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Redefining Roman Women: Powerful Benefactresses & Patrons of the Early Roman Empire

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**Redefining Roman Women:
Powerful Benefactresses & Patrons of the Early Roman Empire**

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HIS 489 Senior Classics Thesis

Department of History & Classics

Providence College

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Introduction

The history of the Roman Empire is an epic tale of male excellence and glory, or so modern society believes. Dating as far back as Rome's mythical foundation in 753 B.C., Roman history has been glaringly dominated by male voices. Built from the ground up by brothers Romulus and Remus, the city of Rome, cradle of the Roman Empire, was defined as a masculine undertaking at its very core, relegating Roman women as spectators and secondary to male achievements. According to Roman mythology and accounts by the ancient historian Livy, the early city used to be inhabited solely by men, lacking women entirely. Consequently, the first alleged introduction of women into Rome was described as a mass abduction and rape of the local Sabine women led by Romulus and his band of men.¹ From its very advent, the Roman Empire built its legacy upon these actions, immortalizing and seemingly glorifying the free will of men at the expense of the subservience and passivity of women. As Rome expanded outside of its city walls and grew from a monarchy to a Republic and eventually into its expansive empire, men continued to be the primary focus of Roman historical records.

By the time the Roman Empire reached its largest expanse and so called "height" under Emperor Trajan in 117 A.D., most surviving texts from the Roman-conquered Mediterranean appeared to arrive at a consensus regarding the cultural status quo; men ruled, and women obeyed. However, while this image of the Roman Empire commonly prevails in modern consciousness today, this stereotypical understanding of life is ultimately a gross generalization based upon highly biased textual evidence. Much of the information we believe to be true about

¹ Livy, "Titus Livius (Livy), the History of Rome, Book 1 Rev. Canon Roberts, Ed." Titus Livius (Livy), The History of Rome, Book 1, Chapters 9-13, n.d.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0026%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D9>.

the ancient Roman Empire has been derived from the historical works of men like Livy and Tacitus. As historians, these men recorded all manner of events they deemed important during the rise and height of the early Empire and are crucial to our modern understanding of Imperial Roman history. They contributed vital information regarding wars, political disputes, economic ventures, and territorial expansion in the early Roman Empire, utilizing their wealth and education as upper-class men of society to preserve major historical events of their days. However, as valuable as the *Histories* of Livy and Tacitus' *Histories* and *Annals* are to modern historians, these works also provide dangerously limited narratives regarding the reality of Roman life. As a result of being written by male historians and depicting merely the mainstream, elite male perspective, marginalized voices of the empire such as women are rarely ever mentioned in the works of Livy and Tacitus. When briefly discussed, Roman women are recorded one-dimensionally as mothers, wives, and overall keepers of domesticity. Women who attempted to reach beyond their domestic spheres and vie for greater influence within society, such as Agrippina the Younger or Agrippina the Elder, were villainized and looked down upon as scandalous figures worthy of social, and often literal, exile. In Tacitus' *Histories*, he denounces Agrippina the Younger, wife of Emperor Claudius and mother of Emperor Nero, as a power-hungry, evil manipulator for even daring to openly pursue power.² Never in these contemporary works are Roman women depicted as recognized, accepted members of public society.

In addition to the exceptionally limited discussion of the daily lives of Roman women within ancient literary sources, there are equally as few surviving records of Roman women who were able to function as independent, powerful figures within the public sphere. For example, in

² Tacitus, "Cornelius Tacitus, The Annals Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodribb, Ed." Cornelius Tacitus, The Annals, Book XIV, chapter 1, n.d. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0078%3Abook%3D14%3Achapter%3D1>.

the case of Empress Livia Drusilla, wife of Emperor Augustus, she served alongside her husband for many years as part of the first Imperial family of the Roman Empire. Even as the first official Empress of the empire, according to ancient records, Livia was simply memorialized as a dutiful wife and the epitome of Roman female virtues and marital devotion. Unsurprisingly, in light of Livia Drusilla's public image and her virtuous example of traditional female roles, her husband Emperor Augustus decreed the *Lex Iulia* in 18 B.C., criminalizing adultery, granting special benefits to women who birthed at least three children, and enforcing traditional values across the Empire.³ This law established a high standard of female piety and traditionality in the Roman World. It effectively reaffirmed into law the widespread cultural expectation of female relegated roles within the early Roman Empire, solidifying the male dominated society which began at the foundation of Rome and sequestered women to the domestic sphere. In such a culturally rigid environment with strict gendered roles, it is not surprising that ancient texts maintained this image within the public eye, whether intentionally or unintentionally continuing its concept into perpetuity.

However, despite the overwhelming amount of biased male narratives in literary sources and the restrictive laws of the Roman Empire subsequently omitting Roman women from historical records, the vibrant, dynamic lives of these women were not completely lost to history. Evidently, where textual evidence sought to hide powerful Roman women who participated outside of their domestic roles within the public sphere, material remains are able to reveal the true extent of female agency and influence during the 1st-3rd centuries of the Roman Empire. Named upon honorific inscriptions, statue bases, nymphaea, courtyards, and various other physical benefactions scattered throughout the expansive empire, Roman women and their

³ David Daube, "The "Lex Julia" Concerning Adultery" *Irish Jurist* (1966-), New Series, 7, no. 2 (1972): 373-80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44026592>.

generous contributions were unmistakably engrained in the civic stage. As we will examine within the subsequent chapters of this work with the case studies of Roman Hispania, Pompeii, Perge, and Ephesus, “middle-elite”⁴ women from the expansive Roman Empire expertly wielded their existing wealth and influence as established members of local society in order to create names for themselves. Utilizing some combination of wealth, social class, religious position, marital or familial connection, or traditional virtues, many middle-elite Roman women funded civic munificence projects, donating architectural and/or aesthetic gifts to their local communities. These benefactions appeared to participate within a mutual exchange of goods in Roman society, bolstering the public renown of benefactress in exchange for her betterment of the city. Through their very existence, these benefactions and material artifacts shatter the traditionally accepted representation of Roman women solely within the domestic sphere. Through the extensive analysis of these surviving remains, this thesis will prove that Roman women during the early empire were by no means merely secondary figures or “background characters” to a male-dominated society. While feminine virtues and traditional gender roles were certainly important parts of Roman culture which cannot be ignored, modern history can no longer accept the textual accounts of the Roman Empire at face value. By reexamining these invaluable sources as biased narratives and putting them into conversation with material evidence found throughout the Empire, this project will begin to redefine the lives of Roman women as more than one-dimensional beings and identify the truth behind a hidden layer of Imperial Roman society by filling in the gaps of female narratives left out of mainstream history for too long.

⁴ At this point in history, the concept of a middle class was nonexistent. However, for the purposes of my research, I have identified this stratum of Roman women who were not of working-class families, nor the Imperial family as “middle-elite”. Members of this class came from some form of preexisting wealth or societal influence and subsequently held significant cultural or societal power in their local communities.

Chapter 1. Benefactresses of Roman Spain

Absorbed into the Roman Empire following Emperor Augustus' annexation of the Iberian Peninsula c. 19 B.C., Roman Spain boasts a unique history of female public agency and *euergetism*⁵ during the 1st -3rd C.E.. Unlike what we will later examine with the benefactions and munificence styles of the central and eastern reaches of the early Roman Empire, the territories of Roman Spain do not seem to contain a similar abundance of physical evidence for female-funded benefactions and public works projects. While Pompeii in central Italy and Perge in the eastern provinces can each be connected to woman-commissioned architectural projects such as that of Eumachia's forum building and Plancia Magna's gate complex, the regions of Baetica and Tarraconensis cannot so easily be linked to comparable physical evidence. Despite the overwhelming number of inscriptional remains confirming that female-funded benefactions and patronage were a thriving phenomenon in Roman Spain, incomplete historical databases referencing this period and region largely consist of fragmentary texts and partial translations of said contributions. However, due in large part to the growing efforts of leading historians including Emily A. Hemelrijk and John F. Donahue to better research, catalogue, and analyze the material evidence of such powerful, "middle-elite" women, these partial remains have begun to offer crucial insight into the public lives and benefactions of influential Spanish-Roman women.

Fragmentary as they may be, there are copious amounts of physical evidence littered throughout the Baetica and Tarraconensis regions of Eastern Spain left behind in the wake of female munificence efforts. Detailed on one damaged inscription stone located in what is now Sevilla, Spain, is a record of the civic benefaction(s) of Antonia Procula. The modern state of the

⁵ According to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, *euergetism* is "the phenomenon of elite gift-giving to cities (or to groups within them) in Greek and Roman societies".

inscription is highly degraded, leaving the text undatable and incomplete; however, we are still able to glean vital information from the text which states, “[- -]s et portic[us - - - / - - - Anto]nia Q(uinti) f(ilia) Procu[la //] Rustic/[us - - - L(ucius) Att]ius Vetto / [- - -] sua inpen/[sa - - -] proneptis d(edit)”.⁶ Translated from its original Latin, this inscription roughly points to a joint dedication project by Antonia Procula and a man named Rusticus Lucius Attius Vetto for a porticus paid for at Antonia’s own expense. We know that Antonia Procula funded the project through her own wealth due to the inclusion of “sua inpena” at the end of the dedication which, in the singular form, literally translates to “her own expense”. Evidently, despite being a woman with open possession and public usage of her own wealth, the inscriptional text does not appear to regard this phenomenon as improper or presumptuous. Interestingly, the “et”, translated into English as “and”, placed at the very beginning of the readable text suggests the presence of a secondary benefaction or donation also tied to Antonia Procula and her co-dedicator. While this inscription does not offer a shocking, visible display of female agency and power in the early Roman Empire, the humble text does shatter the mainstream belief that these women were purely relegated to the domestic sphere. Antonia Procula, while not entirely independent in her donation, was clearly capable of contributing to the public sphere of her city without her gender or its subsequent societal expectations holding her back.

In addition to Antonia Procula, another woman by the name of Quintia Flaccina similarly participated in the civic stage of ancient Seville with her own munificence project.⁷ Sometime in the 2nd century, Quintia Flaccina funded a series of donations to the city of Munigua in the Baetica Region including the dedication of a temple and its portico to the “genius of the town”

⁶ Hispania Epigraphica Online Database, n.d. http://eda-bea.es/pub/record_card_2.php?rec=892.

⁷ Hispania Epigraphica Online Database, n.d.

(AE 1972, 270). According to the archival efforts of Emily A. Hemelrijk, it is also suggested that Quintia may have donated a silver statue to the “genius of the town” alongside her first temple benefaction.⁸ It is important to note that as the *flaminica divarum Augustarum*⁹ of the Baetica province, Quintia Flaccina held a significant level of civic sway in the town of Munigua as a religious and moral example for her fellow citizens. As a priestess of the Imperial cult, Quintia connected the local culture and society of the distant Baetica Region to the heart of the Roman Empire. Although geographically and often culturally different from Rome itself, elite women like Quintia who served in high status religious offices effectively brought Rome and its values to their local areas through the practice of Roman state religion. Moreover, while Quintia’s role as priestess earned her substantial status in larger Roman society by connecting her to the Imperial elite, her physical benefactions to Munigua added to her social elevation on a local scale in the Spanish provinces. Her dedication of a temple and silver statue to Munigua demonstrated the sheer amount of wealth and power which she was able to yield in the city despite being a woman. As a powerful member of elite society, both as a Roman and as a Baetican, Quintia Flaccina was able to present herself to local society as a benefactress and priestess in her own right.

In the final years of the 2nd century A.D., Vibia Modesta donated a considerable amount of wealth and goods to the Baetica Region. On a surviving honorific inscription to Augustan Victory, a lengthy text details the life and honors of Vibia Modesta as well as the gifts she granted to her local community stating,

⁸ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 135.

⁹ This phrase is the Latin term for a priestess of deified Augustus. This religious office served the state cult which worshiped the legacy and identity of Emperor Augustus.

To Augustan Victory. Vibia Modesta, daughter of Gaius Vibius Libo, originating from Mauretania, twice enjoying the repeated honor of being priestess of the imperial cult, priestess of Italica, donated a silver statue...with earrings with ten pendants each consisting of three pearls, forty gemstones, eight beryls, and a gem-encrusted golden crown with twenty-five gems...she donated a golden crown of the flaminiate, a golden bust of Lady Isis, another one of Ceres with silver hands and also one of Juno Regina (*AE* 2001, 1185).¹⁰

Much like Quintia Flaccina, Vibia Modesta served as twice priestess of the Imperial cult and a priestess of Italica, establishing herself as a local and Roman moral, religious, and societal elite.

As was common practice for members of Roman religious cults, both men and women alike, this social establishment came at the cost of an almost unspoken mutual exchange of goods.

Religious leaders were afforded substantial civic authority in local society and in return, either to display their gratitude or newfound wealth and agency, gave back to the community in some form. In the instance of Vibia Modesta, she repaid her elevation of status with the donation of a silver statue decorated with pearl and gemstone-embedded earrings, a golden, gem-encrusted crown, and busts to the goddesses Isis, Ceres, and Juno. These donations would have clearly displayed Vibia Modesta's wealth and generosity as one who was willing to spend so much money on such grand items for her city. Most importantly, these gifts were closely intertwined with her religious identity as a priestess. The golden crown specifically represented an obvious religious purpose as it would have most likely been worn by the priest or priestess of whatever cult it was donated to during important religious festivals.¹¹ The crown's habitual acknowledgement and usage by public religious figures would have served to semi-immortalize Vibia Modesta and her action through its repeated presence. In addition, by commissioning several elaborately decorated statues of various goddesses in the Roman pantheon, Vibia

¹⁰ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Women and Society in the Roman World: A Sourcebook of Inscriptions from the Roman West* (Cambridge University Press, 2021): 241.

¹¹ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Women and Society in the Roman World*, 241.

Modesta tied herself to the traditional religious domain and the Roman feminine virtues of piety and devotion. Even while openly functioning in the civic sphere as a wealthy, powerful individual, Vibia Modesta purposely presents herself as a priestess and a woman of utmost virtue, molding her public image into an acceptable format.

Although civic munificence was frequently associated with women of high religious offices or performed alongside an elite male relative, these circumstances were not the only opportunities for women of the Spanish provinces to participate in benefaction projects. In the region of Hispania Tarraconensis an affluent woman named Licinia Macedonia commissioned and dedicated an honorific statue to her daughter Allia Candida during the 2nd century (CIL II, 3229¹²).¹³ While the actual statue of Allia Candida has been lost to time, the statue base and its text can be seen in image A below. Intended to publicly honor Allia Candida and her unspecified achievements in life, the statue and its base were co-dedicated by Licinia Macedonia and the “clients and freedmen” of Allia Candida out of gratitude for their “patroness”. Whether she was awarded her honorific statue for her patronage in Tarraconensis or for some other unspecified reason, Allia Candida was clearly influential and successful enough amongst her clients to deserve public acknowledgement. However, not only was Allia Candida a prominent woman in her local society, so too was her mother Licinia Macedonia. Wealthy enough to fund this benefaction and powerful enough to place the statue in public view, Licinia Macedonia would have presumably held an elite status in her community and an influential place in society.

¹² Alliae M(arc) f(iliae) / Candidae / curante / Licinia / Macedoni/ca matre / collec[3] / Anense mai / clientes et / liberti [pat]/[r]on[ae] pos(uerunt)

¹³ Hispania Epigraphica Online Database, n.d. http://eda-bea.es/pub/record_card_2.php?rec=892.

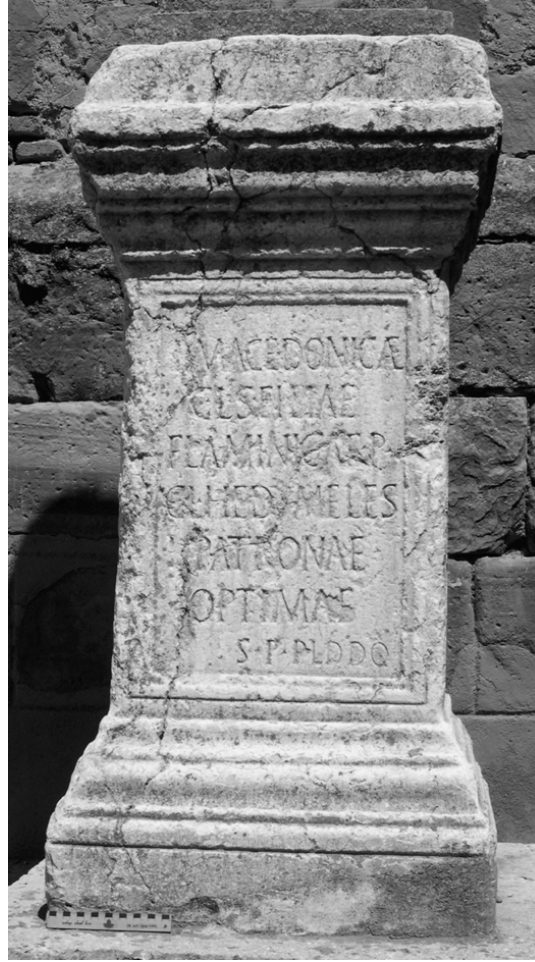


Image A: Inscribed Statue Base to Allia Candida¹⁴

Moving beyond the strictly physical, female-funded benefactions of the Spanish provinces, a unique pattern of civic munificence was most prominently practiced in this region of the Roman Empire consisting of a much more immaterial nature. Rather than simply donating physical monuments of prestige to local communities in order to demonstrate their agency and contributions to society, Spanish Roman women of the early empire frequently employed their

¹⁴ Rosario Cebrián Fernández, “Saetabis y El Comercio Del Buixcarró.” Research Gate, n.d. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277787348_Saetabis_y_el_comercio_del_Buix_carro.

wealth to pay civic taxes to Rome, hold festivals in their name, and/or establish *alimentas*¹⁵.

Although these practices themselves were not wholly unheard of in the Roman Empire amongst men and women alike, the sheer frequency of these donations by female benefactresses sets the Spanish provinces entirely apart from their central and eastern counterparts. In just the Baetica Region alone, roughly 51% of all public feasts and festivals recorded were sponsored by local women.¹⁶ Discovered on one inscription from Cartima in the Baetica Region, the text details a “Valeria Cai, the daughter of Situllina, made perpetual priestess by decree of the councilors of the municipality of Cartima, with her own money alone did this, and dedicated it to the given feast” (*CIL* II, 5488).¹⁷ Primarily identified in her own right as perpetual priestess of Cartima and solely referenced as the daughter of Situllina to orient herself in local society, Valeria Cai was a wealthy and powerful woman of Cartima. Either through her position as perpetual priestess or derived from preexistent familial wealth, Valeria Cai acquired a considerable amount of capital and used it to benefit her public image as a woman of the early empire. While we cannot fully assume what “this” is that Valeria Cai initially did in the civic sphere, we do know that her mysterious action was significant enough to deserve not only a dedicatory feast in her honor but also a physical acknowledgement of said feast and her position in Cartima through an honorific inscription.

Comparably, in the nearby city of Tagilis located in the Baetica Region, Voconia Avita contributed both material and immaterial benefactions to her city sometime between 69 A.D. and

¹⁵ A type of “Roman welfare program” in which either the state or another wealthy individual would allot a certain amount of goods or wealth to a chosen population.

¹⁶ John F. Donahue, “Iunia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West,” *Latomus* 63, no. 4 (2004): 877. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41544714>.

¹⁷ Hispania Epigraphica Online Database, n.d. http://eda-bea.es/pub/record_card_2.php?rec=892.

110 A.D.. Written upon a white marble slab discovered in 1976, an inscribed text detailing Voconia's civic participation states,

Voconia Avita, daughter of Quintus, built baths for her city of Tagilis on her own soil and at her own cost and she dedicated these same [baths] after having given circus games and a banquet. In order to provide for the maintenance of the building and the perpetual use of the baths, she donated 2,500 *denarii* to the city of Tagilis (*AE* 1979, 352)¹⁸

It is unknown whether Voconia Avita held an established position in her community as a priestess or whether her wealth and influence simply derived from familial funds; however, this inscription leaves no debate that she was a high-status woman of means. Not only could Voconia Avita afford to independently fund the construction of a public bath complex, an expensive endeavor on its own, but she simultaneously paid for celebratory circus games and a banquet to commemorate her donation. Moreover, Voconia possessed her own land and was evidently willing to offer it up as a public site for her construction project, ultimately suggesting that this substantial donation of land and money was trivial in comparison to what she still held. In addition to the immediate social consequences of her benefactions, Voconia Avita seems to have recognized the importance of perpetuating her notoriety and legacy amongst the community of Tagilis. Her supplementary donation of 2,500 *denarii* for the continued maintenance of her bath complex served a practical purpose of ensuring the continued use and recognition of the public amenity. This continual upkeep would have guaranteed that the bath complex attached to Voconia Avita as a physical representation of her power and generosity would not crumble over time and begin to tarnish her public image rather than highlight her identity as a benefactress. Through the immediate, yet temporary enjoyment of the celebratory games as well as the more permanent, daily services provided to the city with the bath complex, Voconia Avita provided for

¹⁸ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Women and Society in the Roman World: A Sourcebook of Inscriptions from the Roman West* (Cambridge University Press, 2021): 270.

her fellow citizens, elevating herself in society and establishing herself first and foremost as a benefactor, not just as a woman.

In the cases of Voconia Avita, Valeria Cai, Allia Candida, Vibia Modesta, and Quintia Flaccina, we see elite Roman women repeatedly presenting themselves as independent agents without attachments to male individuals. Although these women do faintly allude to male relatives in their inscriptions through the naming of their fathers, they do so secondarily to their own names. Furthermore, this allusion to a paternal figure was a typical convention for men and women alike when naming themselves upon inscriptions. Consequently, the presence of these men simply serves to connect these powerful women to their respective family units, orienting them in their local communities. They are not meant to qualify the actions of the benefactresses. In doing so, the women listed above were not merely defined by any male relative they were named alongside, nor were they reduced to being just sisters, daughters, or wives in the public eye. However, while these women seemed to intentionally distance themselves from their domestic expectations and traditional familial roles while contributing to their communities, not all benefactresses in the Spanish provinces appeared to follow this example.

On the honorary plaque dedicated to Fabia Hadrianilla of the Baetica Region, her identity as a mother, daughter, and sister is intentionally highlighted and equally praised alongside her benefaction. During the 2nd century A.D., Fabia Hadrianilla, a member of the senatorial class, established an *alimenta* for local children in her community in honor of her and her husband. The foundation, valued at roughly 50,000 sesterces, biannually distributed money to ~100 children, specifically freeborn boys and girls.¹⁹ The honorary inscription listing the exact details of the

¹⁹ Juan Manuel Abascal, "Fabia Hadrianilla," Real Academia de la Historia, n.d., <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/23727/fabia-hadrianilla>.

alimenta states that on April 25th and May 1st of every year, Fabia and her husband's birthdays respectfully, 30 sesterces would be allotted to the applicable boys and slightly more would be allotted to the applicable girls.²⁰ Unfortunately, the deteriorated state of the inscription prevents us from knowing the exact amount which the freeborn girls were budgeted to receive. However, in the continued text, it states that, in the event where too many children were expected to receive the *alimenta*, then the allotment should simply be reduced to the standard 30 sesterces designated to the boys.²¹ This specification implies that, in order to be cost effective and fulfill the necessary *alimenta*, the portion set aside for freeborn girls would need to be reduced in order to suffice all. While the benefaction itself denotes Fabia Hadrianilla's obvious wealth and generosity in Hispalis as she essentially acted as patroness for freeborn children, the intentional inclusion of both boys and girls in her *alimenta* suggests a clear concern for the care and betterment of the local youth. One may even suggest that the *alimenta* served as an extension of traditional female domestic roles into the public sphere, allowing for Fabia Hadrianilla to behave as a mother to the city. Additionally, this *alimenta* may demonstrate a sort of normalization for women possessing their own wealth in Roman society, whereas both Fabia Hadrianilla and the allotted freeborn girls publicly possessed personal wealth.

Intriguingly, within the lengthy inscription detailing her sizable donation, Fabia Hadrianilla is pointedly named as the daughter of Quintus and the wife, sister, and mother of senators (*CIL* II, 1174).²² While her actual benefaction is arguably the more significant detail of said inscription, this inclusion suggests that Fabia Hadrianilla deemed her marital and familial

²⁰ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 152.

²¹ Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives*, 152-153.

²² Hispania Epigraphica Online Database, n.d. http://eda-bea.es/pub/record_card_2.php?rec=892.

status to be just as important as her donation to Hispalis. Coming from a family in which the men were historically linked to the Senatorial office, Fabia Hadrianilla's primary role and identification was as the product of past senators and the producer/caretaker of the future senatorial class. In other words, Fabia Hadrianilla's identity was deeply intertwined with her membership in the Senatorial class, and she was thus extremely important to local society due to her male relatives' achievements. Even as she donated 50,000 *sesterces* to local freeborn children, Fabia Hadrianilla is initially honored, not for her benefaction, but for her connection and secondary role to her male relatives. While contemporary readers may interpret this as a slight upon Fabia Hadrianilla's legacy, this manner of identification was completely intended by Fabia Hadrianilla and reveals just how valued traditional feminine roles were to Roman society. The honorary inscription essentially announces that Fabia Hadrianilla contributed two benefactions to Hispalis: her *alimenta* and the perpetuation of her family's senatorial prestige. As long as the funds for the *alimenta* lasted, Fabia Hadrianilla and her family's elite status in Hispalis would be continually acknowledged and honored by all who benefitted from her benefaction.

Finally, the last benefactress we will examine from the Spanish provinces is Iunia Rustica and her numerous benefactions to the city of Cartima in the Baetica Region. Inscribed upon an otherwise unassuming statue base from the Flavian Dynasty (c. 70 A.D.), pictured here below,

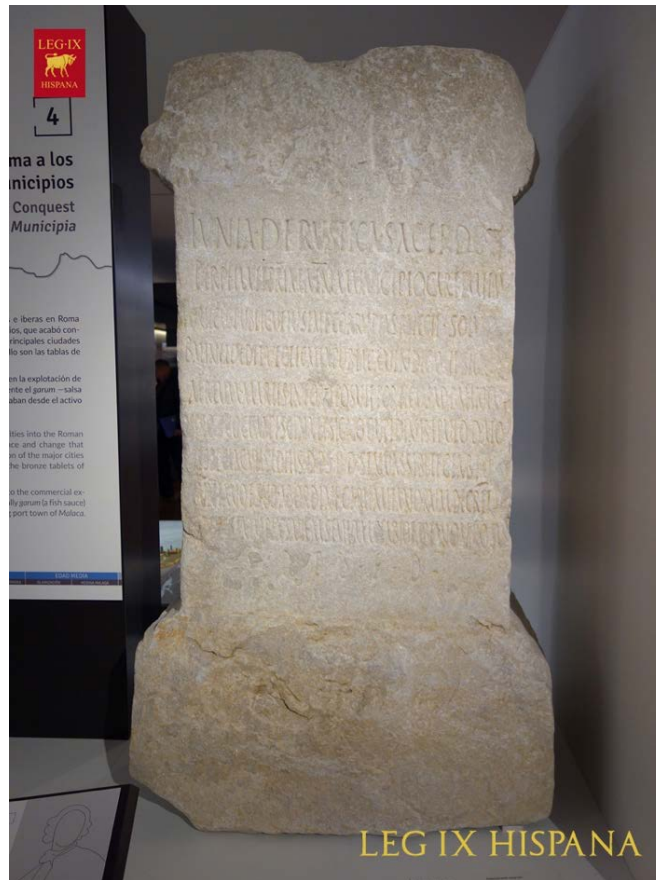


Image B: Inscribed Statue Base to Iunia Rustica²³

Iunia Rustica is credited with the donation of at least 8 civic munificence projects both material and immaterial alike. The exact honorific inscription states,

Iunia Rustica, daughter of Decimus, priestess for life and the first priestess in the town of Cartima, rebuilt the public porticoes ruined by age, gave a parcel of land for the baths, paid the public taxes on the town, set up a bronze statue of Mars in the forum, gave as a gift at her own expense porticoes at the bath on her own property with a fish pool and a statue of Cupid, with a public banquet and spectacles having been given. After remitting the cost, she also dedicated the statues that were decreed by the council of Cartima for herself and her son, Gaius Fabius Junianus, and she likewise made and dedicated at her own cost a statue for Gaius Fabius Fabianus, her husband.²⁴

²³ “La Cartima Romana,” Legión Novena Hispana, November 6, 2017, <https://legionixhispana.com/2017/11/06/cartima-romana/>.

²⁴John F. Donahue, “Iunia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West,” *Latomus* 63, no. 4 (2004): 875. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41544714>.

Considering Iunia Rustica's obvious elite civic position as priestess as well as the sheer multitude and variety of her donations, it is almost shocking that no other evidence of her various benefactions survives to this day. In comparison to the benefactresses littered throughout the Spanish provinces which we examined above, Iunia Rustica seems to incorporate each of the female civic munificence patterns previously discussed in this work. Much like Antonia Procula and Quintia Flaccina, Iunia Rustica funded the rebuilding efforts for decrepit, public porticoes in Cartima. Similar to Voconia Avita, Iunia Rustica gifted a portion of her independently possessed land to the town of Cartima in order for it to be of public use as a bath complex. In so doing, she sacrificed her own wealth and property in order to benefit the larger community. Furthermore, as was common for benefactresses of the Spanish provinces, Iunia Rustica held municipal games and banquets to commemorate her civic munificence. While each of these benefactions alone were individually "enough" to acquire a certain level of respect and notoriety in any Roman city, as we discussed earlier and will continue to see in subsequent chapters, Iunia Rustica's remaining donations helped her to further establish herself as an important individual in Cartima while counterbalancing her undeniable agency as a power woman with traditional ideals.

Proclaimed within the honorific inscription, Iunia Rustica is praised for paying the public taxes on the town of Cartima. In the Roman Empire, all cities outside of Rome proper were required to pay tribute to the Empire through what is called the *uectigalia publica*, or the annual taxes in simple terms.²⁵ The amount each town was required to pay would be determined by an assessment of the land revenue; however, if the bill was simply too much for the town to afford, it was common practice for the rich elite to "front the bill". Despite the frequency of this practice, this phenomenon does have one caveat; it was not a common munificence pattern for

²⁵ John F. Donahue, "Iunia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West," *Latomus* 63, no. 4 (2004): 876. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41544714>.

the female elite. In fact, among all records recording elite payment of the *uectigalia publica*, Iunia Rustica is the only known woman from the Roman West to have paid off the *uectigalia publica* in her town.²⁶ This benefaction alone sets Iunia Rustica apart from her fellow benefactresses, for she was capable of demonstrating her wealth and power like no other woman at the time in a manner which would have been recognized as far away as the heart of the Empire. Evidently, as the council of Cartima not only allowed Iunia Rustica to pay the taxes, but also publicize her contribution and patronage of the town within her inscription, it is clear that Iunia Rustica's gender did not prevent the town from appreciating her contributions. Whether male or female, a wealthy donor was valued by Cartima for anything they would provide.

Finally, through both the religious and personal statues Iunia Rustica commissioned, she balanced her public image as a powerful benefactress with allusions to the expected traditional virtues placed upon her as a woman and priestess of the Roman Empire. Iunia Rustica's funding of statues dedicated to Cupid and Mars publicly demonstrated her religious piety and connected her benefaction to the heart of the Roman Empire through the pantheon. These gods, associated with Venus and the foundation stories of the Roman Empire, represented core Roman virtues through their very presence. As was mentioned at the very beginning of her honorific inscription, Iunia Rustica was awarded the title of priestess for life and first priestess of the town of Cartima. These honorifics, while granting immediate, public elevation to Iunia Rustica also carried cultural and societal expectations to whomever they were bestowed upon. As first and perpetual priestess, Iunia Rustica would have been expected to behave as the epitome of religious piety and devotion within the public eye in addition to appearing devoted to the family and traditionality as an elite Roman woman. Although many may anticipate these expectations to come into direct

²⁶ Donahue, "Iunia Rustica", 876.

conflict with Iunia Rustica's participation in the civic sphere, her unique lineage suggests just how Iunia Rustica was able to practice a life of traditional virtues and nontraditional civic power.

Through her "Rusticus" name, Iunia Rustica is connected to the historically prominent *Rusticii* family of ancient Roman Spain. The *Rusticii* are credited with an extensive lineage of female benefactresses including ties to Vibia Rusticana and her restoration of dedications to Emperor Claudius and Venus Augusta and Vibia Turrina, a fellow perpetual priestess from the late 1st c.²⁷ Furthermore, her marriage to C. Fabius Fabianus connected Iunia Rustica to another prominent elite family, the *Fabii*, with a similar history of women participating in religious offices and public benefactions.²⁸ As John F. Donahue summarizes this advantageous marriage, "...her marriage served as a link to a family which, through activities such as statue dedications and donations, continually and publicly displayed its wealth and status in ways that were typical of the local aristocracy".²⁹ As a member of two of the most affluent families of the Spanish provinces with such a long-standing history of civic munificence, Iunia Rustica's abundant benefactions was not only accepted by local society, but almost anticipated and expected. As an elite of the *Rusticii* and *Fabii* lines, gender would not prevent Iunia Rustica from fulfilling societal expectations and becoming a benefactress of Cartima. Ultimately, Iunia Rustica was rewarded for her generous actions in Cartima with the dedication of statues to herself and her son as decreed by the town council. Iunia Rustica remitted the cost for these statues and commissioned a further statue of her husband to join her and her son's honorific depictions. Markedly, her son and husband, while named in the honorific dedication to Iunia Rustica, were

²⁷ John F. Donahue, "Iunia Rustica of Cartima: Female Munificence in the Roman West," *Latomus* 63, no. 4 (2004): 879. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41544714>.

²⁸ Donahue, "Iunia Rustica", 881.

²⁹ Donahue, "Iunia Rustica", 881-882.

only included at the very end of the text and placed in reference to Iunia Rustica's achievements. Despite being a woman of elite status in an Empire of strict cultural and gendered expectations, Iunia Rustica not only participated as a powerful individual in the public sphere of Carthage but was openly honored by her community for her benefactions.

Elite Roman women of the Spanish provinces did not simply spend their days in the home. Ambitious women like Vibia Modesta, Iunia Rustica, and Allia Candida recognized the unique opportunity which their high social status afforded them in a culture which so deeply valued male excellence and a male-only political sphere. In a world which barred them from established political offices, these women learned to utilize their existing wealth, influence, and feminine virtues to earn a level of civic power equal to the political offices they could never achieve. As John F. Donahue states, "...women like Iunia Rustica, who had the ability to control and disperse significant amounts of wealth, were people of genuine influence – and with influence came power".³⁰ While modern history is not entirely incorrect to state that Roman women lived within a world of domestic expectations and were not able to participate in the public sphere as men did, it is a gross oversimplification of such a widespread, diverse empire to suggest that all Roman women simply remained within the home. As we have examined in Roman Spain and will continue to demonstrate through the public benefactions and patronage of women in the central and eastern portions of the empire, elite Roman women were more than willing and capable of breaking out of their domestic confines and contributing to their communities.

³⁰ Donahue, "Iunia Rustica", 883.

Female Munificence in the Italian Peninsula

In mainland Italy, female funded benefactions and civic patronage were far more restricted by societal pressures than those found in the eastern and western reaches of the empire. In Roman Spain, distance from the Italian Peninsula, as well as the blend of the Hispanic culture which promoted public euergetism with new Roman ideals, created an environment in which women were allowed to continue the area's long held tradition of female munificence. Similarly, as we will examine in the final chapter, "middle-elite" women from the eastern provinces publicly spearheaded benefactions through a variety of methods at different levels of agency much to the gratitude of their local cities. However, while women in the Baetica region and the eastern provinces were afforded a certain degree of independence from traditional Roman gender roles due to their own preexisting cultures and remote locations, women living closer to the city of Rome were not granted such opportunity.

For women living on the Italian Peninsula, there was essentially no escape from the cultural and societal expectations of the empire. These Roman women were confined to a region in which foundational stories like that of Lucretia³¹ epitomized rigid female virtues which were subsequently set in stone for hundreds of years. Feminine ideals such as piety, modesty, and devotion to traditional familial structures, all of which were established during the ancient Roman monarchy, continued to shape the lives of women in the early empire through the

³¹Lucretia was a legendary heroine from Ancient Roman history who was viewed as the height of womanly/wifely virtues. She was raped by the corrupt Prince Sextus Tarquinius and, although assured by her husband and father that she was at no fault for what happened, killed herself rather than continue to live as a woman who was unfaithful/unclean. Roman women were expected to uphold this same sense of honor and virtue that Lucretia held.

example of Empress Livia³² and the social and moral legislation of Emperor Augustus.

Traditionally, Roman women were taught from a young age to embody the conventional feminine virtues and standards instilled in them by Roman society. In the funerary inscription of an unknown Roman woman, known as the *Laudatio Turiae*³³ and pictured below, her husband praised her for her “...obedience, affability, reasonableness, industry in working wool...modesty of appearance...devotion to [her] family...[and] courage...”.³⁴



Image C: Fragment of the *Laudatio Turiae*³⁵

³² Livia was the wife of Emperor Augustus who ruled Rome from 31 B.C. to 14 A.D. As the Emperor who passed the morality and marriage laws in Rome restricting extramarital relations, Augustus and Livia were viewed as the epitome of traditional Roman marital values.

³³ It is important to note that while the *Laudatio Turiae* praised the unnamed women for embodying the traditional virtues expected of her as a Roman woman, the inscription also praised her for her independent actions as keeper of the house while her husband was absent and portrayed her as holding a significant amount of power over her family. The wife was even noted to have physically defended the household from thieves and bandits and was praised by her husband for this, despite it being completely outside of contemporary womanly expectations.

³⁴ *Laudatio Turiae*, ILS 8393, Trans. E. Wistrand.

³⁵ Arthur E Gordon, "A New Fragment of the *Laudatio Turiae*," *American Journal of Archaeology* 54, no. 3 (1950): 226, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/500300>.

Estimated to be from c. 19 B.C., this text is a prime example of the traditionally praised characteristics of women living in the early Roman Empire. In addition to these virtues, women were also raised to be modest, excellent, morally upright, and loyal among countless other attributes.³⁶ Raised in such a male-dominated society as the Roman Empire, they were looked down upon from birth as inferior to men and thus of little value besides as wives and mothers. Women of enough means who were not required to contribute to the family business were largely relegated to overseers of the household where, confined to the home, they fulfilled the domestic needs of their families and birthed heirs for their husbands. Those of the elite and “middle-elite” classes were especially pushed into this domestic sphere of hospitality, for they were expected as higher class, refined women to perfectly display each of the Roman virtues above. With an environment as culturally and socially stringent as mainland Italy, ambitious Roman women in the early empire needed to be creative yet unassuming in order to exist outside of their expected gender roles.

Already restricted by social stigmas, Roman women who desired to exhibit their agency and enter into the public sphere faced a second, more systematic, obstacle; the male-oriented, Roman political system. Men in the empire were able to climb the social ladder through the *cursus honorum*, a structured pathway of successive political offices which an individual would slowly advance through over their lifetime of public service. However, while they were able to enter the public sphere through a structured system, their female counterparts had virtually no direct, structured way to gain influence in public life and rise in status unless through strategic marriage or preexisting influence. As such, many simply aspired to be married off into higher status families in which they could reap the benefit of their familial wealth and power. With

³⁶ Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2014: 55.

marriage being a key to social climbing in Rome, traditional virtues became the tool which wealthy, middle-elite women used to make advantageous marriages, climb the ranks, and gain further influence and power in society.

In addition to advantageous marriages, women of Roman Italy frequently used their religious positions and offices in the state cult to increase their public presence in local cities. Intended to be high ranking servants to the gods and the figureheads of local temples, priestesses held a significant amount of power in Roman cities, as all citizens were exposed to religion in one way or another. As an empire, Rome was incredibly dedicated to the Roman state cult and respected the priests and priestesses of the gods as important and powerful members of society, often placing them on the same level as their local politicians. Despite their gender otherwise preventing them from existing outside of the domestic sphere, religious offices offered a unique opportunity for women to garner power for themselves, at least on a local level. Consequently, wealthy women often used the feminine and religious virtues expected of them to seek out positions in the state cult and earn a level of status and influence in society which was normally reserved for male politicians. Using religious appointments, preexisting wealth, and/or strategic marriages, mainland Roman women climbed the ranks in their communities and became powerful members of society. Ultimately, as prominent individuals, these women expressed their influence and power in virtually the same way as their male counterparts did, through public munificence and the erection of honorary benefactions.

Frozen in time on the southeastern coast of Italy, the city of Pompeii contains several instances of middle-elite women contributing significant benefactions to the public at their own expense. Immediately following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D., Pompeii was preserved in a snapshot of its daily life by the volcanic ash which buried the city. Among the

remains, archeologists have found evidence of seven female patrons who were openly commemorated and honored for their service in society. Of the seven women, six can be connected to architectural remains throughout the area, five were revealed to be priestesses, and the remaining two were identified as important cult figures in Pompeii.³⁷ Despite the presumed novelty of these women existing as both benefactresses and priestesses, this was an entirely unsurprising occurrence, for as Brenda Longfellow states, "...communal patronage [was] habitually linked with tenure in priesthoods and civic offices; these official roles seem to have provided women with the authority or opportunity to bequeath monuments to communities...".³⁸ As we have previously acknowledged, religious positions in either the state or local cults allowed women to access the public sphere in positions of cultural and social power. Accordingly, just as high-ranking men of civic offices were almost expected to donate back to the city, so too did these women, in their relative positions of influence, contribute back to their communities. However, from the seven known cases of female patrons and benefactresses in Pompeii, two names stand out among the rest for their civic munificence: Mamia and Eumachia.

Sometime before 14 A.D., Mamia funded and commissioned the construction of a public sanctuary dedicated to the "genius of Emperor Augustus" situated directly in the heart of Pompeii. Marked on the map below, this structure was exposed to heavy foot traffic by countless individuals who daily frequented the political, cultural, and social center of the city. Subsequently, all who passed through the forum would have known that a woman had built a structure in one of the most important locations of Roman society. Inside the sanctuary itself, an

³⁷ Brenda Longfellow, "Female Patrons and Honorific Statues in Pompeii," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 59/60 (2014): 82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44981973>.

³⁸ Longfellow, "Female Patrons," 81.

inscription written by Mamia states, “Mamia, daughter of Publius, public priestess, [built this] to the genius [of Augustus/of the colony] on her own land and at her own expense” (*CIL* 10.816).³⁹ While admittedly a short text, this inscription reveals much about the life of Mamia and her public identity in Pompeii. To begin, as seen above, Mamia’s own name is listed first and foremost in the text, followed immediately by her identification as Publius’ daughter. While most women in Roman society remained tied to a male figure of some form throughout their lives, public priestesses in Pompeii are found to have largely self-identified by their own name, and, to the larger community, were linked only to their father’s name.⁴⁰ According to Roman inscriptional formats, it was common practice for individuals to identify themselves in context to another family member in order to highlight their connections in society and larger familial values. However, while men typically identified themselves in connection to their fathers, women were often identified simply as wives or mothers, secondary to their male relatives. In comparison to these women, it is noteworthy that Mamia, despite being married and having heirs, does not identify herself as the wife or mother of any man, but rather mentions her own name and achievements and, secondarily, her familial lineage through her father. By mentioning her father’s name, Mamia honored her ancestry and displayed the familial values expected of her as a woman in the empire even while demonstrating independence and influence as a benefactress.

In the second half of her inscription, Mamia presents herself as an important individual in her own right, a fact which she seems to counterbalance through the dedication of her construction. As we have discussed, priestesses such as Mamia held great sway in their local

³⁹ Longfellow, “Female Patrons,” 85.

⁴⁰ Longfellow, “Female Patrons,” 84.

cities as the acting religious heart of their communities. Her position as public priestess most likely allowed Mamia to possess her own land and wealth, a fact which must not be overlooked despite being included in the final words of the inscription. Mamia specifically attributes the land which her sanctuary was built on as well as the funds used to construct her building to herself and no other. Previously implied by her contextualization as a daughter and not as a wife or mother, this further inclusion unmistakably states that no man contributed to this construction by any means. Mamia's benefaction was purely a female funded action.

In light of this bold display of female agency and power, it seems nearly expected that Mamia attempt to protect her actions from negative backlash in some way. Therefore, we must turn to Mamia's "insurance" policy and focus of the dedication, "the genius of Augustus/of the colony". Although the exact subject is unclear due to translational issues, both possible renditions of the dedication serve to counteract Mamia's untraditional presence in the public sphere. By honoring the genius of Augustus in her sanctuary, Mamia connects her actions to Emperor Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire and protector of Roman culture and society. Through her dedication, she publicly shows her devotion to the emperor and, by extension, the empire and all of its cultural values. The dedication thus frames her benefaction not as a countercultural display of feminine power, but rather in the context of traditional Roman virtues, beginning with honoring Augustus. Equally, the possible translation instead nodding to "the colony" shows a similar level of Mamia's loyalty and devotion on a local scale. If Mamia had intended for the sanctuary to be devoted to the people of Pompeii, her actions would have further demonstrated her service to the city. Already performing her civic duty as priestess, this benefaction, whether intended for Augustus or for the colony, memorialized her actions as a powerful individual in her own right.

While the sanctuary itself represents a crucial display of nontraditional women’s roles, equally as important is the public reception of the benefaction by the citizens of Pompeii. In recognition of her public service as a priestess and benefactress of the city, Mamia was honored by the public council with a special schola styled tomb, pictured below. Typically, this tomb style was reserved in Pompeii for newly high-class members of society and those who built temples to the imperial cult. Located within 100 feet of the city walls in the sacred pomerium⁴¹, the tomb was intentionally situated within a burial zone dedicated to only the most important members of society.⁴²



Image E: Mamia’s Schola Tomb⁴³

⁴¹ In the Roman Empire, burials were not allowed to take place within the bounds of the city. As such, all deceased were required to be buried outside of the city gates. Over time, the area located just beyond the city walls named the *pomerium* became prime real estate for wealthy, elite members of society to be laid to rest. Only those who earned the right or were able to pay the fee to be buried in this area were allowed to do so.

⁴² Longfellow, “Female Patrons,” 87.

⁴³ Christopher Polt, Mamia's Schola Tomb, Google, n.d.
<https://www.google.com/search?q=mamia%2Bpompeii%2Btomb&client=safari&rls=en&sxsrf=AJOqlzURhp6hYIB>

In addition to this symbolic importance of the tomb's location, the locale also supplied a more practical consequence of the structure. Marked on the map below, Mamia's tomb was placed just beyond the Herculaneum Gate, a main entrance to Pompeii for citizens and visitors alike. This area would have exposed Mamia's tomb to all who passed by, practically announcing her importance to everyone who laid eyes on the mortuary site. Contrary to modern, mainstream implications that the achievements of Roman women were either nonexistent or hidden from public view, Mamia's contributions to Pompeii were not only acknowledged but awarded with highest honors by a male-led council. Despite being a Roman woman, Mamia's tomb reveals how she was able to step out of the traditional roles expected of her and be regarded for her own merits as an honored member of Pompeii's public life.

Similar to Mamia, Eumachia was a priestess and benefactress of Pompeii who contributed a construction project to the main forum of the city c. 22 A.D. Born into a semi-elite family and advantageously married to a wealthy husband, Eumachia served as both the priestess of Venus Pompeiana, the city's patron deity, and patroness of the fuller guild.⁴⁴ As was common for powerful Roman individuals, Eumachia exhibited her civic authority by giving back to the city in the form of architectural power. In doing so, Eumachia, a middle-elite woman, funded the construction of the largest building in the forum just next to Mamia's sanctuary (see map below). The intended purpose of the Eumachia building (as it is now referred to) has been hotly debated by archeologists since its excavation in 1821; however, it is largely agreed that the benefaction was a multipurpose structure open to public use. With an open courtyard surrounded on all sides

[q7lqcWP8VEJVsu4Md_A%3A1677782939099&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewidhuHA9L39AhXrKlkFHcifARMQ_AUoAXoECAIQAw&biw=1372&bih=858&dpr=2#imgrc=pFidB_x7Pdj5_M](https://www.google.com/maps/@40.7500000,14.7500000,15z/data=!3m1!1e3!3m2!1s4MqA%3A1677782939099&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewidhuHA9L39AhXrKlkFHcifARMQ_AUoAXoECAIQAw&biw=1372&bih=858&dpr=2#imgrc=pFidB_x7Pdj5_M)

⁴⁴ Fullers were essentially ancient launderers who worked in fulleries where they cleaned wool and other clothes.

by a two-story columned porticus and walls containing statuary niches, Eumachia's building provided the perfect locale for a meeting place, market, or any other versatile, spacious area required by the public.



Image D: Map of the Forum of Pompeii



Image E: Artist's Reconstruction of the Eumachia Building⁴⁵

Situated over one of building's entryways, a dedicatory inscription written by Eumachia states "Eumachia, daughter of Lucius Eumachius, a public priestess, in her own name and that of her son, Marcus Numistrius Fronto, built at her own expense the portico, the crypt, and the colonnade, dedicating them to Augustan Concord and Piety" (*ILS* 3785).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Pompeii - Jeanclaudegolvin.com: Pompeii, Ancient Rome, ancient civilizations*, Pinterest. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/16395986123338147/>

⁴⁶ "Companion: Eumachia," Google Images, 2012. <https://images.app.goo.gl/JK43z1bBWQkw89tFA>



Image F: Eumachia Building Dedicatory Inscription⁴⁷

In this inscription, reminiscent of the text on Mamia’s sanctuary, Eumachia identifies herself by her position as priestess and is briefly linked to her father and son, rather than to her husband, framing herself as the daughter of Lucius, the primary dedicant of the structure, and, finally, as the mother of Marcus. This language and formatting choice indicates her importance in Pompeiian society as an individual agent, not as a woman defined by her marriage. She does not qualify her munificence according to traditional Roman culture, tying her name to or implying subservience to her husband. Although her family’s wealth primarily derived from her husband’s sheep farming and wool industry ties, and thus the financial source of her actions most likely came from her husband’s wealth, the Eumachia building never mentions her husband’s name.⁴⁸ Evidently, Eumachia ensured that her benefaction would be primarily attributed to herself and

⁴⁷ Ann R. Raia and Judith Lynn Sebesta, Companion: Eumachia, January 2009, <https://feminaeromanae.org/Eumachia.html>.

⁴⁸ Longfellow, “Female Patrons,” 87.

that she would not be mistaken or implied as a secondary partner to her male relatives. Ultimately, her son Marcus is identified in reference to Eumachia and her existing status within Pompeian society, not the other way around. However, despite the underlying social implications of her text, Eumachia ensured that the traditional familial virtues and standards expected of her as a woman were visually upheld in her actions by dedicating her building to Augustan Concord and Piety.

Both in design and dedication, the Eumachia building demonstrates how a wealthy, middle-elite, Roman woman was capable of earning public status and influence in society while still maintaining traditional expectations. Following Emperor Augustus' decree of the *Lex Julia* in 18 B.C., adultery was criminalized, special benefits were given to women who birthed at least three children, and enforcements of traditional values were established across the empire.⁴⁹ Nearly forty years later, in full knowledge of these laws, Eumachia deliberately dedicated her multipurpose, public space to Augustan Concord and Piety. Her building was designed to honor the harmony and religious devotion brought to the empire by Emperor Augustus and remind all who entered of these core Roman values. As a structure representing the full effect of female independence in an otherwise male-dominated society, the Eumachia building faced clear potential backlash from Roman society. However, this dedication to familial devotion and feminine virtues seems to be a bold attempt to subvert any such contempt from the community. The text links the benefaction and Eumachia to the late Emperor Augustus and his surviving wife Livia, the models of traditional familial and female values in the Empire. This allusion to the late Emperor and his wife allowed Eumachia to publicly uphold and almost worship traditional

⁴⁹ David Daube, "The "Lex Julia" Concerning Adultery," *Irish Jurist* (1966-), New Series, 7, no. 2 (1972): 373-80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44026592>.

Roman cultural standards despite openly increasing her civic influence and stepping out of her traditional domestic role.

In addition to the underlying message of the benefaction, the very design of the building alludes to Livia and Augustus by mirroring the structure of their own buildings in Rome, the Porticus of Livia and the Forum of Augustus.⁵⁰ Evident from the three plans depicted below (images G, H, and I), the layout of the Eumachia building was remarkably similar to that of the Porticus Liviae and utilized similar, decorative statues as in the Forum of Augustus. Both the Eumachia building and the Porticus Liviae followed the open courtyard, colonnaded porticus style of Roman architecture and included deep porches at the front entrances. This style of architecture was intended to leave all in awe of its beauty and design. Located in the plan of the Eumachia building and marked “B” and “C”, these areas consisted of statuary niches much like the design of the Forum of Augustus. In the Eumachia building, these niches bore the likenesses of Rome’s mythic founder, Romulus, Emperors Tiberius and Augustus, and the Empress Livia.⁵¹ Whereas the statue program in the Forum of Augustus alludes to the powerful history of Rome through Romulus, Aeneas, and various great men of Roman history in order to glorify Augustus as “one of the greats”, Eumachia’s statuary inclusions seem to somewhat serve the same purpose. The inclusions of Romulus, Tiberius (the contemporary emperor), Augustus, and Livia served to once again tie Eumachia’s actions to that of Imperial Rome itself, placing her contribution in context with the Imperial rulers. The Eumachia building appears to overflow with honor of and connections to the Imperial family, a feature which would preemptively silence any who held issue with Eumachia’s actions. In short, who would dare take up arms against a building which

⁵⁰ Longfellow, “Female Patrons,” 91.

⁵¹ Kreisa Innovation, “The Building of Eumachia (Concordias Augusta),” www.planetpompeii.com, n.d., <https://www.planetpompeii.com/en/map/the-building-of-eumachia.html>.

honored the empire to its very foundation, even if it was built by a powerful woman? Through her donation, Eumachia provided new amenities to the public forum in Pompeii and presented an image of herself as an important benefactor of the community like the Emperor Augustus and his wife were to Rome.

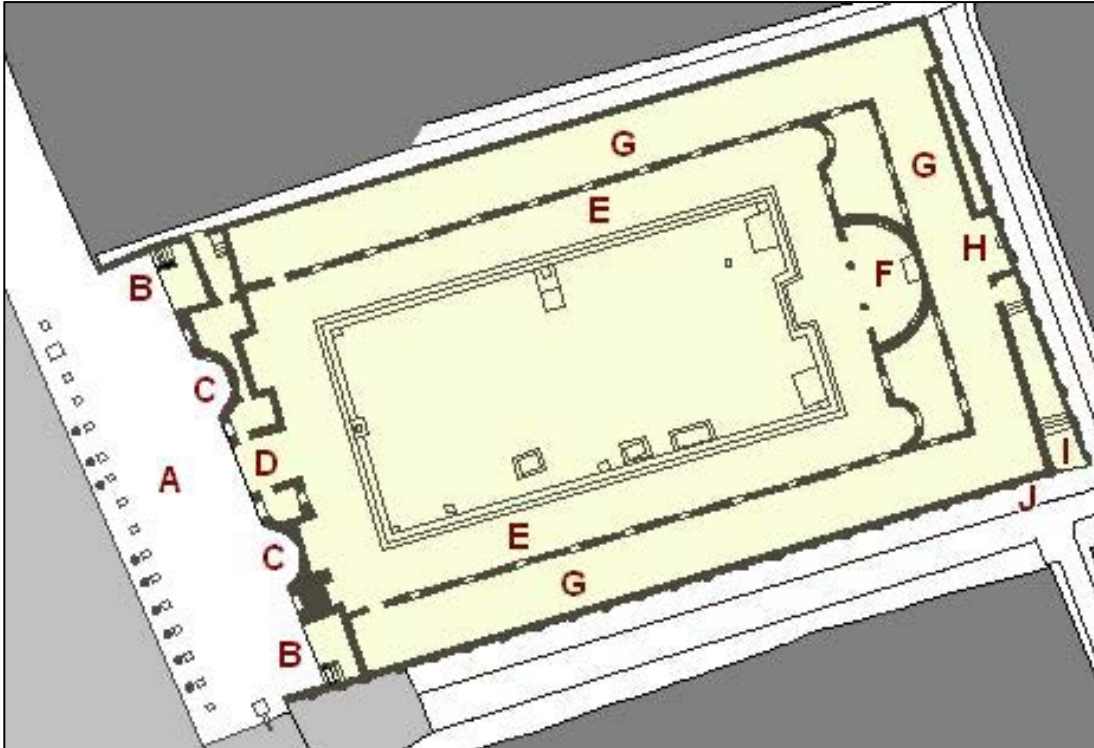


Image G: Plan of the Eumachia Building⁵²

⁵² Ann R. Raia and Judith Lynn Sebesta, Companion: Eumachia, January 2009, <https://feminaeromanae.org/Eumachia.html>.

Image H: Plan of the Porticus of Livia⁵³

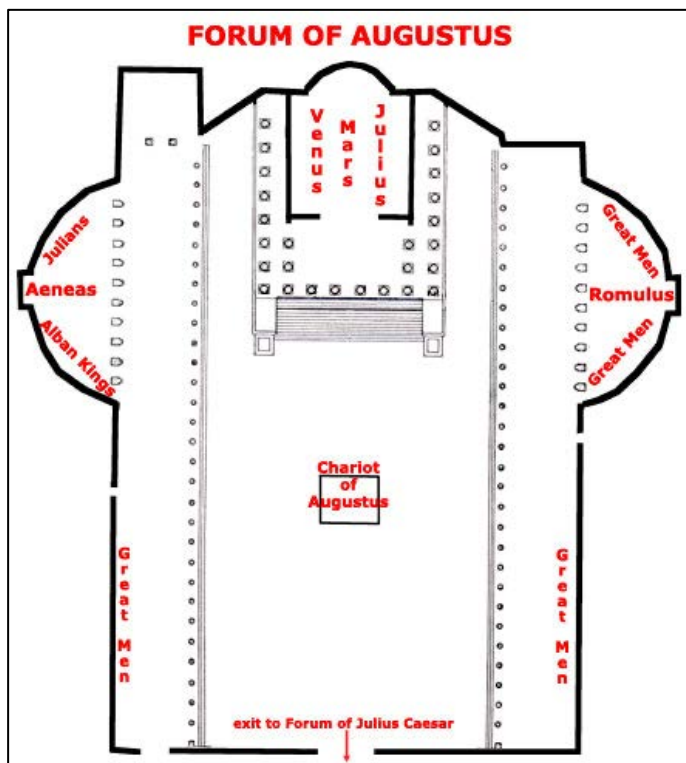
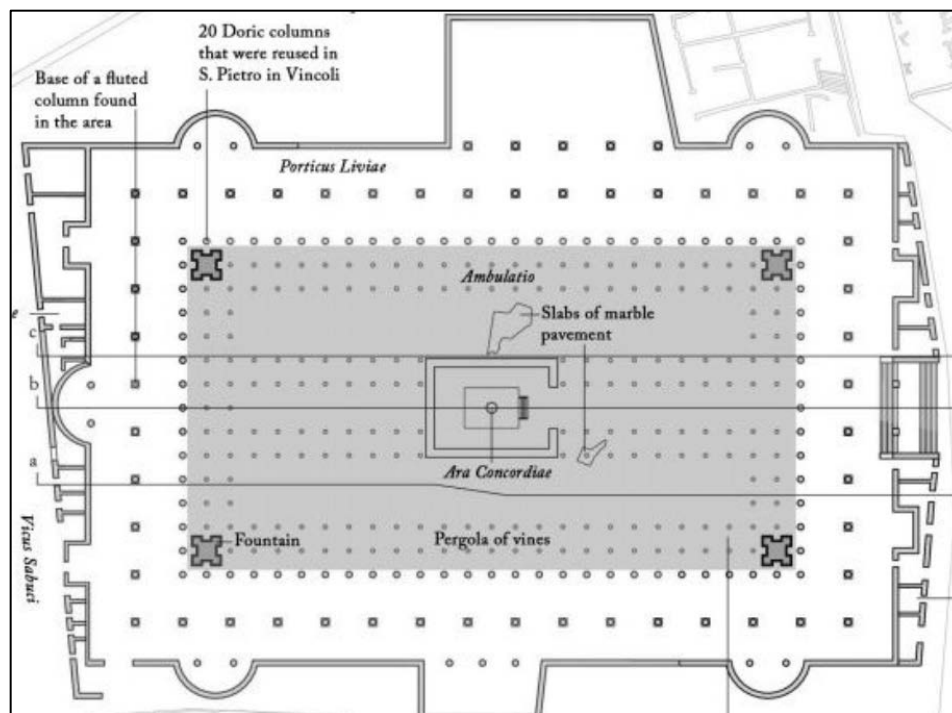


Image I: Plan of the Forum of Augustus⁵⁴

⁵³ "Porticus Liviae," Gardens of the Roman Empire, n.d., https://roman-gardens.github.io/province/italia/rome/regio_iii_isis_et_serapis/porticus_liviae/.

⁵⁴ Plan of the Forum of Augustus, n.d., <http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/forumaugplan.html>.

In response to Eumachia's grand donation and patronage, the fuller guild who frequently used the forum building commissioned an honorific statue of Eumachia out of gratitude for her actions.⁵⁵ The statue itself was placed within the niche, labeled "F" on image G, at the rear of the Eumachia building and bore great resemblance to similar honorific statues designed for imperial monuments in Rome. While intended to highlight her beauty, the statue also emphasized her piety and community service as a patron, dressing her in robes traditionally worn by elite women. In the two images shown below⁵⁶, both Eumachia, left, and Empress Livia⁵⁷, right, are



Image J: Copy of the Honorific Statue to Eumachia



Image K: Statue of Empress Livia

⁵⁵ Longfellow, "Female Patrons," 91.

⁵⁶ Ann R. Raia and Judith Lynn Sebesta, "Eumachia: Dedicatory Inscriptions ILS 3785, 6368," Companion: Eumachia, n.d., <https://feminaeromanae.org/Eumachia.html>.

⁵⁷ "Statue of Deified Empress Livia," Joy of Museums Virtual Tours, August 5, 2020, <https://joyofmuseums.com/museums/europe/germany-museums/berlin-museums/alters-museum/statue-of-deified-empress-livia/>.

depicted in long, flowing robes and sporting neutral, reserved facial expressions. Furthermore, Eumachia's statue adheres to the customary representation of Roman priestesses, simultaneously emulating the dignity and power of the empress as well as the piety and modesty of her religious office. Finally, inscribed on the honorific pedestal just below the statue, the fuller guild wrote, "to Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess of Pompeian Venus, from the fullers". Within this brief dedication, Eumachia stands alone as priestess and patron. The gratitude of the guild lay solely upon this woman, and the physical representation of this indebtedness was intentionally placed within the public eye. With no sign of the honorific statue, Eumachia's dedicatory inscription of the building, or the structure itself being vandalized, tampered with, or modified to hide this mark of female power, it is abundantly clear that Eumachia's actions in Pompeii were not rejected by the community, but plainly appreciated and awarded.

Despite living in a society designed around male-dominance and the patriarchy, middle-elite Roman women like Mamia and Eumachia of Pompeii managed to carve a space for themselves within the public eye. When compared to the benefactions of women in the eastern and western portions of the empire, the munificence projects of Eumachia and Mamia stand out as exceptionally tied to traditional female virtues and images of the imperial family. These women intricately understood the cultural expectations placed upon them and utilized said ideals for their own ambitious purposes. Under constant societal and cultural pressures to adhere to traditional gender roles, women like Eumachia and Mamia who lived nearest to the center of the Roman Empire and its strict norms had to be more careful than women in the distant regions when acting outside of the domestic sphere. Despite being unable to enter political office due to their gender, Mamia and Eumachia used the civic sway of their religious positions to behave parallel to powerful men in their analogous social rankings. As independent female agents, these

women counterbalanced their nontraditional roles in society with an abundance of traditional allusions within their monuments of power. In doing so, Eumachia and Mamia managed to demonstrate an inordinate level of power even while living in a typically repressive society for women such as themselves who, as upper-class individuals, were especially expected to follow the traditions and expectations of Roman society and culture. Permanently etching their names into the center of Pompeii, Eumachia and Mamia expertly wielded the restrictive cultural expectations placed upon them by mainland Italy in order to garner significant power and influence for themselves. Ultimately, these women were not only allowed to exist within Roman society but were able to thrive and were awarded for their contributions to the public.

Female-Funded Euergetism in the Eastern Provinces

The donations and benefactions of Mamia, Eumachia, and Iunia Rustica all intentionally tied themselves back to iconic images and important figures of the Roman Empire. The buildings and public work projects funded by these women are riddled with references to the Imperial family over the ages, benefactions located in Rome proper, and overt displays of traditional female values and familial virtues. As these powerful women openly stepped outside of their expected domestic roles, blatantly defying some sense of social expectation placed upon them by contemporary male voices, they ensured that these connections stood well within the public eye as a sort of fail safe. Should any Roman citizen observe these benefactions and raise issue with them being female funded, going so far as to attack their image and virtues for daring to function within the public domain, the connections mentioned here would allow the women to call upon their significance/symbolism and silence the protestor. Few would dare to publicly attack the person paying for the town's taxes or providing a crucial nymphaeum out of their own pocket, let alone criticize a construction which honored the Imperial family or heavily mirrored that of a previous Empress' benefaction. Whether male or female, the average Roman citizen would not be so affected by the gender of the benefactor, so long as they stood to benefit in some way and traditional standards were still met.

When we compare the benefactions of women in the central and western areas of the Roman Empire to those of women in the far-eastern portions of the Mediterranean, like Plancia Magna and Aurelia Paulina, there is a stark difference in how closely these donations attempted to reference core identities and images of the Roman Empire. Whereas female benefactresses in the central and western parts of the empire largely ensured that references to traditional Roman

values such as female domesticity and piety were always included in their monuments, benefactresses in the eastern empire did not include as many overt connections to Rome and the Imperial family. Before I proceed, it is important to note that this by no means implies that images of the Roman Empire and/or the Imperial family were entirely missing from these eastern benefactions. However, it does appear that the sheer distance from the Italian peninsula and the remoteness from Rome in terms of cultural and social identities certainly resulted in a marked difference of how these benefactions were decorated. Aurelia Paulina and Plancia Magna each intentionally included at least one reference to their contemporary Imperial rulers within their civic donations, yet they also emphasized local traditional values and important individuals. More often than not, images of local founders, mythological heroes, deities, and familial public figures would adorn the benefactions located in cities like Ephesus and Perge. Similar to the female patrons and benefactresses located in the western empire, eastern women who worked in the public sphere still strove to maintain a visible connection to traditionality and femininity while lightly breaking the expectations of domesticity placed upon them by Roman culture.

The Eastern Province cities of Perge and Ephesus, located on the modern-day Turkish Peninsula, especially seemed to overflow with an abundance of female benefactions and participation outside of the domestic sphere. Much like the examples of female munificence in the regions of Spain and mainland Italy, women in Ephesus and Perge still adhered to the outward presentation of traditional Roman female virtues. However, like the case study of Iunia Rustica and her female peers of the Baetica region, the blend of Roman and provincial identities resulted in a unique opportunity for women in the Pamphylia and Smyrna regions to exhibit far more public freedom and agency than women on the Italian peninsula. Distance from the heart of the empire combined with the typical withdrawn attitude of Roman governance in the provincial

regions⁵⁸ resulted in cities on the edges of the empire like Perge and Ephesus largely defaulting to their own local cultural and societal expectations over the “Roman” ideals of the empire. Luckily for the women in these cities, Perge and Ephesus were historically defined as harbor cities of powerful ancient women.

When entering the ancient Roman city of Perge, one did not have to search very hard to find female participation in the public sphere. One of the largest and most opulent examples of female munificence in Perge was situated right at the main entrance to the city itself- the repaired round towers and grandiose, decorated courtyard constructed and funded by Plancia Magna in the 2nd century A.D. Born into an elite Roman family in the Pamphylia region on Asia Minor, Plancia Magna enjoyed the benefits and privileges which her high social ranking provided her. On a local level, Plancia Magna was descended from the royal lineage of the Herodian Kingdom through her mother Julia.⁵⁹ This dynasty ruled the Herodian Kingdom as a vassal state to the Roman Empire, serving as local governance and the seat of power under the puppet rule of the emperor. In addition to this local prominence, the *Plancii* family were further elevated in the social strata of Perge thanks to Plancia Magna’s father and his long list of political positions serving directly under the emperor. Marcus Plancius Varus was a member of the senate in Rome, eventually rose through the ranks to become praetor, and served as the proconsular governor of Bithynia⁶⁰ during Vespasian’s reign. Through both her matrilineal and paternal lines, Plancia

⁵⁸ Typical procedure entailed that a Roman official would be stationed in the provincial region and would serve as an overseer of Roman laws and taxes. These men would ensure that the state cult would be properly worshipped and allegiance to the emperor would be maintained. Beyond keeping the region loyal and in check, the officials largely left the people of the provincial regions to their own devices and allowed them to continue practicing their own local cultures and ways of life. This practice resulted in a cultural blend of Roman and local identities.

⁵⁹ Daughter of Tigranes VI of Armenia.

⁶⁰ Part of the eastern provinces located slightly northeast of Perge on Asia Minor.

Magna was born into a life of wealth and influence; however, her place in the social rankings of the city was not simply defined by the achievements of her blood relations. Indeed, Plancia Magna built upon her inherited elite status and expertly wielded her own personal wealth and influence to create a name for herself outside of her familial connections.

As a citizen of Perge, Plancia Magna served numerous civic positions in the city despite being a woman. While women in the empire were barred from holding traditional political offices or partaking in the *cursus honorum*⁶¹ like men, this did not mean that women were strictly barred from entering the public sphere. Rather, this roadblock simply motivated Roman women to find other, more creative ways to garner power and influence in their local dwellings. The answer for many who desired to achieve a public identity was to become a priestess. A large number of priests and priestesses in Roman history were wealthy, elite individuals who used their positions in the state religion or local cults to create further public sway for themselves.⁶² Those in religious offices certainly required a varying degree of devotion in their respective worship; however, for those of existing wealth or social ranking, the status of priest and priestess was often considered an honorific title, with slaves or lower class citizens performing the full range of religious work.⁶³

As a member of the local elite, Plancia Magna held the title of priestess of Artemis Pergaia and the “*sacerdos prima et mono*” of the Great Mother goddess.⁶⁴ During her time as a

⁶¹ The political hierarchy/path built into Roman politics which, by design, allowed men in positions of power to rise further up the ranks through merit, wealth, or influence.

⁶² Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56-57.

⁶³ Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae*, 88.

⁶⁴ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women's History and Ancient History*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 249-250.

priestess to the cult of Artemis Pergaia, Plancia Magna served as an overseer to the worship of the city's principal deity, the protector and patron of all in Perge. This title was one of utmost honor and importance, for proper worship of the city's patron divinity ensured continued peace and prosperity in the area. Her position as *sacerdos publicae* intertwined her civic identity with traditional feminine virtues through her "exemplary" piety and devotion to Perge's female divine patron. Plancia Magna further linked herself to tradition and religious piety through her position as the "first and only" priestess of the Great Mother goddess. The cult of the Great Mother goddess, or as the Romans referred the "Magna Mater", was distinctly Anatolian in nature and worshipped a female earth divinity. The exact meaning of Plancia Magna's descriptive *prima* or "first" is unfortunately under historical and translative debate. As such, it is left up to interpretation whether she was *prima* in a temporal sense as the first ever priestess of this cult in Perge, or in a hierarchical meaning as the chief priestess of the local Magna Mater cult.⁶⁵ Regardless of this ambiguity, the gravitas of her title reveals that in some symbolic sense she was of major importance to the local worship of Magna Mater. As the first and only priestess of this cult, Plancia Magna immortalized her name in connection to the earth mother and tied herself to the symbols of Magna Mater: birth, creation, and life. In Roman culture and society, these attributes also represented mothers and wives as life givers of future Roman citizens. Thus, despite being an agent of the public sphere, Plancia Magna's priestess position in the local cults remained strictly within the bounds of female domesticity.

However, with a benefaction as magnificent as her contribution to Perge, Plancia Magna seemed to require even more overt examples of traditional Roman virtues beyond these positions to counteract her unconventional presence in the public domain. Therefore, in addition to being a

⁶⁵ Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56.

priestess to these two local cults, material evidence suggests that Plancia Magna was also a priestess of the Imperial cult. Although never officially mentioned within inscriptions or historical records, an analysis of an honorific bust dedicated to Plancia Magna depicts her wearing a traditional crown of priesthood. As shown on this bronze Cilician coin from the reign of Elagabalus, a typical priestess' crown consisted of a diadem adorned with the miniature busts of Roman emperors. This diadem would have presumably been recognized by local society as the mark of an Imperial priestess, a symbol of her position which the bust of Plancia Magna also appears to be wearing in image M.



Image L: Bronze Cilician Coin of Elagabalus⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Barbara F McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.



Image M: Bust and Imperial Diadem of Plancia Magna’s Statue⁶⁷

Her station as a priestess of the Imperial cult established Plancia Magna as linked to the Imperial family themselves, albeit by title alone. Despite this sect being located far into in the eastern reaches of the Roman Empire, the Imperial cult united the provincial regions, including that of Pamphylia, to the center of Rome, for all who lived in the empire were required to offer piety to the Imperial family. In accordance with her imperial religious position and her service in the local cults of Perge, she rooted herself within the identity of the city while also ensuring that the traditional ties of the Imperial family and “proper” Roman society were observed. As a result, Plancia Magna wielded the extensive moral backing of her religious affiliations and her existing

⁶⁷ Barbara F McManus, “Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors,” Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

wealth and prestige to grant benefactions to Perge. As was common practice amongst priests and priestesses of the Imperial cult, she increased her renown with minimal risk of societal backlash.⁶⁸

Sometime between 119-122 A.D., during the early years of Emperor Hadrian's reign, Plancia Magna made her debut as a benefactress of Perge. In a series of three successive constructions, labeled on the ariel view of the gate complex below, Plancia Magna strengthened the protection and identity of Perge and quite literally carved her name throughout the history of the city. The first of her three benefactions served to repair the round towers of the main southern city gate which dated back to the Hellenistic period (see image N). Although not a glamorous start to her donations, her action helped to strengthen the defenses of the city and showed that she cared to keep her beloved home strong. Furthermore, this repair helped to refurbish the very first image of Perge itself. All travelers who entered between these round towers would, from that moment forward, remember the newly strengthened, soaring walls of Perge thanks to Plancia Magna's generosity.

⁶⁸ Emily Ann Hemelrijk, *Women and Society in the Roman World: A Sourcebook of Inscriptions from the Roman West*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 235.

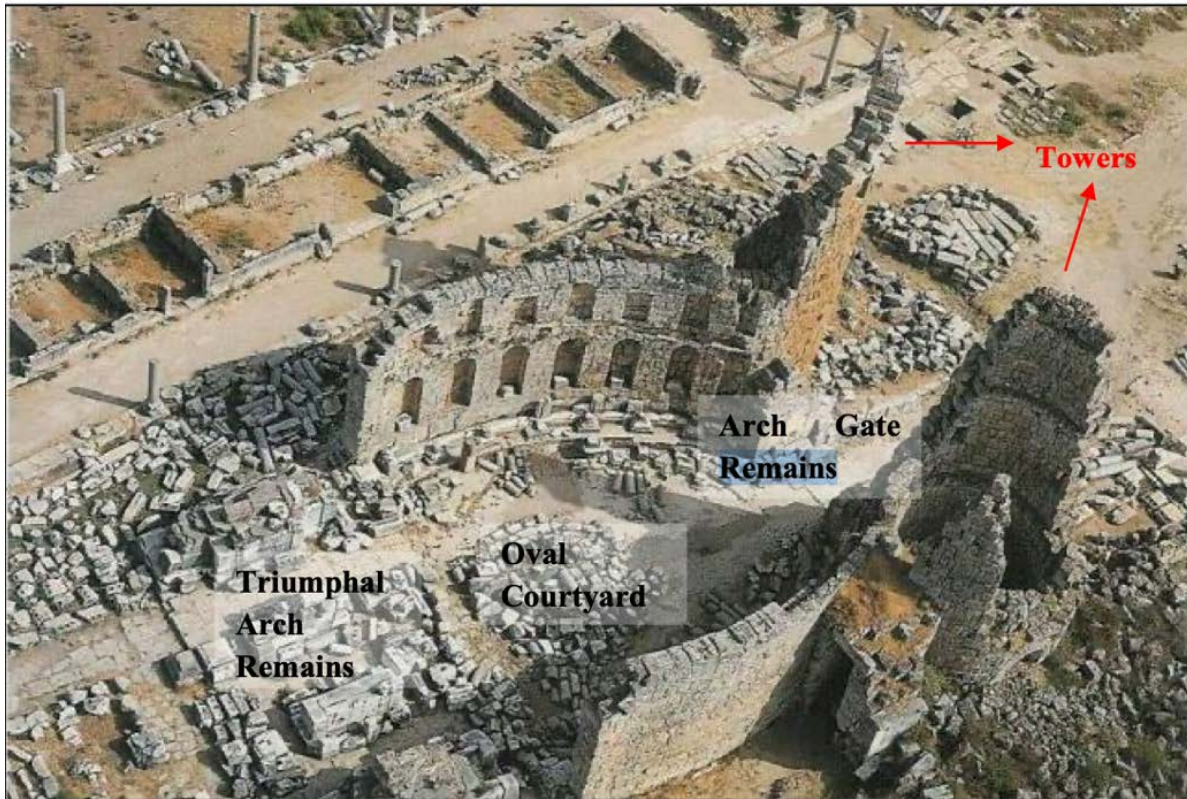


Image N: Arial View of Plancia Magna’s Courtyard and Main City Gate Complex⁶⁹

Continuing into the city, witnesses would immediately behold Plancia Magna’s second and most extravagant benefaction- her two-story niched courtyard. Constructed just inside the city gate as an oval courtyard surrounded by two curving walls, it was decorated with marble and 14 niches on either side, as seen depicted in image O.

⁶⁹ Orhan Mete Işıkoğlu, “Structural Modelling, Analysis, Evaluation and Strengthening of Perge Southern Gate Hellenistic Towers,” n.d., <https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12614142/index.pdf>.



Image O: Courtyard Niches of Plancia Magna's Courtyard⁷⁰

The structure closely resembled that of a traditional *scaenae frons*, the stage backdrop found in Ancient Roman and Greek theaters. Plancia Magna also donated a specifically curated series of statues to be placed in the niches of the walls which told the story of Perge. On the lower level, the niches were devoted to the Graeco-Roman pantheon of gods including Aphrodite, Hermes, Pan, Apollo, and Heracles.⁷¹ On the upper level, the niches boasted statues of the mythological heroes and historical founders of Perge, labeled as the *ktistai* or “city-founders”.⁷² Plancia

⁷⁰ Barbara F McManus, “Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors,” Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

⁷¹ Mary T Boatwright, “Plancia Magna of Perge: Women’s Roles and Status inn Roman Asia Minor”, *Women's History and Ancient History*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, (1991): 251.

⁷² Mary T Boatwright, “Plancia Magna of Perge”, 251.

Magna's inclusion of these gods and important male figures was a calculated move and insurance policy for the sheer magnitude and implications of her benefaction. As an overt display of individual wealth and power wielded by a woman, the courtyard complex risked facing potential repercussions if the citizens of Perge felt too threatened by Plancia Magna's actions. As such, these connections to divinity and male achievements insured that the display of female munificence and agency would be "balanced" out by traditional allusions. Being a priestess of the city and a member of a local historic family, it was only natural that Plancia Magna donate a benefaction displaying the gods and the founders of Perge on such a grand scale. Perhaps due to subtle intention or inadvertent consequence, these inclusions, while alluding to traditional Pergaeon history, also placed Plancia Magna among the historical "greats" displayed throughout the courtyard.

Significantly, on the upper reaches of her courtyard, Plancia Magna also placed statues of her own father and brother, detailing in their respective base inscriptions, "City-founder, M. Plancius Varus, the Pergaeon, father of Plancia Magna... City-founder, C. Plancius Varus, the Pergaeon, brother of Plancia Magna...".⁷³ This inclusion of both her brother and her father amongst the important founders of the city interlaced the history of Perge with Plancia Magna's own history. Plancia Magna's family, according to the implications of the courtyard, stood together with the mythological fathers and gods themselves as those who birthed Perge. However, even as they were elevated to such heights, both M. Plancius Varus and C. Plancius Varus were identified as in relation to Plancia Magna herself, not as figures in their own merit. Despite being two well-known politicians in the Pamphylia region, neither of the men were referenced in a manner traditionally expected at the time. In contemporary Roman inscriptions,

⁷³ Mary T Boatwright, "Plancia Magna of Perge", 251.

men were listed in their own right followed closely by their respective public office, if any, and their most relevant achievements. In an inscription where a woman is included in the details such as those placed in Plancia Magna's courtyard, tradition would call for her to be placed in reference to her male relative, i.e. Plancia Magna, daughter of M. Plancius Varus. Instead, Plancia Magna seems to reject this traditional format of Roman inscriptions and switches the expected placement of names, placing herself, a woman, as the important free agent by which her male relatives were known.

Plancia Magna further tested the socially acceptable extent of her public presence by not including the names of her husband or son in her inscriptions. On each of the statue base inscriptions placed in the niches of her courtyard, exemplified above in image O, Plancia Magna detailed who the figure represented was, what they were known for achieving, and her own name as benefactress of the donation. Each and every statue base listed her name, bearing her mark in plain sight for all who existed within Perge. Everyone who entered or left the city would be forced to lay their eyes on the benefaction and know that Plancia Magna, a woman, was the one to thank. In light of this, she again defies traditional Roman inscriptional format and omits the names of her husband and son from being listed as benefactors as well. This exclusion matters for two reasons. For one, it implies that Plancia Magna herself funded the project in its entirety out of her own funds. She did not rely on the wealth of her husband or adult son to pay for her benefactions, nor on her father or brother for that matter; her wealth was her own. Secondly, Plancia Magna did not even attempt to define herself by the men in her family as was expected. She would be the sole focus of this project, not her husband or son.

The third and final component of Plancia Magna's grand benefaction was the triple archway constructed at the opposite end of her courtyard across from her restored round towers.

Decorating the triarch structure was, again, numerous, and deliberate, allusions to traditional icons. Represented in the statues and busts adorning the arches were members of the imperial family including deified Nerva, deified Trajan, Trajan's surviving wife Empress Plotina, as well as Trajan's deified sister and niece. Emperor Hadrian and his wife Empress Sabina were also present amongst the past and contemporary imperial members. In addition, Plancia Magna depicted divine beings in the archway in the forms of Artemis Pergaia and Tyche as the city's patron goddess and guardian spirit respectively. At first glance, the decorations on Plancia Magna's triarch seem to closely mirror the niche decorations found across the way in her courtyard. While it is true that these icons were designed to maintain a close connection between the benefaction and the traditional values of imperial loyalty and religious devotion, the statues on this archway also demonstrate a subtle rebellion against the expected domesticity of Roman women. Noticeably, upon second review of those depicted on the triple archway, the number of women present on the arch greatly outnumber the men, despite those men being emperors. Plancia Magna thrived upon this subtle subversion of Roman values, toeing the line between acting as an unabashed, individual agent in the public sphere and representing the utmost symbol of femininity in the public eye.

Even when Plancia Magna ensured that a strong tie remained between her actions in the public eye and the traditional Roman values expected of her as a woman, she managed to prevent herself from falling too far one way or the other. Evidently, her actions did not go unrewarded. Despite breaking free from the contemporary image of a "proper" woman and donating one of Perge's largest benefactions during Imperial Rome, Plancia Magna did not receive any apparent backlash for her actions. In fact, her donations to the city and service within three separate priesthoods in Perge only served to increase her popularity and presence in public society.

Plancia Magna received no less than five honorific statues dedicated to her from a variety of grateful citizens, one of which can be seen here, including two inscribed statue bases from Perge's own council and assembly (*boulē* and *demos*) and the council of elders (*geraioi*).⁷⁴



Image P: Honorific Statue of Plancia Magna⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Mary T Boatwright, "Plancia Magna of Perge: Women's Roles and Status in Roman Asia Minor", *Women's History and Ancient History*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, (1991): 249.

⁷⁵ Barbara F McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

One of her honorific statues was stationed next to the round towers amongst a series of three other statues dedicated to important Pergaeian women shown in image P. The base inscription of this statue, see image Q, detailed the life and major achievements of Plancia Magna for all who entered and left Perge to see, stating,

Plancia Magna, daughter of Marcus Plancius Varus, and daughter of the city, a priestess of Artemis and demiourgos three times and a priestess of the Mother of the gods for life, chief priestess of the emperors (literally of the august/revered ones) Marcus Plancius Alexandros put up this statue for the patroness.⁷⁶

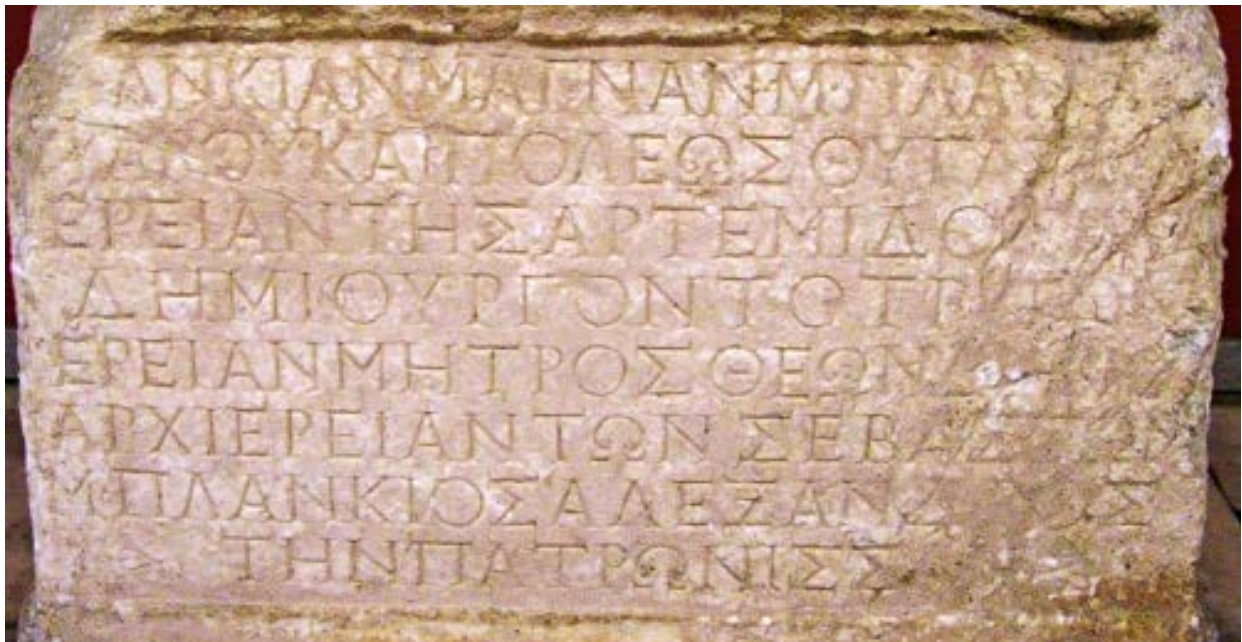


Image Q: Base Inscription from an Extant Statue of Plancia Magna⁷⁷

Following a brief nod to Plancia Magna's lineage through her father, as was typical for Roman inscriptional format, the text noticeably established Plancia Magna in her own name. She is

⁷⁶ Barbara F McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcm Manus/women_civicdonors.html.

⁷⁷ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna", http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcm Manus/women_civicdonors.html.

defined independently by the abundance of power she wielded in the city and the titles she achieved.

Amongst the variety of accolades mentioned in the inscriptional base, Plancia Magna was said to have been awarded the honorific title of “daughter of the city” and the position of *gymnasiarch* which entailed the directorship of the *gymnasium* and overseer/funder for related festivals.⁷⁸ In addition to these honors Plancia Magna was elevated to the title of *demiourgos*, a rare and extreme honor in Roman society. This position was considered the highest appointment for any civil servant, let alone a woman, for it was an eponymous role. This meant that the name of said magistrate would be used for dating purposes much like that of the emperor. In the final piece of the inscription, Plancia Magna is referenced as simply “the patroness”. Strangely, the text does not elaborate what Plancia Magna was the patroness of, should it have been a guild, society, etc. Based on the layout of the inscription, the omission was not the result of an incomplete text due to degradation of the material, for the name *τὴν πατρώνισσαν* (patroness) is centered within the last line of writing. Rather, the dedicator of this statue seemed to assume that all in Perge would, by reading the name of the benefactress, recognize Plancia’s achievements and understand her successive appointment as “patroness”. Presumably, Plancia Magna was labeled as “the patroness” for her service to the city, both as priestess and civic benefactress, thus implying by this text that she was the patroness of Perge itself. Despite being a middle elite woman in the Roman Empire, Plancia Magna existed within Perge as a vital and accepted member of the public sphere, receiving the highest level of honors possible to her regardless of her sex. Contrary to the historical depictions of mainstream Roman culture shunning and

⁷⁸ Mary T Boatwright, “Plancia Magna of Perge”, 250.

rebuking female munificence and civic participation, the city of Perge welcomed and encouraged Plancia Magna for her benefactions and societal contributions.

However, female benefactions in Perge did not simply stop at Plancia Magna, nor did they dissipate into the background or become overshadowed by male dominated benefactions. In fact, the second display of munificence Ancient Romans would have laid their eyes upon after emerging from Plancia Magna's overwhelming display of wealth and status would have been Aurelia Paulina's benefaction, her nymphaeum.⁷⁹ Constructed during the reign of Emperor Septimus Severus, nearly 100 years after Plancia Magna's own donations, Aurelia Paulina's nymphaeum demonstrates that female civic munificence was alive and thriving in later imperial Perge.

Located just beyond the gymnasium bath complex and Plancia Magna's restored round towers, refer to the gate complex map in image R, the nymphaeum of Aurelia Paulina was constructed upon the site of an ancient Pergaeian well. The well was a dated yet vital amenity in Perge and provided clean water as well as an area of social commune to the citizens. By expanding and beautifying the well into a grand nymphaeum complex, Aurelia Paulina, priestess for life of the Cult of Artemis, demonstrated incredible social awareness and strategically linked her name and wealth to this crucial resource. Aurelia Paulina understood that citizens of Perge would be required out of necessity to visit the nymphaeum daily in order to collect clean drinking water. As such, the sight would become a center of the community, specifically for women, servants, and children. Each visitor to the nymphaeum would subsequently connect Aurelia Paulina to the unofficial civic center of Perge and her service of providing lifesaving

⁷⁹ A nymphaeum is an elaborate public fountain utilized both in a practical sense as a source of clean drinking water from the Roman aqueducts and in an aesthetic sense. A famous surviving example of such is the Trevi Fountain in Rome.

water to the people. Furthermore, due to the structure being situated at the main entrance of Perge, all who entered or left the city would have been exposed to the display of female munificence. By design, the very first and last sights which visitors beheld of Perge would have been the benefactions of Aurelia Paulina and Plancia Magna, two women immortalized for their wealth, power, and civic importance.

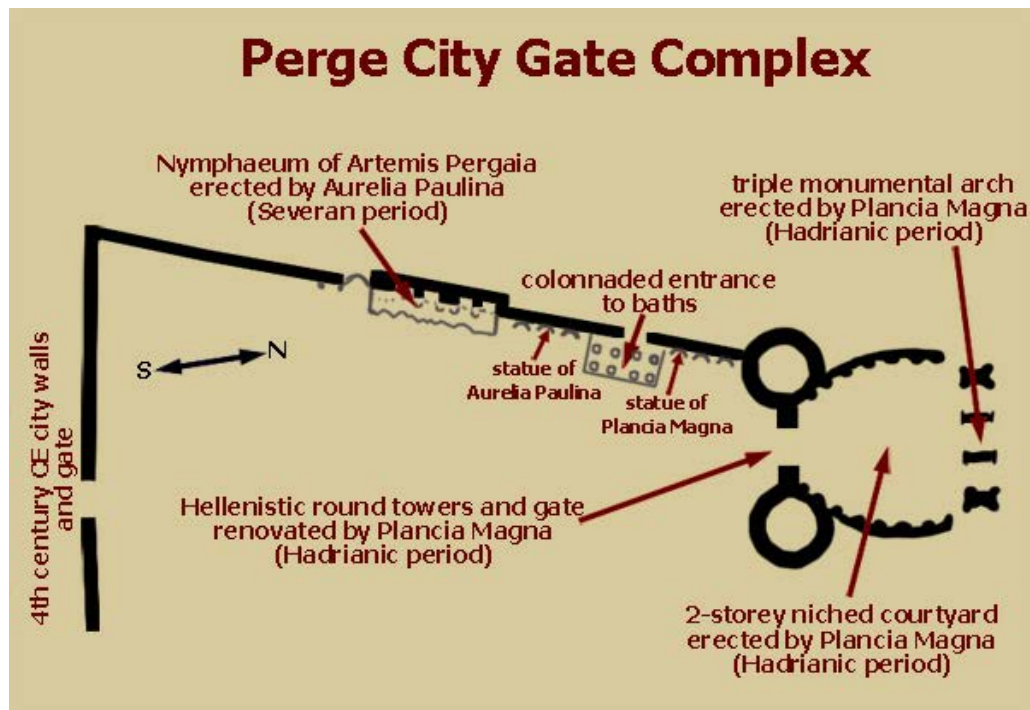


Image R: Diagram of the Perge City Gate Complex⁸⁰

In addition to the geographical significance of the nymphaeum, both the dedication and decoration of the fountain further served to bolster Aurelia Paulina's status in Perge while simultaneously maintaining her connection to traditional feminine virtues. Following Plancia Magna's example, Aurelia Paulina dedicated her nymphaeum to Perge's patron deity Artemis

⁸⁰ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

Pergaia, the reigning Emperor Septimus Severus, Empress Julia Domna, and their sons, Caracalla and Geta.⁸¹ Through her dedication, Aurelia linked her nymphaeum to the Imperial family and the city's divine protector, attaching an underlying message of divine and imperial approval to her actions. Any grumblings which may have potentially arisen in regard to a woman participating in the public sphere or making her name known in such a manner would have thus shown contempt against a vital civic amenity bearing the name of the Empire's rulers and the city's goddess. Such slander and ungratefulness would have been far more shocking and appalling to the people of Perge than the product of female munificence itself.

In terms of the nymphaeum's adornments, the niched walls and overhead scenic pediment each bore customary images of important local Anatolian and Pergaeian individuals, past and present members of the imperial household, and divine figures, as seen in fragmentary remains of the pediment shown here.



Image S: Remains of the Pediment from Aurelia Paulina's Nymphaeum⁸²

⁸¹ Geta's name is later erased from the dedicatory inscription according to *damnatio memoriae* after being murdered by Caracalla and Caracalla's later rise to Emperor.

⁸² Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," *Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons*, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

Plancia Magna's inclusion of historical statuary and traditional symbols of Pergaeon and Imperial Roman culture seemed to set a precedent for female civic munificence in Perge. Allusions to tradition and shared heritage became a tool which ambitious women would wield in order to build notoriety without fearing negative consequences. However, despite following this pattern of behavior to some degree, Aurelia Paulina significantly deviates from her predecessors' examples by intentionally depicting a greater number of distinctly female figures than male figures on the nymphaeum. Amongst the overwhelming number of female statues, including the three Graces⁸³, Artemis Pergaia, Aphrodite, Empress Julia Domna⁸⁴ (image T), and a priestess, merely three statues are definitively identified as male figures: Eros, Dionysus, and Emperor Septimus Severus⁸⁵ (image U). Despite their male presentation, Eros, the Greek god of love and sex, is typically named in association with Aphrodite, and Dionysus himself is deemed as a fluid deity, described as both masculine and feminine. As a result, neither male god on this nymphaeum serves as a strict tie to masculine power which benefactresses traditionally utilized to preemptively undermine criticism towards their donations. Rather, Aurelia Paulina openly flaunted her own wealth and power in connection to similar women of powerful Greek, Roman, and Anatolian roots, maintaining loose allusions to masculine achievements to protect her image while amplifying feminine civic actions.

⁸³ Also referred to in Greek culture and religion as the three Fates.

⁸⁴ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcm Manus/women_civicdonors.html.

⁸⁵ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna", http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcm Manus/women_civicdonors.html.



Image T: Statue of Empress Julia Domna, Emperor Septimus Severus' Wife, from the Niches of Aurelia Paulina's Nymphaeum



Image U: Statue of Emperor Septimus Severus from the Niches of Aurelia Paulina's Nymphaeum

Although her unconventional actions would cause a vast majority of modern audiences to expect swift and harsh backlash according to mainstream depictions of Roman culture, Aurelia Paulina was instead publicly honored and rewarded for her donation to the city. Surviving statuary evidence located between the nymphaeum and the colonnaded entrance to the baths verifies that on at least one account, Aurelia Paulina was awarded an honorific statue to commemorate her service to the city. Depicted in the image below, Aurelia Paulina is shown wearing large, heavy jewelry covering her chest and sporting a long chain and shell pendant on her upper torso. These accessories, while seemingly out of place within a Roman statuary image,

are intentional references to Aurelia Paulina's Syrian heritage and civic position as priestess of Artemis Pergaia. A comparison of Aurelia Paulina's honorific statue (image V⁸⁶) to a contemporary statue of a Syrian woman (image W⁸⁷) reveals that both women bore the same style of large, interconnected, looped necklaces. By adorning Aurelia Paulina with an identifying style of Syrian jewelry, the dedicant ensured that Aurelia Paulina's proud heritage remained in the forefront of her public image. However, the deliberate addition of the long seashell pendant depicted on the statue served to also maintain Aurelia Paulina's connection to Perge and the Roman Empire, for the pendant was a traditional symbol for the priestesses of Artemis Pergaia.⁸⁸ The blend of Syrian and Roman artistic styles used to create Aurelia Paulina's honorific statue represented the larger, very real blend of the two cultures which prevailed in the provincial city at the time. However, the stylistic choices further symbolized the duality of Aurelia Paulina herself as a woman who existed under both a Syrian and Roman identity as a civil servant in Perge.

⁸⁶ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Donors," *Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, and Regilla: Civic Patrons*, n.d. http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

⁸⁷ Barbara F. McManus, "Plancia Magna", http://vroma.org/vromans/bmcmanus/women_civicdonors.html.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*



Image V: Bust of Aurelia Paulina's Honorific Statue



Image W: Bust of an Unnamed Syrian Woman

Aurelia Paulina's rise to power and humble heritage is briefly mentioned upon an extant building inscription discovered near the site of her nymphaeum. The stone bearing the inscription was unfortunately broken off from the nymphaeum and reused within the building of a nearby house. However, the Greek inscription written on the stone is luckily still legible. The text roughly translates to,

Aurelia Paulina, priestess for life of the asylum goddess Artemis of Perge, after acting as high priestess of the emperors in the city of Sillyon with her deceased husband Aquilios, by birth son of Kidramyas, the daughter of Dionysios, son of Apelles ... and Aeliana Tertulla. She, who was honored by the god Commodus with the citizenship of the Romans and built with her own funds a nymphaeum from its foundations with all the ornament around it, dedicated (this).⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Aitor Blanco Pérez, *The Roman Citizenship of Aurelia Paulina in Perge*, September 8, 2018. <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/roman-citizenship-aurelia-paulina-perge>.

Unlike Plancia Magna who utilized explicit connections to traditional values in her statuary decorations and deviated from customary inscriptional format to emphasize her power and name, Aurelia Paulina chose to instead subvert established tradition more visibly through her nymphaeum decorations and counterbalance her unconventional actions with her inscriptional dedication. Following customary format, Aurelia Paulina defines herself in relation to her husband, her father, and their respective male lineages. In regard to her husband's textual inclusion, however, Aurelia specifically declares Aquilios as deceased. While this marked trait may have simply followed customary inscriptional format, perhaps highlighting the contemporary date in reference to Aquilios' death, the inclusion also serves to emphasize Aurelia Paulina's independence in her actions. Subsequently, none could claim that a dead man aided in Aurelia Paulina's benefaction.

Noticeably, Aurelia Paulina's inscription also mentions her own influential station as high priestess for life of the Cult of Artemis Pergaia and her mother by name. However, what is most interesting about this inscription designed by Aurelia Paulina is the mention of how she earned Roman citizenship by grant under Emperor Commodus. It is important to note that in the larger Roman Empire, Emperor Commodus, informally known as one of the "bad emperors", was never officially deified. In addition, Commodus received *damnatio memoriae* immediately following his death in 192 A.D. Although it was common for those in the Eastern provinces to celebrate emperors as gods while they were still living, this inscription was created sometime between 195-211 A.D., at least three years after Commodus died and was supposed to be removed from all historical records. The fact that Commodus' name not only remains on this inscription, but also bears the deified honorific further shows a disconnect between the Eastern provinces and Rome proper. It is unclear whether those in Perge were simply unaware of

Commodus' death or revered him more than those in the West; however, his inclusion within the text demonstrates just how far removed the Eastern provinces were from the center of the Empire, both physically and culturally. Born to two provincial Syrians and non-Roman citizens, Aurelia Paulina proudly displayed her heritage as a local Anatolian woman. She was so proud of both her Anatolian roots and earned Roman citizenship that she purposely stated her citizenship before mentioning the use of her own wealth to build a nymphaeum for Perge. As a woman who was not Roman by birth, Aurelia Paulina's display of influence and feminine power in the city was highly noteworthy, for she seemingly did not rely on any form of preexisting status or elite ranking within the empire to excuse her actions. From a humble birth and unknown origins of wealth, Aurelia Paulina managed to acquire civic value beyond the home and create a name for herself both as a priestess and benefactress, Roman and Syrian.

Whether noble-born or a member of a local Anatolian family, wealthy women who wished to move beyond the restrictions of domestic life and enter the public sphere as active, independent agents were welcomed by the city of Perge regardless of their gender. Evidence of female munificence and the power of benefactresses permeated Perge to its very core. So long as the city stood to benefit from the donations of benefactresses and some semblance of feminine virtue remained firm in the public eye, then Perge rewarded and openly encouraged the participation of wealthy, elite women on the civic stage. However, as uniquely open-minded as Perge may appear at first glance, it was by no means the only city in the Eastern provinces to entertain female civic engagement and promote less militant gender roles. Indeed, situated roughly 14 miles Northwest of Perge, the city of Ephesus boasted a similar history of prominent female munificence and benefactions spanning the course of roughly 300 years.

Far before Plancia Magna granted her expansive courtyard complex to Perge c. 119 A.D., Helvidia Paula contributed her own civic munificence to Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asiana, in 90 A.D. Relocated from its original site and built into the subterranean canal of the Theater Gymnasium in the heart of the ancient city, an inscription slab was discovered bearing Helvidia Paula's name as the dedicant of an unknown benefaction. While some readers may interpret this relocation as a sign of disapproval or disgrace within Ephesian society, such movement of inscription stones and similar architectural pieces was common practice for later periods of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, due to the inscription not being in situ, the text itself remains incomplete on account of deterioration. However, while we are unable to precisely locate or identify the physical evidence of Helvidia Paula's public benefaction, vital information can still be gleaned from the partial inscription. From what can be read on the stone, the text states,

To Ephesian Artemis and to the first neokrate polis of the emperors, the polis of the Ephesians, Helvidia Paula, the daughter of Publius, priestess of Artemis, in the proconsulate of Marcus Flavius Gillo, from her own funds dedicated (it), while —os Tatianus the Asiarch was secretary, T. F[lavius]--.⁹⁰

Similar to Plancia Magna and Iunia Rustica, Helvidia Paula markedly funded her mysterious benefaction from her own pocket with deliberately no aid from her male relatives. Furthermore, as we have examined earlier with other benefactresses and female patrons throughout the empire, the dedication intentionally omits any mention of a husband or brother by which Helvidia Paula places herself in reference. Rather than position herself as the wife or sister of an important man in the city, Helvidia Paula merely mentions the name of her father, sandwiched between her own name and her revered position as priestess, in order to refer to her familial ties according to

⁹⁰ G. M. Rogers, "The Constructions of Women at Ephesos," *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 90 (1992): 219. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20187636>.

traditional inscriptional practices. Her benefaction is thus firmly identified as solely her own contribution to Ephesus as a respected, independent priestess of Artemis, the city's patron deity. Significantly, the format of this dedication strictly adheres to the same, standard inscriptional format used by male benefactors in the Roman Empire.⁹¹ Although clearly funded and issued by a woman, there is no deviation in structure due to Helvidia Paula's gender. Regardless of her public existence as a woman and clear agency as a benefactress in Ephesus, her dedication was regarded on the same level as a male-donated benefaction, at least textually.

In addition to Helvidia Paula's independent approach to female munificence, many other wealthy women in Ephesus added their own contributions to the city in a manner slightly more "approved" by tradition. Beginning during the reign of Emperor Augustus and spanning until the late 2nd century A.D., joint dedications became the most popular method of patronage amongst female benefactresses in Ephesus.⁹² Through this method, affluent women who wished to partake in public munificence did so alongside a close male relative, whether a husband, brother, father, etc. By defining themselves as attached to a man rather than acting as a sole agent, this method allowed women to tie their names to local benefactions while presenting themselves as non-threatening to traditional gender roles. An excellent example of one such joint dedication is the Nymphaeum Traiani, pictured here below in its modern state and in an artist's virtual reconstruction. Constructed in 102-104 A.D. on what is now marked "Curetes Street" (see image Z), the Nymphaeum Traiani was made by its co-dedicators, Asiarch Tiberius Claudius Aristion and his wife Julia Lydia Laterane, in honor of Emperor Trajan, Ephesian Artemis, and "the fatherland". As we have already seen with Aurelia Paulina's nymphaeum in Perge, this

⁹¹ G. M. Rogers, "The Constructions of Women at Ephesos," 220.

⁹² G. M. Rogers, "The Constructions of Women at Ephesos," 217.

benefaction was a vital amenity to the citizens of Ephesus as it provided clean drinking water and an area of community for those who gathered at its base.



Image X: Modern State of the Nymphaeum Traiani ⁹³

Although the Nymphaeum stands in an obvious state of disrepair today (see image X), statue fragments discovered during an archeological dig of the site as well as contemporary models of similar nymphaea allow us to reconstruct what the grand fountain may have looked like. At least ten statues adorned the two-story *scaenae* surrounding the fountain including

⁹³ Ádám Németh, “Virtual Reconstruction of the Nymphaeum Traiani in Ephesus, Turkey: 2017,” Ádám Németh’s Virtual Reconstructions, December 12, 2017, <https://virtualreconstruction.com/wp/?p=662>.

various deities, such as Aphrodite and Dionysus, a young hunter believed to be Androclus, the mythical founder of Ephesus, and Emperor Nerva.⁹⁴

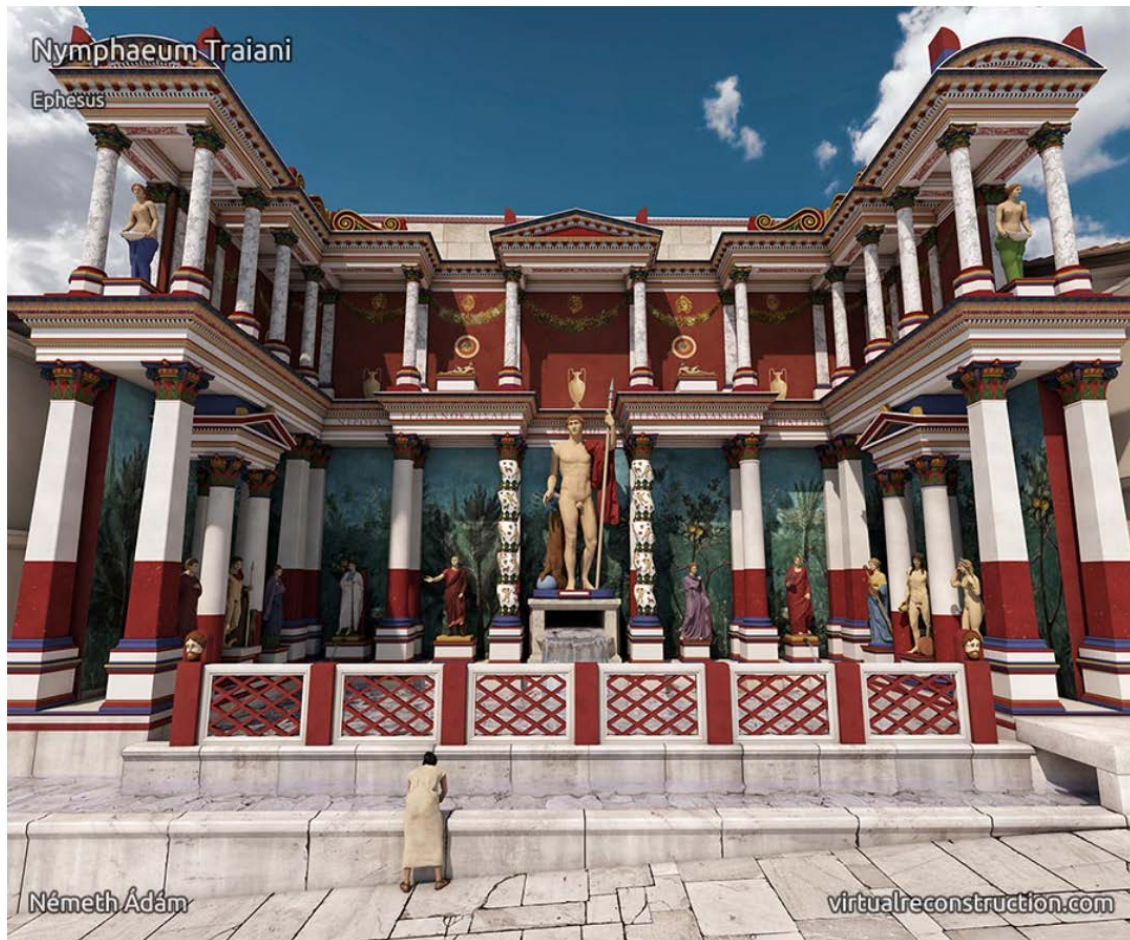


Image Y: Virtual reconstruction of the Nymphaeum Traiani⁹⁵

Similar to the carefully curated statues chosen by Plancia Magna, Eumachia, and Aurelia Paulina within their benefactions, these figures provided obvious allusions to traditional Roman and Ephesian culture. The chosen deities tied the fountain to the Greek pantheon and nodded to the

⁹⁴ Iza, "Trajan's Nymphaeum in Ephesus," Turkish Archaeological News, January 18, 2021, <https://turkisharchaeonews.net/object/trajans-nymphaeum-ephesus>.

⁹⁵ Ádám Németh, "Virtual Reconstruction of the Nymphaeum Traiani in Ephesus, Turkey: 2017," Ádám Németh's Virtual Reconstructions, December 12, 2017, <https://virtualreconstruction.com/wp/?p=662>.

rich history present in Ephesus as a former Greek colony. Comparatively, the statue of Androclus alludes to the city's mythological founding and unique culture while the depiction of Emperor Nerva connects the fountain to the larger Roman Empire. Each statue, save the statue of Emperor Trajan, were constructed to be the same size and artistic style, seemingly implying that the various cultural references were equally important in the eyes of Julia Lydia Laterane and her husband. Even the largest statue of the nymphaeum, the central depiction of Trajan shown in image Y above, demonstrated the multicultural blend of Ephesian history. Roughly twice the size of the other statues and placed directly above the flow of water, Emperor Trajan is depicted in nude heroic posture typical of Greek sculptural tradition, an intentional artistic choice to blend Roman and Greek heritages together within the Nymphaeum. When paired with the tripartite dedication to Ephesian Artemis, Emperor Trajan, and "the fatherland", each and every angle of the benefaction proudly acknowledges the importance of Greek, Roman, and Ephesian culture.

However, what is noticeably absent from this nymphaeum is any overt attempt to emphasize traditional gender roles as we have seen with the benefactions of Plancia Magna and Aurelia Paulina. The reason for this is quite clear: Julia Lydia Laterane did not need to highlight feminine virtues to downplay her agency because the benefaction was attached to both her and her husband. As G.M. Rodgers explains in his own research on female constructions in Ephesus, most scholars when examining joint dedications commonly assume that the man mentioned in the inscription primarily funded the project as lead dedicant.⁹⁶ Presumably, people contemporary to the Nymphaeum Traiani's construction would have shared this thought and understood Tiberius Claudius Aristion to be the primary dedicant and leading agent of the benefaction. The structure of the inscription appears to lend credence to this claim as it states,

⁹⁶ G. M. Rodgers, "The Constructions of Women at Ephesos," 217.

Claudius Aristion, thrice asiarch and neokoros, with his wife Julia Lydia Laterane [...] daughter of Asia, high-priestess and prytanis, he dedicated the [...] water, having brought it 210 stadia through the water conduit he constructed, and the water reservoir, with all its decorations, at his own expense, to Ephesian Artemis and to the Emperor Nerva Trajan Caesar Augustus Germanicus Dacicus and to the fatherland.⁹⁷

The text lists Claudius Aristion as well as his titles first and foremost following traditional Roman inscriptional format. However, just after Claudius' own titles are listed, the inscription then immediately states that his wife Julia Lydia also contributed in this benefaction. One possible assumption we can make from this joint dedication is that, since both husband and wife are mentioned at the beginning of the inscription, they may have intended to present themselves as equal agents in the benefaction. However, as the text proceeds beyond Julia Lydia's inclusion, the narrative pointedly explains that "he", Claudius, dedicated the structure at "his" own expense, emphasizing Claudius' role in the construction over Julia Lydia's. Regardless of Claudius Aristion's primary role in the Nymphaeum, Julia Lydia Laterane's participation in the benefaction and appearance in the dedicatory inscription cannot be minimized. The inscriptional text does not merely list her in reference to Claudius as his wife, but also identifies her in her own right as "daughter of Asia, high-priestess, and prytanis". Although we do not know what deity she was attached to, her position of high priestess was unmistakably of utmost importance in Ephesian society. Furthermore, as a "daughter of Asia", Julia Lydia is marked as a native of the region and consequently intertwined with those in Ephesus and her fatherland. Most interestingly, however, she is identified as *prytanis*, which was an official title for the executive of the *boule*, otherwise known as the local citizens council. The prytanis held significant civic power in ancient Greek cities and oversaw the peoples' council. Evidently, as prytanis, Julia

⁹⁷ Iza, "Trajan's Nymphaeum in Ephesus," Turkish Archaeological News, January 18, 2021, <https://turkisharchaeonews.net/object/trajans-nymphaeum-ephesus>.

Lydia Laterane must have been part of the Ephesian community in her own right, not simply as the wife of Asiarch Claudius or as the secondary dedicant of the Nymphaeum Traiani. Despite being included in the benefaction as part of a joint dedication and being a woman, Julia Lydia Laterane held remarkable power in local society.

As we have seen previously in this study, countless women across the empire were able to partake in civic patronage and benefactions without extreme backlash as a result of their important religious roles and/or their direct connections to male relatives. However, a third method of female patronage must be acknowledged which included neither the protection of religious nor familial backing. Therefore, we will examine the radically independent benefactions of Iulia Potentilla in 3rd century Ephesus. Iulia Potentilla's civic patronage is unique amongst our previous examples for a variety of reasons. Firstly, unlike the grand constructions from Baetica in Roman Spain, Pompeii, and Perge, Iulia's benefactions to Ephesus were much more practical in nature. In a series of three separate inscriptions located between the commercial agora and the ancient theater complex, marked on the map below in image Z, Iulia Potentilla is credited for funding repairs to the awnings and stoa of the theater, the pronaos of the Nemeseion, and the paving of the road in front of the auditorium and the Library of Celsus.

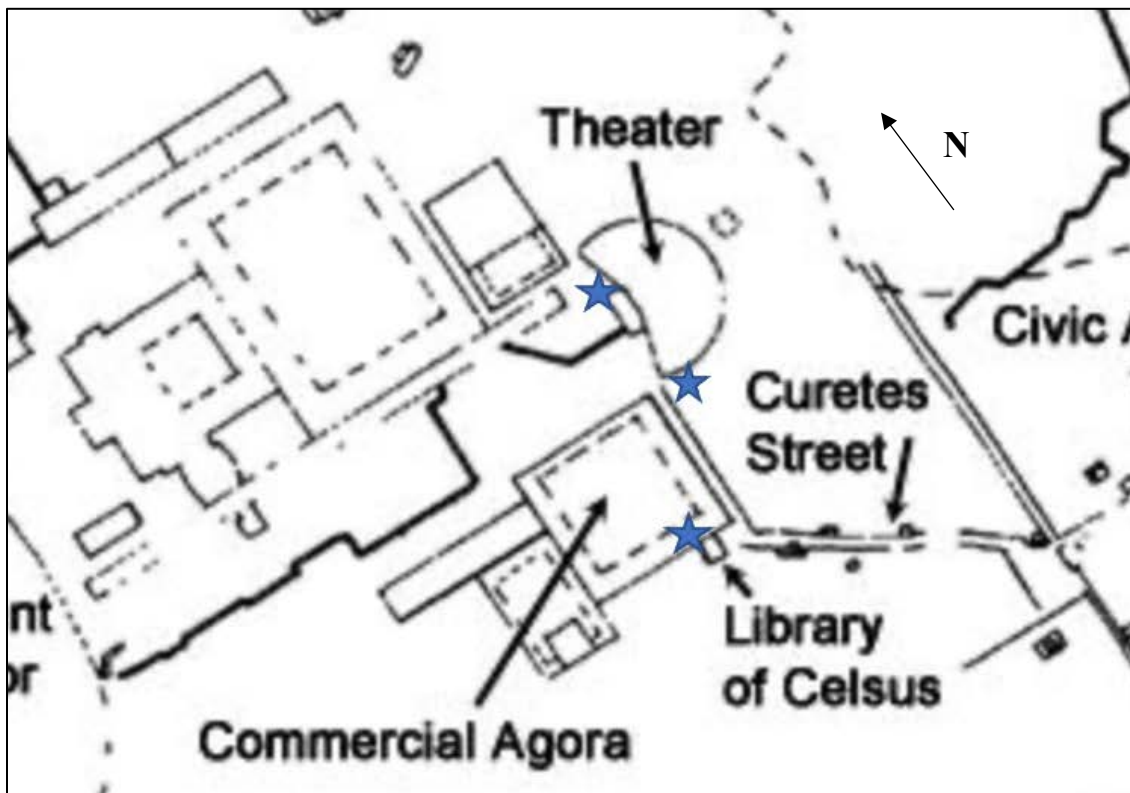


Image Z: Map of Iulia Potentilla's benefaction inscriptions

Interestingly, each of the inscriptions state that the repairs were solely funded by Iulia Potentilla yet were carried out on her behalf by the polis.⁹⁸ In other words, the Ephesian state used the funds given to them from Iulia's estate as a donation to carry out civic beautification projects in her name. Notably, none of the three inscriptions framed Iulia Potentilla as the wife, daughter, or sister of an important man of Ephesus, but rather, simply named her as the benefactress of the projects just as they would have named her male peers. The inscriptional texts also made no note of her religious office as priestess of Artemis despite discovered records proving that Iulia was indeed a priestess at the time. Neither her familial background nor her religious position were used to explain away or restrict her existence as a civic patron, for it seems that the city valued

⁹⁸ G. M. Rogers, "The Constructions of Women at Ephesus," 220-221.

her donation more than they feared a woman acting as an independent benefactress. Two of the inscriptions detailing Iulia Potentilla's contributions made on behalf of the polis were pointedly presented in some of the most visible, frequented locations of the ancient city. Ordered by the polis to commemorate Iulia's patronage, one inscription was placed on the southern wall of the Theater near the entrance to the agora while a second inscription was placed at the intersection of Curetes Street⁹⁹ and Marble Street, where the Library of Celsus was located.¹⁰⁰ Both texts would have been exposed to countless citizens and visitors who frequented the Theater and the ancient agora daily. Rather than hide the fact that a woman was responsible for the upkeep and beautification of Ephesus, the polis proudly declared that Iulia Potentilla was to thank for her benefactions.

Although mainstream history fails to acknowledge the clear presence of "middle elite" women in the public sphere, the benefactions of Plancia Magna, Aurelia Paulina, Julia Lydia Laterane, Helvidia Paula, and Iulia Potentilla all speak to the truth that female benefactresses and patrons were more than welcome in the cities of the Eastern Roman Empire. Over 300 years of history proves that women not only frequently provided crucial amenities and beautification projects to their local cities, but did so through a variety of methods and different states of agency. Female-funded civic patronage was not an uncommon event which was hidden away from the public eye. Eastern cities lauded their female patrons and benefactresses for the services they provided and, over the course of three centuries, increasingly allowed for these projects to be less restricted by the inclusion of images of traditional female virtues. While Plancia Magna and Aurelia Paulina ensured that their benefactions displayed clear signs of religious and cultural

⁹⁹ The ancient name of Curetes Street was Embolos Street.

¹⁰⁰ G. M.Rogers, 221.

piety, Iulia Potentilla was able to act entirely independent as a benefactress without qualifying her actions. While we cannot entirely assume why Iulia Potentilla was able to act so independently within the public sphere, we can speculate a number of justifications as to how she achieved such agency. One possible explanation may be that there was a cultural or societal evolution over the three centuries in Ephesus which allowed for Iulia and her contemporary peers to more independently and frequently donate benefactions. Another explanation suggested by G.M. Rogers attributes this agency to Iulia having been deceased before the benefactions were donated. It is unclear when Iulia may have actually died, however, Rogers posits that Ephesus may have utilized the funds left to the city within Iulia's estate and deemed the public acknowledgement of her benefactions as a posthumous memorial to Iulia Potentilla rather than her proclamation of agency. Regardless, it is clear that beginning in the first century and spanning until the third century, female funded benefactions and civic patronage across the Roman Empire developed both in size and frequency, as the methods of munificence reflected local history, culture, and shifting societal trends.

Conclusion

The history of women in the Roman Empire cannot be reduced to the cult of domesticity. Despite what ancient textual sources have led modern society to largely believe up until now, women of the Roman Empire enjoyed far more diverse and active existences than the one-dimensional lives portrayed of them by their contemporary historical sources. Even as traditional feminine virtues dominated and their male peers sought to mitigate or bury the true extent of female agency in the public sphere, ambitious, middle-elite women from all across the Roman Empire discovered a variety of methods in which they could acquire significant civic power in their local communities without being shunned from society.

In the far-western regions of the Roman Empire, women in Roman Hispania seemed to exist within a culture which encouraged civic munificence regardless of gender. Iunia Rustica, as a descendent of the generationally established *Rusticci* and *Fabii* families of Rome, followed in the footsteps of countless women before her by contributing numerous benefactions to the town of Cartima. In addition to Iunia Rustica's material and immaterial donations as a woman of preexisting wealth and influence, many other women in the Tarraconensis and Baetica regions independently acted in the public sphere as benefactresses and patrons. Whether through bath complexes, statues, and porticos or through public festivals, games, and tax coverages, influential Roman women and their generosity were deeply engrained into the cities and collective history of Roman Hispania. Although it cannot be entirely concluded that these women were privileged with such a welcoming environment to their civic munificence projects due to the historically matriarchal region, this suggestion must not be entirely dismissed. Perhaps as a region of the empire so geographically remote from the heart of Roman virtues, the cities and

peoples of Hispania developed a culturally remote attitude to the Roman consciousness. In other words, as an area which developed independently before being subsumed into the Roman Empire, Hispania maintained its own values and gendered virtues while simultaneously incorporating Roman cultural norms into their daily lives. Consequently, raised in an area of essentially two consciousnesses, one which valued female subservience and another which accepted public female agency, ambitious women in Roman Hispania of adequate wealth and societal sway openly sought notoriety outside of their domestic roles and did not seem to fear societal backlash. However, while the unique culture of the western provinces allowed for a multitude of Spanish Roman women to actively participate within the civic stage, the same cannot strictly said of women on mainland Italy.

Roman women of Italy such as Eumachia and Mamia of Pompeii did not entertain the same level of societal freedom and cultural leniency as women in the eastern and western provinces. Due to their sheer proximity to the heart of the Roman Empire, they were exposed to far more rigid, systematically enforced traditional virtues within their daily lives. In regard to the stereotypical images of Roman women depicted by ancient male authors as strictly domestic beings, these caricatures most closely reflected that of women on the Italian peninsula. Despite this, Eumachia and Mamia still managed to establish themselves as powerful women in the civic sphere through public architectural donations and civic patronage. As established women in Pompeian society, both as priestesses and as wealthy women, Mamia and Eumachia were expected to behave as the epitome of feminine virtue. Amazingly, these women not only adhered to the expectations placed upon them, but strategically utilized the traditional virtues expected of them to their own advantage to further elevate themselves in Pompeian society. Wielding the ideals of piety, familial devotion, generosity, and modesty, Eumachia and Mamia alluded to their

powerful lineage, the Imperial family, and other traditional images within their forum building designs to counterbalance their utter display of female power and agency. In doing so, these allusions preemptively offset any potential contempt regarding the existence of female-funded power architecture on the mainland peninsula. Evidently, even in areas so close to the epicenter of Roman culture and society, middle-elite women found ways to define themselves outside of the home.

Comparatively, the western provinces of the empire boasted a similar cultural leniency as that found in Roman Hispania. Even further remote from Rome than the Spanish Provinces, the cities of Ephesus and Perge existed largely within their own cultural sphere with minimal presence of the Roman Empire. This is not to say that Rome's values or identity were entirely absent from the eastern reaches; however, local, eastern history and societal values seemed to far outweigh that of Roman ideals in these cities. Consequently, much like the benefactions of women in Roman Hispania, women of Ephesus and Perge like Iulia Potentilla and Planica Magna were able to contribute large-scale civic munificence projects to their communities without any apparent societal backlash. Although eastern benefactresses did not do so as frequently as women in Pompeii or the Italian Peninsula, by connecting themselves to male relatives, alluding to traditional religious and cultural images, and/or depicting signs of the Imperial family within their projects, they simultaneously represented themselves as powerful individuals as well as dutiful women of Roman traditional virtues. Moreover, by alluding to eastern traditions and local cultural norms, benefactresses of the eastern provinces further connected themselves to traditional gender roles and societal expectations beyond those expected of them as Roman citizens. As women of both Roman and eastern heritage these benefactresses

existed within the traditional bounds of two cultures, learning to function within the public sphere as powerful individuals and “acceptable” figures.

In exchange for the various female-funded munificence projects, affected towns and cities throughout the empire publicly acknowledged and rewarded the generous actions of said middle-elite women. As evidenced by surviving honorific inscriptions and statues spread across the Mediterranean, not only were these publicly acting women allowed to exist within Roman society, but they were lauded for their contributions. Regardless of their gender or geographic location in the empire, the civic munificence of powerful women did not appear to be punished or deemed anti-Roman. Rather, these women were awarded with public displays of gratitude and elevated in local societies, further accepted in the public domain of the Roman Empire. Although Roman women of the early empire were certainly barred from participating in politics like their male counterparts and were still expected to maintain some semblance of feminine virtue in their daily lives, they were by no means passive figures of Roman history. In an empire as culturally diverse and geographically extensive as the Roman Empire, it is impossible that all Roman women merely stayed within the home as mothers, wives, and keepers of domesticity. In reality, ambitious Roman women of means were frequently found within the civic domain, and, contrary to what ancient male authors wrote, their lives were far more diverse and vibrant than how history believes.

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