

Liberating the *Materfamilias* from her Stereotype
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Introduction: Reference to *Ecce Romani*:

I will primarily make reference to the *Ecce* series as I have used it since about 1984 or so and know it very well. Now in its fourth revision, it originally was developed by the Scottish Classics Group and first published in 1971 in England. Having read some of the SCG's additional readings, which did not find their way into *Ecce*, I venture to say that these readings would have extended students' understanding of Roman culture. For example, in one story, while the family is still at the *villa rustica*, Cornelius takes Aurelia to a play to celebrate her birthday. If that story had made it into *Ecce*, we would have a non-violent counter to the gladiator and racing chapters, learned that Romans did celebrate birthdays, and get a different—and I think improved--picture of Aurelia and her marriage than what we have.

Depiction of Aurelia in *Ecce*:

In the preface to his work on illustrious men, the late Republican Cornelius Nepos sums up very clearly the differences between those actions of elite Greek women and of elite Roman women that Greek and Roman society sanctioned. Having commented that societies differ in what activities are considered appropriate and/or honorable and what ones are not, Nepos mentions two activities that a Roman *matrona* could respectably engage in: attending banquets with her husband and being present at the semi-public spectacle of her husband's *salutatio*. Let us sight read those sentences 6-7 in Companion's Nepos selection in which he clarifies the main difference between elite Roman and elite Greek wives: the former could and did appear in public, the latter did not. In doing so, we hope that you will begin to see how rich a resource Companion can be even for one text:

<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/nepos.html>: demonstrate hyper-linked glosses

So, how is Aurelia depicted in *Ecce*? She is shown supervising the slaves at *the villa rustica* and in Rome, particularly before an important banquet. She goes shopping for dormice for that banquet. Correlating with Nepos' comments, she is present at that banquet (though we do not learn why it is so important or who these guests are—we know that such banquets were ways of making and maintaining important social and political contacts). *Ecce* presents her and Cornelius equally making the decision whom their daughter Cornelia will wed.

Using Companion to expand the *matrona's* activities

Let me hasten to say that to give a reasonably well-rounded picture of Roman life, even if the picture were restricted to the life of the elite, in *Ecce's* 54 chapters AND teach students most of Latin grammar would be exceedingly difficult for a textbook to do! And we may all differ as to what should be included to round out that picture of an elite *matrona*. In the rest of my presentation I will give examples how Companion can expand students' understanding and knowledge about some activities an elite *matrona* could engage in that are not touched upon in *Ecce* and not mentioned by Nepos. Let us begin with her private life.

Private Life

1. The *matrona* and the education of her sons

Ecce shows Aurelia's son Marcus supervised by the *paedagogus* Eucleides and attending a school for elite boys. As Marcus is now somewhere between 14 and 17 years of age, Aurelia would not have been much involved in his education at this point in his life as she had been when he was younger.

Mothers, however, were involved in their sons' education if they were widowed, or if the boy's father was absent, off governing a province, perhaps. In his biography of Agricola, Tacitus points out that after her husband was killed by Caligula, Julia Procilla took over Agricola's education throughout his *pueritia* and *adolescentia* in the years 40-54 CE, saw to it that he was educated in every art, and made the decision that during his adolescence, he should study at Massilia (modern Marseilles), which was known for its Greek education and good morals. Even so, she was not unengaged in the details of her son's education, for Tacitus (*Agricola* 4) adds that Julia Procilla, in her prudence, tempered Agricola's zeal for philosophy, which was greater than a Roman and a future senator should have.

Corellia Hispulla (Learning) <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/Pliny3.3.html>

Our corresponding *Companion* example is Corellia Hispulla, to whom Pliny the Younger wrote a letter sometime between 101-103 CE. In this letter Pliny presents Corellia Hispulla as making alone decisions about the rhetorical education of her son, Lucius Neratius Corellius Pansa, who attained the consulship in 122. When Corellia Hispulla consulted Pliny about her son's rhetorical education, Pliny recommended that she must consider how to ensure continuing her son's moral education, which she had supervised while he was at home. Pliny specifically advised that she entrust her son to Julius Genitor, a professor of Greek and Latin rhetoric who was faultless in his morals, even, as Pliny said, somewhat stern just as these licentious times required.

However, in seeking Pliny's advice and contacts, Corellia Hispulla has cannily accomplished an additional thing to further her son's future career. To be sure young Pansa needed to acquire immense skill in public speaking, but in seeking and accepting Pliny's advice, Corellia Hispulla "showed her political astuteness, for with this exchange she forged a relationship for her son with a noble statesman and imperial favorite." (quote from Companion, Corellia webpage)

2. The education of the *matrona* herself

Equally relevant to the *Ecce* textbook and our topic today, however, is the question how did Cornelia learn to read and write? For she writes a letter to her friend Flavia and certainly looks forward to receiving Flavia's letters. Curiously, no student has raised this question in my classes, even though *Ecce* pays attention to boys' schooling in several chapters and the tutor Eucleides is the boys' main companion. How elite girls were educated is addressed in considerable detail by Emily Hemelrijk in her insightful book, *Matrona docta*.

In the brief time we have I hope it will suffice to say that there were two aspects to Roman education: one that we would call liberal arts education, the other moral education. Let us begin with liberal arts education. Did some, at least, elite girls have more education than just reading and writing?

Clearly yes, for Quintilian (textbook p. 33: Inst. 1.1.6) states that he wishes that parents may have as much learning as possible, and pointedly adds "I am not speaking only about fathers" and names Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, as having contributed much to her sons' eloquence. While it is possible that Aurelia, in *Ecce*, imparted some liberal arts education to Cornelia in addition to teaching her basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, Cornelia may also have shared lessons that Eucleides gave the boys. Hemelrijk has gathered evidence that elite fathers did have *paedagogi* for their daughters (Hemelrijk pp. 21-22) and cites Plutarch's anecdote about Pompeia Magna (born 80/75 BCE - before 35 BCE), Pompey's daughter, that shows she, at least, was educated in Greek authors as well as Latin authors—she was reading Homer by age 8 or 9. Hemelrijk also notes that in the very late Republic, Atticus' daughter Caecilia Attica had a freedman *paedagogus*, the famous *grammaticus* Q. Caecilius Epirota (freedman of Atticus), who taught her reading and analysis of poetry after her marriage to Agrippa (which occurred sometime between 37-20 BCE). Suetonius (*Gram.* 18.2) states that Epirota was innovative in that he taught both Vergil and Vergil's poet contemporaries. Given Atticus' love of things Greek, it is not unreasonable to suppose that his daughter Caecilia might have been instructed in Greek by Epirota, if she had not learned it before marriage. As another example is a letter of Pliny the Younger written in 105

or 106 CE, in which Pliny states that *paedagogi* gave elementary education to thirteen year-old Minicia Marcella and her sister, daughters of his friend Minicius Fundanus, and, moreover, that *praeceptores* gave them more advanced education (textbook Pliny, Ep. 5.16.3 pp. 12-15). Another example of what some women could attain is Oscia Modesta Cornelia Patruina Publina, of senatorial rank and *patrona* of her home town Avioccala in Africa Proconsularis in the early third century CE. Before dying at an advanced age, she wrote her epitaph in elegiac distichs in an archaizing pseudo-Homeric Greek for her marble funerary altar, now in Rome (IGUR 1311= IGR 1 336 =IF 14,1960).

Companion has several other examples. The unnamed wife of Pompeius Saturninus, friend of Pliny the Younger, had some repute for her letter writing for Pliny reports ca. 100 CE that Saturninus proudly said her letters were well composed. I do not see how she could have composed them so well had she not practiced her writing—for as we all know, good writing comes from practice.

<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/Plinyuxor.html> Pliny states in one of his letters of 104-108 CE that his own wife, Calpurnia, was interested in poetry, especially his poetry (of course!) (textbook pp. 24-27).

Classroom Activity: the education of the *matrona*

http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/leen_laelia_lessonplan.pdf

Cicero states that the late 2nd century BCE senatorial woman, Laelia, had knowledge of the early dramatic poets. http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/cicero_laelia.html

Anne Leen: Lesson Plan for Cicero, De Oratore 3.12.45

Laelia's Latin Pronunciation: <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/syllabi.html>

(Read the introduction to Anne's lesson plan and emphasize the importance of correct pronunciation. In addition note that Laelia was very familiar with two authors, Plautus and Naevius:

Plautus, Titus Maccius (c. 254-184 BCE.)-the earliest Roman playwright whose comedies survive.

Quintilian 10.1.99 tells us that the earliest Roman philologist, Aelius Stilo (144-70 BCE), considered

Plautus's Latin so superb that, he claimed, if the Muses spoke Latin they would speak in the language

of Plautus (*Licet Varro Musas, Aelii Stilonis sententia, Plautino dicat sermone locuturas fuisse, si Latine loqui vellent.*)

Naevius, Gnaeus (c. 270-c. 199 BCE)- an early Roman poet and author of tragedies, comedies, and an

epic in Saturnian verse. He is regarded as one of the founders of Roman satire.

Upon marriage, however, some new wives had to cease their study. The Younger Seneca notes in his *Consolation to his mother Helvia*, written during his exile in 40-45 CE, that though Helvia was educated, it was not to the degree that equaled her intellect and curiosity, for his old-fashioned father did not permit his wife to pursue her philosophical studies. As a result, rather than having been educated in philosophy, she was only “introduced” to it—whatever he may have meant by “only introduced”. (*Consolation to Helvia* 17.2-5: *Vtinam quidem uirorum optimus, pater meus, minus maiorum consuetudini deditus uoluisset te praeceptis sapientiae erudiri potius quam inbui non parandum tibi nunc esset auxilium contra fortunam sed proferendum.*) (Seneca was born 4 BCE and was their second son, so their marriage dates to the last years of the first century CE.)

Roman elites also put great value on a second aspect of education, moral education, which was basic for using properly one’s liberal arts education. Here mothers played a very important role, one that prepares their sons for future political activity; here, the private life of the mother is lived out publicly by her son. In his *Dialogue on the Orators* (date of composition unknown; published about 104 CE), Tacitus has Vipstanus Messala blaming the decline of oratory in his day on those Roman mothers that had neglected their primary role as their children’s first teacher of character and civic virtue. Messala specifically mentions Cornelia Gracchorum, but also Aurelia, Caesar’s mother (Caesar was reputed to be the next best orator after Cicero) and Atia, mother of Augustus. (textbook pp. 66-67). Moral education was important equally for young girls. In his consolation to his mother Helvia, Seneca advises her to take some comfort during his exile in teaching her grand-daughter Novatilla. Novatilla must have been about 12 or a little older, for Seneca says that Novatilla will soon bear Helvia great-grandchildren, and twelve was the minimum legal age for girls to marry. He advises his mother to shape Novatilla’s character by becoming accustomed to Helvia’s conversation and by taking Helvia as a model of deportment. He concluded by remarking that if Helvia gives her nothing else, she will do Novatilla a great service, thus implying that Helvia could teach Novatilla other things as well, perhaps such liberal arts education as Helvia had acquired before her marriage (*Seneca Consolation to Helvia* 18.5-9).

Incidentally, we have the letters attributed to Cornelia Gracchorum in our textbook, as given by Nepos (*de uiris illustribus*. Textbook pp. 76-77)/

Classroom Activity: the mother as moral educator

http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/livy_lessonplan.pdf

Anne Leen's lesson plan for Livy Ab Urbe Condita 2.40: Veturia 5th century BCE

Theme: mother as moral educator of her son; private life impinging upon the public

Background to passage: Coriolanus has led the Volscian army to besiege Rome. The matronae of the city go to Veturia, his mother, and Volumnia, his wife, and beseech them to lead the matronae to Coriolanus and plead with him to spare the city. The two women agree and when Veturia meets him, she upbraids him and shame him into ending the siege with a series of deliberative questions and other rhetorical figures of speech not out of line with what would have been heard in a senate meeting. (Granted Livy makes up the speech, but in doing so he seems aware that such rhetoric would not have been unheard of for a woman.)

Significant to our theme is Livy's comment that he is uncertain whether the matronae make their visit to Veturia as a *publicum consilium* or out of fear for their fate. Note the military language of Pliny's phrase *agmen mulierum*: the *mulieres* become *milites* essentially.

The victorious quasi-military act of the women is rewarded or marked for posterity in the same way as a male military act would have been: a temple is erected to commemorate the act, to honor the actors, and to repay the *beneficium* the women have bestowed on Rome: a temple is erected, the temple of Fortuna muliebris. We know that two statues were erected in it are erected, one by the state, one by the women: were these statues honoring Veturia and Volumnia?

Dr. Leen provides questions for comprehension. I advise students to read these before attempting the passage: the questions give them some idea of what goes on in the passage. She provides students with an insight into how Livy structures his narratives and guides us to his desired interpretation of events: through dichotomies (opposites) and provides students with a number of such dichotomies. (You can ask your class if there are more in this passage that they can discern.) Lastly, she gives students an opportunity to analyze a section of this narrative through dichotomies.

4. Running the *domus* is more than supervising slaves and checking on their floor sweeping!

In addition to managing household slaves, a *matrona* could involve herself in the running of the *domus* and the estate on a larger scale. She might supervise her husband's estate and her own estate, as in the case of Terentia, Cicero's wife, who oversaw their properties when Cicero was in exile and in Pompey's camp. A second

example is Seneca's mother Helvia, who was in charge of the inheritance of her sons after the death of her husband, Seneca the Elder. Seneca in his consolation to her (Consolation of Helvia 14.3) states "you, though a daughter in your father's household, actually made presents to your wealthy sons; you managed our inheritances with such care that they might have been your own, with such scrupulousness that they might have been a stranger's."

(http://www.stoics.com/seneca_essays_book_2.html 2/27/2012)

http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/Ausonius_sisters.html

Our Companion example is Namia Pudentilla who, we learn from Ausonius' *Parentalia* 19, ran their estate because her husband preferred to occupy himself with other things. Hers is an unusual situation, for while it was customary for a wife to supervise the estates when her husband was away on business or political affairs and appointments, Namia Pudentilla's husband preferred a life of *otium* to attending to their estate.

Family rites http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/women_rituals.html

Like many textbooks, family religion is neglected—I would say almost completely eliminated. In *Ecce*, the only religious rites shown are Marcus' dedication of his *toga praetexta* and *bullae* to the Lares, and the mourning of the Cornelia during Titus' funeral—where she and Cornelia are involved only in donning mourning and following the body to the pyre and tomb. However, in reality, certain family rites were performed daily, others on important days of the year. The Companion page *Officia Sacra Feminea* gives many examples of how the matron and/or her daughter were involved in family rites. (Some religious activities of women are omitted from it, notably vows and offerings to deities on behalf of family members' illnesses, travel, etc.) We will have time to look at only a couple of these selections.

1. Worshipping the Lares (Religion): Scroll down to Aulularia, Horace, Columella, Varro
2. Compitalia (Religion) Cicero, Festus
3. Parentalia (Religion): length of mourning Julius Paulus; Karistia, Ovid

5. State religious positions held by *matronae*

<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/sacerdotes.html>

Elite women could hold one or more religious positions as priestesses, either of a foreign cult (though these priestesses were usually not senatorial wives), or as *flaminicae* of the imperial cult or as *sacerdotes publicae*. Time permits us to look only at the *sacerdotes publicae*. If Aurelia had ever held the position of *sacerdos publica*, it would most likely have been in one of the municipalities of Italy, most probably one that was Cornelius' family's "home town", but, possibly, one connected

with her father's family line. We know most about *sacerdotes publicae* from the first century CE; excavations at Pompeii have revealed a number of examples from that century.

The adjective *publica* "belonging to the state" underscores the fact that these religious positions were essentially civic offices to which a person was elected by the town council (*ordo*). Which deities had a *sacerdos publica* varied from city to city. Venus and Ceres are the most commonly attested (e.g. Pompeii, Atina, Formiae), but other deities, for example, include Liber (Aquino) and Minerva (Bari). A woman could be the public priestess of two divinities at once (Alleia Mai f. at Pompeii, public priestess of Venus and Ceres).

Election to this public office brought a woman into the public eye. It both asserted her high status in her community and increased her status. A *sacerdos publica* of a town, however, need not belong to an old, prominent family of her community: the grandparents of Alleia Mai f., public priestess of Venus and Ceres (Pompeii), were Alleius Nobilis, who was of lowly birth (despite his cognomen), and Pomponia Decarchis, a *liberta*. For some women, holding the office of *sacerdos publica* may have highlighted her status as an independent individual. While there is evidence that the priestess of Ceres needed to be unmarried during her term of office (Schultz pp.78-79), Ward points out that the inscriptions of the nine known public priestesses of Pompeii do not name any husband. While it is not impossible that all of these were widowed or never married, the lack of a husband's name may reflect that these women wanted to present themselves as independent in their publicly elected office. (Ward, pp. 322)

Sacrifice was the main form of worship of temple cult. Carried out in public before the temple, following the procession of sacrificial animal (*hostia; victima*) bedecked in *vittae*, and accompanied with the utterance of prayers, the pouring of libations, the burning of incense, and a flute playing to drown out ill omens, sacrifice was a spectacle. Equally impressive was the more common offering of sacrifices in the form of libations of unmixed wine, honey, oil or milk, or fruits and cakes (possibly in the form of a sacrificial animal)---all accompanied by the burning of incense, prayers, and flute playing. Through such sacrifices the priestess communicated with the deity on behalf of the townspeople. Any sacrificial food left over, the attending crowd consumed in a meal that created and maintained communal bonds.

Companion examples include the well-known Pompeian *sacerdos publica* Mamia (sometimes written *Mammia*), a member of a very old and prominent Pompeian family. At some point during the late Augustan period (before 14 CE) she was

elected *sacerdos publica*, perhaps as a priestess of [Venus Pompeiana](#), the principal tutelary divinity of Pompeii (see [Temple of Venus](#)). In a gesture typical of the upper class men, but impressive for a woman, Mamia assumed the considerable expense of building a temple on the east side of the [Forum of Pompeii](#). The historic identification of her temple as the [Temple of Vespasian](#) in the [Sanctuary of the Genius of Augustus](#), located between the [Sacellum Larum Publicorum](#) and the [Aedificium Eumachiae](#), has been debated. Similarly, a segment of Mamia's marble inscription, incised in Augustan style capitals and assumed to have been set on the temple's [architrave](#), has been questioned. The stone was found broken in several places, notably where the temple deity was named, leaving only the letters *GENI*, which have traditionally been resolved *GENI[*o Augusti*]* (see [CIL 10.816](#)). Recently [scholars](#), arguing persuasively from wider archaeological, epigraphic and cult evidence, have proposed the alternate resolution, which we use in Companion.

A second, well-known, Companion example, also from Pompeii, is Eumachia <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/eumachia.html>, also from the Augustan period. Despite her sex and humble ancestry, Eumachia became one of the most prominent citizens of the city of Pompeii. Having inherited a considerable fortune from her father, Lucius Eumachius, who became wealthy through his brick manufactory, Eumachia married into one of Pompeii's oldest families, the Numistrii Frontones. Her money and new social position enabled her to assume the important public office of priestess and become a patron of the town's corporation of fullers, the dyers and clothing cleaners. One of Eumachia's benefactions was an impressive [building](#) on [one side](#) of the [Forum](#) in Pompeii, which she and Marcus Numistrius Fronto, her son, dedicated to *Concordia Augusta* and *Pietas*. If this building was erected when Numistrius was running for the office of *duumvir* for the year 2/3 CE, this benefaction was perhaps intended to help gain public support for his election. The function of the building is unknown; it may have served as a warehouse for the wool and fulling trade or as an auction house. Its [doorway](#) is particularly elegant, faced with fine white marble carved in [acanthus leaves](#) reminiscent of the [floral panels](#) of the *Ara Pacis Augustae* in Rome. The excellence of the sculpture and the building's resonance with themes of Augustan ideology suggest that the panels were carved in Rome. Zanker (p. 97, see [Bibliography](#)) suggests Eumachia may have been emulating the example of the empress Livia and her son Tiberius, who built the *Porticus Liviae* in Rome and dedicated it to *Concordia Augusta* in 7 BCE.

The *beneficia* that Eumachia and Mamia bestowed upon Pompeii are paralleled by those of other priestesses, and Barbara McManus has developed a wonderfully illustrated and hyperlinked page on VRoma about three female civic donors:

- Plancia Magna (between 1st and 2d century CE) and Aurelia Paulina of Perge (Severan period), both priestesses of the patron city goddess Artemis Pergaia
- Appia Annia Regilla Atilia Caucidia Tertulla (125-160 CE), unfortunate wife of Herodes Atticus, and priestess of Demeter at Olympia and of Tyche at Athens.

http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html

Concluding remarks

As I said in the beginning, it would be hard indeed to devise a graded reading course such as *Ecce* that would provide students with Latin texts at different levels, logical presentation of grammar, AND a comprehensive picture of Roman life, including the life of the elite women. It would be an interesting project, moreover, to imagine a Latin reader ancillary to *Ecce* that accompanies the various chapters depicting the lives of the Cornelia family—though writing the Latin stories would not be easy! We would learn what Flavia is reading in chapter 1 (Plautus? Naevius?) and see Aurelia acting as a *sacerdos publica* in some one of the bayside towns, meeting with her steward to go over the accounts of *her* estates, helping Cornelia learn how to conduct the worship of the Lares in their *domus*, and discussing poetry with the female guests while Cornelius and his friends have their *commissatio*, rather than see her shopping for dormice in preparation for that banquet, something that a woman of her class would not have done.

None of the elementary textbooks have a full picture of the Roman *matrona*, but using WRW and Companion, you can offer real *matronae* to your students.