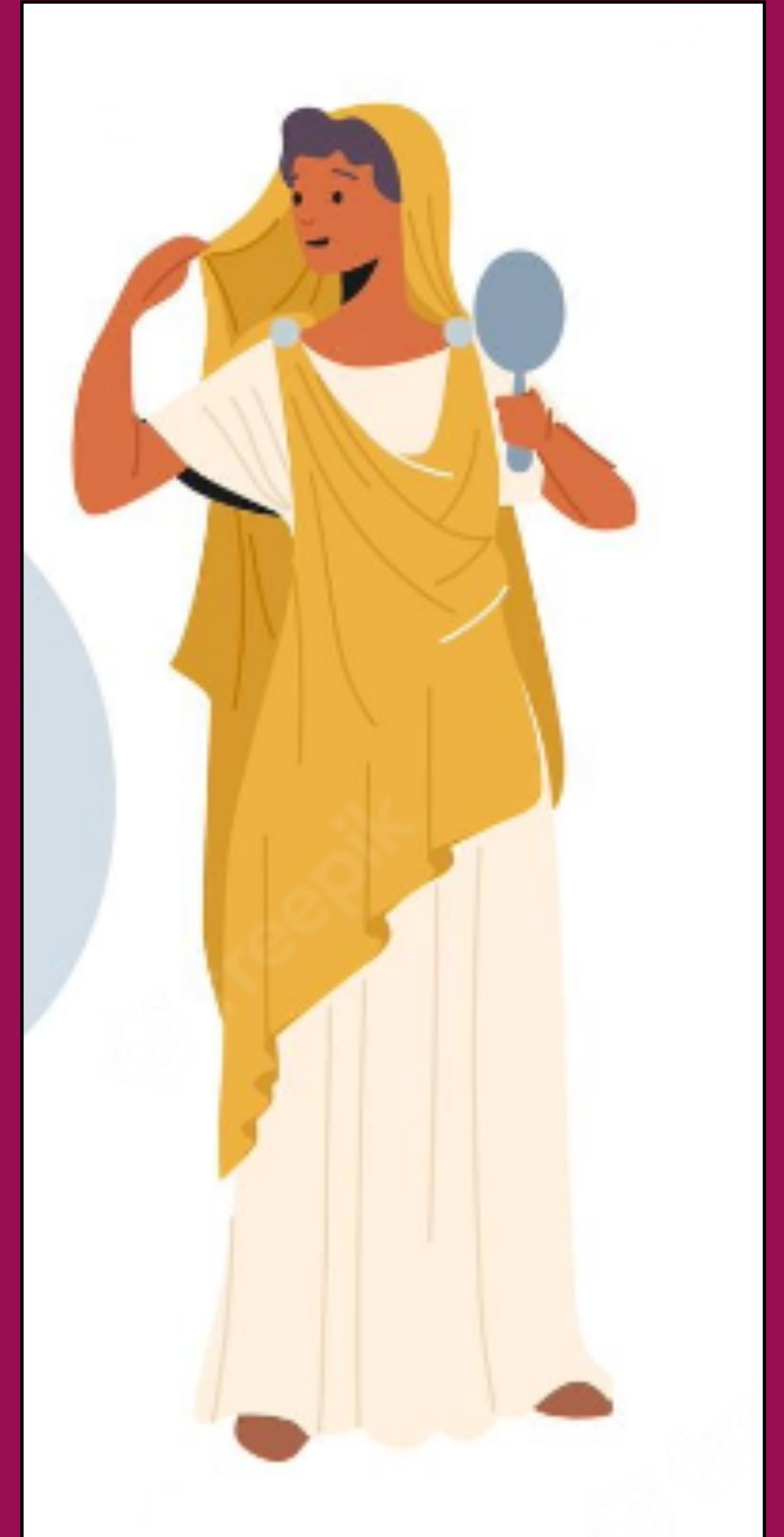


Roman Women

Working Women

Component 3B > Latin GCSE



Starter

Once a Roman girl was married, she became known as a **matrona**. If she was married to a *paterfamilias* she would be known as the **materfamilias**. *matronae* were usually responsible for running the **household** and bringing up the children, but the *materfamilias* would have authority over the slaves, **children**, and dependent **unmarried** women of the *familia*. Although women couldn't sell **property**, free slaves, or bring **lawsuits**, she could own property and **land**.

unmarried property land *materfamilias* lawsuits *matrona* household children

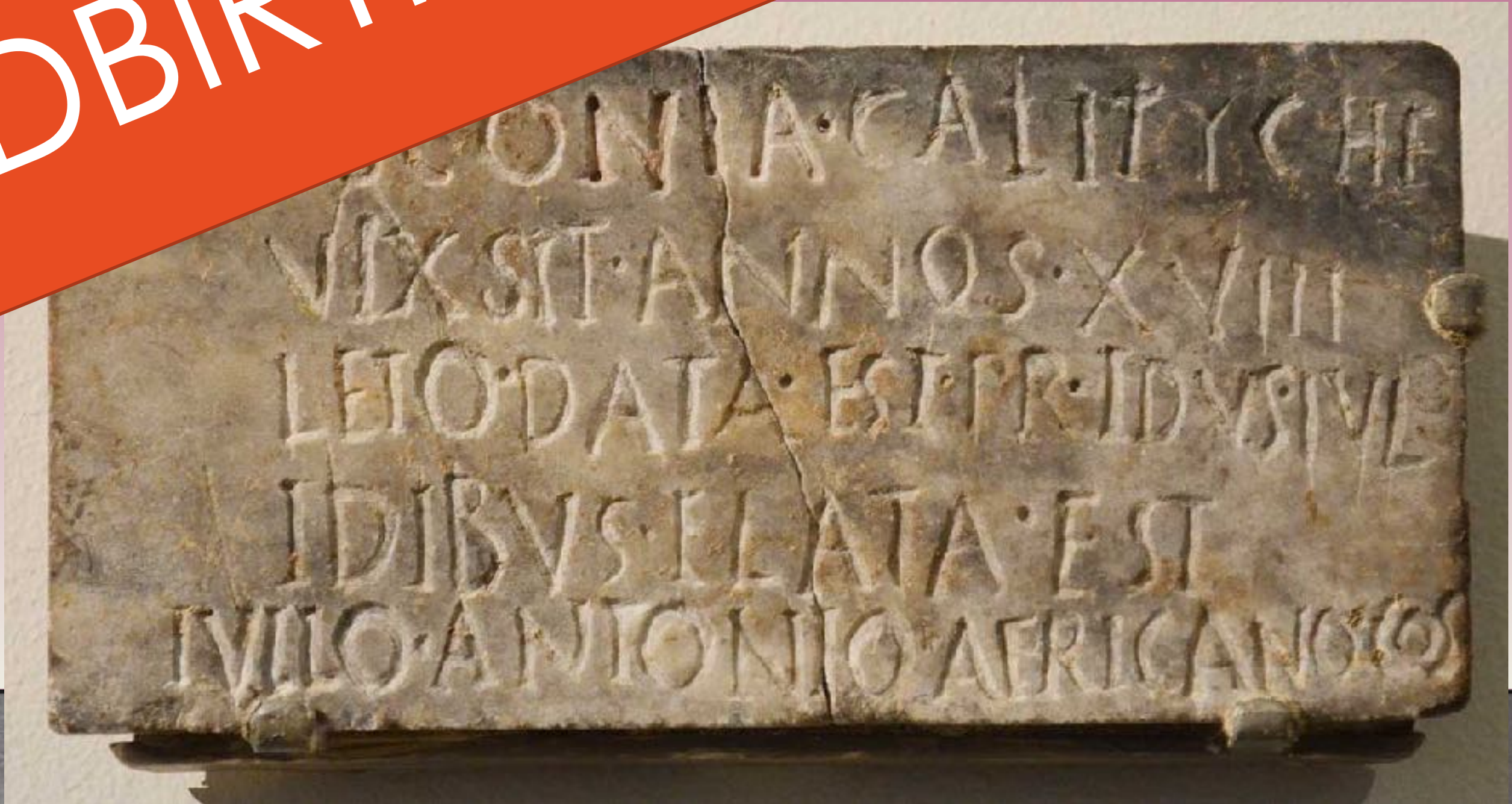


What do these
grave
inscriptions tell
us about
some Roman
matronae?

Why mi

“Cosconia Callityche lived 18 years. She
was given over to death
before the Ides of
buried on the
Antonia Africanus

CHILDBIRTH



‘To the spirit
Cla
Antonia, dedicated this
to her wife. She lies here.’



- **Women's role in the household**
 - A married woman's life was largely centred on the home
 - She ran the household, controlled the money and raised the children, something which gained her respect and prestige.
 - A Roman wife could leave her home to visit friends and to attend the games, the theatre, and the courts with her husband.
 - She could own property and run her own business (although this was unusual)



The historian Tacitus describes the relationship between Agricola and his mother who took an active role in her son's education, moral guidance and political career.

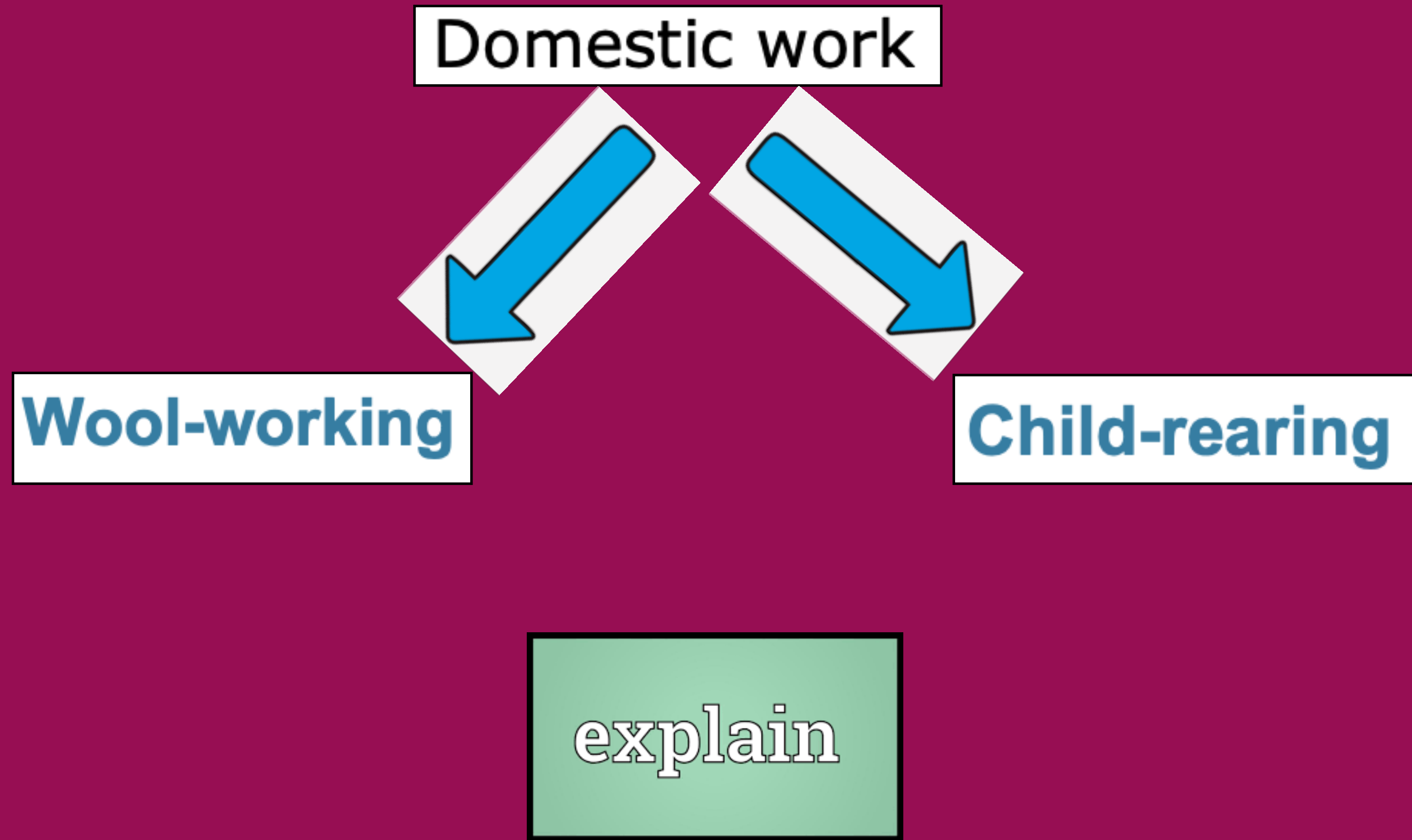
His mother was Julia Procilla, a lady of exceptional virtue. Close by her side with fond affection, he spent his boyhood and youth being gently trained in every aspect of honourable attainment. He was guarded from the enticements of immorality not only by his own good and straightforward character, but also by living as a child in Massilia, a place where Greek refinement and provincial frugality were blended. I remember that he used to tell us how in his early youth he would have been absorbed by a keener love of philosophy than was proper for a Roman and a senator, had not his mother's good sense controlled his ardent and passionate nature.

Tacitus, Agricola 4, 2-4 (adapted)

Highlight the positive attributes of his mother described by Tacitus

What sort of qualities are these?

Our evidence for women working outside of the home is not overwhelming. However, the work women undertook in the domestic sphere would have been extensive, and goes some way to explaining the relative lack of evidence of women working beyond the home.



What might life in the domestic sphere have been like for women?

Wool-working

In poorer families, it is likely that clothes were home-produced, and the predominance of surviving loom weights in domestic settings, as well as spindles, inscriptions and imagery suggest that the domestic cloth industry might have been extensive.



Good wives and women were often praised for being good wool-workers, but this wasn't just a hollow compliment. In the early Roman period spinning wool and weaving clothes was one of the most important jobs of women in the household. Later on too, poorer families might have had to make their own clothes.

Funerary inscription (CIL 6.15346):

*[Claudia] loved her husband with all her heart. She bore two children, one of whom she left on earth, the other beneath it. She had a pleasing way of talking and walking. She tended the house **and worked wool**. I have said my piece.*

Wool-working

But for upper-class women it became an unnecessary practice as they could afford to buy new clothes or get their slaves to do the weaving for them. So why did they continue to do it or at least why did the compliment of being a good wool-worker continue to appear on tombstones and in eulogies?

Livia, the wife of the emperor Augustus kept up an image of traditional matronly morality and modesty. She was famously said to have been good at spinning and weaving. Suetonius wrote about Augustus:

... ueste non temere alia
quam domestica usus est, ab
sorore et uxore et filia
neptibusque confecta ...

Suetonius *Augustus* 73

*On all but special occasions
he wore house clothes
produced for him by his sister,
wife, daughter and grand-
daughters.*

*Head of the empress Livia, late 1st
century BC (Walters Art Museum)*



explain

Do you think it was true that the emperor Augustus only wore home-made clothes?

Why do you think this is an image he would have been keen to propagate?

Does the story about Livia change your interpretation of tombstones that praise women's wool-working?

Women who managed to work outside of the home...

- Eumachia was the daughter of Lucius Eumachius, a manufacturer of bricks, tiles and amphorae.
- She married Marcus Numistrius Fronto, who may have left his wealth to Eumachia and their son.
- Eumachia was able to use her wealth and social standing to obtain the position of public priestess of the goddess Venus Pompeiana (the city's patron goddess)
- She became a successful patron of the guild of fullers (tanners, dyers and clothing-makers).
- Eumachia is an example of how a Roman woman could become an important figure in a community and involved in public affairs and business.



Image of the Eumachia building in Pompeii

Women who managed to work outside of the home...

Domitia Lucilla

This is Domitia Lucilla Minor, the wife of Marcus Annius Verus and mother of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Her son mentions what he learnt from his mother in the first lines of his *Meditations*:

... From my grandfather Verus I learned good morals and the government of my temper. From the reputation and remembrance of my father, modesty and a manly character. **From my mother, piety and beneficence, and abstinence, not only from evil deeds, but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.**

Domitia Lucilla

We have quite a different type of evidence for Domitia Lucilla's life as well though. Roman bricks were marked in the centre with a stamp from the clayfield and manufacturer, and sometimes the year (by mentioning the current consuls). A large number of bricks was found in Portus, near Ostia, with stamps mentioning the clayfields of Domitia Lucilla Minor, like the one below, which reads "Brick-product of Claudius Quinquatralis and Livius Martialis, from the estate of Domitia Lucilla".



Molds like the one below were used to stamp the clay before it was baked.

Only part of the brick and part of the stamp survive, but Domitia Lucilla's name can still be read.



explain

Why do you think Aurelius has not mentioned her success in business but instead focusses on her piety and frugality?

What aspects of Domitia Lucilla's life might her epitaph have mentioned?

explain

paterfamilias or materfamilias?

Romulus granted absolute power to the Roman father over his son, and this power was valid until the father's death. He could decide to imprison him or whip him, to put him in chains and make him work on a farm or even to kill him. Romulus even allowed the Roman father to sell his son into slavery.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2. 26-27

explain

- Do you think women were satisfied in their roles as matronae?

Visual Source A

What can we learn from this?

PLENARY

A father looks on as his wife feeds their child.



Visual Source B

What can we learn from this?

A father, mother and their children.



Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting images

Consider the following images of women at work:

Source 1: Fresco from a bar in Pompeii

What do you think the profession of the girl in the fresco was?



This fresco from a bar in Pompeii shows two customers (left) and a serving girl? (right). The text above them reads:

A: Hoc [poculum mihi est]

B: Non! Mia est!

C: Qui vol, sumat!

A: This cup is mine

B: No! It's mine!

C: Whoever wants it, pick it up!

Fresco from Caupona of Salvius, Pompeii.

Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting images

Consider the following images of women at work: **relief of hairdressers**

Do you think the hairdressers in the relief might be slaves, or professionals?



In this funerary relief (left) from a large tomb (right), four women attend to a lady seated in a wicker chair. From left to right: two women tend to the lady's hair, another holds up a mirror, and a fourth stands by with a jug.



Marble relief from a large family tomb from Neumagen (Trier).

What difficulties did you encounter when interpreting these images?

Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting inscriptions

Though the majority of funerary inscriptions reference women exclusively in the role of daughter, wife or mother, we do have surviving examples telling us different stories. What aspects of these women's lives do the following inscriptions choose to commemorate?

AURELIAE · C · L · NAIS
PISCATRIX DE HORREIS GALBAE

For Aurelia Nais, fisherwoman
from the granaries of Galba
*(Nais was a freedwoman
who ran a fish-shop)*

SELLIA EPYRE
DE SACRA VIA
AURIVESTRIX

Sellia Epyre, a gold
clothworker from
the Sacred Way

ITALIA · QUASILLARIA

*Italia, a quasillaria
(a spinner)
(set up by her husband
Scaeva, a book-keeper)*

Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting inscriptions

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OPTATA · PASAES
OSTIARIA

Optata Pasaes, a
doorkeeper / janitor

GNOME · PIERINIS
ANCILLA ORNATRIX

Gnome, slave girl of Pieris,
hairstresser

HYMNIS · CELLIA
PSALTRIA

Hymnis Cella, musician
who played the cithara

Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting inscriptions

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HYGIA · MARCELLAE · L
OBSTETRIX

Hygia, freedwoman of
Marcella, midwife

STATILIA · T · L · TYRANIS
PAEDAGOGA

Statilia Tita, freedwoman of
Tyranes, tutor / teacher

PHILAENIS · L · LIVI
NUTRIX

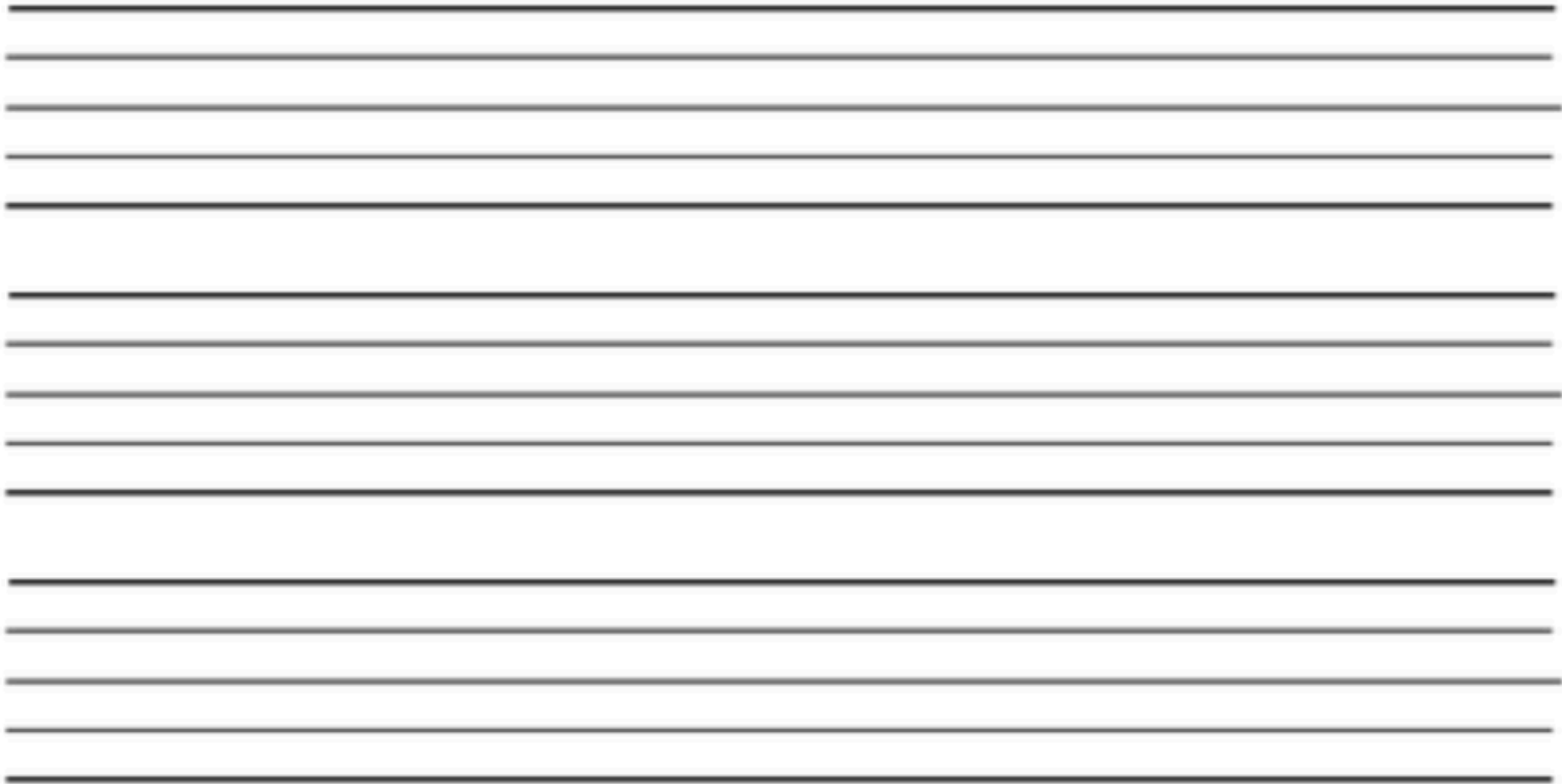
Philaenis, freedwoman of
Livus, wetnurse

Home Task: working Roman women - interpreting inscriptions

How important do you think the occupation of these women was in their lives?
Do you think this makes them unusual?

How successful do you think these women might have been,
from looking at these inscriptions?

Thinking about the range of professions listed, which of these would men have undertaken as well, and which were particularly female occupations?



Home Task: here are some epitaphs on graves we may see today...

Devoted wife & mother

Beloved sister and daughter

An inspiration to us all

Remembered with love

Gone, but not forgotten

An inspiration to us all

At rest with God

Rest In Peace

In loving memory of...

Home Task: here are some epitaphs on graves from the Romans...

SANCTAE · CL · PIERIDI · KA
RISSIMAE · ET · RARISSIMAE
ET INCONPARABILI · CONIUGI
ANNIUS TELESOPHORUS · B · MER
HIC · CONDITAE · POSUIT ...

... To blessed Claudia Pieris, his most beloved and most extraordinary and incomparable wife, for her - well-deserved - Annus Telesphorus put this up here ...

ANNIAE
ISIADI
MATRI
DULCISSIMAE
SERGIUS ASINIUS
PHAINUS

To Annia Isias, his sweetest mother,
Sergius Asinius
Phainus
[set this up]

AELIAE TRYPHERAE
CONIUGIS RARISSIMAE
ET ULTRA MODUM
SEXUMQUE MULIEBREM
SANCTISSIMAE
CASTISSIMAE

To Aelia Tryphera, an exceptional wife, pure and chaste beyond what can be expected of the average female

Highlight the positive attributes of the women described here
What sort of qualities are these?

Home Task: here is an epitaph on a grave from the Romans...

HIC · SITA · EST · AMYMONE · MARCI · OPTIMI · ET · PULCHERRIMA
LANIFICA · PIA · PUDICA · FRUGI · CASTA · DOMISEDA

Here lies Amymone, wife of Marcus, most good and most beautiful,
wool-spinner, dutiful, modest, careful, chaste, home-loving.

Highlight the positive attributes of the woman described here

What sort of qualities are these?

