

SEARCHING FOR PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN THE MID TO LATE ROMAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY*

I

In the late fourth century, the Church Father John Chrysostom (c.349–407) laid out what he saw as the natural difference between men and women in marriage:

When God divided these two He assigned the management of the household to the woman, but to the men He assigned all the affairs of the city, all the business of the marketplaces, courts, council-chambers, armies, and all the rest. A woman cannot throw a spear or hurl a javelin, but she can take up the distaff, weave cloth, and manage everything else well that concerns the household. She cannot give an opinion in the council, but she can give her opinion in the household.¹

Chrysostom's attitude towards women was generally reflective of the idealized way in which they were portrayed in late Roman literature. While the rise of Christianity has been credited with giving women a more public social role,² their legal position at that time remained limited, confined and subordinated within the house.³ It hardly bears repeating that gender is and was socially constructed; in Antiquity a woman's existence was mediated by the negotiation of various factors including status,

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¹ John Chrysostom, *Quales ducenda sint uxores* (CPG 4379, PG 51.225–42), in St John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, 1986), 96.

² Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–700*, 2nd edn (London, 2012), 142–4.

³ Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le Statut de la femme à Byzance, 4^e–7^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1990–2); Antti Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1996); Andrew M. Riggsby, *Roman Law and the Legal World of the Romans* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 16.

economic position and societal expectation, particularly around her role in the family.⁴

The family as an entity was more than a nuclear kinship group; it could include a number of generations, non-immediate dependent relations and slaves, all of whom constituted the *domus*. Families were also important institutions through which society organized itself, and extended economic units whose strategies often relied on more than just male labour.⁵ High rates of mortality in addition to divorce also meant that family structures were inherently unstable and often in flux; while men frequently remarried after the death of a spouse or divorce, there are indications that women did so at lower rates, despite attempts by the state to sanction those who remained single.⁶ All these factors created space for women in the economy. But this space was still framed by the ideology of the Roman family, which has obscured the roles women actually played, particularly in relation to production. In literary sources, women were expected to remain confined to the home and family while men pursued public, political and occupational lives, a theme common to many patriarchal societies. The reality was much more complex.

Chrysostom's use of weaving to illustrate the place of women was part of this ideology. Throughout history, the act of textile manufacture has been closely associated with the performative roles of women in domestic settings. By the time of Augustus, the romanticized *matrona* — the virtuous mother dutifully spending her days wool-working for her family while raising children — was an important component of imperial

⁴ Leslie Brubaker, 'The Age of Justinian: Gender and Society', in Michael Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), 431; Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (Oxford, 2015); Jussi Rantala (ed.), *Gender, Memory, and Identity in the Roman World* (Amsterdam, 2019), editor's intro.; all with extensive bibliographies.

⁵ Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, *The Roman World of Work: Social Structures and the Urban Labour Market of Roman Italy in the First Three Centuries AD* (University of Leiden Ph.D. thesis, 2017), 130–41; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore, 1992), 25–6. For landowners, see Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge, 2007), 111–14.

⁶ April Pudsey, 'Death and the Family: Widows and Divorcées in Roman Egypt', in Mary Harlow and Lena Larsson Lovén (eds.), *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World* (London, 2012), 159; Mathew Kuefler, 'The Marriage Revolution in Late Antiquity: The Theodosian Code and Later Roman Marriage Law', *Journal of Family History*, xxxii, 4 (2007), 345–6.

propaganda, separate from the world of commerce.⁷ The prevalence of this representation has led to a scholarly consensus that, despite historical associations between women and textiles, female production was separate from the textile industry (and the Roman economy in general), diminishing the importance of women's productive activities. Commercial textile manufacture and trade, vitally important to the Roman economy, was cast as a male task; where women contributed, it was viewed in a highly conscripted capacity based on their status as a slave, without any autonomy, or within a rigid gendered division of labour in which women's work was classed as unskilled, a means of explaining the occasional presence of women in settings where it was assumed they should not have been.⁸

While scholars of other time periods have sought to reassess the erasure of women from commercial production, notably in the Middle Ages, the process has stalled for Antiquity. The different directions this has created in the study of women between the Roman and medieval periods has rarely been commented on. Some of the reasons for the diverging historiography of economic gender roles within the two periods are found in the numbers and kinds of sources available, how women's occupations were presented in these sources (especially in relation to men), and how differing levels of control that women were shown exerting in productive settings have led to vastly different interpretations of agency. Instead of asking why Roman women were less visible, it has been accepted that their absence from documented economic settings was a reflection of

⁷ Suzanne Dixon, 'Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut: Cultural Representations of Women in the Roman Economy', in Fiona McHardy and Eireann Marshall (eds.), *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization* (London, 2004), 65.

⁸ For the importance of textile manufacture and trade within the Roman economy, see Kerstin Droß-Krüpe (ed.), *Textile Trade and Distribution in Antiquity / Textilhandel und -distribution in der Antike* (Wiesbaden, 2014); Kerstin Droß-Krüpe and Marie-Louise Nosch (eds.), *Textiles, Trade and Theories: From the Ancient Near East to the Mediterranean* (Münster, 2016). The resourcing of fibres, manufacture and distribution of textiles employed a large segment of the population, allowing for multiple modes of production and consumption: Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 82; Thelma K. Thomas, 'Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt: Corpora, Collections, and Scholarly Perspectives', in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700* (Cambridge, 2007). For views on women's textile work, see Cathy Lynne Costin, 'Gender and Textile Production in Prehistory', in Diane Bolger (ed.), *A Companion to Gender Prehistory* (Chichester, 2013), 190.

reality. This, combined with a bias about where professional work is expected to have taken place, has encouraged a normative construction of Roman women's production circumscribed by domestic confinement to prevail.⁹

However, recognition of the significant role women played in the Roman fiscal world beyond the traditional 'domestic economy' is growing. Their presence in the service sector has long been known.¹⁰ They could also own property, including workshops and businesses, enabling them to make important contributions to the accumulation of familial wealth.¹¹ Women's control of property was legally limited so as not to challenge the appearance of male domination and hierarchy,¹² but as will be discussed later, their legal position did not completely negate their agency. There has also been a rise in studies showing that women participated in manufacturing for a variety of craft trades (and their retail) throughout the Roman Mediterranean, some where they might not be expected. Women have been identified as calligraphers and scribes (perhaps even clerks), glassblowers and managers of brick-making workshops.¹³ There is some suggestion that they also worked as cobblers, goldsmiths, gem

⁹ This has begun to change with the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequential rise in working from home, although the full implications, not to mention longevity, of this trend have yet to play out.

¹⁰ Susan Treggiari, 'Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy', *Florilegium*, i (1979), 78; Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman, 1992), 71–4.

¹¹ Hilary Becker, 'Roman Women in the Urban Economy: Occupations, Social Connections, and Gendered Exclusions', in Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean MacIntosh Turfa (eds.), *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World* (London, 2016), 924–7; Jane Rowlandson, 'Additions to the Philosarapis Archive: The Contribution of Women to the Family's Wealth', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, liii (2016).

¹² Richard P. Saller, 'Household and Gender', in Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris and Richard P. Saller (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2007), 98.

¹³ Kim Haines-Eitzen, ‘“Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing”: Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vi, 4 (1998); E. Marianne Stern, ‘Neikais: A Woman Glassblower of the First Century AD?’, in Gabriele Erath, Manfred Lehner and Gerda Schwarz (eds.), *Komos: Festschrift für Thuri Lorenz zum 65. Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1997); Päivi Setälä, ‘Women and Brick Production: Some New Aspects’, in Päivi Setälä (ed.), *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Empire* (Rome, 2002), 187–8, 198–200; Piotr Berdowski, ‘Some Remarks on the Economic Activity of Women in the Roman Empire: A Research Problem’, in Piotr Berdowski and Beata Blahaczek (eds.), *Haec mihi in animis vestris tempa: Studia Classica in Memory of Professor Lesław Morawiecki* (Rzeszów, 2007), 286–9.

setters and perfumers, and may have been working in the building sector.¹⁴ These studies are largely based on small regional datasets, and are therefore unable to make claims about industry-wide participation, and the questions they introduce of how gender included or precluded women from specific occupations have been overshadowed by blanket assumptions that women's economic participation was restricted.¹⁵ Dismantling these assumptions for textile work, built on conflicting gender norms that traditionally bound women to it while also denying them active economic roles, will aid an understanding of the evidence for other sectors.

To highlight deficiencies in the discussion of women and textile production in the Roman period, this article begins by comparing studies of Roman women's occupational roles with those carried out for the Middle Ages, a period with comparatively extensive documentation. I explore how the history of medieval women in the textile industry was rewritten, what has complicated similar reassessments for earlier periods, and how to approach assumptions in the current discourse of Roman women's productive activities. I then argue that a more synthetic examination of Roman textile production, focusing particularly on Egyptian papyri, demonstrates that women were in fact significant industry actors at this time.¹⁶ While men probably outnumbered women in most sectors and restricted at least the appearance of authority that women could exercise over their own productive activities, gender expectations and domestic associations were not so much depriving women of occupational roles as obscuring them in textual records. This, combined with an impulse in modern scholarship to accept classical and early Christian moralistic rhetoric, typified by Chrysostom, as reflective of the structural reality of Antiquity, has worked in the discourse to portray a restricted role for

¹⁴ Lena Larsson Lovén, 'Women, Trade, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy', in Andrew Wilson and Miko Flohr (eds.), *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2016); Becker, 'Roman Women in the Urban Economy', 918–19; Gernot Piccottini, 'Ein römerzeitliches Handwerkerkollegium aus Virunum', *Tyche: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, viii (1993), 114–16, 119; Jinyu Liu, *Collegia centonariorum: The Guilds of Textile Dealers in the Roman West* (Leiden, 2009), 179.

¹⁵ See discussions in Cameron Hawkins, *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy* (Cambridge, 2016), 242–5; Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 75–8.

¹⁶ The evidence discussed largely dates from between the second and the fifth centuries.

women in the mid to late Roman economy. I conclude by examining the possible role of family structures as social institutions in framing women's productive contributions and the normative modern understanding of women's economic agency between the Roman and medieval periods.

II

The symbol of female domestic textile manufacture was prominent in the classical world, from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Penelope's faithfulness to her husband is demonstrated through her textile work, to frequent depictions on vases and funerary steles contrasted to military scenes of men, a theme also common in poetry.¹⁷ As time went on, these iconographic and rhetorical tropes became increasingly moralistic, and were embraced not only by the Roman state but also by early Christian theologians to create an enduring model of ideal womanhood.¹⁸ Textile production was firmly established in late Roman literary representations of femaleness, but as an activity that kept women in the house, reflecting legal doctrines which seemed to restrict many aspects of their lives. Renaissance scholars used these classical and early Christian texts to create an image of ancient women as essentialized ahistorical paragons of virtue, normalizing their exclusion from history,¹⁹ a construction that continues to influence modern scholarship of the Roman era. Ancient references to women working in select industries (for example, as midwives, wet nurses, cooks and innkeepers) were used to demonstrate that while women may have been allowed to work in certain capacities, it was in professions that kept them in the house, largely outside the 'public' professional

¹⁷ Violaine Sebillotte Cuchet, 'Women and the Economic History of the Ancient Greek World: Still a Challenge for Gender Studies', in Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel (eds.), *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin, 2016), 550. Under pressure to select a new husband, Penelope delays by promising she will choose once she has woven a burial shroud for her father-in-law. For three years she spends her days weaving and her nights unpicking her work.

¹⁸ Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford, 1994), 170. On the moralistic transformation of representations of women's textile work, see Dixon, 'Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut', 57–8, 68.

¹⁹ Mary Spongberg, *Writing Women's History since the Renaissance* (Basingstoke, 2002), ch. 1 and pp. 34–7.

spaces, and separate from the market.²⁰ Evidence of women's labour that would have taken them out of the house or seen them making commercial contributions was often dismissed or treated as exceptional, outside discussions of industrial organization.

This is not to say that the scholarship of the Roman period has remained untouched by the accelerating interest in feminist history, coinciding with the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Focus on ancient women's day-to-day experience and evidence of their occupational roles has begun to push back on the notion of wider female economic exclusion, particularly in textile manufacture, by expanding the corpus of historical sources considered. For example, to find evidence of Roman women at work, Susan Treggiari examined occupational titles on funerary commemorations of workers in elite households.²¹ She noted that women held a number of occupational titles related to textile manufacture, but that their servile status confined their production to the domestic context. Comparing the commemorations of household staff with those of free and freed persons, Lena Larsson Lovén found that occupational titles for non-servile women were rarer, but when they appeared in the textile industry they held a greater number of roles.²² Natalie Kampen's study of the textile industry evidenced by iconography from Ostia acknowledged freewomen working as professionals, but claimed that this was an occupation of last resort more commonly performed by slaves.²³ These studies were crucial in demonstrating the potential of female labour in the Roman world, but they stopped short of situating women in an industrial context.²⁴ This continued to leave room for women's

²⁰ Even acceptable occupations were subject to morally charged rhetoric: Molly Fulghum Heintz, 'Work: The Art and Craft of Earning a Living', in Ioli Kalavrezou (ed.), *Byzantine Women and their World* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 139.

²¹ Susan Treggiari, 'Jobs in the Household of Livia', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, xlivi (1975); Treggiari, 'Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy' (her theme is expanded in Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*); Becker, 'Roman Women in the Urban Economy'.

²² Lena Larsson Lovén, 'Female Work and Identity in Roman Textile Production and Trade: A Methodological Discussion', in Margarita Gleba and Judit Pásztókai-Szeőke (eds.), *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times: People, Places, Identities* (Oxford, 2013); Larsson Lovén, 'Women, Trade, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy'.

²³ Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (Berlin, 1981), 123.

²⁴ Treggiari and Larsson Lovén also focus almost exclusively on Rome, perhaps because elite urban slave owners were concentrated there: Treggiari, 'Jobs in the

productive activities to be overlooked as ‘domestic’ occupations, even as studies of other industries were demonstrating the economic importance of domestic activity and the variety of spaces utilized for commercial purposes.²⁵

In contrast, the end of the twentieth century brought about a number of important studies that challenged a pervasive historiography of absent female economic participation through the Middle Ages. Demonstrating the significant integration of women in the productive economy, they highlighted women readily apparent in the textual record, particularly in northern Europe, in positions that afforded them a degree of power over industry and in organized settings where they interacted with each other. Women were shown in a variety of sectors, including some traditionally associated with men (brewing, construction and ploughing to name a few), evidenced through contracts, tax registers and property records.²⁶ They were also extremely active in the textile industry, where they could make up a significant proportion of the labour force.²⁷

One of the first places where women’s textile work was identified was in the *gynaecea*, aristocratically owned textile

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Household of Livia'; Treggiari, 'Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy'; Larsson Lovén, 'Female Work and Identity in Roman Textile Production and Trade'. However, it was not only the wealthy who owned slaves: see Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425* (Cambridge, 2011), 42–60.

²⁵ For example, in his study of the Roman ceramic industry, Peacock showed that the principle dictating type of production was not its location but the wider economic context of the producer. Whereas ‘household production’ and ‘individual workshops’ produced out of necessity, ‘household industry’ responded to market orientation. D. P. S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman World: An Ethnoarchaeological Approach* (London, 1982), 8–14.

²⁶ Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300–1600* (Oxford, 1996); Shelley E. Roff, “‘Appropriate to her Sex?’ Women’s Participation on the Construction Site in Medieval and Early Modern Europe”, in Theresa Earenfight (ed.), *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2010); Miriam Müller, ‘Peasant Women, Agency and Status in Mid-Thirteenth- to Late Fourteenth-Century England: Some Reconsiderations’, in Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens (eds.), *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe* (Woodbridge, 2013), 101; Maria Paola Zanoboni, *Donne al lavoro nell'Italia e nell'Europa medievali (secoli XIII–XV)* (Milan, 2016), 91–101.

²⁷ A comprehensive overview is found in Sarah Randles, “‘When Adam Delved and Eve Span’: Gender and Textile Production in the Middle Ages”, in Merridee L. Bailey, Tania M. Colwell and Julie Hotchin (eds.), *Women and Work in Premodern Europe: Experiences, Relationships and Cultural Representation, c.1100–1800* (London, 2018).

factories on large estates, particularly associated with the Merovingians and Carolingians.²⁸ These factories referenced a late Roman model of state-owned textile workshops used from the fourth century to provision the army, supplementing textile quotas established by the tax known as the *vestis militaris*.²⁹ Although the Latin term *gynaeceum* was derived from the Greek *gynaikēion*, referring to women's spaces within the house, both men and women worked in the Roman workshops.³⁰ The medieval *gynaecea*, however, employed — and were managed by — women.³¹ David Herlihy argued that when these *gynaecea* disappeared along with the estates, it created space for men to take over textile production, particularly in urban areas.³² This was similar to assertions made for the ancient world, where increasing urbanization was associated with commercialization and male productive activities.³³ Changes to the presence of women in records of textile manufacture after the tenth century were often attributed to increased gendered labour division as the Middle Ages progressed,³⁴ again mirroring narratives of Roman textile production. One of the earliest studies of the Roman industry conducted by A. H. M. Jones defined weavers

²⁸ Constance H. Berman, 'Women's Work in Family, Village, and Town after 1000 CE: Contributions to Economic Growth?', *Journal of Women's History*, xix, 3 (2007), 17. Berman argues that these were minor contributors, but Garver asserts that they accounted for a large share of Carolingian textiles manufacture: Constance H. Berman, 'Gender at the Medieval Millennium', in Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013), 550; Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca, 2009), 228.

²⁹ *Codex Theodosianus*, 7.6.5; J. P. Wild, 'The *Gynaeceum* at *Venta* and its Context', *Latomus*, xxvi, 3 (1967), 652; Roger S. Bagnall, 'Governmental Roles in the Economy of Late Antiquity', in Elio Lo Cascio and Dominic Rathbone (eds.), *Production and Public Powers in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2000), 88.

³⁰ Both Lactantius and Eusebius document them as places of penal servitude for individuals of either sex: Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 21, PL 7.228; Eusebius, *De vita Constantini*, 2.34. By the fourth century, the term *gynaecea* had become analogous with *textrinum*: Wild, 'Gynaeceum at *Venta* and its Context', 649.

³¹ David Herlihy, *Opera muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 1990). This spanned class, as high-status women were responsible for supervising and directing workers: Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*, 227–8, and 262–5 for monasteries.

³² Herlihy, *Opera muliebria*, 185–91.

³³ Costin, 'Gender and Textile Production in Prehistory', 190. For example, A. H. M. Jones, 'The Cloth Industry under the Roman Empire', *Economic History Review*, xiii, 2 (1960), 184; Wesley Thompson, 'Weaving: A Man's Work', *Classical World*, lxxv, 4 (1982); Saller, 'Household and Gender', 111–12.

³⁴ Berman, 'Women's Work in Family, Village, and Town', 17–18.

as male; women performed the initial preparation (processing and spinning) at home casually in their ‘spare time’, contributing little to the economy, while men worked in professional workshops for market consumption;³⁵ this became a standard part of the discourse of Roman textile production.³⁶ However, detailed sector-specific studies of the later medieval period have shown this was not the case. Women were active in most, if not all, steps of textile production in many parts of Europe, dismantling the normative assumptions that had hitherto denied them this place. Women outnumbered men among Parisian silk workers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,³⁷ while in Italy women monopolized the spinning of both silk and gold, often forming their own workshops.³⁸ Their wide participation in the textile industry of the Low Countries has been credited for the drastic increase in urbanization in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the establishment of Beguine communities.³⁹ In Cologne, Paris and Rouen, in particular, women participated in guilds for spinners, weavers and seamstresses of varying fibres, typically under a male member’s licence, but also independently and in some cases forming their own professional associations.⁴⁰

³⁵ Jones, ‘Cloth Industry under the Roman Empire’, 183, 190.

³⁶ For example, Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women’s Work: The First 20,000 Years. Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York, 1994); Fulghum Heintz, ‘Work’, 140–1; Saller, ‘Household and Gender’, 11; John P. Wild, ‘Textile Production’, in John Peter Oleson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2008); Margarita Gleba, ‘Women and Textile Production in Pre-Roman Italy’, in Budin and Turfa (eds.), *Women in Antiquity*, 850. Ewa Wipszycka, *L’Industrie textile dans l’Égypte romaine* (Wrocław, 1965), also describes gendered specializations, but with a greater tolerance for what is considered professional activity.

³⁷ Sharon Farmer, *The Silk Industries of Medieval Paris: Artisanal Migration, Technological Innovation, and Gendered Experience* (Philadelphia, 2016), 106–9.

³⁸ Zanoboni, *Donne al lavoro nell’Italia e nell’Europa medievali*, 80–4. This became more prominent from the fifteenth century.

³⁹ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia, 2001), 6–11, 85–6. The Beguines were groups of Christian laywomen particularly active in the Low Countries who chose to emulate monastic communities without joining a particular order.

⁴⁰ Sheilagh Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (Princeton, 2019), 236; Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett, ‘Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years after Marian K. Dale’, *Signs*, xiv, 2 (1989); Edith Ennen, *The Medieval Woman*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1989), 180–5; Susan Broomhall, ‘Women, Work, and Power in the Female Guilds of Rouen’, in Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock (eds.), *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2008); Kathryn Reyerson, ‘Urban Economies’, in Bennett and Karras (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 303. The number of women participating

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In doing so, they created a space in which, as in the earlier *gynaecaea*, women were able to exert control over the productive process.

Working women were present in the East as well, yet their roles in specific industries have received less attention. Throughout the Islamic world, women's participation in most sectors increased between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, although there is little record of their positions or working conditions; more prevalent were reflections of society's negative attitudes towards these women.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the provision of legal protections for wage-working women in the textile industry demonstrates that there was official recognition of their presence, even if statutes were not always upheld.⁴² In the Byzantine empire, the ninth-century legal compilation *Basilika*, a revision of the *Corpus juris civilis* of Justinian (r. 527–65), completed under Leo VI (r. 886–912), imposed a fine on any male who 'corrupted' a woman working within the imperial silk factories, and in the tenth-century book of commercial regulations *To eparchikon biblion* (The Book of the Eparch) female spinners were listed among the silk producers.⁴³ As in

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in guilds was heavily weighted towards the textile sector: Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, 238, 246–7.

⁴¹ Delia Cortese and Simonetta Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (Edinburgh, 2006), 199–200; Karin Hofmeester, 'Jewish Ethics and Women's Work in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Arab-Islamic World', *International Review of Social History*, Ivi, 19 (2011), 154; Maya Shatzmiller, 'Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of Later Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities', *Arabica*, xxxv (1988), 50–1. It is also reflective of rhetorical misogyny found in many texts describing women's public activities. For example, Ibn 'Abdūn's treatise *Risāla fī l-qadā' wa-l-hisba*, probably written in Seville in the early twelfth century, noted that fabric embroiderers should be prohibited from the market because they were immoral women, and he frequently commented on the sexual impropriety of women in public spaces: Évariste Lévi-Provençal, *Séville musulmane au début du XII^e siècle: le traité d'Ibn 'Abdūn sur la vie urbaine et les corps de métiers* (Paris, 1947), no. 143, and nos. 13, 15, 55, 128, 155, 168.

⁴² Maya Shatzmiller, 'Women and Wage Labour in the Medieval Islamic West: Legal Issues in an Economic Context', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, xl (1997); Cortese and Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam*, 201.

⁴³ *Basilika*, 54.16.8–9; Julia Galliker, 'Terminology Associated with Silk in the Middle Byzantine Period (AD 843–1204)', in Salvatore Gaspa, Cécile Michel and Marie-Louise Nosch (eds.), *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD* (Lincoln, NE, 2017), 355; *To eparchikon biblion*, 7.2, in *The Book of the Eparch*, ed. Ivan Dujčev, trans. E. H. Freshfield and J. Nicole (Aldershot, 1970), 34.

western Europe, female textile workers may even have had their own guilds. Michael Psellos gave an eleventh-century account of the *panēgyris* of Agathe in Constantinople in which a group of women wool-workers celebrated the festival in a dedicated sanctuary, a common activity of a guild association.⁴⁴

Guilds, in particular, seem to have been instrumental in female agency within the medieval textile industry, even as they were also institutions of restriction. The European all-female guilds were particularly prevalent within luxury silk production, which, by virtue of its commercial importance, might have been expected to be an exclusively male sector, indicating a measure of economic power.⁴⁵ Yet the rise of guilds has traditionally been seen as detrimental to women labourers in both the medieval and the Roman periods.⁴⁶ In the Middle Ages, the level to which guilds controlled production (or trade) varied, and new studies have highlighted the opportunities that guilds afforded women, particularly in relation to family business.⁴⁷ Women were largely barred from owning workshops or serving as guild officials, but do appear in guild documents; widows could inherit privileges from their husbands (indicating active collaboration during the

⁴⁴ Psellos' description of the festival of Agathe is contained in the Codex Parisinus Graecus 1182, fo. 168, in *Mesaionike bibliothekē*, ed. K. N. Sathas, 7 vols. (Venice, 1872–94), v, 527–31; Angeliki E. Laiou, 'The Festival of "Agathe": Comments on the Life of Constantinopolitan Women', in Nia A. Stratos (ed.), *Byzantium: Tribute to Andreas N. Stratos*, i, *History — Art and Archeology* (Athens, 1986).

⁴⁵ For example, in Cologne the members of the all-female guilds were from wealthy merchant families with links to the political elite: Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, 241. In contrast, the women silk workers in London were forbidden from forming their own guild: Ruth Mazo Karras, '"This Skill in a Woman Is by No Means to Be Despised": Weaving and the Gender Division of Labor in the Middle Ages', in E. Jane Burns (ed.), *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings* (New York, 2004), 95 n. 18.

⁴⁶ Described and refuted for the Middle Ages in Clare Crowston, 'Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research', *International Review of Social History*, liii, S16 (2008), 22–3. However, a high degree of regional variability in women's treatment by medieval guilds, some quite restrictive, is detailed in Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, ch. 5. For the Roman period, see Tregiari, 'Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy', 78; Liu, *Collegia centonariorum*, 179–80; Philip F. Venticinque, *Honor among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 2016), 15–16.

⁴⁷ For geographical variations in guild influence, see Hugo Soly, 'The Political Economy of European Craft Guilds: Power Relations and Economic Strategies of Merchants and Master Artisans in the Medieval and Early Modern Textile Industries', *International Review of Social History*, liii, S16 (2008).

husband's lifetime), and they were frequently named as weavers.⁴⁸ As workshops were generally in homes, family labour was probably significant even where not acknowledged, with limited evidence of specific prohibitions against family activities.⁴⁹ Female labour could also be hired in, and there is evidence that workshops employed 'casual' workers not listed on local registers as well as full-time craftspeople, an opportunity for rural women to contribute seasonally as other obligations allowed.⁵⁰ Additionally, some young girls were apprenticed within the guild system, although it was more common for them to receive less formal instruction, demonstrating familial interest in training children regardless of sex.⁵¹ Combined with the evidence of all-female associations, it seems that guilds could afford women a means of authority and agency in medieval commercial textile production.

While there are still questions around gendered division of labour,⁵² much has already been done to redefine the role of women in medieval textile production. More men might have been employed in the skilled steps of manufacture, and they received more recognition, but women were also present and were able to exert a level of control within the industry, particularly through their guild participation. It is notable that many of the arguments previously used to confine women's

⁴⁸ Karras, 'This Skill in a Woman Is by No Means to Be Despised', 95; Jeremy Goldberg, 'Home Work: The Bourgeois Wife in Later Medieval England', in Bailey, Colwell and Hotchin (eds.), *Women and Work in Premodern Europe*; Ingvild Øye, 'When Did Weaving Become a Male Profession?', *Danish Journal of Archaeology*, v, 1–2 (2016), 45–7.

⁴⁹ Karras, 'This Skill in a Woman Is by No Means to Be Despised', 96. Early modern guilds were less tolerant of household participation: Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, 272–8.

⁵⁰ Dominique Cardon, *La Draperie au Moyen Âge: essor d'une grande industrie européenne* (Paris, 1999), 541. For rural women, see Berman, 'Women's Work in Family, Village, and Town', 19.

⁵¹ Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, 269–71. Men could also be excluded from guilds, which had specific entry criteria, and could be further limited by the influence of merchants: Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Thinking Carefully about Inclusiveness: Evidence from European Guilds', *Journal of Institutional Economics*, xvii, 2 (2021). See also Soly, 'Political Economy of European Craft Guilds'.

⁵² For example, the use of the treadle loom is discussed in Cardon, *La Draperie au Moyen Âge*, 545; Karras, 'This Skill in a Woman Is by No Means to Be Despised', 97–8; Jennifer Ball, 'The Missing Link: Filling the Gap in the Evolution of Medieval Domestic Looms', in Joseph D. Alchermes, Helen C. Evans and Thelma K. Thomas (eds.), *Avaθέματα Εορτικά: Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews* (Mainz, 2009), 40; Øye, 'When Did Weaving Become a Male Profession?'

production in the medieval period have also been used in the discourse of the Roman period. Yet, unlike for the Middle Ages, the momentum of the growing number of studies on Roman women has not led to comparable reassessments of the impact of female labour. Rather, assumptions about women's production within the domestic sphere, their absence in skilled occupations (and the position of those classed as unskilled), status and levels of training, and women's relationship with economic institutions have been used to place women outside the world of commercial production, even for something they were already expected to be able to produce. There are numerous reasons why these assumptions have continued, not the least of which is the difficulty in piecing together information about women's activities from the remains of a society not concerned with recording such details. But the lack of 'official' documentation of female labour (tax rolls, guild registers, legal dictates, etc.) and ambiguity regarding the context in which the remaining evidence was produced have resulted in a tendency to reconstruct ancient models as a reflection of aspects of contemporary society.⁵³ This has played an outsize role in reconstructions of the mid to late Roman textile industry. To reconcile the supposed femininity of the task with the assumption that commercial production was carried out by men, scholars devised a model of two types of production. The first was informal domestic manufacture, in which women produced the necessary textiles for members of their household.⁵⁴ The second was organized urban commercial manufacture, which sometimes included women performing unskilled labour at home, particularly spinning.⁵⁵ However, integrating a wider set of source types in the vein of Treggiari,

⁵³ Robin Osborne, 'Classical Presentism', *Past and Present*, no. 234 (Feb. 2017), 224–5.

⁵⁴ This also defined the rural textile industry: Lena Larsson Lovén, 'The Invisible Women of Roman Agrarian Work and Economy', in Rantala (ed.), *Gender, Memory, and Identity in the Roman World*, 94–6.

⁵⁵ Larsson Lovén, 'Female Work and Identity in Roman Textile Production and Trade', 123; Daniela Cottica, 'Spinning in the Roman World: From Everyday Craft to Metaphor of Destiny', in Carole Gillis and Marie-Louise B. Nosch (eds.), *Ancient Textiles: Production, Crafts and Society* (Oxford, 2007); Ruben Menten-Plesters, 'Weaving Tunics and Beyond: Rural–Urban Interactions in Roman Egypt', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, xciv (2017), 119. Groen-Vallinga designates this as part of the 'secondary labour market': Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, 'Desperate Housewives? The Adaptive Family Economy and Female Participation in the Roman Urban Labour Market', in Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf (eds.), *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West* (Leiden,

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Larsson Lovén and Kampen to piece together the industry structures as has been done for the Middle Ages shows a commercial landscape in which women undertook a variety of profit-making productive activities, both skilled and unskilled, within and alongside the institutions of a thriving textile industry in the Roman Mediterranean.⁵⁶

III

The evidence for the place of women within mid to late Roman textile production is not uniform across segments of the industry. For some parts, answers are found in state records. John Peter Wild, basing his argument on passages from Diocletian's *Edictum de pretiis rerum venalium* (Edict on Maximum Prices), proposed that within the Roman *gynaecaea* both men and women were responsible for weaving, although there may have been differences in the types of fabric they specialized in.⁵⁷ For private production, the picture is less clear. Much of the evidence comes from Egypt, where the level of document survival is high, making it possible to contextualize the evidence from elsewhere. The large collections of excavated papyri reveal intimate details of women's daily lives that are often ignored in more literary texts.⁵⁸ Many were written by women themselves, recording not

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2013), 299; Dixon, 'Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut', 68–70. Surplus production from large estates also probably made its way to the market.

⁵⁶ For textile production outside Egypt, see Andrew Wilson, 'Timgad and Textile Production', in David J. Mattingly and John Salmon (eds.), *Economies beyond Agriculture in the Classical World* (London, 2001); Orit Shamir, 'Textile Production in Eretz-Israel', *Michmanim*, xvi (2002); Isabella Benda-Weber, 'Textile Production Centres, Products and Merchants in the Roman Province of Asia', in Gleba and Pásztókai-Szeőke (eds.), *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times*; Miko Flohr, 'The Textile Economy of Pompeii', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, xxvi (2013).

⁵⁷ Wild, 'Gynaecum at Venta and its Context', 659. Diocletian's *Edictum* specifically refers to women weavers in the state-owned factories getting paid less than weavers who specialized in other types of cloth: *Edictum de pretiis rerum venalium*, 20.12, in Tenney Frank, *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, v (Baltimore, 1940). On the status of these women, see Marialuisa Navarra, 'Tessere per condanna: donne al lavori forzati', *Diritto e Processo* (2018).

⁵⁸ Bagnall has argued that whereas at one time Egypt may have been considered exceptional to the rest of the empire because of what was recorded in the papyri, when documentary texts from elsewhere in the empire are found, they demonstrate similar concerns: Roger S. Bagnall, 'Evidence and Models for the Economy of Roman Egypt', in J. G. Manning and Ian Morris (eds.), *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford, 2005), 188. On the use of papyri in

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only personal communications but also business transactions and disputes. While references to textiles in these documents are uncommon, when they do appear, they demonstrate women participating in a range of activities related to the commercialized textile industry. Orders for supplies and, more significantly, business transactions, combined with an advancing understanding of urban organization through the archaeology, highlight the specialized nature of each production step, regardless of where it took place or who performed it.

For decades, the vestiges of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European morality that required the segregation of men and women were superimposed onto an assumption of how ‘public’ and ‘private’ space had been used in the past.⁵⁹ Yet the inadequacy of models that categorize pre-industrial domestic labour as economically insignificant has already been conclusively established. Suzanne Dixon was one of the first to challenge the sharp demarcations between domestic and commercial spheres as too restrictive to describe women’s space.⁶⁰ Kate Cooper further questioned defined constructions of space by showing that the Roman conception of ‘private’ was based on neither location nor proximity, but instead on the idea of ‘proprietary interest’; therefore, all aspects of production, whether for the household or for the market, were within the private sphere regardless of where they took place.⁶¹ Jane Whittle disputed the concept of domestic production itself, arguing that vague, inconsistent and uncontextualized definitions of ‘domestic work’ have led to persistent undervaluing of women’s economic contributions throughout history.⁶²

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histories of the wider Mediterranean, see Todd M. Hickey, ‘Writing Histories from the Papyri’, in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford, 2011), 500–3. On women, see Ville Vuolanto, ‘Public Agency of Women in the Later Roman World’, in Rantala (ed.), *Gender, Memory, and Identity in the Roman World*, 58.

⁵⁹ Kate Cooper, ‘Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Roman *Domus*’, *Past and Present*, no. 197 (Nov. 2007), 19; Cooper, *Fall of the Roman Household*, 96–7.

⁶⁰ Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres and Real Life* (London, 2001), 124; Dixon, ‘Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut’, 58.

⁶¹ In the absence of clearly defined ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres, the line of demarcation was not in the *domus* but rather in the forum: Cooper, ‘Closely Watched Households’, 20–3.

⁶² Jane Whittle, ‘A Critique of Approaches to “Domestic Work”: Women, Work and the Pre-Industrial Economy’, *Past and Present*, no. 243 (May 2019).

The structure and organization of Roman workshops would have rendered such spatial distinctions as irrelevant anyway. Little is known of the practices of the small-scale workshops that largely dominated textile production prior to the seventh century, and identifying their physical remains has proven difficult. The ephemeral nature of manufacturing tools, such as looms, can make archaeological identification of a physical workshop difficult,⁶³ allowing papyri to contextualize the archaeology. For example, in Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab), in the Dakleh Oasis in Egypt's Western Desert, archaeologists uncovered placements for two vertical looms in a room of a fourth-century house as well as a letter stating that one of the male occupants was being sent to a monastery to learn linen weaving.⁶⁴ The house was clearly a domestic residence, but the presence of loom mounts and references to external training indicate that the weaving taking place in the house was probably professional. Similar artefacts were found in several other houses, but without corroborating documents.⁶⁵ In her ground-breaking study of the Roman textile industry in Egypt published in 1965, Ewa Wipszycka noted that although tools associated with textile production were found in great quantities in a variety of archaeological contexts, and groups of weavers appeared frequently in the papyri, the actual space of textile workshops was mentioned rather infrequently. She concluded that textile production was probably undertaken within the houses of the artisans themselves and often occupied the entire family, confirmed by finds of papyrus archives.⁶⁶ Leases of workshops show that they were often located within houses, and could be rented as individual rooms or in conjunction with the entire house, allowing groups of craftspeople, and probably families, to

⁶³ Brian C. McGing, 'Lease of a Linen-Weaving Workshop in Panopolis', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, lxxxii (1990), 118.

⁶⁴ Gillian E. Bowen, 'Textiles, Basketry and Leather Goods from Ismant el-Kharab', in Colin A. Hope and Gillian E. Bowen (eds.), *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994–1995 to 1998–1999 Field Seasons* (Oxford, 2002), 97; *PKell.* 1.12 (fourth century).

⁶⁵ Gillian E. Bowen, 'Texts and Textiles: A Study of the Textile Industry at Ancient Kellis', *The Artefact*, xxiv (2001), 24.

⁶⁶ Wipszycka, *L'Industrie textile dans l'Égypte romaine*, 56. For example, the archive of Tryphon from Oxyrhynchos documents a large extended family of weavers: Maria Valentina Biscottini, 'L'archivio di Tryphon, tessitore di Oxyrhynchos', *Aegyptus*, xlvi, 1–2 (1966); Monica Piccolo, 'Osservazioni ad alcuni papiri dell'archivio di Tryphon', *Aegyptus*, lxxiii, 1–2 (2003).

work together.⁶⁷ It may also have been common for extended families of artisans to live together, further blurring the lines between occupation and household.

Until the seventh century, multi-purpose block units, termed *tabernae*, lining the streets, with structural features suggesting they could be used for both manufacture and retail, were a common feature of many Mediterranean cities.⁶⁸ Many had open fronts, benches, counters and production units such as vats or ovens.⁶⁹ But these were not just stores and workshops. In Pompeii the majority of the *tabernae* identified were also attached to houses. The *tabernae* were street-facing and typically flanked the entrance to the atrium leading into the house; even in houses without *tabernae*, it was not uncommon to find workshop spaces.⁷⁰ Economic activity was therefore well integrated into the residential city rather than occupying its own quarter.⁷¹ Such organization appears to have been common throughout the Mediterranean. Excavations in Alexandria at Kom el-Dikka uncovered houses with rooms leading directly onto the street, probably serving as shops; the living quarters were located at the back, a feature more common among

⁶⁷ *SPP* 20.53 (AD 246) and *SB* 26.16580 (AD 362–363) from Herakleopolis, and *P.Dubl.* 31 (AD 355) from Panopolis, all lease parts of a house to set up a workshop. *P.Neph.* 48 (AD 323) from Phathor records the sale of a house with an established linen workshop.

⁶⁸ For terms for retail spaces, see Steven J. R. Ellis, *The Roman Retail Revolution: The Socio-Economic World of the Taberna* (Oxford, 2018), 30–6. In comparison, a feature of early Islamic cities was the concentration and separation of manufacturing spaces: Rebecca M. Foote, ‘Commerce, Industrial Expansion, and Orthogonal Planning: Mutually Compatible Terms in Settlements of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad Period’, *Meditarch*, xiii (2000); Alan G. Walmsley, ‘Production, Exchange and Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean: Old Structures, New Systems?’, in Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham (eds.), *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leiden, 2000), 274–85.

⁶⁹ Toon Putzeys and Luke Lavan, ‘Commercial Space in Late Antiquity’, in Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift and Toon Putzeys (eds.), *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2007), 83; Ellis, *Roman Retail Revolution*, 37–8.

⁷⁰ Miko Flohr, ‘Working and Living under One Roof: Workshops in Pompeian Atrium Houses’, in Anna Anguissola (ed.), *Privata luxuria: Towards an Archaeology of Intimacy. Pompeii and Beyond* (Munich, 2012), 9–11; Miko Flohr, ‘Reconsidering the Atrium House: Domestic *Fullonae* at Pompeii’, in Eric Poehler, Miko Flohr and Kevin Cole (eds.), *Pompeii: Art, Industry and Infrastructure* (Oxford, 2011), 89.

⁷¹ Simon P. Ellis, *Roman Housing* (London, 2000), 78–80; Ardle MacMahon, *The Taberna Structures of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2003), 70–7; Ellis, *Roman Retail Revolution*.

Mediterranean than among traditionally Egyptian houses.⁷² Similar structures have been identified throughout the Italian peninsula and North Africa.⁷³ Traditional Egyptian houses also shared domestic and production spaces; at El Kab (Eileithyia), between Luxor and Thebes, multiple families lived in houses together, along with their workshops.⁷⁴ In one house, an ostraca archive documents an extended family of pot-makers living together, with four of the rooms containing potters' basins dating to the first half of the second century AD.⁷⁵ A further archive found within the house suggests that a weaver moved in after the potters left, demonstrating spatial flexibility.⁷⁶ It is therefore no longer justifiable to dismiss women's production based solely on where it might have taken place. The issue of physical space is but one factor in situating women within the textile industry. As in the Middle Ages, surviving documents have been particularly crucial in dismantling narratives that preparatory production steps took place outside the commercial industry and that gendered distinctions between skilled and unskilled labour in Roman textile production confined women's professional participation.

IV

The papyri, however, are not without their limitations, particularly in regard to understanding the full *chaîne opératoire* of textile production. For instance, there are few references to spinning, the ideal 'virtuous' female activity, which, according to Jones, was a casual task undertaken as and when allowed; yet to support the Egyptian textile industry spinning would have to

⁷² Mieczysław Rodziewicz, *Les Habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie: à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka* (Warsaw, 1984), 331–2. This format became standard in the Byzantine period: Grzegorz Majcherek, 'Notes on Alexandrian Habitat: Roman and Byzantine Houses from Kom el-Dikka', *Topoi*, v, 1 (1995), 141–2.

⁷³ Ellis, *Roman Retail Revolution*, 98–101; Majcherek, 'Notes on Alexandrian Habitat', 140.

⁷⁴ Sabine R. Huebner, 'Egypt as Part of the Mediterranean? Domestic Space and Household Structures in Roman Egypt', in Sabine R. Huebner and Geoffrey Nathan (eds.), *Mediterranean Families in Antiquity: Households, Extended Families, and Domestic Space* (Chichester, 2017).

⁷⁵ O. Elkab 65–84, 106–7, 109; Stan Hendrickx, 'Habitations de potiers à Elkab à l'époque romaine', in Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors and Harco Willems (eds.), *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Part II* (Leuven, 1998), 1356.

⁷⁶ Huebner, 'Egypt as Part of the Mediterranean?', 165–6.

have occurred on a very large scale.⁷⁷ Where spinning is mentioned, it is transactional, dispelling the notion that it was not a commercial endeavour. The writer of *P.Oxy.* 31.1414 (AD 271–2) complained that a group of tradesmen and their wives had not provided enough spun yarn to satisfy their tax burden. The specific inclusion of the wives highlights their involvement.⁷⁸ *P.Oxy.* 31.2593 (second century AD) is a letter from a woman, Apollonia, to a male client named Philetos which states it was accompanied by finished spun yarns, some spun by her and some by another spinner. Another letter, from Arsinoites in the Fayyum, *P.Mert.* 3.114 (AD 175–99), from a male client named Achillas to a woman called Sarapias and her mother, Thermouthis, acknowledged that the women had finished a garment for his father and requested that they spin a weft yarn to match a warp he had purchased elsewhere, also suggesting that the same women could be involved in multiple steps in the production process.

In *P.Oxy.* 31.2593 and *P.Mert.* 3.114, the status of the women is not addressed. Despite this, Apollonia, Sarapias and Thermouthis have often been interpreted as either slaves or servants within the households of the men named, thereby making their production ‘domestic’.⁷⁹ But there is nothing in the texts themselves to indicate unfree or servile status, and such an assumption raises the question of literacy rates among slaves. Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen notes that it is unlikely that slaves would have been educated unless it was required for their role; children would have been expected to begin work, even if only simple tasks, as soon as possible.⁸⁰ While there is nothing to preclude the possibility that Apollonia and Sarapias were

⁷⁷ Jones, ‘Cloth Industry under the Roman Empire’; Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor, 2006), 78. For estimates of the spinning labour required to weave a single garment, see J. P. Wild, ‘The Textile Industries of Roman Britain’, *Britannia*, xxxiii (2002), 8–9. A detailed study of documents referring to spinning can be found in Sophie Gällnö, ‘(In)Visible Spinners in the Documentary Papyri from Roman Egypt’, in Gleba and Pásztókai-Szeőke (eds.), *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times*.

⁷⁸ Gällnö, ‘(In)visible Spinners in the Documentary Papyri from Roman Egypt’, 165.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 166–7.

⁸⁰ Hanne Sigismund-Nielsen, ‘Slave and Lower-Class Roman Children’, in Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2013), 290–1.

illiterate and the letters were written (*P.Oxy.* 31.2593) or read (*P.Mert.* 3.114) on their behalf, declarations of the former are not included in the text as they are elsewhere.⁸¹ Nor is there anything in the contexts of the social interactions described that indicates a servile status. The woman in *PHarr.* 2.235 (third to fourth century from the Oxyrhynchite nome) is certainly not a slave. In this letter, a man named Kopres asks his mother, Kopria, to spin wool finely and send it to him, which he will then presumably turn into woven garments to sell.⁸² This letter also suggests a network of extended kin, including women, involved in a family business, a common feature of the Roman and productive economy to which we shall return.

The final document depicts the stark reality of the economic deprivation that would require at least some women actively to seek out commercial opportunities. Dating to the fourth century but of unknown origin, *SB* 14.11881 was written by a woman named Allous lamenting her inability to afford the care for her late brother's orphaned children. She requests that Faustina send her two pounds of tow (shorter coarse flax fibres) for her to spin and sell. This letter is not only one of the few recorded instances of a woman declaring economic hardship, it is also a concrete example of a woman stating that she was spinning commercially for money.⁸³ In addition to these letters, in which women discuss spinning, there are several in which women request spun yarns be purchased or sent to them. Collectively these texts confirm that there was a commercial economy surrounding spinning in which women could sell their products or contract their unskilled labour.

More significantly, the papyri also show women commercially weaving, contrary to the narrative that it was exclusively men who wove for the market. In addition to discussing their

⁸¹ For example, *BGU* 1.153 (AD 152) or *BGU* 2.427 (AD 159), although there are numerous others.

⁸² Kerstin Droß-Krüpe, *Wolle, Weber, Wirtschaft: die Textilproduktion der römischen Kaiserzeit im Spiegel der papyrologischen Überlieferung* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 185; Sophie Gällmö, 'Le Tissage dans les lettres privées de l'Égypte byzantine: travail domestique ou activité lucrative?', in Henriette Harich-Schwarzbaier (ed.), *Weben und Gewebe in der Antike: Materialität, Repräsentation, Episteme, Metapoetik* (Oxford, 2016), 27.

⁸³ *P.Oxy.* 31.2599 (third–fourth century) is possibly a further example; Tauris instructs her brother Theodoros either to weave the 'fine tow' she gave him, or to bring back the equivalent price (meaning to sell it), but it is unclear if she spun the fibre herself: Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 400–1.

spinning, Achillas acknowledges in *P.Mert.* 3.114 that Sarapias and Thermouthis were in the business of weaving garments. The mother–daughter pair had just finished a garment for his father and were being sent an order for Achillas himself. A similar exchange may be found from the third to fourth century in *P.Giss. Univ.* 3.32, although it is unclear if the woman the letter is addressed to is also the manufacturer of the garments being ordered.⁸⁴ *SB* 18.13305, an apprentice contract from AD 271 in Karanis in the Fayyum, clearly names a freewoman, Aurelia Libouke, as a master weaver accepting apprentices. A second- to third-century arrest warrant, *BGU* 11.2083, addressed to the *archephodoi* and the *toparches* of the village of Soknopaio Nesos, also in the Fayyum, calls for the apprehension of Abous and Kaieus, both weavers, as well as Abous' wife and daughter, also identified as weavers. Their offence is not recorded, but the implication of a family of professional weavers is clear. In the fourth-century Kellis Account Book (KAB), a codex of accounts for an agricultural estate in Kellis, a woman named That is allocated an amount of cotton 'for weaving'.⁸⁵ As it was common at the time for customers to provide their own materials for weaving, it is possible that she was working in the estate's weaving workshop mentioned later in the codex, or independently nearby.⁸⁶

Women hired to weave in workshops may not have been uncommon. The verso of *SB* 10.10759, an account for a textile workshop written on the back of a damaged census return from the Arsinoite nome, dating to AD 35 or 36, documents the wages of a group of five women and four men for their weaving as well as an additional two women whose pay, if any, was not recorded. Nikos Litinas argues, I think correctly, that this documents a group of women and perhaps two apprentices working professionally in a workshop. He notes that the women were

⁸⁴ Gällnö, 'Le Tissage dans les lettres privées de l'Égypte byzantine', 27.

⁸⁵ *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book (PKell. IV GR. 96)*, ed. and trans. Roger S. Bagnall (Oxford, 1997), 115.

⁸⁶ *Kellis Agricultural Account Book*, ed. Bagnall, 153. For provision of materials, see Maryline G. Parca, 'The Textile Industry in Egypt in the Greek and Roman Periods', in Eunice Dauterman Maguire (ed.), *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt: The Rich Life and the Dance* (Urbana-Champaign, 1999), 20; Ines Bogensperger, 'How to Order a Textile in Ancient Times: The Step before Distribution and Trade', in Droß-Krüpe and Nosch (eds.), *Textiles, Trade and Theories*, 261–5.

shown to earn less than the men, perhaps reflecting an arrangement in which professional men were being assisted in their weaving by women. While this is a possibility, the organization of the papyrus, indicating the number of patterns each weaver worked, gives no indication that the women were assistants.⁸⁷ Like the men, the women were listed based on the number of patterns they specialized in, and wage discrimination based on gender, then as now, could have been due to a number of factors that devalued women's work, none of which related to productive output.⁸⁸ *P.Brem.* 63 (AD 116) from Hermopolis even goes so far as to complain that there were no women to hire in the market to work in a weaving shop.⁸⁹ And within a fourth-century archive of Greek and Coptic papyri documenting a tailoring business run by a woman, Tehat, and her kinsman Hatre in Kellis, *P.Kell.Copt.* 44 records two women named Heni and Kame hired to weave for three days for a wage.⁹⁰

There are further scattered references that may refer to women working in the commercial textile industry, including records of women paying the weaver's tax. Tapais, a weaver in Soknopaiou Nesos, pays it in AD 184 in *P.Coll. Youtie* 1.36. Taleis, also from Soknopaiou Nesos, pays the tax in AD 216 in *BGU* 2.617. And Euporous and Melanous, weavers somewhere in the Arsinoite nome, pay the tax in AD 243 and AD 265 in *O.Mich.* 1.11 and *PSI* 9.1055.V.b, respectively. Whether these were individual weavers or employees of a workshop, or even slaves, is not stated, but the issue of their status will be returned to. A fourth-century ostraca (*O.Douch* 1.51) found in a temple in Kysis in the Kharga Oasis lists weights of cotton next to the names of women, interpreted as amounts allocated to spinners

⁸⁷ Nikos Litinas, 'Accounts Concerning Work of Weavers', *Tyche: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, xxviii (2013), 123, 120.

⁸⁸ This was also true in the Middle Ages: Sandy Bardsley, 'Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England', *Past and Present*, no. 165 (Nov. 1999); John Hatcher, 'Debate: Women's Work Reconsidered: Gender and Wage Differentiation in Late Medieval England', and Sandy Bardsley, 'Reply', both in *Past and Present*, no. 173 (Nov. 2001).

⁸⁹ In this case the writer specifically refers to slave women: *C.Pap.Jud.* 2.442, in *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook*, ed. Jane Rowlandson (Cambridge, 1998), 121–2.

⁹⁰ Bowen, 'Texts and Textiles', 25; *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis*, i, ed. Iain Gardner, Anthony Alcock and Wolf-Peter Funk (Oxford, 1999), 256.

and weavers.⁹¹ Again, if these were individuals working on their own or in an organized setting is unknown.

Finally, many personal letters written by women include allusions to weaving and requests for materials in ambiguous contexts. For example, in *P.Oxy.* 56.3860 (AD 375–99), Taesis wrote to her husband that she was weaving him a cloak, seemingly referring to domestic production. However, the word used to describe Taesis' work (a form of *hyphainō*) was typically used to refer to professional weaving; terms used to describe the production of items within the home tended to be more vague.⁹² While the particular garment in question was clearly not intended for the market, it may indicate that Taesis was also a professional weaver, possibly within a family business.⁹³ Several papyri also refer to cutting and finishing fabrics, opening the possibility that women were working as seamstresses. In *P.Oxy.* 14.1679, from the third century and found in Oxyrhynchos, Apia writes to her mother that she should expect garments from a 'seamstress' (*hēpetrias*).⁹⁴ As more papyri in collections are transcribed, it is probable that more examples of female textile workers will be uncovered.

Such documents provide only a snapshot of female textile workers' professional lives, and in light of such scarcity and gaps in the record, it is impossible to make any claim about the scale of women's involvement in the industry. Preservation of papyri, even in the ideal climate conditions of Egypt, is inconsistent throughout geographical regions and time periods.⁹⁵ The papyri also tend to record only certain types of information, particularly official accounts concerning government administration and judicial matters. Personal, or unofficial, documents are

⁹¹ Hélène Cuvigny and Guy Wagner, *Les Ostraca grecs de Douch (O.Douch): fascicule 1 (1–57)* (Cairo, 1986), 32.

⁹² Gällnö, 'Le Tissage dans les lettres privées de l'Égypte byzantine', 23–4. Gällnö concluded that some letters could refer to professional production, and all production had economic implications. Other letters include *P.Brem.* 59 (AD 113–20), *SB* 5.7572 (early second century AD) and *BGU* 3.948 (fourth–fifth century AD), all in Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*.

⁹³ Earlier she refers to a payment for the *vestis*, probably the *vestis militaris*, which was a tax intended to provide clothing for the military: Bagnall and Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 378–80. Alternatively, this could also be a word choice used by the scribe Alexandros as he transcribed Taesis' speech.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 352–3.

⁹⁵ Roger S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London, 1995), 8–12.

dominated by letters, but with relatively few examples of private contracts; most business between private individuals would have been agreed verbally, requiring written documents only under certain circumstances, such as when property or civil law was concerned.⁹⁶ Standard contracts between artisans and clients would not necessarily leave a written record, thereby obscuring the visibility of professionals, regardless of gender. This would have been particularly true for women working in an organized setting where business and legal communication would be carried out in the name of the head of the workshop, typically a man.

But Egypt is not the only place where women textile workers are present in the written record. Sporadic references by writers across the Mediterranean attest to their (at least theoretical) presence throughout, and indicate that female participation was not considered unusual. The second-century geographer Pausanias wrote in his *Hellados periēgēsis* (Description of Greece) that in Patrai (Patras in western Greece) the female population of the town was nearly double the male population and that they earned their living weaving *byssos*, a type of fine linen.⁹⁷ In the sixth century, Cyril of Scythopolis' hagiography of St Sabas included the story of how the saint intervened to help a woman named Genarous who had ordered some curtains as a church offering from a group of female weavers working in rural Palestine.⁹⁸ And finally Chrysostom, who had argued that spinning and weaving were the traditional and proper activities for women to pursue within domestic confines, conceded, albeit disparagingly, that women manufactured textiles for commercial use. He criticized men living with women who took their thread and cloth to workshops to sell, saying that they opened themselves up to 'ridicule both at home and in the market'.⁹⁹ He further stated that if one purchased clothing, it was likely to be from a woman, although of their presence in the marketplace he

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–15; Gällnö, '(In)Visible Spinners in the Documentary Papyri from Roman Egypt', 164.

⁹⁷ Pausanias, *Hellados periēgēsis*, 7.21.14, in *Pausanias: Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 296–9.

⁹⁸ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Bios tou hosiou patros hēmōn Sabba*, 80 (CPG 7536).

⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, *Contra eos qui subintroductas habent virgines* (CPG 4311), in Jerome, *Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations*, trans. Elizabeth A. Clark, 2nd edn (New York, 1982), 193–4.

admonished that ‘it is in truth shameful’.¹⁰⁰ None of the authors give any indication that women producing for the market was exceptional, even if Chrysostom personally questioned their morality. Combined with the letters from Egypt, the writings of Pausanias (western Greece), Cyril (Palestine) and Chrysostom (Constantinople) show that women’s professional participation in the many steps of textile production spanned the eastern Mediterranean.

V

These texts show that neither location nor stage of manufacture was relevant to women’s commercial contribution in the textile industry, leaving the question of status. In the past, references to women in workshop settings or receiving occupational training, especially as weavers, have often been interpreted as descriptions of slaves, a position that has afforded them little credit in studies of production and manufacture.¹⁰¹ As slaves were property, their involvement in commercial activities was seen as ‘outside’ the traditional paradigm of gendered labour; slave manufacture is typically considered part of household, or ‘domestic’, production, and therefore separate from the market.¹⁰² Textile production is one of the few non-agricultural industries where we have substantial evidence of slave participation, and both male and female slaves appear in the Egyptian papyri performing a number of functions.¹⁰³ This has led to a tendency to assume slave status for women textile workers unless explicitly stated otherwise (Gillian Bowen’s interpretation of Heni and Kame as free in *P.Kell.Copt.* 44 is an exception).¹⁰⁴ In the earlier example of women owing the weaver’s tax, patronyms for the women were not included, interpreted as an indication that they were

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant* (CPG 4312), in *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends*, trans. Clark, 222.

¹⁰¹ *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, ed. Rowlandson, 269 n. 2.

¹⁰² This point was raised by Harper in his examination of the economics of slave labour in the textile industry, although attitudes towards slaves and their economic positions varied greatly: Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, 128–35.

¹⁰³ Treggiari has noted that in the Roman funerary inscriptions the majority of women with documented occupations were slaves, and male slaves had recorded occupations more frequently than other men: Treggiari, ‘Jobs in the Household of Livia’, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Bowen, ‘Texts and Textiles’, 25.

slaves. However, only one of the women, Taleis in *BGU* 2.617, was identified as a slave (*doule*) of Herieus, a weaver himself.¹⁰⁵ The status of Tapeis in *PColl. Youtie* 1.36, Euporous in *O.Mich.* 1.11 and Melanous in *PSI* 9.1055.V.b was undefined, but they were also not connected to any other individual. The name of the owner would be expected for a slave woman, considering their legal standing, perhaps more so than a patronym would be for a freewoman. For example, a study of early second-century papyri from Hermopolis documented 606 individual names, of which 180 appeared without any family identification.¹⁰⁶ As the documents naming the women were tax receipts rather than registers, full name identification may not have been necessary.¹⁰⁷

Where the papyri record young girls apprenticed to craftspeople, they have also been interpreted as slaves. The majority of surviving apprentice contracts, formulaic in both wording and construction, are for work in the textile industry.¹⁰⁸ They were generally entered into on behalf of the under-age child by an adult (often a male family member or guardian) and detail the length of the apprenticeship, provision of food and clothing, time off for festivals, and wages.¹⁰⁹ Apprentices began their official training around the age of 12 or 13 for variable

¹⁰⁵ To my knowledge, the circumstances in which slaves rather than their owners paid taxes have not been comprehensively addressed. Cassius Dio mentions that Caligula levied a tax on wage-earning slaves, but this was different from the taxes owed by craftsmen: Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 59.28.8.

¹⁰⁶ Yanne Broux, 'Graeco-Egyptian Naming Practices: A Network Perspective', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, lv (2015), 710–11.

¹⁰⁷ The amount of identifying genealogical information depended on the formality of the document; however, women's names overall tended to provide less information than men's: Deborah W. Hobson, 'Naming Practices in Roman Egypt', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, xxvi, 3 (1989), 160–6.

¹⁰⁸ Keith R. Bradley, 'Child Labour in the Roman World', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, xii, 2 (1985), 320–1; Richard Saller, 'Human Capital and Economic Growth', in Walter Scheidel (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy* (Cambridge, 2012), 77.

¹⁰⁹ Similar terms are found in medieval apprentice contracts, but with greater financial outlay given to the master artisan. There are also far fewer apprentice contracts for women. See Kathryn Reyerson, 'The Adolescent Apprentice/Worker in Medieval Montpellier', *Journal of Family History*, xvii, 4 (1992); Cécile Béghin, 'Donneuses d'ouvrages, apprenties et salariées aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles dans les sociétés urbaines languedociennes', *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, iii (1996); Richard Goddard, 'Female Apprenticeship in the West Midlands in the Later Middle Ages', *Midland History*, xxvii, 1 (2002). See also Zanoboni, *Donne al lavoro nell'Italia e nell'Europa medievale*, 29–38, particularly for later periods.

lengths of less than a year up to six years.¹¹⁰ Even children of master artisans could be apprenticed externally in the same craft; Pausiris, a first-century weaver from Oxyrhynchos, sent at least three of his sons to other weavers for their apprenticeships, and accepted the nephew of one of these weavers into his own workshop.¹¹¹ Keith Bradley examined thirty of these contracts, and identified three groups of children able to become apprentices: free-born boys, slave-boys and slave-girls. He noted:

Freeborn girls do not appear at all, and that is a detail of some significance, for it implies that daughters in artisanal families, like their counterparts in upper-class society at Rome, may not normally have been trained for work other than that of a traditional, domestic sort, but were instead prepared only for marriage and childbearing in the seclusive manner typical of women's life in antiquity as a whole.¹¹²

However, Bradley's examples are not the only apprentice contracts in which female children appear. SB 18.13305, the third-century agreement with a female master weaver, is also a contract for a young girl. Orsamus Pearl initially reconstructed this fragmentary document to read as a contract between a man, Aurelius Ision from Karanis, and the master weaver Aurelia Libouke from Arsinoë to train a slave-girl for the period of one year. Two things stand out in the text. First, Aurelia Libouke is certainly a freewoman, 'a weaver acting without guardian by right of her children'.¹¹³ She herself must have learnt the craft somewhere. Secondly, the highly fragmentary nature of the lines detailing the status of the girl leave their reconstruction as an ongoing problem. Peter van Minnen suggested that rather than being a contract for a slave, this is actually a contract for a free-born girl. He notes that the word indicating that the girl was a slave, *paidiskē*, was entirely constructed by Pearl.¹¹⁴ In the rest of the text the child is only referred to as 'the girl' or 'the child',

¹¹⁰ Bradley, 'Child Labour in the Roman World', 319–22.

¹¹¹ *PMich.* 3.170 (AD 49); *PWisc.* 1.4 (AD 53); *PMich.* 3.172 (AD 62); *PMich.* 3.171 (AD 58).

¹¹² Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York, 1991), 108. In contrast, Lewis made no such distinction between slave and free-born children based on gender: Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule* (Oxford, 1983), 135.

¹¹³ Orsamus Pearl, 'Apprentice Contract', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, xxii, 1–4 (1985), 257 and *passim*.

¹¹⁴ Peter van Minnen, 'Did Ancient Women Learn a Trade Outside the Home? A Note on SB xviii 13305', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, cxxiii (1998), 202. For example, *paidiskē* is used in *PBrem.* 63, *PMich.* 5.346a and *SPP* 22.40.

using the feminine form (*hē pais*) of the word used to describe free-born males in other apprentice contracts (*ho pais*). Van Minnen proposes a reconstruction in which the girl in question is the daughter either of Ision or of his brother, an example of a free-born girl apprenticed outside the household.¹¹⁵

While there has been ambivalence about van Minnen's interpretation, there is another example of a free-born girl apprenticed to a master weaver, although with some unusual financial terms.¹¹⁶ In *P.Oxy.* 67.4596 (AD 232 or 264), Aurelius Polydeukes apprenticed his daughter Aurelia Aphrodite (also referred to as *hē pais*) for four years to the weaver Aurelius Thonis in return for a loan of 400 drachmas, to be repaid without interest after the girl's period of instruction. She was also to be housed and clothed for the duration of the apprenticeship, a more typical set of conditions. There have been two interpretations of this agreement. The first, proposed by Marco Bergamasco, is that the financial transaction is secondary to the apprenticeship of the girl and therefore can be read as a guarantee to the father that the training will be carried out correctly.¹¹⁷ Others have suggested that the apprenticeship was intended to act as surety for a loan provided to Aurelius Polydeukes.¹¹⁸ Although the papyrus is missing a significant portion in the middle, there are no references to wages paid to Aurelia Aphrodite, so her labour could replace any interest owed on the loan. The master artisan had the most to lose in these contracts as their time-labour in training would be wasted if an apprentice was removed early, a situation indicated in the surviving portions of *PKell.* 19a and 19a Appendix discussed below.¹¹⁹ Regardless of interpretation, that a weaver would take

¹¹⁵ Van Minnen, 'Did Ancient Women Learn a Trade Outside the Home?', 202–3.

¹¹⁶ For example, when discussing van Minnen, Claire Holleran presents both interpretations but maintains that free-born girls would have been apprenticed only in extreme cases: Claire Holleran, 'Women and Retail in Roman Italy', in Hemelrijk and Woolf (eds.), *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, 315.

¹¹⁷ Marco Bergamasco, 'Tre note a tre διδασκαλικοῦ', *Studi di Egittologia e di Papirologia*, i (2004), 35–8, points to *P.Oxy.* 31.2586 (AD 264) as a comparison, but notes that the terms of provision for the apprentice are different.

¹¹⁸ Livia Migliardi Zingale, 'Riflessioni in tema di apprendistato femminile e arte della tessitura: in margine a *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4596', *Aegyptus*, lxxxvii (2007), 201–3; Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 119.

¹¹⁹ Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 120.

on this risk with a female apprentice points to an occupational space for women within the industry.¹²⁰

These contracts are the only instances of free-born girls apprenticed in weaving known to me, but they are not the only contracts for free-born girls learning a craft. In *P.Heid.* 4.326 (AD 98) the couple Ischyras and Didyme apprenticed their daughter Syairous to another couple, Isidorus and Apollonarion. What was being learnt was not stated, but this contract was referred to a year later in *P.Heid.* 4.327 when Ischyras sent his nephew to be apprenticed with Apollonarion, the woman.¹²¹ There is also a possible reference to a free-born female apprentice in one of the fragments of *P.Ross.Georg.* 2.18 FrQ (AD 140), a scroll of a notary's register of contracts. While there are large gaps in the text, use of terms relating to learning, instructing and providing clothing (*manthanō*, *didaskō* and *imatizō* respectively), which typically appear in the stipulation clauses of apprentice contracts, suggests that this might be the register of an apprentice contract.¹²² That the contract is being entered into by a father on behalf of his daughter (*thygater*), based on a familial relationship rather than on property rights, indicates that she is free-born, not a slave. Free-born children, including girls, also feature in other types of labour contract, further evidence that working outside the house was not unknown.¹²³

¹²⁰ Two later examples include *P.Aberd.* 59 (c. AD 475–525), possibly from Panopolis, where a girl is apprenticed to a tapestry weaver (*plumarrisa*), and *SB Kopt.* 1.45 from Jeme (sixth to eighth century), in which a girl is apprenticed to a female weaver, although the terms are less formal; T. G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 76–7. For the term *plumarrisa*, see John Peter Wild and Kerstin Drotz-Krüpe, 'Ars polymita, ars plumaria: The Weaving Terminology of *Taqueté* and Tapestry', in Gaspa, Michel and Nosch (eds.), *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe*.

¹²¹ Van Minnen, 'Did Ancient Women Learn a Trade Outside the Home?', 201–2; Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 125–6. Here the craft to be learnt is *sömpfiaiken*, which may have something to do with dancing: see Willy Clarysse and Pieter J. Sijpesteijn, 'A Letter from a Dancer of Boubastis', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung*, xli (1995), 57–9.

¹²² There is some dispute over whether this does refer to an apprentice: Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 126 n. 189.

¹²³ Ville Vuolanto, 'Children and Work: Family Strategies and Socialisation in the Roman and Late Antique Egypt', in Katariina Mustakallio and Jussi Hanska (eds.), *Agents and Objects: Children in Pre-Modern Europe* (Rome, 2015), 106–7; W. Graham Claytor, Nikos Litinas and Elizabeth Nabney, 'Labor Contracts from the Harthotes Archive', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, liii (2016).

Two additional documents from Kellis, *P.Kell.* 19a (c. AD 299) and *P.Kell.* 19a Appendix, may offer a compelling account of what happened when one of these contracts went wrong. *P.Kell.* 19a is a highly fragmentary document in which only about a third of the text remains; during the preparation for the initial publication of papyri from Kellis, a further set of fragments was discovered in the same house which excavators thought may at one time have been connected to *P.Kell.* 19a. These fragments were identified as *P.Kell.* 19a Appendix.¹²⁴ The text of 19a indicates that it is a petition from a man against a woman regarding a slave who appears to have been removed from her apprenticeship after only six months, and the petitioner includes a copy of the original contract, possibly 19a Appendix. The latter document, also highly fragmentary, appears to be an apprenticeship contract for a weaver.¹²⁵ Bergamasco's reconstruction of the text documents a complicated dispute in which a slave-girl was apprenticed to a master weaver for two years, who in turn sought legal recourse and compensation when she was taken back by her owner's son six months later. The petition highlights the financial contributions apprentices made to workshops, regardless of gender or status.¹²⁶

While these documents show female artisans active and being officially trained, their scarcity in the written record suggests that there may have been social norms that resulted in a greater variety of training practices for girls; as in the Middle Ages, it might have been more common for girls to be trained at home or informally. But some young women were clearly trained outside the house. In neither case should it be assumed that the location of training was indicative of the end-use of their wares; free-born boys may also have been trained at home.¹²⁷ Van Minnen

¹²⁴ Greek Papyri from Kellis: I, ed. K. A. Worp (Oxford, 1995), 56.

¹²⁵ The two fragments were initially published as references to different contracts: *ibid.*, 57. However, Bergamasco argued that both texts must be referring to the same apprentice owing to similarities of dates, length of contract and language used: Marco Bergamasco, 'Una petizione per violazione di un contratto di tirocinio: *P.Kell.* G.19.a', *Aegyptus*, lxxvii, 1–2 (1997).

¹²⁶ Freed slaves often continued their previous professions after manumission: Larsson Löven, 'Women, Trade, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy', 202.

¹²⁷ For example, in *POxy.* 2.310 (AD 56), Tryphon from Oxyrhynchos paid the weaver's tax for his son Apion, listed as an apprentice, but no contract for him exists; ten years later, in *POxy.* 2.275 (AD 66), Tryphon's younger son Thoonis was contracted as an apprentice to another weaver. Tryphon had partially lost his

suggests that the gender difference between rates of training within the house or externally could be due to age, as the age at which a child would typically become an apprentice was also the age at which most free-born girls would be married. He further suggests that protecting the virginity of young women entering marriageable age may have been an incentive for parents to keep them at home.¹²⁸ While this would not be a concern for males, regardless of status, sexual exploitation of a female slave could still have been a problem. The virginity of a slave would not have been a concern, but female slaves who became pregnant during an apprenticeship would be less productive, at a cost to both the owner and the master artisan, and maternal death rates remained high. Miriam Groen-Vallinga cites human capital theory to explain the lack of formal training of girls, reasoning that their future earnings would be lower because of the expectation that they would marry young and because of the limited job opportunities available to them.¹²⁹ Alternatively, girls may have been apprenticed less because their domestic education would already have given them a level of competency in textile production that boys would not have had; additional skills for these girls could have been gained on the job. There is, therefore, ample evidence that slavery was not the only condition that allowed women to work in professional production; at the same time, slave status and lack of formal training should not be assumed to have excluded women from the industry.

VI

The issues surrounding the setting of productive activities, the commercial and gendered divisions between skilled and unskilled labour, and the status and training of women in the textile industry still leave the question of women's agency. The female weavers in the documents do not appear as heads of workshops managing multiple (male) employees; they seem either to have acted independently, perhaps with a female apprentice or family member (as Aurelia Libouke and Sarapias did), or to have worked within workshops run by men. But the

(n. 127 cont.)

eyesight by this time. Biscottini, 'L'archivio di Tryphon, tessitore di Oxyrhynchos', 209; Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 124.

¹²⁸ Van Minnen, 'Did Ancient Women Learn a Trade Outside the Home?', 201.

¹²⁹ Groen-Vallinga, *Roman World of Work*, 126–7.

circumstances of many are ambiguous. Taesis (*P.Oxy.* 56.3860), That (KAB), Tapeis (*PColl.Youtie* 1.36), Euporous (*O.Mich.* 1.11) and Melanous (*PSI* 9.1055b) may have been independent weavers or workshop workers. The women in *SB* 10.10759 and *P.Kell.Copt.* 44 laboured in a workshop, but as waged employees. Kopria (*P.Harr.* 2.235) is the only woman discussed so far who was definitely working within a family structure. And the spinners Apollonia (*P.Oxy.* 31.2593) and Allous (*SB* 14.11881) seem to have been free agents. In all these circumstances, women would have been able to exert a level of economic autonomy, even if working in workshops run by others — they were not slaves and their labour was not compelled — but their relationship to larger economic institutions is unknown. As such, their position within the wider industry was inherently one of less outward agency and power than men, a fact also reinforced by the guild system.

Descriptions of these guilds, or business associations (*collegia*), and how they functioned are relatively rare, but official records, such as membership lists and charters, do survive, showing that familial connections were important to the organizational structure.¹³⁰ In past studies, the *collegia* were described more as social or religious clubs, and the occupational aspects of these associations have only recently become a point of interest.¹³¹ The documents reveal that although the social element remained crucial within associations, it became blended with occupational regulation and protection in the later Roman period; by the fourth century they were being treated as units by the authorities for the purpose of tax collection.¹³² Surviving guild constitutions detail ‘that groups met regularly, feasted together, marked major life events, celebrated religious rituals with colleagues, and relied on each other for financial assistance and support in their professional and personal lives’.¹³³ As institutions, guilds fortified social, familial and business ties between their members, cementing the integration of professional and domestic activities. Dues owed to the guild were not just for

¹³⁰ Venticinque, *Honor among Thieves*, 85–90.

¹³¹ See Koenraad Verboven, ‘Guilds and Organisation of Urban Populations during the Principate’, in Koenraad Verboven and Christian Laes (eds.), *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World* (Leiden, 2016).

¹³² Liu, *Collegia centonariorum*, 179.

¹³³ Venticinque, *Honour among Thieves*, 10.

business expenses, but were also used to finance burial rites for members, take care of the families of members who had died, and provide for members who had fallen on hard times.¹³⁴ Like the workspaces that housed many of them, the guilds therefore transcended, and blurred the distinction between, the private and the professional.

Surviving membership lists also demonstrate that close links of kinship defined many of these associations. Members of the same guild (and therefore profession) were often members of the same family.¹³⁵ The names on these lists are generally of free-born men, but there are some indications that women were allowed to participate in the guilds of which their male family were members. For example, *P.Oxy.* 12.1414 (AD 271–2) refers to women and children contributing to the production of items requisitioned from an association of linen weavers by the local administration of Oxyrhynchos, and a second-century inscription of the builders' *collegia* in Virunum in the province of Noricum lists thirty-five men and twenty-two women, most of them wives or sisters of male members.¹³⁶ It is therefore possible, even probable, that women were also participating in textile production under the auspices of guilds in which they had family members, or that families would hold guild membership as a unit. Women were also able to hold ceremonial titles in guilds and function as patrons, and despite lacking official status, may have been influential to the internal workings of the family workshop.¹³⁷ Private letters, *P.Brem.* 63 (AD 116) and *P.Giss.* 78 (c. AD 113–20), from the archive of the *strategos* Apollonios from Hermopolis, show that it was his mother, Eudaimonis, and wife, Aline, who managed the day-to-day affairs of the family weaving business.¹³⁸ In fourth-century Kellis, Tehat managed the tailoring business that hired the women Heni and Kame as

¹³⁴ Philip F. Venticinque, 'Family Affairs: Guild Regulations and Family Relationships in Roman Egypt', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 1 (2010), 274.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 275–9.

¹³⁶ For discussion of the linen weavers, see Venticinque, *Honour among Thieves*, 16. For the builders, see Piccottini, 'Ein römerzeitliches Handwerkerkollegium aus Virunum', 119.

¹³⁷ Liu, *Collegia centonariorum*, 178–80, 220–1.

¹³⁸ They may have also been weavers: *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, ed. Rowlandson, 118, 121–2.

weavers in partnership with a male relative (either a husband or a son).¹³⁹

The relationship between women and guilds in the Roman period was markedly different from what is found in the Middle Ages. Whereas medieval women could own their own workshops, officially participate in occupational guilds, and form their own associations, the same was not true for Roman women.¹⁴⁰ While women's roles in commercial production were not limited, the level of agency and control they could officially exert was. There were no legal restrictions on women joining guilds in the Roman period, but they were excluded from holding civic or public office. The offices of the *collegia* often mirrored individual political roles in the city, and in addition to exerting economic influence on industry, guilds were able to wield great political and social influence; they were also able to own property in their own names.¹⁴¹ All of these would have been ventures that women were largely legally barred from, and this could be one reason why any female participation in occupational guilds would have been informal or registered under the name of a male head of household. So while the structure and institution of the Roman family may have enabled another avenue for women to participate in the commercial economy, it also served to conceal that participation.

VII

There were many factors that dictated not only how women were allowed to participate in work, but also how they were represented as workers in the Roman and medieval worlds, all of which have contributed to the different historiographic interpretations of women's economic contributions in each period. Their presence in the documents, and what kinds of documents have been preserved, played a large role in this. While records of various official institutions of the medieval

¹³⁹ P.Kell.Copt. 44; *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis*, ed. Gardner, Alcock and Funk, 46.

¹⁴⁰ There is also some evidence of women-only *collegia*, but they were not occupational associations and their purpose is unclear: Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae*, 205–7.

¹⁴¹ Becker, 'Roman Women in the Urban Economy', 922, 924; Benda-Weber, 'Textile Production Centres, Products and Merchants in the Roman Province of Asia', 173.

period depict women both formally and informally employed in a variety of profit-making occupations, the evidence from the mid to late Roman period is more scattered, found in commemorations, private correspondence and fragmentary accounts, framed by a sometimes ambiguous archaeological landscape. When collectively examined, they show that normative assumptions about where commercial production took place, who performed skilled and unskilled work, worker status and training, and the impact of guilds on women's labour are in fact incorrect. But while the women working in the medieval textile industry had establishment recognition and in some cases were depicted wielding a level of control within the industry, the women engaged in Roman textile production notably lacked a comparable level of acknowledgement or authority. Their presence was therefore easy to dismiss. Part of this can be explained by societal constraints on the way in which gender was documented and the social status of individuals.¹⁴² Another aspect was the manifestation of a familial ideology that sought to erase the appearance of female autonomy, if not the reality of it. Roman women's contributions were controlled so as not to challenge the display of male dominance, but they were not subjugated out of participation.

The legally constrained role of women within Rome's patriarchal society began with the family. Women typically married older men, entering the established paternal family unit of her husband, and while men were expected to have legally reached adulthood before a betrothal or marriage took place, women were often still socially and legally considered children, requiring paternal consent before entering into a betrothal or marriage.¹⁴³ Where the father of a man had died, and in the absence of another older male relative, he was allowed to select a bride himself; a woman of any age, on the other hand, still required the consent of whomever had been declared her legal

¹⁴² Occupational identifiers were more typically used for slaves and freed persons: Dixon, *Reading Roman Women*, 115. Moralistic rhetoric on work was also a feature of male identity, which could obscure their commercial activities as well: Dixon, 'Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut', 57; Groen-Vallinga, 'Desperate Housewives?', 298.

¹⁴³ Pudsey, 'Death and the Family', 158; Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, 'Betrothal, Mid-Late Childhood and the Life Course', in Lena Larsson Lövén and Agneta Strömberg (eds.), *Ancient Marriage in Myth and Reality* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), 60.

guardian.¹⁴⁴ Women were denied any legal role in the formation of the family, reflecting the general lack of agency ascribed by scholars to other aspects of their lives.

Similarly, any property or wealth a woman brought to the family was not legally hers to manage. Roman women could independently own property, but they needed to be represented by a man (*tutela mulierum*) for all transactions relating to that property unless, as stipulated by the Augustan-era *ius liberorum*, she could represent herself ‘by virtue of having three children’.¹⁴⁵ This only applied to Roman citizens, but jurists noted similar restrictions in some provinces, particularly Roman Egypt.¹⁴⁶ A woman advocating for her own interests would have inverted the social hierarchy, and therefore had to be restricted. However, while women’s familial and ownership roles were strictly legislated to protect the social and economic authority of men within the family structure, social practice seems to have afforded them greater autonomy, and the trope of the wealthy nagging wife humiliating and subjugating her husband was common in Roman comedy.¹⁴⁷ Women could be emancipated from their father’s control, and literary texts suggest that fathers were far more deferential to their daughters’ wishes when it came to choosing a spouse.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, the *tutela mulierum* had only nominal control over a woman’s property and none over her private conduct, and a woman could request a new guardian if she did not agree with her current one; by the mid first century the *tutela mulierum* bore little legal weight.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Kuefler, ‘Marriage Revolution in Late Antiquity’, 348. This was also less of an impediment to males as they tended to marry later but die younger, meaning many adult men would not have had a living father: Antti Arjava, ‘Paternal Power in Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, lxxxviii (1998), 148.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook on Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood* (London, 2002), 37–8; *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, ed. Rowlandson, 190. This allowed Aurelia Libouke to enter into a contract on her own.

¹⁴⁶ Grubbs, *Women and Law in the Roman Empire*, 34–7.

¹⁴⁷ Vuolanto, ‘Public Agency of Women in the Later Roman World’; Saller, ‘Household and Gender’, 98 n. 59.

¹⁴⁸ Susan M. Treggiari, ‘Consent to Roman Marriage: Some Aspects of Law and Reality’, *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada*, xxvi, 1 (1982); Richard P. Saller, ‘The Social Dynamics of Consent to Marriage and Sexual Relations: The Evidence of Roman Comedy’, in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.), *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (Washington, DC, 1993); Lauren Caldwell, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity* (Cambridge, 2015), 118–20.

¹⁴⁹ Grubbs, *Women and Law in the Roman Empire*, 23–4, 26, 38.

Women's roles in production can be seen as following a similar pattern. They could participate in commercial production, but not in a way that threatened the ideology of male economic dominance. Women could be commercial workers, but could not accumulate power or authority in their own right. This may explain why, although the above evidence clearly shows women working in the textile industry, they were not shown controlling aspects of manufacture that would have placed them on the same footing as men; they could work independently, but not manage a workshop with hired employees without a male relative, and they could work in a workshop, but not attain master status in an occupational association. During the medieval period, women were allowed to participate in organized industrial structures, giving them greater economic autonomy and visibility. This shift may correlate to changes in family structures and a social ideology that permitted, and in some cases even encouraged, greater female economic independence (not to be confused with advancement or attainment, however).

By the later medieval period, the system of family formation seems to have changed. John Hajnal's proposal, published in 1965, of a 'European Marriage Pattern' which began in the Middle Ages, characterized by later marriage for both sexes and high proportions of adults who never married, as well as increased labour opportunities for women, has been the subject of debate regarding the levels of actual change in behaviour, regional variation throughout Europe, and the impact this had on economic growth.¹⁵⁰ Regardless of scale and overall economic impact, there is some evidence that changes to family formation were possibly tied to the economic environment. Key to this may have been a shift in the norms of familial property, particularly in north-western Europe, where much of the evidence for women working in medieval textile guilds

¹⁵⁰ J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns in Perspective', in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London, 1965), 107. For arguments and bibliographies, see Jan Luiten van Zanden, Sarah Carmichael and Tine De Moor, *Capital Women: The European Marriage Pattern, Female Empowerment and Economic Development in Western Europe, 1300–1800* (Oxford, 2019); Tracy K. Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie, 'Institutions, Demography, and Economic Growth', *Journal of Economic History*, lxxvi, 1 (2016).

originates, resulting in greater pressure on individuals to provide for themselves outside a larger familial network.¹⁵¹ For example, in England in the century before the Black Death, when marriage was tied to landownership, patterns of land inheritance, rising land rents and falling wages meant many poor individuals were unable to afford marriage.¹⁵² This pushed both men and women into the workforce; census records show that it was more common for women to leave their home villages in search of economic opportunities than men, with many earning enough to pay for their own marital endowments if they did marry.¹⁵³ While these changes might be attributed to a weakening of extended family networks, it corresponded to a strengthening of European social institutions ‘that could substitute for familial labor, insurance and welfare services that were unavailable to unmarried individuals and fragile nuclear families’, enabling further changes to social practice.¹⁵⁴ It is possible that changing patterns of family formation, from one where the family as an institutional unit was crucial to social and economic organization to one revolving around non-familial institutions, allowed women to participate with greater autonomy in productive activities.¹⁵⁵ Women who had long been economically active were therefore able to move more visibly into the commercial domain. This is but one possible reason for the differences in presentation of women workers in the texts from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Others probably include survival of sources, conventions in documentation, and the pervasive ideologies of these patriarchal societies. But the changing role of the family as an institutional agent (and geographical differences that emerged) as it related to shifts in the economic roles may be an interesting comparative approach for future research across historical contexts, further disentangling pre-modern women’s reality from their constructed reality in the contemporary social imagination.

¹⁵¹ Van Zanden, Carmichael and De Moor, *Capital Women*.

¹⁵² Judith M. Bennett, ‘Wretched Girls, Wretched Boys and the European Marriage Pattern in England (c.1250–1350)’, *Continuity and Change*, xxxiv, 3 (2019), 320–1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 327–33.

¹⁵⁴ Tracy Dennison and Sheilagh Ogilvie, ‘Does the European Marriage Pattern Explain Economic Growth?’, *Journal of Economic History*, lxxiv, 3 (2014), 687.

¹⁵⁵ Dennison and Ogilvie, ‘Institutions, Demography, and Economic Growth’, 208; van Zanden, Carmichael and De Moor, *Capital Women*, 231.

The tendency to assume that patriarchal societies resulted in the complete subjugation of pre-modern women's economic lives is no longer tenable, and looking to new ways to piece together source material may prove illuminating for other industries. Women were working in the professional textile industry in the mid to late Roman period, as they were in the Middle Ages. Differences in the historiographic discussions of women's labour between the two eras can be traced not only to the amount and kinds of documents preserved, but also to the presentation of women depending on source type and how changing patterns in family structures impacted patterns in women's labour; gender mattered, but not in the way traditionally assumed. The legal domination men had over women in Roman society, reflected in both legal and literary texts, restricted the levels of control they could appear to exert over their economic lives but did not deny women working roles or agency in productive industry, demonstrated by the papyri. This is most apparent in textile manufacture, owing to both the size of the industry and the relative ease with which women could obtain unofficial training in the home, something not available in other industries. Gendered labour division, therefore, was not based on occupation or end-use market, but was determined by the level of authority exerted. The fact that women were expected to have at least some skill in textile production as part of their domestic education is significant, and is perhaps one reason why women are more readily apparent in the textile industry than in other craft industries. However, the few references to women in other such industries suggest that a similar pattern would also be expected in other sectors. Women were allowed agency — working independently, in workshops run by men, or within the context of the family — but only to a point, one that did not threaten social and institutional hierarchies. As a consequence, their participation became obscured in the documents and in the archaeological record. By the medieval period, women's growing independence from the family as an institution, coupled with relaxation in the labour market, may have meant that, while still subject to restriction and inequality, women could claim more control over productive industries and their own economic interests. Thus, the economic

gender norms of both periods were not those of exclusion as traditionally written, but of mediated inclusion, especially when it came to production.

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s, feminist historiography has been hard at work challenging established narratives of women's roles in past societies, although with greater impact in some disciplines than others. Studies of production in the ancient world, in particular, continue to exclude women from discussions of professional labour. When women do appear in texts, modern scholarship has tended to treat them either as exceptional cases, or as part of an unskilled, casual workforce. Utilizing a variety of source materials, particularly Egyptian papyri, this article examines women's labour in the mid to late Roman textile industry, which in recent historiography has typically been relegated to the category of 'domestic' production. Drawing upon a comparative model for women's manufacturing roles in the Middle Ages to highlight important distinctions between women's roles and their documentation in manufacturing between time periods, it becomes evident that Roman women were crucial actors at all stages of commercial textile production, although they possessed limited levels of control within the industry. Establishing women within the better-evidenced Roman textile sector, despite legal and social norms that historically obscured them, opens the possibility of finding professional women in other industries in the ancient world, and continues the process of re-evaluating the economic history of women throughout the ages.