1962: 79). One part of Horace's commission referred explicitly to Augustus's recent legislation (trans. ibid.):

> Goddess, produce children and give success to the Senate's decrees about the marriage of women and the marriage laws which aim at increasing the birth-rate.

This was part of a general pro-fertility drive by Augustus, to persuade women to have more babies. This included the dedication of the monumental public altar, the Ara Pacis, one panel of which depicted a goddess-woman with two plump infants, surrounded by the fruits of the earth. The imagery on this panel can be read quite simply. The image of the infant, as I have argued elsewhere (Scott 1992) tends to be presented for mass consumption in its most appealing form when it is being used to encourage women to eschew notions of independence, have more babies, and stay home 'nesting'. The Romans went through a sustained phase of such backlash propaganda under Augustus, and it is notable that one of the most naturalistic and attractive Roman depictions of infants is to be found on the Ara Pacis. The imagery clearly links human fertility with abundance and happiness, and the woman's physical presence, posture and garments are clearly intended to invoke in the viewer many different associations – Pax, Venus, Ceres, Italia, Terra Mater, Tellus – all goddesses (Zanker 1988: 174). The goddess is the good, eternal and ubiquitous mother, and the infants are the future of Rome. This was a quite open pro-fertility programme, and ancient Rome saw a rise of restrictive property laws and penalties for unwed and childless women. The message for women was to tow the line and earn nature's 'rewards', or suffer severe consequences.

What about the illiterate classes? The illiteracy of the masses would not have prevented the prevailing ideology permeating their lives, for the messages of Augustus and other administrations were encapsulated in visual images and in poetry and rhetoric, all of which were carried round the empire. The poetry would have been transmitted primarily by bards, and if one looks at the verse of Horace quoted above in the original Latin one can see that its inherent qualities include a quite beautiful and *memorable* cadence. The fertility propaganda of Horace would have reached everywhere.

> Diva producas subolem patrumque
> prosperes decreta super iugandis
> feminis prolisque novae feraci
> lege marita

Relief sculptures – such as the Ara Pacis – and statues, and *copies* of these sculptures and statues, images of perfect goddesses and Roman imperial women, were highly visible in public places. They were transported all over the empire, into every forum and public space in every town, such as the statue from Ostia in Italy of Sabina as the goddess Ceres, and the statues of the Empress Julia Augusta around the empire. There were wall-paintings and mosaics of goddesses in public and private buildings and baths. There were images of goddesses on the reverse sides of coins in circulation, and there were images of women on the samian pottery which we know was in circulation on even the poorest sites in the empire. The uniformity of the imposed culture throughout the empire meant that every woman and man, regardless of status, would be exposed on a daily basis to these idealised images of women. Rome was, after all, a blueprint for every other city, town and even fort in the whole Roman world.

We now begin to see the sets of contradictions presented to women. There were the official images of women as goddesses, imbued with a power and goodness which ordinary women could never attain, but which they would revere. There were the official role models of the imperial matrons, with their extraordinary complex hairstyles and robes to be painstakingly emulated and consumed, regardless of the provincial woman's status or background. And there was the official reality of women in law and Roman social custom and popular literature, disenfranchised and steered toward subordination through a harsh reward-and-punishment regime. It is perhaps noteworthy that the very complex hairstyles were seen primarily in the early empire, in the first and second centuries AD, and one might even begin to think of a cultural colonisation by Rome of the women of the new provinces.

Altered Images?

Sometimes maverick images break through in later years, especially in the late third and fourth centuries, images which seem to challenge the cultural colonisation of the Romans, such as the Celtic triple goddess representations from Roman Britain, and the woman on the Rudston villa 'Venus mosaic' in Yorkshire, with her hair swinging free and her body unencumbered with the complicated Roman garments of the earlier imperial period. Is she a Celtic goddess? Or a real woman? This isn't as important as the uninhibited image itself. The image, however, received rather dismissive treatment from Professor Ian Richmond who wrote about the Rudston pavements in 1963 (Richmond 1963):

> The immediate problems presented by the pavements are . . . those of design and taste. Each pavement is different: the first [the 'Venus mosaic'] is lively with figures; the second [a plain geometric tesselated pavement] has a quiet conventional pattern like a rug . . . . The most satisfying to modern taste is unquestionably the second. But the first is in every way the most remarkable; for we can admire the ambition of the designer, while smiling at the execution of subjects beyond his skill . . . . There is no need to dwell on the badness of this work.

Another image from a similar context, that of a fourth century AD Romano-British villa, has produced evidence for the participation of women in mainstream Christian worship. A group of six figures, both adult women and men, were found painted onto a wall at Lullingstone villa in Kent. Taking this evidence together with that for increased ritual infant burials in this period (Scott 1991), I have often wondered if we are not seeing a positive shift for women in gender relations here after 300 years of cultural colonisation by Rome. If it had not been for Christianity, at first a gender equal cult or religion, the dominant religion of the empire might well have been Mithraism, exclusive to men and beloved of the military. The early Christian church was probably an exciting and fulfilling place for women. But then something went wrong. By the fourth century the male church theologians had become thoroughly infected with the misogynist sentiments of the ancients, particularly Aristotle, who saw women as a corrupting force on earth (Sanders and Stanford 1992: 18). St John Crystotom (AD 347–407) wrote:

> The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food . . . . If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and the cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulchre.

Saunders and Stanford carefully argue that the Church's obsession with virginity, closely coupled with the unholiness of the normal, mature woman, was well under way. They observe that 'Having sex with one of these pieces of Adam's rib, said theologians, was the equivalent of embracing a bag of shit' (ibid.).

THE FEMINIST CHALLENGE

It has always been a source of great disappointment to me that archaeology has failed so dismally to challenge or provoke discussion of the social

theories which our modern democracies are prepared to accept. I suspect that this is because the past which archaeologists write tends to ape conveniently the present they want to condone. Nowhere is this more clear than in the writing about women, particularly the women of the Roman empire. When one thinks that archaeological narratives still tend to be written by men for men, one might wonder just what storyboard games are being played out in the corridors of learning up and down the land. And the storyboards of course get passed on to the public, to school children in museums and to right-wing think tanks.

These comments are not simply made in passing. There is a pressing need for an archaeology of gender relations. Romanists should not feel exempt from this call just because they have information about 'real' women in the form of texts, epigraphy, sculpture, paintings and small finds. On the contrary, the cultural meanings of this data need to be critically assessed. Further, the information presented for study tends to represent the existence of only a small proportion of women from particular social groups, leaving the vast majority of women historically disenfranchised.

I believe that it is through increased analysis of the images of women and a better understanding of the burial evidence, the social construction of space and all the narratives of material culture in the Roman empire that we will be able to write an archaeology of women and gender relations in this period. This would mean Romanists critically examining their conceptual or interpretive frameworks (Scott 1993a), and I think that it is becoming increasingly clear that this would be no bad thing.

My final comment is addressed to those socialist archaeologists who have informed me that one cannot begin to address adequately the issues of androcentrism and gender within archaeology until we have begun to do so in society in general. I am inclined to argue the opposite, because we should not under estimate the influence of perceptions of the past on our present policy makers (or rather, the perceptions they think they can get away with). The macro- and micro-political ideologies of our western democracies are underpinned by a core of traditional mythologies, dressed up and labelled as history and biology, and it is up to those who have primary access to the knowledge which can dispel these myths to challenge vociferously the current orthodoxies. We have the power to counter the politically compromised ideas of 'history' and 'tradition' which are used to sustain the gender imbalances of our society.

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