

## HORIZONTAL WOMEN: POSTURE AND SEX IN THE ROMAN *CONVIVIUM*

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(figs. a–d)



*Abstract.* This paper examines literary and visual evidence for women’s dining posture at Rome. I distinguish actual social practice from the ideology of representation, while recognizing their interdependence. Contrary to the view that “respectable” women dined seated until the Augustan era, I argue that a woman (of any status) could always dine reclining alongside a man, and that this signifies a licit sexual connection. The sitting posture, seen mostly in sub-elite visual representations, introduces further complexities of practice and ideology. In general, postures attributed to women function more as indicators of sexual *mores* than as direct representations of social practice.

### I. INTRODUCTION

WHY, WONDERS ISIDORE, DID THE ROMANS refer to positions on the dining couches as *sedes*, when in fact they dined reclining? In answer he offers an historical explanation for which he invokes the authority of Varro. He writes, “*Sedes* are so-called because among the old Romans there was no practice of reclining, for which reason they were also said to ‘take a seat.’ Afterwards, as Varro says in his work *On the life of the Roman people*, men began to recline and women sat, because the reclining posture was deemed shameful in a woman.”<sup>1</sup> Two generations after Varro, Valerius Maximus offers much the same information about ancestral convivial posture. Among the nuggets of information he provides “on old Roman customs” (*de institutis antiquis*), he writes, “Women ordinarily dined sitting next to men who reclined, a custom that passed from human dining practice to the gods: for at the feast of Jupiter, the

<sup>1</sup> Isid. *Etym.* 20.11.9: “*sedes dictae quoniam apud veteres Romanos non erat usus adcumbendi, unde et considerare dicebantur. postea, ut ait Varro de Vita populi Romani, viri discumbere coeperunt, mulieres sedere, quia turpis visus est in muliere adcubitus.*”

god himself was treated to dinner on a couch, while Juno and Minerva sat in chairs.” Valerius then dryly contrasts this longstanding divine dining practice to that of his own, mortal contemporaries: “Our own age cultivates this type of discipline more assiduously on the Capitol than in our own homes, evidently because it is of greater consequence to the state to ensure the orderly conduct of goddesses than of women.”<sup>2</sup> By declaring that the seated convivial posture constitutes “orderly conduct” for a woman, and by noting that in his own day such conduct was no longer preserved “in our own homes,” Valerius clearly implies two things: first, that by his day women were likely to be found reclining in *convivia* (the seated posture being retained only among the female gods at the *epulum Iovis*); and second, that this postural shift marks a moral decline. Likewise Varro, as quoted by Isidore, affirms that women’s convivial posture was thought to have moral implications. The “old Romans,” he says, regarded the reclining convivial posture as “shameful” in a woman, wherefore women dined seated. Varro also, like Valerius, probably implies a contrast with contemporary practice. For the fact that he bothers to explain an ancient practice together with its ethical underpinnings seems to imply that, in his own day, the practice is disused and its rationale generally forgotten.

These two passages are rich in implications about the ethical and social stakes of dining posture, especially that of women in contrast to men. On the one hand, these passages seem to make a concrete historical claim: that in an (undefined) early period, Roman women sat to dine while men reclined, whereas “now”—for the contemporaries of Varro and Valerius, each in his present moment—women, too, recline to dine, just as men do; they therefore must have changed their convivial posture at some point. On the other hand, these passages also make clear that the distinction between these two dining postures is ideologically fraught, especially along gendered lines—for they link the alleged shift in women’s posture to overall moral decline.

Now, of these two aspects, the historical and the ideological, scholars to date have found the former most engaging. Indeed, there is a

<sup>2</sup> Val. Max. 2.1.2: “feminae cum viris cubantibus sedentes cenabant, quae consuetudo ex hominum convictu ad divina penetravit: nam Iovis epulo ipse in lectulum, Iuno et Minerva in sellas ad cenam invitabantur. quod genus severitatis aetas nostra diligentius in Capitolio quam in suis domibus conservat, videlicet quia magis ad rem <p.> pertinet dearum quam mulierum disciplinam contineri.” The *epulum Iovis* was celebrated twice per year, September 13 and November 13; hence Valerius can speak of it as a contemporary, observable phenomenon that, he supposes, preserves and transmits an archaic social practice.

scholarly *communis opinio* regarding what happened when. The accepted and widely disseminated view—enshrined in the authoritative handbooks of Roman social practice—is that, while men dined reclining, married women dined seated in *convivia* (prostitutes being another matter) through the bulk of the republican period. However, even these “respectable” women began to adopt the reclining posture by the last years of the republic, or perhaps in the Augustan period or early empire.<sup>3</sup> The ideological aspect, on the other hand, has only recently attracted any attention. Keith Bradley, in a recent article on familial dining practices (1998, 47), suggests that the seated posture functioned pragmatically, placing women under male scrutiny and control. Moreover he asserts that, whatever the vagaries of actual social practice, the seated posture for women remained at *all* times the “strict protocol,” even in the imperial period. Thus Bradley not only understands women’s convivial posture in the context of gendered social dynamics and social control broadly, but he employs this understanding to nuance the historical claim—for he makes the vital point that social values and social practice may not coincide neatly.

In this article I explore anew both the historical and the ideological questions just defined. For as Bradley intimates, they cannot be separated but must be considered together. We shall see, indeed, that any representation of women’s dining posture is ideologically invested. Virtually no such representation in any medium, at any time or place, or among persons of any social status, provides direct, unmediated evidence for actual social practice. On the other hand, once we grasp the symbolic dimensions of women’s convivial posture—its implicatedness with Roman sociosexual norms and values more broadly—we can also draw some conclusions about the social practices that were possible or probable at different periods and for persons of different statuses. The practical and ideological dimensions of dining posture thus refer to, presuppose, and symbiotically require one another. To open this discussion (section II), I survey the practice and ideology of convivial posture for

<sup>3</sup> This account is first articulated, to my knowledge, in Marquardt-Mau 1886, 300–301, and is repeated a decade or so later in the relevant articles in Pauly-Wissowa (e.g., Ihm, “cena,” *RE* 3 (1899): 63–67). It reappears largely unchanged in handbooks and surveys down to the present (e.g., Balsdon 1962, 272; Dentzer 1982, 432) and is duly accepted by historical, literary, and archaeological scholars, who suppose that a view so widely diffused in authoritative reference works is well-founded (e.g., Christenson 2000, 269–70 (*ad* Plaut. *Amph.* 804); Wardle 1994, 225 (*ad* Suet. *Cal.* 24.1); Kay 1985, 123 (*ad* Mart. 11.23); Richardson 1988, 397–98).

adult males, since women's practices are typically articulated with respect to those of men. I then turn to women, examining representations of female conviviality and posture in three different media: literary texts, funerary monuments from the city of Rome, and Campanian wall paintings (sections III–V, respectively). These media differ both in their chronological range and in the social strata within which the corresponding representations were produced and consumed. I discuss these complications as I take up each body of evidence in turn.

## II. DINING MEN: POSTURE, LEISURE, AND PRIVILEGE

From the late third century B.C.E.—the earliest period for which we have contemporary evidence—through the high empire, free adult males are represented as reclining to dine in the normal course of events. In Rome, as in the other cultures of the ancient Mediterranean for which reclining dining is attested, this posture marked a greater degree of social privilege and autonomy than any other dining posture (i.e., sitting or standing).<sup>4</sup> Here I examine a particular kind of privilege that this posture entailed for free adult Roman males: namely, the privilege of leisure (*otium*) and the various pleasures and luxuries that *otium* may comprise. Literary texts expose most clearly the association of reclining dining with *otium*, but the link is also visible—with different social consequences—in the convivial iconography of certain funerary monuments from the city of Rome and in panel-paintings that decorated the walls of dining rooms in several Pompeian townhouses.

The literary texts examined below were produced largely by and for a Rome-oriented male elite and tend to articulate elite urban values, anxieties, and practices.<sup>5</sup> In such texts, conviviality is often categorized under the rubric of *otium* and implicitly or explicitly contrasted with the

<sup>4</sup> Dentzer 1982, 431–47, discusses the cultural trajectory of the *banquet couché* from the near east to Greece to Italy to Rome, along with the aristocratic associations of this practice in each culture; esp. 432 on the greater privilege and status accorded to reclining than to sitting.

<sup>5</sup> Plautus is the exception to this characterization. Whatever his own social origins (traditionally non-elite), his dramas—unlike those of his successor Terence—do not seem to privilege elite concerns and viewpoints, nor do they speak predominantly to the elites within his audience. Yet even in Plautus, as we shall see, conviviality is largely an elite (or elite-dominated) activity. See Habinek 1998, 45–59, for the argument that early Latin literature (including Terence, but not Plautus) functions at least in part to consolidate and acculturate the mid-republican aristocracy; also Gruen's (1992, 202–22) remarks on Terence.

various *negotia*—the occupations or duties—with which elite Roman males not only busied themselves much of the time, but also defined themselves as elite Roman males: their own private social and economic affairs, legal advocacy on behalf of their clients or friends, and discharging magistracies or other military and administrative posts associated with government.<sup>6</sup> More generally still, conviviality in these texts may symbolize or instantiate something “pleasant,” in contrast to “unpleasant” alternatives. While this characterization of elite conviviality should occasion no surprise, it seems worthwhile to cite a handful of literary passages, scattered across various genres and periods, to illustrate these associations.<sup>7</sup>

To begin with the earliest Roman literature, several Plautine dramas (late third to early second century B.C.E.) contain convivial scenes in which high-status males dine and drink while reclining in one another’s company and alongside courtesans. The *convivium* is thus a place where such males enjoy a nexus of pleasures: wine, food, companionship, and the prospect (at least) of sex.<sup>8</sup> These convivial pleasures persist in the late republic as well. Cicero, early in his treatise on the ideal orator (*De Or.* 1.27), contrasts such pleasures with more serious activities and concerns (i.e., *negotia*). He relates that, when he was a young man, the senior senator and orator Cotta regaled him with a story from Cotta’s own youth. Cotta said that he himself had participated one day in a gloomy and difficult discussion with certain *éminences grises* regarding the condition of the state. Following this discussion, however, when the party

<sup>6</sup> By “elite” I mean any member of the senatorial-equestrian aristocracy of the city of Rome, along with municipal aristocrats of other towns—those who had the wealth, birth, and acculturation to compete for magistracies and participate in government (whether they actually did so or not). With Hopkins 1983, 44–45, 110–11, I take this group as a single social entity, one largely unified (from the first century B.C.E. if not earlier, at least in Italy) by economic interests, acculturation, and socialization, whatever its political rifts. By “sub-elite” I mean anyone else, though in this paper the term is applied only to individuals who are clearly far removed from elites on all three standards (birth, wealth, and acculturation)—for which see Weaver 1967, 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> A bibliography on Roman leisure is just beginning to emerge. See Toner 1995, 11–33 (and *passim*), for an overview of the sociological and semantic questions; much in Edwards 1993, 173–206, is also pertinent. Leach 1999 offers an excellent, culturally engaged study of one aspect of elite *otium*. Less useful for current purposes are André 1966 and André et al. 1996, 229–451, which focus almost exclusively on literary and intellectual pursuits.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Plaut. *Asin.* 828–32; *Bacch.* 1188–206; *Most.* 308–47. See section III below for more on the status of the males who recline to dine in Plautine comedy and on the “Greekness” or “Romanness” of the practices so represented.

repaired to the dining couches, the host Crassus dispelled the prevailing gloom with his humanity, urbanity, and pleasantness. Cotta contrasts these moods as follows: “in the company of these men the day seemed to have been spent in the senate-house, while the dinner party seemed to have been spent at [a suburban villa in] Tusculum.”<sup>9</sup> That is, the grave affairs of state (*negotia*), which filled the day’s conversation, stereotypically occupied the *curia* at the political heart of the Roman republican forum, while the pleasurable, cheerful fellowship of the evening *convivium* (*otium*) better suited a country villa. Cicero himself, says Plutarch (*Cic.* 8.4), almost never reclined for dinner before sundown, pleading a bad stomach and also his *ascholia* (i.e., *negotia*) as keeping him away. Julius Caesar, a busy man, rather eccentrically combined business with pleasure: Plutarch remarks upon the fact that he regularly dealt with his correspondence while reclining at dinner.<sup>10</sup>

Moving onward, Horace contrasts *otium* and *negotium*, though not necessarily in these terms, in some of his dinner-invitation poems (e.g., *Carm.* 2.11, 3.8, 3.29), for he dangles before his addressee—in each case, a magistrate busy with public affairs—the enticements of companionship, sex, and especially wine, requesting that he seize these pleasures and yield for the evening his anxious cares on behalf of the state.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, one declamation in the elder Seneca’s collection (*Cont.* 9.2) posits that a provincial governor executed a criminal in the midst of a *convivium* at a prostitute’s request. Many of the declaimers who handle this theme explore the shocking collapse of the *otium/negotium* distinc-

<sup>9</sup> Cic. *De Or.* 1.27: “tantam in Crasso humanitatem fuisse ut, cum lauti accubuissent, tolleretur omnis illa superioris tristitia sermonis; eaque esset in homine iucunditas et tantus in iocando lepos ut dies inter eos curiae fuisse videretur, *convivium* Tusculani.” See also *De Or.* 1.31–33, where *otium* is distinguished from the activities associated with the *forum*, *subsellia*, *rostra*, and *curia*; also, *Mur.* 74 and Var. *Sat. Men.* fr. 336–40 Astbury (= Gell. 13.11.3–5).

<sup>10</sup> Plut. *Caes.* 63.7. Plutarch further notes at *Mor.* 619D–F that the *locus consularis*, the position of the guest of honor on the low end of the middle couch, is advantageously located for conducting such business as may come to this high-ranking man’s attention during the *convivium*—though the remark that “nobody crowds him, nor are any of his fellow diners crowded” by this man’s retinue (619F) implicitly acknowledges the tension entailed by transacting business in an environment notionally devoted to leisure and pleasure.

<sup>11</sup> On *otium* and *negotium* in Horatian dinner-invitation poems, see La Penna 1995, 268–70, and Murray 1985, 45–48. More generally on drinking, drunkenness, and *otium/negotium*, see D’Arms 1995, 305–8.

tion that this situation envisions. For judicial matters, such as punishing criminals, belong in the forum, not the dining room; they should be done by daylight, not at night, and so on.<sup>12</sup> The younger Seneca, in *Ep.* 71.21, contrasts “lying in a *convivium*” with “lying on the rack” (i.e., for torture). The former, he acknowledges, is pleasant while the latter is unpleasant, yet the two kinds of reclining are indifferent in regard to Stoic moral value. Finally, Martial (*Epig.* 14.135) gives voice to an outfit of dining-clothes (*cenatoria*), which primly defines its proper realm by contrast with “serious” business: “neither the forum nor going to bail are familiar to us: our job is to recline on embroidered couches.”<sup>13</sup> These passages are purely illustrative, and by no means exhaustive; they merely show how elite Romans consistently slotted conviviality into the category of *otium* and regarded it as encompassing a variety of specific pleasures: wine, food, conversation, companionship, sex. They also show how such Romans distinguished conviviality broadly, and the reclining posture that symbolizes it, from activities they perceived as serious or mundane (i.e. *negotia*), or unpleasant.

The privileges and pleasures associated with reclining to dine are thrown into higher relief when compared with the convivial postures and roles assumed by slaves. For slaves were excluded, by their postures as well as actions, from the leisure and pleasure enjoyed by the reclining diners—even as they were omnipresent around the site of the meal, and by their presence and service made the reclining diners’ leisure and pleasures possible.<sup>14</sup> Literary texts normally show slaves on their feet, and often in motion as well—bringing food, pouring wine, clearing the tables, and the like. The younger Seneca (*Ep.* 47.3) evokes the image of wretched, hungry slaves standing all evening in silence—any noise to be punished with a whipping—attending at an imperious master’s meal. Likewise, toward the end of his dinner party, Petronius’ Trimalchio (74.6–7) turns around on his couch to address slaves (apparently) standing behind, dismissing them from service so that they can eat. Shortly before

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Sen. *Cont.* 9.2.4 (Hispo), 9–10 (Capito), 14 (Montanus), 22 (Argentarius), 24 (Latro); esp. 27 (Murrelius): “serviebat forum cubiculo, praetor meretrici, carcer convivio, dies nocti,” where *negotium* is the category governing the first term in each pair, and *otium* governs the second.

<sup>13</sup> Mart. 14.135: “nec fora sunt nobis nec sunt vadimonia nota: / hoc opus est, pictis adcubuisse toris.”

<sup>14</sup> In general on slaves in *convivia*, with abundant sources, see D’Arms 1991; also, Foss 1994, 53–56.

their dismissal, however (70.10–13), they crowd onto the couches and recline briefly among the guests, at their master's express invitation. This is apparently an equalizing gesture, directed by the host, himself a former slave, to those who now fill the kind of station he once filled. Similarly, Martial catalogues the actions of a troupe of slaves who stand and move about a dining room, attending to the most menial bodily needs of their master (*Epig.* 3.82.8–17), and Juvenal (5.64–65) describes a handsome cup-bearer who disdains to serve his master's guests, resenting that the guests recline while he himself stands. These texts, though satiric, all presuppose that standing and moving about is the norm for slaves in *convivia*, and that this posture along with the service it implies marks slaves off as socially inferior to the reclining, stationary diners. Slaves are instrumental to the leisure and various pleasures of those who recline, without (in normal circumstances) enjoying that leisure and pleasure themselves. Occasionally slaves do appear reclining or sitting in *convivia*, but only when they thereby especially enhance the atmosphere of pleasure and *otium* for the privileged reclining diners—for example, when they are favorite children or sexual objects. More on this matter below.<sup>15</sup>

Many associations of the reclining posture found in literary texts are also articulated iconographically, though to different social effect. Consider first a grave altar from the city of Rome, dating to the early second century C.E. and now in the Capitoline Museum (fig. a; B 830). It must stand for a number of such monuments that cannot be discussed here (though two others are discussed in section IV below). A relief at the bottom of this altar shows a man reclining on a *lectus* that has high boards at the head and foot, which are curved in a gentle S-shape. It also has a high backboard, difficult to see in this image. This man is propped upon his left elbow so that his torso is upright; his right knee is elevated while his left leg rests upon the mattress. This bodily disposition I henceforth call the “classic dining posture.” His torso is bare, but a mantle covers his hips and legs. He holds a drinking vessel in his left hand and a crown in his right. In front of the couch, within the diner's reach, stands a small table with three curved legs, upon which rests several implements

<sup>15</sup> Thus the female slave-prostitutes in Plautine comedy recline with the elite males to whom they provide sex (*Asin.* 830–32; *Bacch.* 79–81, 139–42, etc.). Also, at Trimalchio's *convivium* (Petr. 68.4–8) a youthful slave recites Vergil while sitting on the foot of the couch where his master Habinnas reclines. This boy, as subsequent comments reveal, is his master's pet educational project (hence the recitation) and also the object of his sexual attentions. Such cases merely confirm that a slave's role in the *convivium* is instrumental: to enhance the pleasure of the privileged and reclining diners in any way required.



or items of food that are difficult to identify here (though easier on other monuments, as we will see). At either end of the couch stands a male figure in a short *tunica* girt at the waist, the one at the foot holding a vessel in his right hand; both are of smaller stature than the reclining man. Comparison with the literary representations discussed above—some of which are roughly contemporary with this altar—reveals that these standing figures are undoubtedly slaves, tending to the wants of the man reclining at leisure. Above this tableau, the inscription identifies the deceased as C. Calpurnius Beryllus, freedman of Gaius, age 21.<sup>16</sup> It seems reasonable to identify the free adult male who is named in the inscription with the reclining (hence privileged) adult male in the relief beneath the inscription. Thus, Beryllus is commemorated in the guise of a reclining diner attended by slaves.

This relief displays a number of features that we will see are typical of convivial iconography. First, a hierarchy of postures distinguishes the figures: the free adult male reclines at leisure and the slaves stand in service. Second, the reclining diner is surrounded by objects that are probably to be regarded as carrying high prestige, signaling a distinctively elite form of dining luxury and pleasure. One possible prestige object is the small three-legged table. Such tables, as we shall see, commonly appear in these scenes and are often depicted with elaborately carved zoomorphic legs and feet. The curved legs here may be an attempt to suggest legs of this sort. Literary sources further indicate that dining tables of various sorts—even the smallish, round, three-legged variety such as this one—could be made of precious materials and as such might contribute materially to the host's display of his status and wealth.<sup>17</sup> The couch, too, is perhaps to be thought of as a prestige object. One such *lectus*, having (like this one) high endboards and backboard, but decorated with an elaborately patterned inlay, is known from

<sup>16</sup> “D M / C Calpurnius / C lib Beryllus / hic situs est / vix ann XXI” (*CIL* VI 14150). In addition to Boschung 1987, 107, no. 830, and Taf. 42, see Altmann 1905, 152 and fig. 124; Jones 1912, 353–54, no. 14a and pl. 89 (who identifies the objects on the table as a dish and a spoon).

<sup>17</sup> For dining tables of rare and precious materials, especially tops made of exotic veined woods, see Hor. *Serm.* 2.8.10–11; Sen. *Tranq.* 1.7; *Ben.* 7.9.2; Plin. *Nat.* 13.91–102; Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.38–39; Mart. *Epig.* 12.66.7, 14.89–90; also Amedick 1991, 23. On the other hand, such tables are apparently very modest at Hor. *Serm.* 1.3.13 and Ov. *Met.* 8.660–63. Three-legged tables in prestigious materials like marble and bronze have been recovered archaeologically (Richter 1966, 111–12); even the wooden ones known from Herculaneum are at least made of hardwoods to accommodate the decorative carving (Mols 1999, 129). For the zoomorphic legs, see Mols 44–45.

Herculaneum.<sup>18</sup> More certainly prestige objects are the slaves themselves, who stand at attention to the left and right of the couch. Their very presence implies that the diner's household has a certain degree of wealth—enough, at any rate, to purchase and maintain at least a couple of domestic slaves. Moreover, these particular slaves, whose smaller stature suggests that they are adolescents and not yet adults, are probably to be imagined as notably beautiful, sexually desirable boys. For adolescent males of this description, as literary texts indicate, were among the most highly prized and expensive of slaves. In elite households they commonly served wine in *convivia* (note again the vessel held by the slave at the left); as such they were among the beautiful, expensive, luxurious accoutrements that the elite host exhibited in an effort to impress and delight his guests.<sup>19</sup> Their slightly bulky hairstyle—fairly common in the iconography of youthful male slaves—may also signal their sexual desirability, since such slaves are sometimes described in texts as “long-haired.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, our reclining male diner may enjoy the prospect of an imminent sexual encounter since the owner of such slaves could be expected to make sexual use of them immediately after the *convivium* or at any other time.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the privileged, reclining, free adult male represented in this scene is the focal point of a number of pleasures. He enjoys food

<sup>18</sup> For such couches from Herculaneum, see Mols 1999, 35–42, 124–27, and cat. nos. 1–13; cat. no. 13 has the inlay in question (figs. 87–93).

<sup>19</sup> For the sexual desirability and expense of adolescent male cupbearers (the Ganymede figure) in elite *convivia* of the late republic and early empire, see, e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 47.7, 95.23–24; Petr. 92.3–5 (downscale version); Mart. *Epig.* 1.58, 9.25, 10.98, 11.70, 12.66.8 (etc.); Juv. 5.56–63; Suet. *Caes.* 49; and D'Arms 1991, 175–76. Slaves not fitting this profile make for less-refined *convivia*: see Cic. *Pis.* 67; Juv. 5.52–55.

Other funerary monuments from the city of Rome likewise depict slaves whose proportions appear to be those of adolescents or smaller children (see below). In my view, these cannot be instances of “proportional scaling” as seen on (e.g.) Romano-German grave reliefs of the first century C.E., where adult slaves are represented at a much smaller scale than the central figures on the couch to indicate their lesser importance (see, e.g., Galsterer-Galsterer 1975, nos. 196, 219, 228). I have found no clear instances of such “proportional scaling” of slaves on funerary monuments from the city of Rome proper.

<sup>20</sup> These slaves' hair, though not “long” in the sense of reaching their shoulders or beyond, is also not closely cropped; it is comparable to the slave hair seen on two urns, S 458 and S 462 (much longer on the extraordinary altar B 852), though the slaves in these latter cases are younger. For such hair as an attribute of luxurious, sexually desirable slave boys, see the iconographic and literary evidence collected by Fless 1995, 56–63.

<sup>21</sup> For the master having sex with his handsome slave boys directly following the *convivium*, see Sen. *Ep.* 47.7, 95.24 (similar implication at Petr. 92.3–4, 94.1–6). On slaves of both sexes as sexual objects, see Williams 1999, 30–38; Bradley 1987, 116–18; Neraudau 1984, 353–62.

and wine, kept in good supply by valuable, high-prestige, sexually exciting slaves standing in attendance, and surrounded by what is perhaps to be understood as showy, expensive furniture. These are precisely the sorts of pleasures manifested in literary representations of leisured elite conviviality, as discussed above.

What could such an image mean? Why might a deceased freedman be commemorated in the guise of a diner, reclining amidst the trappings (or allusions to the trappings) of elite conviviality? To begin with, this scene probably does not “realistically” illustrate the way Beryllus actually dined during his life. Undoubtedly he dined reclining, at least after gaining freedom and citizenship. But could he have afforded the luxurious accoutrements—the valuable slaves, perhaps the furniture—that are depicted or alluded to iconographically? Assuredly, Beryllus, or whoever commemorated him, was not impoverished: grave altars are a substantial form of commemoration (though seldom used by the Roman elite). On the other hand, this particular monument is a smallish example of the form and not of outstanding workmanship.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the “realistic” details of luxurious, elite dining make a claim to wealth and status on behalf of the commemorand that other physical aspects of the monument do not support.<sup>23</sup> But “realism” is not the only clue to meaning. For instance, there is no evidence that Roman males ever actually dined with bare torsos wearing only hip-mantles, as Beryllus does here. On the contrary, in literary texts ranging from the mid first to early second centuries C.E.—the period of this monument—we hear of an ensemble of garments, the

<sup>22</sup> The preserved height of the ancient stone, from the base of the columns to the cornice above the capitals, is 59 cm; the base and crown are modern. Originally, the monument no doubt had a base and pediment, which would have increased its height an unknown amount (ca. 20 cm?). Even so, it is smaller than the average height of a funerary altar. An unscientific survey of the first fifty or so altars in Boschung’s catalogue yields an average height of about 90 cm.

<sup>23</sup> While a large, elaborately decorated monument likely implies that the deceased (or at least the dedicator) was wealthy and probably of high social status, the reverse claim—that a relatively modest monument implies relatively modest social status—is more problematic. For example, the few known altars commemorating elites (e.g., B 1 and 287, Calpurnii Pisones) are large but austere, and based on their form and decoration alone might not be expected to belong to lofty, wealthy aristocrats. Yet an altar alone may or may not indicate the material level of the burial overall: it may, for instance, have sat originally in a richly decorated family tomb, as those of the Calpurnii likely did. Nevertheless, given the Romans’ penchant for self-advertisement, it seems probable that smaller altars with poorer decoration *on average*, if not universally, reflect lower status and wealth than larger altars with richer decoration.

*synthesis* or *cenatoria* (whose exact appearance is unknown) that men normally wore for dining, and several texts suggest that any exposure of flesh in a convivial context is exceptional and transgressive.<sup>24</sup> The point of this motif, however, is hardly to suggest that Beryllus is an outrageously rude diner. Rather, scholars compare this nudity (which, as we shall see, is fairly common in dining scenes) with the nudity that often costumes gods and heroes in Graeco-Roman iconography, and on this basis they deem it a “heroizing” motif, a positive attribute, to be sure, and one that also removes the reclining figure from the realm of the ordinary and places him in a somewhat elevated sphere.<sup>25</sup> It follows that the nude torso signals an *abstraction*: it divorces the image from any specific, actual *convivium* and instead enlarges the image’s frame of reference, inviting viewers to think in general terms about the social values articulated by the image. Through idealizing abstraction, then, the specificity of the particular instance is converted into the generality of the *exemplum*, which aspires to transcend contingency and to embody a universal, diachronically valid canon of socially valorized behaviors, ideals, and values.<sup>26</sup>

This relief, then, shows Beryllus not (necessarily) as he actually dined but as the central figure in a generalized, stereotyped scene of elite dining, which ties him to the values and ideals associated with such dining: *otium*, privilege, luxury, and various specific pleasures such as wine, food, companionship, and sex. Romans across a range of social classes could have regarded such dining, and its associated values, as refined, cultured, and indeed characteristically Roman, precisely because of its elite associations, since elites were the persons in society who most quintessentially “belonged.” The deceased, then, is commemorated as having embraced such values himself, and he exemplifies them for any-

<sup>24</sup> For the *synthesis* as dining garb, see Mart. *Epig.* 5.79, 14.1.1; *CIL* VI 2068.8; on *cenatoria*, see Petr. 21.5, 56.9; Mart. *Epig.* 10.87.12, 14.136; in general, see Schuppe, “synthesis,” *RE* 4A (1932): 1459–61; Marquardt-Mau 1886, 570–71. For condemnations of convivial nudity, see e.g. Cic. *Ver.* 2.3.24; *Cat.* 2.23; *Pis.* 22; *Deiot.* 26; Vell. Pat. 2.83.2. Hessel 1994, 136–39, discusses the meanings and implications of the adjective *nudus* (“naked” or “improperly dressed”) in these Ciceronian passages.

<sup>25</sup> On “heroic” nudity in Roman statuary, see Zanker 1988, 5–8. For the nude torso in dining scenes as a “heroizing” motif, see Amedick 1991, 13; Ghedini 1990, 38; Himmelmann 1973, 18. Such “heroization” need not imply that the dead is envisioned as existing in a blessed afterlife (so Ghedini 1990, 45–48): the motif can merely mark an idealization or abstraction, without implying any specific eschatology.

<sup>26</sup> For “unrealistic” elements in Roman art signaling an abstraction, see Koortbojian 1995, 29–30; Hölscher 1987, 50–54.

one who examines his monument. Moreover, the fact that a former slave is shown attended by slaves has particular point: the slaves call to mind the freedman's former, enslaved self, and, through the contrast in postures, this freedman starkly distinguishes the social condition he achieved from that in which he began (and they remain). The message for the viewer, then, is one of both social differentiation and social integration. On the one hand it says, "the deceased transcended his erstwhile slavish condition and achieved a position of privilege relative to others." On the other, it says, "the deceased was—or at any rate should be remembered as being—a refined, cultured, exemplary Roman citizen, a good thing to be." To slaves who viewed this monument, it suggested that freedom, autonomy, and social integration were achievable (or had been achieved by some). To freedmen and their descendents, themselves new or recent entrants into the ranks of Roman citizens, such iconography declared that persons like themselves had achieved social belonging—had embraced and immersed themselves in central Roman values and practices—through their appropriation of this key elite artifact, namely, a certain style of dining.<sup>27</sup>

Visual representations of men dining in luxurious, leisured settings also survive from an entirely different social context—namely, as mural decoration in Campanian townhouses. These images offer another perspective on the cultural meanings of reclining dining, one different from those offered by literary texts and funerary monuments. Here again, the analysis of a single painted scene in its domestic context will have to stand for a large number. Another such scene will be discussed in section V below.<sup>28</sup>

The scene in question is found in the recently excavated (and still incompletely published) Casa dei Casti Amanti in Pompeii (IX.12.6–8). A provisional plan, published early in the excavation, seems to indicate that one entered from the street into a central hall (perhaps not a canonical *atrium*) with which various rooms were associated. The structure contained a bakery, including a large oven, millstones, and stables for the horses or donkeys that turned them; a shop for selling the bread

<sup>27</sup> On how elite habits, objects, and values provide models for sub-elites who are striving to belong, see Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 169–74 (and chap. 7 *passim*); Dexheimer 2000, 82; D'Arms 1999, 311.

<sup>28</sup> Of the ca. 25 Campanian panel paintings of dining scenes of which I am aware, virtually all are of the late third to fourth Pompeian styles, with the latter period better represented than the former; most therefore date ca. 30–79 C.E. Thus they overlap chronologically with some of the funerary monuments and literary texts under discussion.

was also attached (at no. 7).<sup>29</sup> A room adjoining the central hall to the north and east measures approximately 4 x 8 meters and looks out onto a garden through a window in the south wall (the door is toward the south end of the room's west wall). The room is decorated with red and black panels of the late third style (30s–40s C.E.); the east, north, and west walls sport well-preserved central panel-paintings, all of which are convivial scenes. This room's size, dimensions, view-lines into the garden, and pattern of central panel decoration all suggest that it is a dining room, a *triclinium*—a space designed and decorated with a view to holding *convivia*, though its actual uses at various times may have been more diverse.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, then, this structure had both living and industrial or commercial functions, that is, its final occupant was presumably a baker—assuredly a sub-elite—who conducted his business out of this unit but also maintained a well-decorated dining room in which to entertain guests. These guests, to judge from patterns found in literary texts, are likely in most cases to be the host's social peers or inferiors, men as well as women (as we shall see in section III below).<sup>31</sup>

Here I discuss the panel on the west wall of this room, because in most respects it typifies other panel paintings with convivial scenes and also permits edifying comparison with the funerary relief just discussed.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Varone 1993a provides a detailed but preliminary publication of this structure. For the ground plan (as it was known in 1988), see 619–20 and 632 fig. CLII, 1. At that time, the structure was not yet known to contain a bakery. For a description of the finds and structures associated with baking, see Varone 1993b, 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> Varone 1993a, 622, explicitly identifies it as a *triclinium*; for discussion of this room and its paintings see 622–29 (with accompanying images). Recent years have witnessed much scholarly discussion and reevaluation of the traditional methods for identifying the functions of rooms in Campanian houses; however, I am persuaded that most criteria traditionally used to identify *triclinia* are sound. For recent discussion see Dickmann 1999, 215–19; Dunbabin 1996, 67–70 (and *passim*); Zaccaria Ruggiu 1995, 139–42 and 144–46 (and *passim*); Ling 1995, 240 (and *passim*); critical remarks in Allison 2001, 192–93.

<sup>31</sup> Literary texts overwhelmingly represent hosts as being of a status higher than or equal to their guests. For rare attestations of sub-elites inviting elites to dinner, see Cic. *Fam.* 7.9.3, 7.16.2; [Quint.] *Decl. Min.* 301. Situations where elites invite higher-ranking members of their own group to dinner—equestrians hosting senators, or any such person hosting an emperor (e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 2.11, 3.8, 3.29; *Serm.* 2.8; Sen. *Ira* 3.40; Plin. *Nat.* 14.56; Suet. *Tib.* 42.2; Plut. *Mor.* 759F–60A)—should perhaps be considered special cases of “hosts inviting their peers,” on the view that the senatorial-equestrian aristocracy constituted a unified socioeconomic group; see n. 6 above.

<sup>32</sup> This painting is illustrated in Varone 1993a, 637 (color); Varone 1993b, 8 (black and white); and online at <[www.archart.it/archart/italia/campania/pompei/pompei.htm](http://www.archart.it/archart/italia/campania/pompei/pompei.htm)>, image no. 14 under “chaste lovers.” I could not obtain permission to reproduce this painting in time for this article's publication.

In this panel, two couches are arranged at approximately a right angle, each occupied by a male-female couple. The men have darker skin than the women, as they often (but not always) do in paintings. Both men have nude torsos and recline in the higher position on their respective couches (i.e., at the head), while the women recline below them (i.e., toward the foot). All four figures support themselves on their left elbows in postures that resemble, but are not quite, the “classic” dining posture defined above. Both women lean against their men’s chests; both also clutch large drinking vessels. Near the head of each couch, in the foreground, stands a three-legged wooden table—the rightmost one having lion feet like the majority of such tables on the funerary monuments (e.g., fig. b below), while the other is hoofed. Both, moreover, bear a set of drinking vessels and ladles like the tables on many of the funerary monuments (see below). These implements appear to be silver, comprising an entirely respectable if not strikingly luxurious drinking service, conspicuously displayed.<sup>33</sup> A slave is present in the scene, marked off in the familiar way—by his standing posture—as a social inferior discharging an instrumental function. Specifically, he props up a woman who, though on her feet, seems on the verge of toppling over backward, rolling her eyes upward and clutching a drinking vessel in an unsteady manner. Aside from the slave, all of these figures wear wreaths on their heads, a common convivial motif. One further figure appears in the scene. On what is presumably a third couch between and behind the two visible ones, a man (as evidenced by the darker skin and close-cropped hair) lies flat on his back, his head in profile and his eyes closed; his right arm is folded behind his head and his elbow points upward. Thus this painting, though compositionally a two-couch arrangement, in fact depicts three, hence a *triclinium*, properly speaking.

This description has stressed the iconographic similarities between this scene and the Beryllus monument; however, these scenes also diverge significantly. First, the composition of the painted scene is more complex with multiple couches<sup>34</sup> and many human figures. Also, these

<sup>33</sup> A much grander silver service is depicted as lying out on display in a fresco from the tomb of Vestorius Priscus; see D’Arms 1999, 311, and Dunbabin 1993, 119, for black and white images. For an actual luxury silver drinking service—the hoard from the House of the Menander—see Painter 2001, 14–25.

<sup>34</sup> These couches also lack the backboards and endboards seen on the many of the funerary reliefs. The reason for this difference is obscure to me, unless the choice is purely compositional, that is, couches depicted with high boards would block the view of some of the figures and portions of the background in the painted scenes, while the funerary reliefs seldom have any depth of field to obscure.

figures' bodily dispositions are vastly more dynamic than that of Beryllus (or of the convivial figures on funerary monuments generally). Their dining postures are not *quite* the "classic" one. They turn their heads this way and that, and some recline more on their backs than on their sides. Three of the four gesture vigorously to the left side of the scene as if in lively conversation, perhaps discussing what should be done about the reeling woman. In short, the scene has a narrative character that is absent from the funerary relief, which seems merely to signify.<sup>35</sup> Second, the painted *convivium* takes place within a carefully delineated architectonic setting, a space whose decoration complements the respectable tableware, furniture, and the like. On the funerary monuments, in contrast, the convivial reliefs seldom have much depth. Sculptors do not seek to enhance the overall sense of convivial luxury by this means (see figs. a, b, c). Third, while texts describe the pleasures of convivial wine drinking, and while funerary monuments like Beryllus' allude to them, the painting puts them graphically on display. The woman (barely) standing at the left, whose drinking vessel suggests she is reeling from wine, probably belongs on the couch of the supine man in back, who himself has apparently passed out from drinking.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, the woman on the rightmost couch holds an overturned glass in her dangling arm, another motif suggesting intoxication. Finally, the men's bare torsos not only "idealize" the scene but also eroticize it, as the women recline against these torsos in intimate physical contact. Thus, on the one hand, the painting and the funerary monument share the same basic iconographical elements pointing to the leisure and luxury of reclining dining, as described in elite literary texts: notably, the pleasures of food, wine, companionship, conversation, and eroticism, all in surroundings ranging from comfortable to luxurious. They also share the "idealizing" motif of the nude torsos, and in addition the diners in the painted scene are all ideally youthful and beautiful. Accordingly, the painting, like the monument, announces that it depicts no actual, specific dining situation but rather a generalized scene of the pleasures of high-style conviviality, and seeks to foreground the values associated with it. On the other hand, the monument and the painting differ in that the former merely hints at or

<sup>35</sup> For this distinction, see Dentzer 1982, 18.

<sup>36</sup> For drunken diners supine, see the panel on the opposite wall of the same room (Varone 1993a, 640, discussion at 629; image no. 13 on the website cited in n. 32); also, Suetonius reports that the emperor Claudius regularly finished *convivia* supine and asleep on his couch from too much food and wine (*Cl.* 8, 33.1).



alludes to these elements, while the latter heightens and even exaggerates them by displaying the drunkenness and sexuality with special gusto.

Remarkably, three other Pompeian townhouses—all houses of substance, but not among the grandest—contain dining rooms decorated with such dining scenes. The social dynamics of all such rooms are probably similar. In them, prosperous but sub-elite proprietors host *convivia* for (mostly) their social equals and inferiors.<sup>37</sup> What such hosts and their guests may have made of such paintings, viewing them as they themselves reclined to dine in these very rooms, I discuss in section V below. For to grasp the range of meanings these viewers may have found in such scenes, we must next examine the practice and ideology of women's convivial posture, the principal topic of this paper. Since central aspects of women's conviviality are often articulated, implicitly or explicitly, with respect to men's conviviality, and since we have now analyzed the central and privileged role of (reclining) free adult males in convivial ideology broadly, we can now direct our attention to women in particular.

### III. WOMEN'S DINING POSTURE: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

This historical and ideological analysis of women's dining posture begins by surveying some literary texts that pertain to the question, roughly in chronological order. These texts range from Plautus to the high empire.<sup>38</sup> The visual representations, found again on funerary reliefs and in Campanian mural decoration (see sections IV–V below), all date from the mid first century C.E. onward. Literary texts, then, offer the only *contemporary* evidence for women's conviviality in the republican period. I devote special attention to this material in the next few pages for the following reason. The quotations with which we opened, from Varro (transmitted by Isidore) and Valerius Maximus, assert that in an

<sup>37</sup> These other houses are I.10.7, V.2.4, and VI.16.36. Certain dining scenes now in the Naples museum are without precise provenance, and others occur (with no discernible patterns of deployment) in grand houses.

<sup>38</sup> The practice and iconography of dining women at Rome, whether seated or reclining, is no doubt heir to both Greek and Etruscan practice and iconography. I cannot pursue these precedents here, but for starters see Fabricius 1999, 115–16, 169–73, 229–30, 284–86, 338–39, for women's dining postures in various Hellenistic cities of Asia Minor; also De Marinis 1961, 74–76, and Small 1994, 87–88, on their dining postures in various Etruscan cities. Yet Roman practice and representations must make cultural sense in Roman terms; it is this distinctively Roman cultural sense that I pursue in the following pages.

(undefined) early period, Roman women dined seated but subsequently took up the reclining convivial posture just as men did. I noted that, for over a century, scholars have accepted this account, though with some disagreement about the date of the postural transition—perhaps in the late republic, perhaps a generation or so later. The early literary evidence, therefore, looms disproportionately large, providing a test of this scholarly *communis opinio* and also, perhaps, of the antiquarian claims of Varro and Valerius themselves. To adumbrate my conclusion (section VI), I will argue that the *communis opinio* is quite wrong and that the historical status of the antiquarians' claim is at best unclear. What makes the antiquarian claim interesting, however, is not so much the (perhaps false) concrete information it conveys about who did what when, but rather the ideological effects and implications of making such a claim about how women behaved long ago.

Plautine comedy provides the earliest representations of women's dining posture in Roman literature—indeed, the earliest depictions of Roman dining *tout court*. Plautus stages a number of *convivia* in which prostitutes recline to dine alongside high-status males. Such events follow readily from the stock comic plot device whereby a well-born youth falls in love with a courtesan. Thus in *Asinaria*, a prostitute reclines to dine, sharing a couch with the father of the youth who loves her. The youth himself is present but reclining on another couch. Again in *Mostellaria*, a well-born youth reclines to dine with the prostitute he loves, though she is technically no longer a slave, as he has recently purchased her freedom. In the same scene, the youth's friend and his own prostitute arrive to share the meal, and they too recline together on a couch. *Bacchides* is filled with convivial situations in which the title characters—both prostitutes—recline with the two elite youths or their fathers.<sup>39</sup> Finally, an anecdote describing an historical event from this period activates all the same status relations, again in a convivial context. This anecdote relates that L. Quinctius Flaminius, discharging his consular (or perhaps proconsular) duties in Gaul or northern Italy in the late 190s B.C.E., summoned a condemned criminal to his dining room and had him cruelly executed there, because a *scortum* with whom he was reclining had asked to see a man killed.<sup>40</sup> Yet, while all of these passages

<sup>39</sup> *Asin.* 830–32, 878–79; *Most.* 308–9, 326–27, 341–43; *Bacch.* 79–81, 139–42, 754–58, 834–52, 1188–93, 1203–4.

<sup>40</sup> This anecdote, rooted in the historical tradition, was appropriated by the declaimers of the early empire and formulated as a *controversia*. Cic. *Sen.* 42 and Plut. *Cato Maior* 17.3 date the event to Flaminius' consulship (192 B.C.E.), while Sen. *Cont.* 9.2.2.pr. places

make the reclining woman a prostitute and pair her with an elite male on a dining couch, this is not the only possible combination. In Plautus' *Persa*, a male slave, Toxilus, reclines at a *convivium* with the prostitute he loves and whose freedom he has just purchased (763–67). Here, the woman's juridical status surpasses the man's, though in context this fact seems insignificant since Toxilus usurps the generic features of the young (elite) lover along with those of the clever slave and often exercises masterly authority over other figures (McCarthy 2000, 153–58). Conversely, a *convivium* in *Stichus* is populated entirely by slaves from the same *familia*. Here a woman reclines on a couch with two men (750–52). She is called an *ancilla* and implied not to be a prostitute.<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between Plautine representation and contemporary Roman social practice is (to say the least) difficult to sort out. For while Plautine drama assuredly engages contemporary Roman sociopolitical structures and norms, it also derives many plot devices, character types, and much of its formal structure from Greek New Comedy. Disentangling these strands is a tall order, given the dearth of other contemporary evidence.<sup>42</sup> Yet even if the juxtaposition of prostitutes and high-status males on dining couches is a stock comic situation with Greek roots, and even if elite youths fall in love with prostitutes far more predictably on the comic stage than in real life, nevertheless, Roman society itself included both elite males and prostitutes, and the comedies neither draw much attention to these pairings in *convivia* nor present them as transgressive. I therefore incline to think that these situations, as represented on stage, appeared unexceptional to contemporary Roman audiences and generally accorded with their own expectations about proper convivial behavior. The anecdote about Flamininus and the *scortum* independently supports this view, as it involves all the same status relations and social dynamics in an unambiguously Roman social context.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, we can conjecture what one pertinent convivial norm may have been in this period. Slaves, as we saw above (section II),

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it in his proconsulship (191 B.C.E.; also apparently Livy 39.42.8, Val. Max. 2.9.3). The accounts vary regarding the sex of the *scortum* (woman or youth) and the status of the person executed (condemned criminal or prisoner of war).

<sup>41</sup> *Stichus*' outraged query *prostibilest tandem?* (765), when Sangarinus tries to steal a kiss from her, presupposes the answer "no."

<sup>42</sup> These are familiar lines of discussion in Plautine scholarship; for recent work, see McCarthy 2000, 17–29 (and *passim*), Anderson 1993, 133–51; Gruen 1990, 124–57.

<sup>43</sup> Certainly, Flamininus' *convivium* is presented as problematic and transgressive—but only because elements of elite *negotium* intrude inappropriately into a situation

function instrumentally in the Roman *convivium*, at least in later periods where the evidence is fuller. They normally manifest and perform their instrumentality by standing in service, but might assume some other posture if they thereby enhance the pleasure of the privileged, reclining diners. Prostitutes who recline alongside men to whom they provide sex are a clear instance of this. Thus these Plautine situations are consistent with what we know in general of how slaves functioned, both practically and ideologically, in other (later) Roman convivial contexts.

One passage in Plautus, however, complicates the picture. The title character of *Amphitruo* is an aristocrat, as he commands the army of the Greek city Thebes. His wife Alcmena is obviously no slave or prostitute, since it was both a Roman social reality and a key plot device in comedy that only the free could contract legal marriages; indeed, she must be elite herself, a social match for her husband.<sup>44</sup> Now, midway through the play, Amphitruo returns home after some months away on campaign. He greets Alcmena, only to find her insisting that he had already arrived the previous evening. She says that, upon arriving, he gave her a kiss (800) and bathed (802). Then they dined: *cena adposita est; cenavisti mecum, ego accubui simul* (804, cf. 735). Subsequently, she says, they retired together to bed. She implies clearly, and with enough emphasis to suggest considerable enthusiasm, that a sexual encounter followed (807–8). Now, the audience knows that last evening’s “Amphitruo” was in fact Jupiter, disguised to seduce her. Consequently, the real Amphitruo grows increasingly alarmed at her story, anxiously asking *in eodem lecto?* when she says that they dined reclining together (answer: *in eodem*, 805). In fact, at every stage of this narration, one or another character underscores the erotic character of the progression from kissing, to reclining for dinner together, to having sex. The slave Sosia declares his “displeasure” with both the kiss and the dining (*non placet*, 801, 805), and Amphitruo himself declares, after Alcmena affirms that they spent the night together in the same bed (808–9), that she has “killed him” (*haec me modo ad mortem dedit*, 809) by losing her *pudicitia* in his absence (811). Here, then, as in the other Plautine passages, the posture of a woman who reclines to dine alongside a man has an erotic implication. It

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otherwise constituted as *otium* (n. 12 above); the reclining prostitute herself helps to constitute the scene as “leisured.”

<sup>44</sup> One aspect of her characterization as an elite is that, in reply to her husband’s accusations of adultery, she appeals to her lineage: “istud facinus, quod tu insimulas, nostro generi non decet” (820).

is the middle element in a sexual crescendo that begins with a kiss and concludes with the couple having sex and sleeping together. Yet here, the woman shares the man's elite status, and in general a sexual symmetry seems to obtain, with Amphitruo (or Jupiter) being as much Alcmena's erotic object as she is his; the sexual pleasure to be had is distributed between the two.<sup>45</sup> This passage, then, implies that the practice identified above for elite males and prostitutes encompasses "respectable" women as well. It suggests that a wife would naturally recline to dine alongside her husband and that the audience would find such a practice familiar and unexceptional.

The next body of evidence dates from the late republic. In this period, too, we find women of diverse social and sexual statuses reclining alongside elite males at *convivia*. Certainly women of low status figure among these. In his second Catilinarian oration (*Cat.* 2.10), delivered in 63 B.C.E., Cicero invokes the specter of a debauched *convivium* in which wine-soaked, gluttonous, perfume-drenched followers of Catiline, exhausted by their illicit sexual exertions, embrace "shameless women" as they recline, plotting murder and fiery destruction for the city. Similarly, in a letter of 46 B.C.E., Cicero describes a *convivium* at the house of Volumnius Eutrapelus in Rome, attended by a number of male aristocrats, in which the actress and courtesan Cytheris was also present and reclining to dine: *infra Eutrapelum Cytheris accubuit . . . non me hercule suspicatus sum illam adfore* (*Fam.* 9.26.2). Bradley (1998, 47) explains that Cytheris reclined because "[s]he was an actress, and for a woman of her profession, or that of a *meretrix*, the conventions of respectable society did not apply," where by "conventions of respectable society," he presumably means the "strict protocol" (mentioned in the same paragraph), whereby the dutiful, subordinate wife sat while her husband reclined. Cytheris was assuredly not married to Eutrapelus but was his freedwoman and was almost certainly his sexual partner at one time or another.<sup>46</sup> Again, however, we must resist the temptation to associate the

<sup>45</sup> For Alcmena's enthusiastic recollection of the sex (Jupiter is apparently good in bed), compare 807–8 with 512–15, 735. The intimacies Alcmena describes are in her view perfectly unexceptional for a married couple: in response to Amphitruo's accusations, she asks uncomprehendingly, "quid ego tibi deliqui si, cui nupta sum, tecum fui?" (817, cf. 818; for *esse cum aliquo/a* meaning "to have sex with," see Adams 1982, 177).

<sup>46</sup> Cytheris as freedwoman of Eutrapelus: Serv. *ad Verg. Ecl.* 10.1. At the time of Cicero's letter, she is attested as Antony's mistress; she is later, famously, identified with "Lycoris" in the erotic elegy of Cornelius Gallus (for the sources, see Groß, "Volumnius (17)," *RE* 9A (1961): 883, with Laigneau 1999, 183–85). See also Treggiari 1991, 302, 305, on Cytheris, and Leach 1999, 150–53, on this letter.

reclining convivial posture exclusively with low-status women. In a querulous letter to Atticus dating to 51 B.C.E. (*Att.* 5.1), Cicero describes the rudeness of Atticus' sister Pomponia to her husband Quintus Cicero, Marcus' brother, during a day the three spent together while traveling. First, Marcus reports, she harshly rejected Quintus' suggestion that the three collectively host a dinner. Then she refused to join the Cicero brothers and their guests as they reclined for a meal and rejected food that Quintus sent her from the table. Finally, to cap it all, she refused to sleep with Quintus.<sup>47</sup> Marcus makes clear that at every stage Pomponia behaved unreasonably, unsociably, and undutifully. He faults her, then, not merely for refusing to recline with Quintus among the dinner company and then refusing to retire to bed with him. By commenting also on the harshness of her words and on her rejection of food sent her from the table, Marcus seems to invoke a larger social expectation or norm that wives (at least elite ones) were equal partners with their husbands in the pleasure and leisure of the *convivium*. They should enjoy the same nourishment (hence the gesture of sending food), the same company and conversation, and presumably the same sexual titillation (hence the expectation of retiring to bed together) that normatively characterize the convivial experience for reclining men. These are precisely the expectations that Plautus' Alcmena invoked in conversation with her own spouse.<sup>48</sup>

This Plautine and Ciceronian evidence begins to suggest a pattern. Since, in all these passages, the woman who reclines (or is expected to recline) alongside a man on a dining couch is known or likely to be sexually attached to him, it is tempting to propose that the converse is true: namely, a man and woman who recline together on the same couch in a convivial setting thereby *signal* their sexual connection, regardless of

<sup>47</sup> Cic. *Att.* 5.1.3–4: “tum Quintus ‘en’ inquit mihi ‘haec ego patior cottidie.’ . . . idque me ipsum commoverat; sic absurde et aspere verbis vultuque responderat. dissimulavi dolens. discubimus omnes praeter illam, cui tamen Quintus de mensa misit; illa reiecit. quid multa? nihil meo fratre lenius, nihil asperius tua sorore mihi visum est . . . Quintus . . . Aquinum ad me postridie mane venit mihi que narravit nec secum illam dormire voluisse et cum discessura esset fuisse eiusmodi qualem ego vidissem.”

<sup>48</sup> Other texts dating from or referring to the late republic that depict elite women reclining to dine alongside their husbands, or imply that this convivial practice was the norm, are Cic. *Ver.* 2.5.80–82, Suet. *Aug.* 70, and especially Dio Cass. 48.44. To my knowledge, Treggiari 1991, 423, is the only scholar to observe (correctly) that elite married women in the late republic are regularly attested as reclining to dine alongside their husbands; others (as at n. 3 above) assert that women began reclining no earlier than the Augustan period.

the woman's status. Such a partnership presents itself as "licit"—i.e., involving a man and women who can have sex without *stuprum*. "Licit" relationships range from marriage proper to quasi-marital relationships (*concubinatus* or *contubernium*), to the sexual use of one's own or others' slaves, to prostitution.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, it is a grave transgression if a couple who cannot have licit sex reclines together to dine, for their posture and juxtaposition would be taken to imply that they do, nevertheless, have sex and so are guilty of *stuprum*.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation is incompatible with the scholarly *communis opinio* (itself an interpretation of Varro and Valerius) that "respectable" women dined seated in the republican period. I suggest, rather, that any women not precluded under the rubric of *stuprum*, including both "respectable" ones (i.e., wives) and "non-respectable" ones (e.g., prostitutes), could and did dine reclining alongside their male sexual partners, thereby visibly affirming the existence and social legitimacy of that partnership. Nevertheless, crucial differences remain between women at the high and low ends of this social spectrum. Slave prostitutes, for instance, being inherently instrumental to the pleasure of the privileged, reclining males, can only have reclined on the males' sufferance and only if they thereby made an especially significant contribution to the males' convivial pleasure (e.g., by charging up the erotic atmosphere or providing entertainment). Presumably they could be reduced to standing in service, or be required to do something entirely else, at any time. At the other social extreme, elite wives, in reclining alongside their husbands in *convivia*, thereby participated substantially or fully in the leisure and various pleasures of the event. They benefited from the slaves' attention no less than their husbands; they shared the same food, drink, entertainment, and erotic subjectivity as

<sup>49</sup> *Stuprum* is the moral and legal category with respect to which Romans defined the "forbidden" and "permitted" sexual partners for men and women of various statuses. See Williams 1999, 96–103, (and his chap. 3 *passim*) on *stuprum*, along with Treggiari 1991, 299–309, on women who are "fair game" for elite males; also, McGinn 1998, 194–202, on the legal codification of these longstanding social conventions under Augustus.

<sup>50</sup> The trick played on Nicobulus in Plaut. *Bacch.* relies on this expectation. Nicobulus is led to believe that the unknown woman with whom he sees his youthful son reclining to dine is another man's wife, a "forbidden" category of woman. Nicobulus immediately infers that his son's life is in danger, since the couple could be killed as adulterers by the woman's husband should they be discovered (*Bacch.* 832–71)—an inference requiring the presupposition that reclining to dine together implies a sexual connection (cf. 892–97, where this assumption is made explicit). In fact, Nicobulus' inference about the sexual connection is correct: he is deceived only about the status of the woman who is actually a prostitute and therefore a licit sexual partner for the youth.

their husbands; and—on the evidence of Pomponia—they substantially controlled their own level of engagement, far from being automatically subject to their husbands' commands or wishes. What modes of participation might have been available to a socially intermediate figure like Cytheris—neither a slave nor a wife, but a freedwoman who socialized at the highest levels of elite male society—is less clear, though we catch sight of her reclining alongside her patron and (probable) sexual partner, apparently participating fully.

Representations of women's conviviality become more plentiful in Augustan and imperial texts. These representations confirm that a woman's dining posture—at least in elite male company—expresses her sexuality, but they show considerable ambivalence about the consequences of such expression. Especially striking are several tableaux in Ovid's elegiac poetry where the male lover, reclining in a *convivium*, observes his beloved reclining on another couch with another man and plots to seduce her. In *Amores* 1.4, the woman in question is explicitly described as reclining alongside a man, the image of her “warm[ing] the breast of another, placed close below him” (*alteriusque sinus apte subiecta fovebis?* v. 5), and the other gestures of intimacy that the poet-lover observes or fears that the two may exchange (vv. 4–6, 15–16, 29–30, 33–44) suggest that readers would understand this couple as reclining in close physical contact, with the man at the head of the couch and the woman slightly toward the foot, her back against his chest. That is, he reclines above her (in the high position on the couch) and she below him (in the low position). Clearly, this positioning facilitates physical contact, among other things.<sup>51</sup> The lover, for his part, proposes a set of signals that he and his beloved might exchange, across the distance that separates them, to signify their attraction and perhaps set up a tryst. A similar tableau in the *Heroides* (16.217–58) depicts a banquet in Sparta in which the hosts, Helen and Menelaus, recline together on a couch exchanging various physical intimacies, while Paris, their guest, watches enviously from another couch. Here, too, the sexually charged atmosphere made possible by mixed-sex reclining on a dining couch is vividly portrayed.<sup>52</sup> In a third

<sup>51</sup> This is the usual ordering of mixed-sex couples in wall paintings that show convivial scenes: see fig. d, with discussion below.

<sup>52</sup> Menelaus and Helen are never explicitly said to recline together. But Paris says he himself is reclining (16.233, 257), and Menelaus, too, must be assumed to be reclining as the host and as an elite male. Moreover, the constant kissing and touching between husband and wife (16.221–26) indicates they are adjacent to one another and resembles the contact made between the woman and her *vir* in *Am.* 1.4. Helen, too, then, seems to be reclining and sharing a couch with her husband.



passage, *Ars Amatoria* 1.565–608, Ovid presents these same convivial practices and social dynamics in a didactic mode: he advises his reader how to proceed if, at a *convivium*, he should notice an attractive woman reclining on another couch alongside another man.

Certain patterns remarked in the republican material persist in these Ovidian representations. First, the couples who recline together are connected in sexual relationships that the various diners seem to accept as “legitimate,” including the lover himself, whatever his designs on the woman.<sup>53</sup> Second, the women, whatever their status, seem to be full and equal participants with the men, again sharing the food, wine, companionship, posture, and sexual subjectivity of their male partners. Third, these texts continue to suppose, at least in many cases, that couples who recline to dine together will subsequently retire to bed for sex.<sup>54</sup> Yet these texts also reveal a new dimension of the sociosexual politics of women’s dining posture. For in these passages, the sexuality that a woman displays while reclining with a man is not completely contained by that relationship. Rather, it spills out and infuses the whole *convivium*, creating the anxiety (or hope) that she may become sexually available to other men. Thus, the elegiac texts make clear that a woman’s normal placement on the couch below her man, with her back to his chest, not only facilitates physical contact between them, but also enables him to keep her under surveillance.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, these texts credit her with numerous resources by which she and a lover reclining on another couch can stymie his surveillance, so as to make approaches and responses to

<sup>53</sup> Whether such couples in elegiac poetry can be considered *truly* “legitimate”—i.e., involving no *stuprum*—is uncertain, since the precise social status and circumstances of the elegiac beloved is notoriously difficult to pin down (see McKeown 1989, II 78, I 19–24; Treggiari 1991, 303, 306). My point, rather, is that the *rhetoric* (verbal and postural) of legitimacy normally attaches to these couples, and the lover accordingly presents himself as a seducer. In a very few cases, the couple’s relationship is specified: in the *Heroides* passage Helen and Menelaus are married, while in Prop. 4.8, the poet-lover reclines alongside two prostitutes on a couch to dine (vv. 27–34)—no *stuprum* in either case.

<sup>54</sup> The poet of *Am.* 1.4 foresees that the reclining couple will have sex after the *convivium* (59–70); likewise in Prop. 4.8, where the lover’s declaration that he sought “unfamiliar passion” (*Venere ignota*, 34) in Cynthia’s absence, hired two prostitutes (29–33), and reclined to dine with them (37–44) can only mean that he expected sex to follow. Also, Paris, as he observes the intimacies of Helen and Menelaus on the dining couch (*Her.* 16.221–28), knows that they “have sex throughout whole nights” (*heu facinus! totis indignus noctibus ille / te tenet, amplexu perfruiturque tuo*, *Her.* 16.215–16).

<sup>55</sup> Thus the man reclining above “his” woman observes her secret signs to another lover at *Ov. Am.* 2.5.13–28 and *Ars Am.* 2.549–50.

one another: writing signs or letters in wine on the tabletop; drinking from the same part of a cup as the lover does, when cups of wine circulate around the party; getting the man with whom she reclines drunk so he falls asleep, whereupon she and the lover can communicate more openly.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the liaisons that she and the lover seek out are adulterous or quasi-adulterous, undercutting the claim to sexual exclusivity, legitimacy, and recognition made by the reclining posture and dining couch she shares with “her” man. These lover’s trysts therefore occur at other times and other places, away from the *convivium* and its couches, and so do not assert legitimacy for themselves by this means.<sup>57</sup>

The hope (or fear) that the woman who reclines below a man on a dining couch, thereby expressing a legitimate sexual connection to him, may also generate an excess of erotic energy that extends transgressively beyond this man to encompass other men, is not just a figment of the hypereroticized elegiac imagination. Traces of this idea appear in texts of other genres, in both the Augustan and imperial age. We hear of one Gabba feigning sleep during a *convivium* so that his wife could flirt with Maecenas, who reclined elsewhere. We also hear of the young Octavian taking the wife of a consular, before her husband’s eyes, out of the dining room and into a bedroom, returning her shortly with flushed face and disheveled hair. Caligula, too, is said to have taken other men’s wives from the triclinium for sex.<sup>58</sup> In each case, presumably, the wife in question was reclining on a couch below her husband in accordance with the legitimate sexual connection and as a full, equal participant in the leisure and pleasures of the *convivium*.

Occasionally, even this postural rhetoric of legitimacy might be enlisted in the service of sexual transgression. Caligula broadcast the fact that he committed *stuprum* with his sisters by having them recline below him on his couch during *convivia* (as if this sexual connection were legitimate), while his wife was displaced to the position above.<sup>59</sup> Like-

<sup>56</sup> For such strategies, see (e.g.) Tib. 1.6.15–20, 27–28; Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.4.11–32, 51–58; *Ars Am.* 1.565–78; *Her.* 16.249–54. In all of these passages the woman is explicitly said, or clearly implied, to be reclining below a man. See also Yardley 1991.

<sup>57</sup> For the circumstances of such trysts, see e.g. Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.603–8; *Am.* 1.4.45–50.

<sup>58</sup> Gabba: Plut. *Mor.* 759F–60A. Augustus: Suet. *Aug.* 69.1. Caligula: Suet. *Cal.* 25.1, 36.2; Sen. *Const.* 18.2. Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.6.23–28; Plin. *Nat.* 14.141. Still other imperial texts where women recline to dine: Vitruvius *Arch.* 6.7.4; Mart. *Epig.* 10.98.1–6; Tac. *Ann.* 4.54; Petr. 67.1–5 (note here Fortunata’s supposed reluctance to join the party, in contrast to Habinnas’ expectation that she will; note too that she constantly moves around the dining room and never alights anywhere for long; cf. §§37.1, 52.8–10, 54.2, 70.10).

<sup>59</sup> Caligula and his sisters: Suet. *Cal.* 24.1, “cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit pleneque convivio singulas infra se vicissim conlocabat uxore supra cubante.”

wise, Tacitus reports (*Ann.* 11.27) that Messalina and her lover C. Silius brought their adulterous liaison into the public eye not only by celebrating a wedding ceremony (though she was still married to Claudius) but also by reclining together on a couch at the wedding banquet, and then (in normal fashion) retiring to their “conjugal” bed for sex. In these passages the diners are assuredly sexually transgressive, but not by virtue of pursuing sexual encounters outside of the legitimate relationship symbolized by the joint reclining posture. Rather, they co-opt and subvert this very symbol of legitimacy itself.

One circumstance under which the potential for transgression may be realized is the heavy consumption of wine. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.25.6), Romulus determined that women who committed adultery or drank wine should be put to death, since “adultery was the beginning of madness, and drunkenness the beginning of adultery.” Valerius Maximus (2.1.5) gives a similar account of this early prohibition. Ovid declares in several places that wine dispels worries and makes lovers bolder, and Pliny the Elder laments in general terms the harm, including adultery, wrought by excessive convivial drinking.<sup>60</sup> Still other texts from a range of periods speak of adultery and drunkenness in almost the same breath, thereby betraying the close conceptual connection between them, even without drawing an explicit causal link.<sup>61</sup> Scholars have explained this alleged Romulean prohibition on women drinking wine in various ways.<sup>62</sup> For our purposes, what matters is that the *convivium* could be considered all the more likely a locus for sexual transgression precisely because women had, or could have, access to wine there.

In fact, this “Romulean” prohibition on women drinking wine further illuminates the claim of Valerius and Varro that early Roman women were forbidden to dine reclining. For these prohibitions are two sides of the same ideological coin. Each betrays an anxiety about the potential for women’s sexuality to escape the bounds of social legitimacy and to

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Caligula seems to be imagined as the middle diner on a three-person couch, though possibly he could be at the head of a two-person couch with his wife “above” him in the low position of the couch above (so Hurley 1993, 97).

<sup>60</sup> *Ov. Ars Am.* 1.241–44, 3.762; *Her.* 16.231–32, 243–48; *Plin. Nat.* 14.141. Similarly, *Sen. Ep.* 85.20.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., *Cic. Cat.* 2.10; *Val. Max.* 6.3.9; *Gell.* 10.23.3, along with the fragment of Cato the Elder in *Gell.* 10.23.4.

<sup>62</sup> For a collection of the crucial texts and survey of earlier scholarship, see Pailler 2000; also Bettini 1995; Minieri 1982.

move from licit, overtly declared connections to illicit, secretive ones that qualify as *stuprum*. Each asserts that such movement was stymied—i.e., women’s sexuality was properly regulated—in a remote, morally valorized past. For it is “long ago,” or “in the reign of Romulus,” that women neither drank wine nor dined reclining. Each prohibition implies or concedes that the mechanism no longer operates in the morally fallen present. Each, finally, points to the *convivium* as a locus of particular anxiety, the situation most liable to give rise to and foster a woman’s impulse to sexual transgression, whether because she reclines alongside a man or because she drinks wine there. In the terms set out in section I above, then, we see that Varro and Valerius—indeed, the literary material as a whole—foregrounds the ideological (rather than historical) dimension of women’s dining posture. It is the social, sexual, and more broadly cultural meanings and values tied up with her posture that are most visible and susceptible of analysis. Nevertheless, this material hardly leaves us bereft of historical information, and to this we return in the conclusion (section VI below).

Even this analysis is only partial, however. For while the numerous and varied literary representations of women who dine reclining enable us to pinpoint some of that posture’s socioethical implications, we have no idea (so far) what the *seated* posture might mean, the posture that Varro and Valerius attribute to early women and that is otherwise virtually unattested in literary texts (but see n. 76 below). Yet the seated posture is no mere fantasy, for it appears with some regularity on early imperial funerary monuments. To proceed with our ideological analysis of women’s dining posture, then, we turn to the visual evidence and to funerary monuments first.

#### IV. WOMEN’S DINING POSTURE AND FAMILY VALUES ON SUB-ELITE FUNERARY MONUMENTS

Like the grave altar of Calpurnius Beryllus discussed above (fig. a), and indeed like all funerary monuments bearing convivial reliefs for which the evidence is clear, the two discussed in this section commemorate, and one was dedicated by, freed persons or persons of undistinguished freebirth (e.g., the children of freedmen). They therefore provide a different ideological engagement with dining from that found in the literary texts examined above, which manifest the convivial concerns and values of elite males (whatever the status of the women with whom they recline).

Consider an ash-urn dating to perhaps the 60s or 70s C.E. in the

Palazzo Corsini in Rome (fig. b, S 276) on which a dining scene is sculpted in relief, a scene iconographically close to that of Beryllus. Here a woman reclines in the classic dining posture on a couch with lowish endboards and backboard.<sup>63</sup> She appears to hold a piece of fruit in her left hand, rather than a drinking vessel, but this does not mean that wine is unavailable to her. For near the foot of the couch (an unusual position) stands the familiar three-legged table with zoomorphic legs on which rests a drinking vessel, a mixing vessel, and a ladle. Above the table, in mid air, hovers a loaf of bread or cake. Thus both food and drink, the essentials of conviviality, are represented. The woman wears a mantle around her hips and legs, like Beryllus, and it is unclear whether her torso is clothed in a thin tunic or is (like his) entirely nude. If nude, then she too is costumed in the unrealistic manner that idealizes the leisure and pleasures of the *convivium* and “heroizes” the diner.<sup>64</sup> Around the couch stand three figures of childlike stature and proportions. The two standing near the head wear short tunics resembling those worn by Beryllus’ slaves; the one in the foreground holds a doll or perhaps a bird, while the one behind perhaps adjusts the woman’s pillow. The third stands behind the couch near the foot, holding a long curved object above the reclining woman—perhaps a flapping piece of fabric with which he fans her.<sup>65</sup> While these figures are surely slaves, they are not the sexually desirable, adolescent male variety that attend upon Beryllus.

<sup>63</sup> Though this figure appears to have a visible breast and female hairstyle, its sex may nevertheless be debatable, since the inscription commemorates a man: De Luca 1976, 119, no. 64, carefully calls it a “figura” without ever ascribing a sex to it, while Sinn 1987, 160, no. 276, and Altmann 1905, 145, no. 160, both see a woman. However, the shoes under the couch are paralleled only for monuments that show women reclining alone, e.g., on the urns of Loriania Cypare (S 462, shoes rest on footstool) and Iulia Capriola (S 516; Candida 1979, 74–76, no. 31, and pl. 26). Such shoes are never found on reliefs showing men reclining alone or men and women reclining together. Thus they seem to indicate the female sex of the figure under discussion here.

<sup>64</sup> Any such nudity should present her as Venus (see below for another such iconographic motif); for a woman with a clearly nude torso and hip mantle on a dining relief, see the late second-century *loculus* cover from Isola Sacra discussed and illustrated by Amedick 1991, 136, no. 84, and Taf. 3.2 (also 20: “die . . . Frau . . . ist gleich Venus mit entblößtem Oberkörper dargestellt”). On the other hand, our woman on S 276 may be wearing a very thin tunic, such as that of Loriania Cypare (S 462, who also wears a mantle covering her lower body).

<sup>65</sup> Sinn 1987, 160, no. 276, identifies the objects as a doll and a fan; De Luca 1976, 119, no. 64, sees a bird. For slaves fanning reclining diners see Varone 1993a, 640 (cf. n. 36 above), and Mart. *Epig.* 3.82.10–12.

Rather, these are younger, prepubescent children. A handful of literary passages describe or allude to child-slaves kept by elite women—slaves considered desirable for their innocence, childish antics, and talkativeness, even impudence.<sup>66</sup> The slaves represented on this monument, and on several other monuments commemorating women, may be child-slaves of this sort.<sup>67</sup>

Here, it seems, is confirmation in an early imperial, sub-elite social context (we have already seen it in elite literary texts) that the convivial pleasures available to free men and women are generally parallel. For this monument's iconography closely parallels that of Beryllus in that each diner reclines alone on the couch and is represented as enjoying various pleasures and luxuries of idealized elite dining and drinking. Each diner has his or her every need attended to by attentive slaves who themselves signal luxury and wealth, and the diners may (or may not, depending on the woman's costume) share an idealizing nudity. Nor is this monument unique; several other sub-elite monuments from the first and second centuries C.E. show women reclining to dine alone on a couch, with or without slave attendants.<sup>68</sup> As a group, these closely parallel a series of similar monuments commemorating males and so suggest that there is no great distinction between male and female enjoyment of convivial leisure and pleasures. In only one respect do these monuments show a gender differentiation: Beryllus' slaves are of the sexually attractive, adolescent male variety that elite males stereotypically desire, while the woman's are of the adorable, impudent, prepubescent variety that elite women stereotypically collect. This iconographical difference implies at least one differentiation in convivial pleasures. The slaves on Beryllus' monument are presumably his sexual objects and give his convivial pleasure an erotic component, while those on the woman's monument probably enhance her convivial experience in other, nonsexual

<sup>66</sup> For such slaves, see especially Dio Cass. 48.44.3. They may also be associated with women in elegiac and lyric poetry, as Slater 1974, 136–37, argues: e.g., perhaps in Cat. 55, 56, 58; Prop. 2.29A (assimilated to *erotes*); and Tib. 1.5.26. They are also sometimes associated with men, as at Suet. *Aug.* 83 (and further passages at Slater 133–35).

<sup>67</sup> Other such monuments: S 462, with such children left, right, and behind the couch; S 458, with such children left and right of the couch (the togate child seated on the couch must be freeborn); and a plaque in Geneva (*loculus* cover? Chamay-Maier 1989, 80) with a very small long-haired child in a tunic sitting on the foot of the woman's couch. In general on child-slaves and their hair, see Fless 1995, 56–63; Amedick 1991, 19–22; Slater 1974, 135–38.

<sup>68</sup> In addition to the monuments listed in the previous note, see B 8 and S 516.

ways. This difference is subtle, however, and the scenes remain parallel in most respects. Indeed, the fact that the deceased, whose name is recorded on the inscription, is male—a freedman named M. Servilius Hermeros<sup>69</sup>—may not mean that the dedicator made a terrible mistake when purchasing this urn. Supposing that no dining scene with a male figure and adolescent slaves were available, the female figure with child slaves might have been considered close enough, since in all other respects the iconography of elite, leisured, luxurious dining, and the social integration that this iconography communicates, is similar.

But when a man and woman are depicted *together* in a convivial funerary relief, this iconographical symmetry breaks down. On such monuments, the man reclines at the head of the couch, while the woman, almost invariably, is represented as seated on the couch's foot. Here, finally, on funerary monuments that postdate Varro and Valerius by several generations, we encounter scenes that look like what these authors describe as the convivial practice of the remote past. Let us examine one such monument in detail. An altar of middling size in the Vatican (fig. c; B 327, 94 x 66 x 39 cm), of Flavian or Trajanic date, displays a relief in which a man reclines in the classic dining posture, a drinking vessel in his left hand. The couch has the usual back and curved endboards. Before him stands the usual table with zoomorphic legs, holding several further vessels. His gaze is directed toward the foot of the couch. There, on the edge of the couch, sits a woman whose body and gaze are correspondingly oriented toward him. Though her right arm is broken off above the elbow, her right hand survives, clasped with his in the *dextrarum iunctio* gesture, which in some cases accompanies a marriage connection. Both figures are clothed in tunics and mantles (no “heroizing” nudity here). His costume may be the elusive *synthesis* or dining-suite, or more probably the outer garment is a toga (a *balteus*-like curve extends from his left shoulder to right hip), by which he would be asserting his citizen status. Her mantle, meanwhile, may notionally be draped over her left arm in the manner of a *palla* that sometimes seems to connote modesty and chastity, though there is no sign of the *stola*, the matronal garb *par excellence*.

Beneath this relief is an inscription naming the deceased as P. Vitellius Successus and the dedicator as his wife Vitellia Cleopatra, both, undoubtedly, freed persons or the children of freed persons of the same

<sup>69</sup> *M Servilio M et C lib / Hermeroti pio / in patrono suo / vixit annis L (CIL VI 36337).*

*gens*.<sup>70</sup> Inscription and image fit together impeccably: the *dextrarum iunctio* of the couple on the couch is consistent with marriage, and the portrait-heads borne by these figures are reproduced in a second pair of portraits in the pediment that crowns the altar. This couple must surely be the couple named in the inscription. What, then, of the woman's posture? Evidently, it marks a degree (at least) of inferiority to the reclining man. She does not share his posture of ease; moreover, the table, with the pleasures of wine and food that it represents, is located much more conveniently to him than to her, and while he holds a drinking vessel in his left hand, her left hand is empty. In short, she appears rather less than a full and equal participant in the leisure and pleasures her husband enjoys. On the other hand, she does at least share his couch, and as a married couple they undoubtedly have a sexual connection. Furthermore, were slaves present in this scene, she would enjoy their ministrations no less than he, and her position in the social hierarchy—as well as in the hierarchy of postures—would be more readily perceived as “intermediate”: inferior to the reclining man, yet by no means reduced to the instrumentality of those who stand in service.<sup>71</sup>

Several other funerary urns and altars bear dining scenes similar to this one, and in one case standing slaves are also present.<sup>72</sup> But in no case is the reverse configuration found: never does a woman recline while a man sits. Moreover, this arrangement is invariable regardless which member of the couple is deceased and regardless who dedicates the monument; that is, the man *as such* monopolizes the reclining posture,<sup>73</sup> and the gender-differentiated postures correspond to differential enjoyment

<sup>70</sup> *Dis Manibus / P Vitelli Successi / Vitellia Cleopatra / uxor bene merenti / fecit* (CIL VI 29088a). For detailed art-historical discussion of this monument, see Kleiner 1987, 158–60, and an excellent photo of the dining scene at pl. xxvi.

<sup>71</sup> Adult males, too, are occasionally said to sit in *convivia*, their posture marking their social inferiority to higher-status men who recline: see Plaut. *Stich.* 486–93; Suet. *Poet.* fr. 11.27–33; Dio Cass. 59.29.5; also, Cic. *Ver.* 2.3.62 for an elite male humiliated by being made to stand.

<sup>72</sup> See B 833 (reclining man, seated woman, standing slaves); B 775, 784, 955, S 457 (all showing a reclining man and seated woman, but no slaves).

<sup>73</sup> On monuments where a single figure reclines on a dining couch—man or woman—it is generally clear that the reclining figure represents the deceased. But when a man and woman appear together, she sits and he reclines regardless whether he is deceased and she dedicates to him (B 327, the Vitellii just discussed; also S 457); or she is deceased and he dedicates to her (B 775); or he or a third party dedicates the monument for both of them (B 784, B 955). On B 833, the man dedicates to himself, and the woman is epigraphically invisible.



of convivial pleasure. Why should this be, when literary texts consistently portray wives (or their equivalent) as reclining alongside their men, having full access to the food and wine, and generally participating equally in the leisure and pleasures of conviviality? I propose an explanation that returns to an association of female reclining discussed above: the idea that, by reclining alongside a man and so announcing a licit sexual connection, she also exudes a sexual energy that may extend transgressively beyond this licit connection to encompass other men, an effect further enhanced by wine drinking. Recall that the sub-elites who dedicate these monuments are appropriating an image of elite conviviality as a symbol of, or means of claiming for themselves, social integration and belonging. Yet such persons have particular, status-specific concerns that also demand iconographical expression. Urban freedmen of the late republic and Augustan era, for instance, usually chose a different way of asserting their social belonging on funerary monuments. They emphasized, iconographically as well as epigraphically, the juridical existence and emotional solidarity of their family ties. The men are represented wearing togas (stressing their juridical status as free citizens and their capacity both to contract legal marriages and raise legitimate children); spouses clasp hands; women make the *pudicitia* gesture; children wear togas and *bullae*.<sup>74</sup> Although the funerary iconography of urban freedmen evolved in new directions in the early empire, some of these earlier devices persisted and are found in the dining scenes examined here (e.g., the likely toga and the *dextrarum iunctio* seen on the altar of the Vitellii, fig. c).

Here, then, is the crux: these two strategies for asserting social belonging—assuming an elite convivial guise and stressing the existence and solidarity of familial ties—do not mesh perfectly. The elite convivial practice whose image these freedmen sought to appropriate included the figure of the woman reclining and drinking wine alongside her man. But the potential for sexual transgression associated with the reclining woman could seem incompatible with these freedmen's equally strong desire to insist that the couple shared an exclusive, legally recognized marriage bond (which implies their juridical status as free citizens).<sup>75</sup> This problem could, however, be resolved by the stratagem of representing the woman

<sup>74</sup> See Zanker 1975, 279–94 on these funerary monuments, the *Fenstergucker* type of the late republic and Augustan era.

<sup>75</sup> Any hint of sexual promiscuity might also be redolent of the sexual use to which they themselves, or their parents, had been put as slaves.

*seated* at the foot of the couch, with the man reclining at the head. The overall atmosphere of elite conviviality is little compromised by this distortion of actual elite practice. Meanwhile, the woman's posture and position separates her from the man's body and from the dangerous wine on the table before him (and again, *she* never holds a drinking vessel), thereby eliminating the more intense eroticism, and transgressive overtones, of the woman who reclines and drinks wine with a man. Nor do monuments showing women who recline *alone* on a dining couch (such as the Hermeros monument, fig. b) tell against this argument. For the absence of a man sharing her couch minimizes the erotic overtones of such scenes, notwithstanding the woman's horizontality and (in some cases) wine drinking. Anxieties about *stuprum* or adultery in particular emerge only insofar as her body relates to a male body. The seated woman, then, I interpret as a sub-elite adaptation of the imagery of elite conviviality, one that accommodates their particular (and distinctively non-elite) concern to assert their juridical status through a display of familial bonds.

Iconographical analysis, then, clarifies the moral significance of the woman who dines seated while her man reclines, a significance that Valerius and Varro leave unexplained when they (merely) imply that the posture denotes traditional womanly virtue.<sup>76</sup> Whether Roman women of any status actually dined seated in any period, we discuss in the conclusion (section VI).

## V. WOMEN'S DINING POSTURE AND SUB-ELITE SELF-REFLECTION IN POMPEIAN PAINTING

If the above explanation is correct—namely, that a status anxiety distinctive to sub-elites accounts for why, on funerary monuments, they depict

<sup>76</sup> Aside from Varro and Valerius, I know only two literary texts representing women who dine seated while their men recline—both cited by Bradley 1998, 47, and both dating from the late first or second century C.E. In Dio Chr. *Or.* 7.65, this is the convivial practice of an idealized Greek peasant household; in Apul. *Met.* 1.21–22, it is that of a miserly Thracian moneylender. Both texts thus depict values and practices *remote* from those of contemporary, elite, urban Romans (likewise Varro and Valerius, who locate this practice in a distant, morally valorized past). The distinctively non-elite concerns of urban freedmen, manifested in the distinctive convivial iconography on their funerary monuments, only corroborates the impression left by these literary texts: that the practice of women dining seated, and its associated values, are remote from elite urban ways and not (*contra* Bradley 1998, 47) the proper practice for elites at any time.

woman as dining seated in male company—then we may wonder why the same posture is not seen in our other corpus of sub-elite convivial representations, namely, the dining scenes painted in dining rooms of sub-elite Pompeian houses. One such painting was discussed above (section II) with emphasis on how the experience of the men is articulated iconographically. We saw that, in general, these men are shown enjoying the same sorts of (characteristically elite) convivial pleasures as the men on the funerary monuments and as the elite males in many literary texts. But if we reexamine these paintings with an eye to the women's convivial experience, we find that this experience resembles that portrayed in texts but differs from that represented on the funerary monuments. In this section I seek to pinpoint these differences and account for them in their particular social setting.

We begin by considering anew the painting from the west wall of the *triclinium* in the bakery and residential complex at IX.12.6–8 (see n. 32 above). I argued that this painting depicts two of the familiar pleasures of elite conviviality in a heightened form: overt representations of intoxication and the heightened erotic charge of women reclining against the men's bare chests. These features take on a new aspect, however, now that we have examined the socioethical implications of women's dining posture. First, in light of the literary evidence analyzed in section III, the women in this scene, who recline below men on dining couches, may be interpreted as sharing with them a licit sexual connection (i.e., one involving no *stuprum*). Indeed, the men with their "idealizing" but also erotically bare torsos, against which the women press their shoulders, seem no less the women's sexual objects than the women are theirs, since the partners share horizontality and full-body contact (not to mention idealized youth and beauty). This collocation also, as the Ovidian passages show, enables the couple to touch, caress, and exhibit other signs of their sexual connectedness before the eyes of the assembled party. Second, the women enjoy the ministrations of the slave no less than the men do—here, in fact, the standing woman monopolizes the slave's attention, at least for the moment. Third, since these women recline alongside the men, the tables that bear drinking implements are equally convenient (or inconvenient) to both. Indeed, the fact that every woman in this scene clutches a wine cup, and two are overtly intoxicated, indicates that they share fully the pleasures of wine with the men—for the man on the middle couch is himself presumably asleep from wine. In all these respects, then, these women (like those in the literary texts) seem to be full participants in the leisure and pleasures on offer in this *convivium*. Yet we have seen that women's wine drinking, especially in *convivia*, was

stereotyped as tending toward adultery or other sexual transgression, for the woman who reclined *and* drank alongside a man was thought capable of generating a sexual “excess” that could draw in other men. So while this scene shows no obvious sexual transgressions in progress, it displays a number of the attested predictors, or proximate causes, of such transgressions.<sup>77</sup>

This eroticism is even more overt in another painted scene that exists in two versions: one from the north wall of this same dining room, and the other (fig. d) now in the Naples Museum, but of uncertain provenance originally.<sup>78</sup> Here, two couples recline on couches, the women below their bare-chested men. These couples share a tall, three-legged table with hooved feet, which holds a small silver drinking service. The woman on the rightmost couch clutches a large silver drinking vessel, and in figure d looks to her left toward a cooling vat that holds still more wine (in the Casti Amanti painting, a slave stands to the far right, pouring wine into this vat). The sunshade overhead indicates that this convivial event occurs outside. A bit of forest is visible to the left, wherein a flute-player and another slave take a break from their own toils. A statue of a god (probably; Varone 1993a, 627–28), holding a staff, presides over the event. For our purposes, the striking feature of this scene is the couple kissing passionately on the leftmost couch, the woman’s left shoulder pressed to her man’s chest.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, her *tunica* is falling off her right shoulder and has drifted well down toward her elbow, leaving her shoulder, upper arm, and a portion of her right breast visible. This “drooping garment” motif derives from the iconography of Venus and is fairly common in paintings and sculpture of the first and second centuries C.E. (indeed, Vitellia Cleopatra—the seated wife in figure c—has a similarly

<sup>77</sup> A similar analysis can be applied to several other Campanian wall-paintings showing dining scenes: one on the east wall of this same dining room (Varone 1993a, 640, cf. n. 36 above); one on the north wall, discussed immediately below; a scene found in two copies—one from dining room (8) in I.10.7, and the other from an unknown room in VIII.2.38–39; also, the scene from the north wall of triclinium (r) in V.2.4. See also a scene known in three closely related versions: triclinium H of VI.16.36; room 12 of VI.9.2/13; and MNN 9024, from an unknown location in Herculaneum.

<sup>78</sup> This panel, MNN 9015, has traditionally been assigned to a small workshop in Pompeii (I.3.18), but this assignment is now known to be incorrect (Varone 1997, 149). Its provenance is therefore completely unknown. For the panel from IX.12.6–8, see Varone 1993a:639, and image no. 6 on the website given in n. 32.

<sup>79</sup> This kiss is paralleled in at least one (MNN 9193) and maybe a second (MNN 9207) small scene of erotes and psyches banqueting, from triclinium 16 of IX.3.5/24; see *PPM* IX 275 fig. 196, and 267 fig. 188, respectively.

exposed right shoulder).<sup>80</sup> This is yet another “idealizing” motif that, like the nude torso, places the figure so depicted in a slightly elevated sphere, imbuing her and the *convivium* as a whole with the values and characteristics associated with this goddess. Among these, of course, are physical beauty and sexual allure. The drooping garment both implies and puts before a viewer’s eyes these attributes of the woman so represented.

The overt eroticism of the couple’s kiss and the sagging tunic again calls to mind the highly eroticized *convivia* constructed by the Augustan elegists, which provide a literary analog to the iconography of these paintings. While these two forms of representation are unlikely to have a direct connection (I do not hold that the paintings “illustrate” elegiac *convivia* or that the elegists “narrate” scenes like these), they do share a rhetorical stance toward conviviality. Both present an ironized, exaggerated, even parodic image of certain potentialities inherent in any standard, mixed-sex *convivium*. Any Roman would probably agree that a woman who reclines to dine below a man thereby declares her sexual connection to him. But the elegists and paintings constantly submit to their audiences that, especially when combined with drinking wine, this sexuality becomes especially pronounced, producing excess and transgression. Thus these particular representations are attention-grabbing and amusing because they depict a recognized potential as being substantially *realized*—an extreme result that is probably quite unlike the normal unfolding of actual *convivia*.

Turning to these paintings’ social context—a dining room in a house/bakery, in which a prosperous but sub-elite proprietor probably hosted primarily his social equals and inferiors at *convivia*—we may wonder what meanings the viewers found in them. Since sub-elites from the city of Rome, at roughly this same time, were employing funerary monuments bearing convivial reliefs that show women sitting in male company, and since (as I argued) this gendered differentiation of postures responds to the anxieties of the dedicators *qua* sub-elites regarding the possibility of sexual promiscuity, then why would such persons shed these anxieties when decorating their dining rooms and represent women not only reclining to dine alongside men, but kissing them, drinking heavily, losing their garments, and generally exuding a transgressive sexuality?

One answer may reside in the self-reflexivity of the viewing situation—the fact that these paintings, showing men and women reclining

<sup>80</sup> On this motif as Aphrodisiac, see Kleiner 1981, 520; Wrede 1971, 128, and more generally, D’Ambra 1996. Literary parallels: Ov. *Ars Am.* 3.307–10; Tib. 1.6.18.

together on couches in a *convivium*, were painted on the walls of a dining room to be observed by men and women who reclined together on couches in a *convivium*. A handful of literary texts from the late republic and early empire describe people who encounter and interpret paintings. These passages, which cannot be discussed at length here, tend to depict Roman viewers as making meaning out of paintings by seeing them as commentaries on their own immediate situation.<sup>81</sup> If so, then the self-reflexive viewing situation discussed here—dining scenes painted in dining rooms—would seem only to confirm and strengthen that impulse. It seems likely that the diners who viewed these scenes examined them at least in part for how they compare to the actual *convivium* unfolding in that very room in which they themselves were participating. On the one hand, the paintings show ideally beautiful and youthful (for the most part) men and women, dining in surroundings that range from comfortable to grandiose. Thus the diners are presented with an idealized image of the luxury in which their social superiors dine, a desirable image likely to outshine their own, more modest, material surroundings. On the other hand, the rather exaggerated, even parodic depictions of heightened female sexuality and general intoxication might cause the viewers to question whether these are models of elite deportment that socially insecure sub-elites would actually want to adopt. In this respect the diners might not wish to “jump into the picture,” or transform the actual *convivium* into a simulacrum of the picture, so as to inhabit these roles for themselves. While we can never know all the ways in which an individual might find meaning in a painting, it seems likely that status-anxious sub-elites might have constructed meaning, *inter alia*, in the two domains just defined: on the one hand material luxury as a proxy for social status, and on the other hand personal conduct also as a proxy for social status. “I’ll take the furniture, but leave the behavior” might well be the verdict of the aspiring sub-elite as she or he dines under these scenes. Funerary monuments, in contrast, differ both in their social context and in their modes of articulating belonging. By their nature, such

<sup>81</sup> Ter. *Eun.* 583–92 (Chaerea is inspired to rape his beloved, upon viewing a painting of Jupiter approaching Danae in a golden shower); Plut. *Brut.* 23 (Porcia, preparing to leave Brutus, identifies with Andromache in a painting of Hector’s departure); Petr. 83 (Encolpius interprets scenes of divine-human love matches as emphasizing divine blessedness, in contrast to his own misery); Verg. *Aen.* 1.453–93 (Aeneas *literally* finds himself in the mural of the Trojan war in Juno’s temple at Carthage and takes the scene to be “about” himself and his situation). For this kind of reception of painting, see Zanker 1999 and Fredrick 1995.

monuments concern families, whether in commemorating family groups or in being dedicated by spouses, children, or parents. These monuments put the family forward as a vehicle for claiming status, and for sub-elites (as we have seen) this means affirming familial solidarity. In the funerary context, the desired status claims could be made by toning down those aspects of elite conviviality that suggest female sexual transgression (hence women sit in male company). However, the status-conscious self-reflection at which the mural decoration aims is best achieved by *exaggerating* those same potentially transgressive elements.

## VI. CONCLUSION: HORIZONTAL WOMEN IN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

This article opened by distinguishing two questions emerging from the antiquarian claims of Varro and Valerius Maximus, both of whom assert that Roman women dined seated in the good old days, while conceding that they no longer dine seated in the (morally degenerate) present. First, a historical question: what posture or postures did women of various status in fact assume in Roman *convivia* at various times? Second, an ideological question: what were the social, ethical, and political implications of a woman assuming one convivial posture or another? Partial answers to these questions have appeared in the subsequent analyses of three broad categories of evidence for women's conviviality, namely, literary texts, Roman urban funerary monuments, and Campanian wall paintings. It is now time to collect these partial answers and fill in some remaining gaps.

The literary evidence as a whole, we observed, provides abundant resources for addressing the ideological question. First, it shows that the reclining posture symbolizes many of the same things for women as for men: *otium*, privilege, and pleasures of various sorts (e.g., gustatory, vinolent, conversational, sexual). Beyond this, many literary representations make women's dining posture a proxy for matters of sexual propriety in general. We can now further assert that the visual representations discussed in sections IV and V also provide plentiful resources for the ideological inquiry. These images confirm that reclining women share broadly the same leisure and pleasures as reclining men. But each corpus of images also problematizes, in its own way, the matter of sexual propriety. On the funerary monuments, to deny a woman the reclining posture and depict her as seated in male company was to deny even a hint of sexual promiscuity on her part—an important claim for sub-elites. In the

mural decorations, again directed primarily at sub-elites, to represent a woman as reclining and drinking alongside a man was to raise precisely this specter of sexual promiscuity and thus to raise the question of what constitutes correct (status-marked) convivial deportment.

But what of the historical question? I argued in section III that the earliest representations of women's conviviality—all literary, mostly Plautine—probably accord with contemporary convivial norms when they portray women of various statuses reclining to dine alongside elite males with whom they had a “licit” sexual connection. This is assuredly the convivial norm in the late republic, the Augustan era, and the early empire. From this period, so many texts of so many different sorts portray women reclining to dine alongside elite males (when not precluded under the rubric of *stuprum*) that normative practice cannot possibly have been otherwise. This does not mean, of course, that all women dined reclining all the time. Slave women standing in service at a *convivium* would not ordinarily recline, and even women for whom reclining was the norm (e.g., wives) may have had the option to do otherwise—Pomponia, recall, withdrew altogether. Nevertheless, the *communis opinio*, which interprets Valerius and Varro to mean that women (at least “respectable” ones) regularly dined seated, not reclining, in male company at least through the late republic, and possibly beyond, is assuredly wrong. Valerius and Varro might be vindicated if they are taken to refer to a period *preceding* any for which we have contemporary evidence, i.e., before Plautus. But I strongly suspect that they transmit no factual information whatsoever about early practice. Rather, they retroject into the morally valorized past the opposite of the practice they observe in their own, morally fallen day. For them, as for many others, women's dining posture is principally a proxy for women's sexual mores.

The visual material raises a somewhat different historical question, since it emerges from and addresses itself to a *uniformly* lower-status social milieu, where the men as well as the women are mostly freed persons or of low freebirth. Is it possible that in this milieu women actually did, normatively, dine seated on the foot of the couch on which their husbands reclined, thereby making in real life the social and ideological claims that their funerary iconography made for them after death? Alas, it is extremely difficult to infer actual social practice from the funerary monuments or wall paintings, or indeed from the few literary texts that depict the conviviality of low-status free persons.<sup>82</sup> However, if

<sup>82</sup> Literary evidence: Dio Chr. *Or.* 7.65 and Apul. *Met.* 1.21–22, which describe sub-elite *convivia* in which the women sit, are overtly speaking of Greeks (see n. 76 above); it



diners saw these paintings as commentaries on their own immediate situation, as I proposed above, women could perhaps do so more easily if they were themselves reclining, just as the women in the paintings do. Moreover, the funerary monuments that show women reclining on a couch alone (as in fig. b) may likewise imply that women generally reclined in this social milieu, even in male company. For given what we know of freedmen's social preoccupations, it seems easier to understand why women who actually dined reclining should be represented on funerary monuments as sitting in male company, than to understand why women who actually dined sitting should be represented on some monuments as reclining alone. That is, funerary monuments tend to be conservative, so funerary representations seem more likely to depict distinctly conservative practices (more conservative than real life, anyway) than to depict distinctly radical ones. Indeed, the image of the seated woman can hardly have served across social strata as an ideologically potent symbol of antique sexual restraint and virtue if the practice was actually familiar and widespread in those social strata. Thus, ideology can illuminate social practice by indicating what is presupposed or taken for granted. So, despite disagreeing with Keith Bradley on certain specifics (see n. 76 above), I agree with him generally in distinguishing the ideology of women's dining posture from the practice while acknowledging their interrelation. This fundamental observation opens the way for further culturally attuned interpretations not only of convivial posture but of other bodily deportments as well, thus enabling us to write new chapters in the histories of dining, gender, and the body in the Roman world.<sup>83</sup>

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is hard to know how, if at all, we can relate such representations to actual sub-elite Roman conviviality. Petronius extensively describes a freedmen's convivial milieu, and there the women do (sometimes) recline when present in the room (see n. 58 above). But whether the behavior of Fortunata and Scintilla are representative of actual sub-elite female conviviality in general is far from clear.

<sup>83</sup> I thank Thomas Habinek, Michael Koortbojian, Alan Shapiro, Herica Valladares, and two anonymous referees for their engaged and critical readings of earlier versions of this paper; also, audiences at Yale, Johns Hopkins, and the 2002 meeting of the AIA/APA for their critiques of oral versions. Photo credits: fig. a: after Altmann 1905, 153, fig. 124; fig. b: photo Rossa, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, neg. no. 74.727; fig. c: after Altmann 1905, 192, fig. 154; fig. d: after Herrmann-Bruckmann 1904, Taf. 210.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- B = Boschung 1987 (followed by catalogue no.)  
 MNN = Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Naples (followed by inventory no.)  
 PPM = G. Pugliese Carratelli and I. Baldassarre, eds. *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici*. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana. 10 vols. to date, 1990–.  
 S = Sinn 1987 (followed by catalogue no.)

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Fig. a. after Altmann 1905, 153, fig. 124



Fig. b. photo Rossa, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, neg. no. 74.727





Fig. c. after Altmann 1905, 192, fig. 154



Fig. d. after Herrmann-Bruckmann 1904, Taf. 210.