Some remarks on the economic activity of women in the Roman Empire: a research problem

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In memory of Professor Lesław Morawiecki (1949-2004)

I. Introduction: Women and the Roman economy

There is a long tradition of research works in the field of the ancient economy. Thanks to the extensive evidence available, our knowledge both in the field of the local (provincial) economies and the economy of the whole Roman Empire is considerably more profound than even a few decades ago. Countless artefacts deriving from archaeological excavations and rich epigraphic material allow us, in many cases, to make an effort to present the results of our research in terms of a statistical depiction, which shows – we must admit – a proportional representation rather than a global picture of economic activities. Next, the prosopographical studies (particularly in the provinces) let us remove the irritating silence of the archaeological sources and allow us to become familiar with the names of the concrete business figures. In a case when evidence is relatively abundant and homogenous (e.g. the inscriptions and the archaeological artefacts from Pompeii or the archives of the Greek papyri from Egypt) the picture obtained is significantly clearer.

From the very beginning, methodological reflection accompanied research of the ancient economy. This was already demonstrated in the works of Eduard Mayer, Karl Bucher, Max Weber and others. The seventies and eighties saw the rise of extremely stimulating discussions called 'the controversy of the primitivists and modernisers', revived anew by the seminal book of Moses I. Finley. Today, the theoretical and methodological reflection is even more ingrained and more profound.

Against this background one thing is still missing – this is a factor connected with the economic activity of women in antiquity. One must be surprised of such a situation, which cannot be explained only in the terms of the paucity of the available sources, neither does the absence of the females in the Roman economy (or in a broader sense in the ancient economy as a whole) which have an ideological dimension:

¹ Referring to the enormous volume of literature is impossible here. Hence only a few newer publications are quoted, well-equipped with the extensive bibliographical references. Cf. Parkins, Smith (1998); Mattingly, Salmon (2001), Scheidel, von Reden (2002); Manning, Morris (2005); Scheidel, Morris, Saller (2007).

² Cf. Love (1991); Morley (2004); Bang, Ikeguchi, Ziche (2006).

³ FINLEY (1973). Cf. Morley (2004), 33-50. On Finley's contribution to understanding the ancient economy see Tschirner (1994).

⁴ Cf. Temin (1991); Morley (2004); Manning, Morris (2005); Bang, Ikeguchi, Ziche (2006).

Historians' neglect of women has been a function of their ideas about historical significance. Their categories and periodizations have been masculine by definition, for they have defined significance primarily by power, influence and visible activity in the world of political and economic affairs. Traditionally, wars and politics have always been a part of 'history', while those institutions which have affected individuals most immediately – social relationships, marriage, the family – have been outside the scope of historical enquiry. Because most women have lived outside the spheres of rewards and recognition, they have not had a history as historians have defined the term ⁵

The exclusion of Roman women from history is also the intentional exclusion of them from the evidence. Not only are the references to female's work in the ancient sources sparse, but also the preserved evidence presents only a male's perspective. As Neville Morley rightly underlines, we gain access not to 'the real lives of real ancient women' but rather 'just representations and images of them'. The methodological consequences of this are significant. We need to develop very subtle tools for the analysis of the evidence available in order 'to read also between the lines'. As Marlin Skinner rightly remarked: 'Real women, like other muted groups, are not to be found so much in the explicit text of the historical record as in its gaps and silences – a circumstance that requires the application of research methods based largely upon controlled inference'. Susan Dixon postulates to apply this 'controlled inference' not only to the narrative sources and *genres* where the ideological and moral components are strong, but also to the epigraphic evidence.

One must stress that the modern view of women in Roman society owes a great deal to the feminist movement. It assisted historians in shifting from the old-fashion perspective of 'sex' to 'gender', which is understood as a cultural construction, not as natural category: A gender-based analysis focuses not on the categories of male and female but of "masculine" and "feminine", the cultural and ideological constructs that, in a given society, tell us what it means (or is supposed to mean) to be male or female'. Of course, post-feminism reflection produces its own ideology which could be also a reason for additional distortion.

Most of the papers published in the field of the economic activity of Roman females have been compiled by scholars who conduct gender studies (often in the margin of the discussion of the legal conditions of Roman women).¹² An extensive economic

⁵ GORDON at al. (1976), 75-92.

⁶ MORLEY (2004), 90, perceives the parallel between the exclusion by sex and the exclusion by the class. There were naturally more co-ordinates of exclusion in Roman society. More on ideology and economy see Berdowski (2004), 259-293.

⁷ Skinner (1987), 3. Cf. Joshel (1993), 3-24.

⁸ DIXON (2000-2001), 7-11; *eadem* (2004), 57. More on ancient sources treating women see *eadem* (2001), 3-25. Cf. MORLEY (2004), 94.

⁹ Cf. Dixon (2001), 3-25.

¹⁰ Morley (2004), 95. On discussion of the usefulness of the gender category in historical analysis see Scott (1986), 1053-1075. Cf. *eadem* (1988); SORKIN RABINOWITZ, RICHLIN (1993). See also papers in the volume edited by M. SKINNER (2004).

¹¹ Cf. Sorkin Rabinowitz, Richlin (1993); Dixon (2001), 3-15; Skinner (2004).

 $^{^{12}}$ Concise discussion on the works devoted to women in antiquity one can find in Dixon (2001), 3-16. Cf. Salvaterra (2006), 15-38.

context was presented only in very few papers. It means that we are at the very beginning of systematic studies of the activity of women in the Roman economy, both in the capacity of membership of the workforce and as 'businesswomen'.¹³ To bridge this severe gap in our knowledge of the Roman economy it is necessary to cover in our studies both narrative sources, and also inscriptions (among them epitaphs), *instrumenta domestica*, papyri, archaeological artefacts and others. This survey of the selected sectors of the Roman economy shows the possible directions that the future studies of the economic activity of females can take, and of the same time which fields seem to be particularly promising. However, this preliminary survey can in no way be understood as a comprehensive or complete study.¹⁴

II. Legal conditions of the business activities of women

In the early Republic, women had little opportunity to run their own businesses. All female members of the Roman family were under the legal authority of pater familias, the male head of the family (usually their father) who had exclusive recourse to all kinds of legal actions, among them purchasing, selling off, the incurring a debt, underwriting etc. The power (potestas) of pater familias encompassed all members of the agnatic Roman family: wife, children (both males and females), slaves and other members of the family not necessary connected to each other by ties of blood. Daughters did not gain in legal independence, either by coming of age (which in the Republic was when a female reached 12 years old), or through marriage. If a daughter married her partner sine manu it meant that she remained in potestate of her father. Otherwise she passed on 'in hand' (in manu) of her husband (in some cases, when he was not legally independent (sui iuris), under the potestas of her husband's father). In both cases women did not posses their own property or even hold joint property with their spouses.¹⁵ If a female remained under the potestas of the pater familias she could gain relative independence after his death: she became *sui iuris*. ¹⁶ However, she still had to come under some form of 'guardianship of women' (tutela mulierum). During the Republic a guardian (tutor) was usually someone from the agnatic family, for instance a paternal uncle. The tutor undertook some legal and business activities in the name of female: making a will, selling some kind of property (res mancipii), liberating slaves etc.¹⁷ It does not mean that he lived with the female, decided on behalf of her or controlled her property. We do not hear from our sources about serious conflicts between females and their tutors. According to Susan Dixon 'it is safe to state that from the second century BCE Roman women exercised greater economic independence apparently unhampered by the restrictions of tutela mulierum, which were whittled down by law and custom in the ensuing centuries.' 18 Gaius,

¹³ On females as a workforce rather than business managers see Treggiari (1976), 76-104; *eadem* (1979), 65-86.

¹⁴Intentionally I have focused on the non-agricultural sectors of the Roman economy, but the involvement of females in agriculture constitutes complex problem worthy of separate study. Cf. Scheidel (1995), 202-217; *idem* (1996), 1-10; Aubert (1994).

¹⁵ Gardner (1991), 5-11; Evans Grubbs (2002), 20-21.

¹⁶ Pater familias could also free her from his potestas voluntarily in every moment if he considered it profitable. However, it seems that, it was not common practice.

¹⁷ Cf. GARDNER (1991), 18.

¹⁸ Dixon (2001), 78.

a Roman lawyer from the second century CE, underlines in his *Institutiones* that in the case of a potential disagreement a woman could ask a praetor to force her *tutor* to legitimate her decision according her wish or in some cases to change her *tutor*. ¹⁹ This had to be daily practice long before Gaius statement.

In the late Republic and early Empire the institution of *tutela mulierum* diminished in import. In 9 CE Octavian Augustus introduced *ius (trium) liberorum*, a law which freed from *tutela mulierum* free born women who had given birth to three children and freedwoman who had given birth to four children (in the case of freedwomen only children born after liberation were taken into consideration).²⁰ Bearing in mind that probably the majority of Roman women fulfilled the criterion of having three children it means that in the first century CE the institution of *tutela mulierum* did not pose any serious obstacles to the business activity of females. The emperor Claudius abolished *tutela legitima* for free born women completely.

The evidence available of the business activity of women confirms that *tutela mulierum* harmed neither their initiative nor independence. Jane Gardner studied waxed wooden tablets (the so called *Archive of Sulpicii*) from Murcii and Puteoli which shows *tutela* as an active institution in daily business matters. She underlines that there is nothing to suggests that this constitute any particular hindrance to women's acting. ²¹ One acquires the same impression when reading documents from Egypt. ²² Probably *tutella mulierum* was part of daily life in Roman Egypt longer than in Italy and Western provinces. The last confirmed example of tutela from Egypt is dated in 293-294 CE. ²³

Tutela mulierum disappeared from Roman legal texts in the early fourth century CE The latest sources to record tutela are Rules of Ulpian and a collection of legal sources known as Fragmenta Vaticana. It figures in neither Codex Theodosianus nor Codex Iustinianus.²⁴

III. Women's business activity in the non-agricultural sector

A. Brick and tile production

Studies of the engagement of women in brick and tile production seem the most promising at this stage because we have at our disposal a relatively rich source of material (especially when taken in conjunction with our knowledge about ceramic production thanks to the number of detailed works).²⁵ The majority of evidence studied to date comes from the district of Rome and from Campania. Bricks and tiles have stamps with short inscriptions which divulge valuable information. Among other things we can

¹⁹ Gaius, *Inst.* 1.151-153, 173, 190; GARDNER (1991), 15; DIXON (2001), 78-79.

²⁰ Gaius, Inst. 1.194; GARDNER (1991), 20; EVANS GRUBBS (2002), 37-42.

²¹ GARDNER (1999), 27.

²² Studies on legal status of women in Roman Egypt have a long tradition. See for example Bieżuńska-Malowist (1939). Cf. Taubenschlag (1944). Egyptian women running their own business were not tied up by laws in the same degree as Greek female citizens and had more freedom in the field of legal acts. See Vandorpe (2002), 331; Rowlandson (2004), 152-153.

²³ ARJAVA (1996), 118-123; EVANS GRUBBS (2002), 34-37. For more about 'guardianship' of women in Roman Egypt see TITCHENER (1922), 20-28; TAUBENSCHLAG (1944), 128-133; cf. SHERIDAN (1996), 117-131.

²⁴ Evans Grubbs (2002), 43-46. Cf. Arjava (1996), 143-156.

²⁵ Helen (1975); Setälä (1977); Steinby (1978). Cf. Boucheron et al. (2000).

identify the names of the *domini* (simultaneously owners of the clay beds (*figlinae*) and the producers), and the *officinatores* who directly managed the production units, the so called *officinae*. The majority of stamps from the Rome district herald from second and third century CE. Stamps from first century CE are rather rarer and have short single-name inscriptions.

Upon coming into contact with such bricks for the first time, one cannot fail to be touched by the very high percentage of women in the group of the *domini*. Thanks to the prosopographical studies of Paivi Setälä, we know 150 persons identified as *domini*, 50 of whom were women (*dominae*).²⁶ For the second century CE women constitute half of the *domini* from the *ordo senatorius*. It is worth underlining that we are unaware of a second example from the whole Roman Empire when women's engagement in production and business was to be so high. For third century CE the proportions are similar.

The scale of the activity of women was, therefore, significant. Some of them, like Antonia Manliola (from second century CE), employed 3-4 *officinatores* (having exclusive rights to them).²⁷ It seems that, in most cases, the women drew up contracts independently. Thanks to analysis of the stamps on the bricks it is clear that women were equal to men in terms of the scale of the business conducted, as well as having recourse to the same forms of legal contracts between *dominae* and *officinatores*. A Flavia Seia Isaurica, who operated her business for an exceptional period (at least between 115-141) was the owner of 6 *figlinae*, 2 of which she had exclusive rights to (*Aristianae* and *Caeliane*). She employed at least 10 *officinatores*.²⁸

The prosopographical studies of Paivi Setälä show that the majority of *dominae* belonged to the local and imperial elites. Persons connected with *domus Caesaris* appear as well, for instance Domitia Lucilla, mother of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, and his mother-in-law, the namesake of Domitia.²⁹ One can assume that the rich representation of elites among *dominae* has no connection with gender (the same trends can be observed in the group of *domini*).³⁰ In second and especially in third century CE the process of the concentration of brick production in the hands of the Imperial administration can be observed.

Despite the significant presence of women on brick stamps, until recently scholars shared the common opinion that the influence of women was limited to that of the *figlinae* owner and did not participate in the processes of production and management.³¹

²⁶ Setälä (2002), 184.

²⁷ Setälä (1998), 101.

²⁸ Setälä (1977), 119-21; eadem (2002), 190.

²⁹ Setälä (1977), 107-9, 250-7; ILS 8562. On the business of the famous Nero's libertina Akte see Tac., Ann. 13.12, 13.46.

³⁰ A decisive factor was probably the profitable nature of this field of activity. The Roman elites had a sharp eye for sources of income, and the city of Rome guaranteed an absorptive market for an unlimited quantity of bricks and tiles. The embarrassing problem of the involvement of the elites in non-agricultural activity, such as the production of bricks and tiles, was solved considering *opus doliare* as a part of agriculture. See Berdowski (2004), 275-6. There are other examples of the ambivalent attitude of the Roman elites to the non agricultural sector of economy. Cf. D'Arms (1980), 77-89; Schleich (1983), 65-90; *idem* (1984), 37-76.

³¹ In this case the role of the *dominae* would be limited to signing the contract with *officinatores*. The latter, depending on the type of the contract, would offer his managerial talents and tools of production. In fact, *officinatores*, not *dominae*, operated *officinae*.

Today our view is fundamentally different. Thanks to recent works, among them studies of Margareta Steinby, we know that the picture outlined above was rather more complicated. Steinby remarked that *figlinae* operated as more than simply clay beds. They constituted a production and administrative unit operated by an *officinator* or by the *dominus* himself (or *domina* herself). *Domini* and *dominae* figured as the owner of the clay beds and producers of brick and tiles at the same time. In all cases excluding one type of contract (*locatio conductio rei*), the manufactured bricks belonged to *domini* or *dominae*.³² It is worth stressing that, without exceptions, we have absolutely no evidence that *officinatores* were the owners of the *officinae*.³³

Thanks to the inscriptions on bricks we know that women did not only take on the role of *dominae*, but also operated as *officinatrices*. Of a total number of 355 *officinatores*, 20 females are confirmed, which constitutes 6 percent of the whole group. This proportion is significantly lower than in the group of *domini*. It seems that females acted in exactly the same way as male *officinatores*. They organized and oversaw the process of production and could also do manual work.³⁴ There were probably women with freedwomen status among *officinatrices*.

Inscriptions on bricks and tiles from the district of Rome constitute a unique material in the research into the business activity of women. The sources are relatively numerous, which enable some quantitative applications. Of course, we have to bear in mind that the conclusions reached on the basis of these inscriptions could in no way be extended across the whole of Italy, let alone the provinces, without some additional research. Unfortunately, evidence from the remaining regions of Italy is not as abundant and homogenous as from the district of Rome. The evidence from Campania is comparatively well researched. In spite of the aforementioned difficulties with the sources, we do know that individual businesswomen from different parts of Italy, and even from the provinces, engaged in *opus doliare*.³⁵

³² Probably there were two commonly used types of contract. First, *locatio conductio operis faciendi*, when the contract of locator (*dominus* or *domina*) tendered out the job to be done (here bricks and tiles), suplying the *conductor/redemptor* (*officinator*) basic raw material as clay, and paying to him *merces*. The final product belonged to the *dominus* (*domina*). Second, *locatio conductio operarum* (a labour contract) when the *dominus* owned all the means of production and *officinator* provided only his technical and managerial skills. There was also probably a third kind of contract, namely *locatio conductio rei*, when the object of the contract was *figlinae*, including clay beds and the means of the production. In that case the *dominus* did not interfere in the production process and the management – the finished product belonged to the *officinator*. See Aubert (1994), 232-233.

³³ Steinby (1982), 227-237; Setälä (2002), 183-184.

³⁴Beyond doubt women often did hard physical work equally with men. Cf. Ulpian. *Dig.* 14.3.7.1: *Parvi autem refert, quis sit institor, masculus an femina, liber an servus, proprius vel alienus.*

³⁵ Among the stamps on the bricks and tiles from Campania one can find the name of Holconia, daughter of M. Holconius Rufus, a prominent notable from the reign of emperor Augustus. See CIL X 8042.57; Castréin (1975), 176; Łoś (1996), 127. It appears that the business activity of Holconia did not stand in the way of holding the office of sacerdos publica. See Castréin (1975), 71, 176; D'Arms (1988), 51-68. The business empire of gens Holconia was based not only on the production of bricks, tiles and amphorae but also agriculture. Similar profile of business activity was that of the most prominent producer of ceramics in Pompeii, L. Eumachius. His daughter Eumachia, known from her euergetic activity, was also involved in her father's business. Besides the names of females belonged to the local elite, one can also find the names of freedwomen on the stamp.

The overview presented above clearly demonstrates that female business activities in the production of bricks can be treated as a promising and attractive field of research. In spite of this, very few scholars have studied this. Paivi Setälä, in her book published in 1977 entitled *Private domini in the Roman Empire. A Historical and Prosopographical Study of Landowners in the District of Rome,* formulated the postulate of the systematic research of the presence of females in the brick industry from the district of Rome. The realization of this postulate failed to take shape until the nineties within the wider project of The Finnish Institute for Classical Studies in Rome. In 2002 Setälä published an article entitled *Women and Brick Production – Some New Aspects*, which presents early and to some degree provisional conclusions. A great deal of systematic studies need to be carried out using a wider spectrum of sources, namely all available material from Italy – and from the provinces.

B. The production of amphorae, pottery and food processing

The production of amphorae and dolia was much more dispersed than the production of building materials. Vessels were produced both in the urban context and within the villa farms. There are interesting examples of mixed economies within villas as wider economic entities. Because villas produced a large surplus, the majority of the production was intended to be sold on the local market or to be exported to the provinces.³⁷ It was nothing unusual to find the combination of pottery manufacture and the production of wine and olive oil in one productive unit. It was characteristic of the highly efficient villa farms, which participated in the market trade to a high degree. 38 In this specific mode of mixed production the manufacture of ceramics could well have been managed by the personnel (vilicus and vilica) connected with the agriculture character of the villa, as well as by officinatores who signed contracts with the owner of the farm.³⁹ The engagement of women in pottery production is not as well attested as in the building materials sector, but the few stamps on amphorae and *dolia* confirm that females did operate as *dominae*, and officinatrices as well. Fortunately we can trace the relationship between dominae and officinator thanks to an interesting contract preserved in Roman Egypt (P.Oxv. L 3595-3597). Two dominae make a freedman, who was a specialist in pottery, available to a workshop, with full equipment, and gave him raw material (in this case clay). In exchange the workshop manager was obliged to deliver a certain number of vessels every spring, which according to the contract (locatio cunductio operis) belonged to the dominae. The freedman obtained payment in coins and wine. 40 There is evidence that women operated not only as dominae, but also as officinatrices. The existence of freeborn females as well as freedwomen are confirmed in the latter group.

³⁶ Setala (1998), 96-110.

³⁷ The mixed economies of villas in Campania is well attested. See e.g. D'ARMS (1970); Łoś (1996), *idem* (2000), 243-277. This profile was characteristic for the business activity of *gentes: Holconii, Eumachii, Sittii* and others. On mixed economies of villas in Spain participating in the processing of fish see Berdowski (2000), 11-30.

³⁸ Cf. Varro, RR 3.2.14-15.

³⁹ Aubert (1995), 173-174, 250-253, thinks that, if the production of the amphorae and *dolia* took place within the frames of the villa farm, both sectors i.e. the production of the ceramics and agriculture with food processing had to have had separate managers.

⁴⁰ Cockle (1981), 87-97. Cf. Aubert (1995), 253-254.

Another field of pottery production was the manufacture of *terra sigillata*. Stamps on this type of ceramic yield few female names, which at least confirms that women were engaged in the production at a different managerial level. We know name of the owners of the factories, and persons engaged in the production process. Among them freedwoman and slaves prevailed.⁴¹ There are inscriptions which confirm also the fact that females were engaged directly in the production.⁴²

The names of women can be also discerned in *tituli picti*, the painted inscription on amphorae from Pompeii for *garum* and *liquamen*. Among the producers and distributors of fish sauces, females constitute a relatively small percentage, though it could be the result of the preserved sources. Three females were engaged in the business in the chain of the enterprises of a A. Umbricius Scaurus, known potentate of the production of *garum* in Pompeii, who controlled almost 30% of its local production. ⁴³ *Tituli picti* testify numerous members of his *familia*, also freedmen and slaves, who operated *officinae* or distributed *garum* and *liquamen*. One must mention Umbricia Fortunata – the wife or daughter of Scaurus⁴⁴ – and his slave Eutyche among them. ⁴⁵

C. Cloth production

Cloth production in antiquity seems to be organically associated with females (and in general this has borne out). One should stress that it would be difficult to find any other branch of the Roman economy so strongly idealized in sources. ⁴⁶ The cloth production connoted traditional Roman female's virtues (*virtutes*): 'the practical components of the task were passed from mother to daughter (or from other older generation women to little girls) in a chain of cultural transmission which involved women of all status groups. The task itself became synonymous with efficient management of the household or estate and care of its members'. ⁴⁷ Thus, both moral and didactic elements seem to be crucial to understanding the available sources.

The works published so far have not paid sufficient attention to the gender aspect of the cloth production.⁴⁸ It has been suggested that the production that was meant for domestic needs was covered entirely by females; next was the large scale production intended for the wholesale market undertaken by men.⁴⁹ Today we know well enough that the strict demarcation between domestic and market production (excluding some specialized sectors of primarily craftsmanship) is false. Susan Dixon underlines that, in the area of Pompeii, even relatively large-scale production took place in residences.⁵⁰ The

⁴¹ Aubert (1995), s. 293.

⁴² CVArr 467; 1915.

⁴³ Curtis (1991), 92.

⁴⁴ CIL IV 2573, 5661, 5674-5. One cannot rule out that she was freedwoman. See Curtis (1988), s. 31.

⁴⁵ CIL IV 2576. If the Umbricia mentioned in the *tituli picti* only under *nomen gentile* is not the same person as Umbricia Fortunata, we have to add her to the list of females engaged in Scaurus' business. See CIL IV 2594 (=5710), 5688, 5670, 5723, 10262, 10281.

⁴⁶It seems that only agriculture was idealized in the same way. On the Roman economy and ideology see Berdowski (2004), 259-293.

⁴⁷ Dixon (2004), 65.

⁴⁸ Moeller (1976), Jongman (1991).

⁴⁹ Moeller (1969), 561-566.

⁵⁰ Dixon (2004), 67.

same observation can be made with reference to the food processing production and other areas of business activity as well. It is true that some actions like spinning was exclusively connected with female members of the *familia*, but the rest is still an open question.⁵¹

Unfortunately the participation of women in the Roman economy generally attracted little attention from Roman commentators: and cloth production is no exception. The available evidence is, as previously mentioned, strongly idealized and, additionally, it represents the male point of view.⁵² As a consequence we should apply very subtle tools to develop an understanding of not only what is written in the sources, but also what was excluded from them. Dixon postulates to read 'between the lines' referring this not only to the narrative sources but also to the epigraphic evidence; in the case of cloth production it means mainly epitaphs.⁵³

Besides the objective difficulties, the studying of the role of females in the cloth production in the Roman Empire seems to be promising. The evidence from Pompeii and Roman Egypt shows the high level of involvement of females from all levels of society.⁵⁴ It is still an open question as to whether the role of the *mater familias* was limited to the supervision of family member and slave household or whether she participated in the process of production as well. It is reasonable to suppose that both situations took place. The epitaphs of the noble families Statilii and Veturii (*monumentum Statiliorum*) from Rome show the organization of production for the market with slaves employed as workers.⁵⁵ Certainly different patterns of the organization of the industry had to be applied: 'for all the variations in the source-material and the differing interpretations of inscriptions and archaeological Romans, we can discern in Roman Egypt and Roman Italy alike the persistence of the small-scale workshop with a mix of slave, free, freed who worked side by side and maintained collaborations into the next generation'.⁵⁶

D. Commerce

Despite the unquestionable primacy of agriculture in the ancient economy, the Romans recognized quite early the enormous potential of commerce, especially large scale sea commerce.⁵⁷ The legislation which was intended to restrict senatorial involvement in commerce probably limited its effectiveness. In fact, senators were engaged in trade operations either directly or through agents, most often freedmen.⁵⁸ Were women of senatorial status involved in this business as well? Susan Dixon thinks that it was possible that *lex Claudia* from 218 BCE – which strictly limited the cargo of senatorial ships – did not apply to female members of senatorial families: 'since the legal prohibitions applied to "senators and their sons" senatorial women should – like equestrian men

⁵¹ We have an example from Rome of *textor* and *lanipendus*, *sarcinator* who did work normally 'reserved' for women. See *CIL* VI 6360-1 (*textor*), VI 6300 (*lanipendus*). Cf. Treggiari (1976), 82-86.

⁵² Cf. Morley (2004), 90.

⁵³ Dixon (2000-2001), 7-11. Cf. eadem (2004), 67.

⁵⁴ BISCOTTINI (1966), 60-90; DIXON (2000-2001), 11-15.

⁵⁵ CIL VI 6213-6640. Cf. Dixon (2000-2001), 12-13.

⁵⁶ Dixon (2000-2001), 13.

⁵⁷ The position of 'primitivists' who minimized the importance of commerce in antiquity was too orthodox and can no longer be supported. Cf. Parkins, Smith (1998); Scheidel, von Reden (2002); Morley (2007).

⁵⁸ D'Arms (1980),77-89; Schleich (1983), 65-90; idem (1984), 37-76; Berdowski (2004), 259-293.

of the upper classes – have been capable of engaging in such enterprises, but the convention might have extended beyond the technical limit'.⁵⁹ However it seems that female members of senatorial families were not excluded from the ideological pressure on the senator order as a whole.

In spite of this, we know that women of various social status did conduct their trade businesses. We know several inscriptions from Spain dating from the reign of the Emperor Claudius which record women as a ship owners engaged in the export of wine. ⁶⁰ The same Emperor passed some regulations which made grain imports to Italy easier. Among the benefactors of this legislation were also freedwomen. ⁶¹ It means that, among females engaged in commerce one can find women originating from both elites and freedwomen. An example drawn from the first group would be one Calvia Crispinilla, whose husband was implicated in the conspiracy against Messalina, ⁶² and one Caedicia, whom we meet during the persecution of her husband by the Emperor Nero. ⁶³ Both derived significant incomes from the lucrative wine trade. ⁶⁴

Other interesting examples refer to female acting as *negotiatrices oleariae*. One of them was Coelia Mascelina *negotiarix olearia ex provincia Baetica item vini* (...), daughter of Cn. Coelius Masculus.⁶⁵ The magnificent tomb inscription referring to her was found under the St. Peter circus in Vatican.⁶⁶ Furthermore Coelia Mascelina is known from the bronze stamp (*signaculum*) dated to the second half of the second century CE, served as a mark of importer of oil and wine.⁶⁷ Besides Coelia Mascelina Silvio Panciera quotes other *negotiatrices oleariae*: Antonia Agathonice, Caecilia [Ch]aritosa, Cornelia Q.f. Placida, Maria Q.f. Fesiana and Maria Q.f. Postumina.⁶⁸

Businesswomen, like high-powered merchants (*negotiatrices*) engaged in commerce and shipping on a grand scale met with social acceptation. Reading legal texts one can have the impression that opinions about *negotiatrices* correspond with the Cicero's view on grand scale trade (*mercarura copiosa*).⁶⁹ Some females managed their business personally but it seems highly plausible that, in most cases, rich women were represented by professional managers. The example of Terentia, the wife of Cicero, shows that rich female citizens use the advice of professional managers in business matters.⁷⁰ It is possible that some females acted as managers as well.

Our sources are fragmentary but it appears that women took part in trade in quite the same fashion as men. In light of the available evidence, it is clear that females formed a small percentage among both small and large scale traders, although this still has to be fully researched.

⁵⁹ Dixon (2004), 62.

⁶⁰ CIL XV 3691, 3729, 3845-7.

⁶¹ Suet., Claud. 18-19.

⁶² ILS 8574a-b. Por. Tac., Ann. 11.36.

⁶³ ILS 8573. Por. Tac., Ann. 15.71.

⁶⁴ Cf. Purcell (1985), 1-19.

⁶⁵ PANCIERA (1980), 244; GARCÍA (2000), 1185; idem (2006).

⁶⁶ See picture in Panciera (1980).

⁶⁷ See http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus images/signaculum.jpg.

⁶⁸ PANCIERA (1980), 244.

⁶⁹ Dig. 34.2.32.4. Cf. Cicero, De off. 1.151.

⁷⁰ Dixon (2004), s. 62.

E. Financial operations

Our knowledge about the financial operation of females is no more than preliminary. Already in the period of the Late Republic women were bequeath; they also could buy and sell their property with the help of *tutor*. In fact the role of tutor was often purely nominal. I would like to refer to the very important group of sources, namely the *Archive of Sulpicii* from Puteoli and Murcii, which was analyzed by Jane Gardner. Reading waxed wooden tablets from Puteoli has convinced us that women operated in business matters in pretty much the same way as men. Both males and females had been represented in these account documents by the authorized agents, like for example Sulpicii. The inscriptions from Puteoli confirmed that the *tutela* system was in wide-spread operation in Campania in first century CE. However there is no evidence that it limited the independence of the economic decision of females. Of course, women did not appear in the tablets in the role, which was reserved by law for men. They could not witness the transaction of *mancipatio*, etc.

While women could administrate their property quite independently, activity in the banking sector was purely a male domain. The individual cases of the presence of the terms *ab argento* or *argentaria* in the female context can not be treated as overwhelming proof; similarly the case of one Otacilia Laterensis from the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius, who was allegedly a professional banker. *Senatus consultum Velleianum* dating from 56 CE, which placed a ban on women giving security or undertaking liability on behalf of others, practically excluded them from acting as a banker. Females could not be the guarantor of incurred debts, although J. Gardner mentions such one case. Because women were not allowed to hold public office, they were also unable to participate in *societates publicanorum*.

F. Businesswomen in Roman Egypt

The research on the economic activity of women in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt has a significantly longer tradition than in other regions of Mediterranean. ⁷⁶ It emerged from studies on the juridical status of females in Egypt. One of the first books on the legal status of women in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt was that of the Polish scholar Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist published in Lwów in 1939. ⁷⁷ She continued her interest in ancient women during her long academic career. ⁷⁸ A certain breakthrough was marked by feminist scholars, among them papyrologist Sarah Pomeroy, who published in the 1970s and in subsequent decades a series of books and papers on women in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. ⁷⁹ In the 1980s and 1990s a few important papers appeared, among them Deborah

⁷¹ Ville Vuolanto (2002), 203-243, reached the same conclusions in his paper on women and the property of fatherless children.

⁷² Gardner (1999), s. 11-27.

⁷³ For a concise introduction into banking in the Roman world see Andreau (1999).

⁷⁴ GARDNER (1986), 235-6.

⁷⁵ Gardner (1999), 27. Cf. Dixon (2001), 82-88.

⁷⁶ White (1898), 238-266; Castiglioni (1919), 343-348; Schubart (1916), 1503-1538; Titchener (1922), 20-28.

⁷⁷ Bieżuńska-Małowist (1939).

⁷⁸ Last work of Bieżuńska-Małowist on women in Greek and Roman Egypt was published in 1993. See *eadem* (1993), 15-21.

⁷⁹ Pomeroy (1988); eadem (1990).

Hobson's on the economic role of females in first century CE Tebtynis and another on women as property owners in Roman Egypt. Next Jennifer Sheridan examined papyri supplementing the list of females acting without guardians and in the same time explored connection between literacy of females and their economic venture. In 2002 in Leuven a publication was brought out, edited by H. Melaerts and L. Mooren entitled: Le rôle et le statut de la femme en Égypte hellénistique, romaine et Byzantine. In the midst of a number of interesting papers, one in particular stands out, namely that by Katelijn Vandorpe on Apollonia, an energetic businesswoman from Pathyris near Thebes. Vandorpe's text is based on papyri from the second century BCE, a period earlier than which is of interest to us, but the example of Apolonia is extremely interesting because this Egyptian businesswomen acted both with and without her guardian (actually her Greek husband). It depended on the contracts drawn up by either Egyptian or Greek notary (Greek and Demotic documents were preserved as well). This might be an important hint which persuades us to consider the possibility that also in the Roman period some females might act in a multicultural social, economic, and maybe even legal environment too.

Publications on the economic activity of women in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt might seem to be abundant and comparing them to the studies on the same subject referring to the other regions of the Roman Empire, this is true. But it cannot conceal the evident fact that research on this field in Roman Egypt is still in its infancy. Thanks to rich papyrological documentation Egypt seems to be a particularly promising area of research. Whether the findings made with regard to Egypt are possible to extend to other regions of the Roman Empire is a separate question.

IV. Conclusions

Obviously, the presented survey is by no means comprehensive. I have intentionally chosen the business activity of females both in those sectors which are relatively well represented by the sources, and these which are characterized by the sparseness of evidence. This survey makes us aware that, despite the legal, ideological and cultural limitations, females played an important role in the Roman economy, not only as a part of the workforce but also as business managers. Undoubtedly their total quantitative participation in the Roman economy was significantly lower than men's. However, the example of the activity of females in brick and tile production shows that there were sectors where the proportions of men and women could be almost equal.

So far the problem of the business activity of females in ancient Rome, with few exceptions, overlooked by researchers. Further systematic research should be an urgent postulate. I would like to distinguish two levels on which such research should take place. The first, a more shallow level, should relate to the mechanisms of the engagement

⁸⁰ Hobson (1983), 311-321; eadem (1984), 373-390.

⁸¹ SHERIDAN (1996), 117-131; eadem (1998), 189-203.

⁸² VANDORPE (2002), 324-336.

⁸³ ROWLANDSON (2004), 152: 'the population of Ptolemaic Egypt could also, in effect, choose between the application of Egyptian or Greek law, exploiting the significant differences between the two systems, particularly with respect to the posiotion of women (...). And we find examples of Egyptian women acting as parties to Greek contracts without using a guardian as Greek law required, because guardianship of women was not a feature of Egyptian law'. Cf. VANDORPE (2002), 331.

of females in the given sector of the economy. This postulate can be workable even with reference to those sectors which are characterized by meagre evidence. The second, deeper level, should refer to the detailed research organized around the given problem or region. In cases where the source material is more abundant we have a chance for quantitative findings. One cherishes the hope that papyri from Roman Egypt will yield such material. The epitaphs and inscriptions on *instrumenta domestica* also appear to be promising sources. All conclusions so far are of a preliminary character.

STRESZCZENIE

Kilka uwag na temat aktywności ekonomicznej kobiet w imperium rzymskim

Problem aktywności ekonomicznej kobiet w imperium rzymskim był podejmowany przez badaczy niezwykle rzadko, niemal wyłacznie na marginesie tzw. gender studies. To nikłe zainteresowanie działalnościa biznesowa i produkcyjna kobiet daje sie tłumaczyć w pewnym stopniu stanem zachowanych źródeł, które albo milcza na temat bizneswomen, albo przedstawiaja obraz silnie zdeformowany i zideologizowany. Warto podkreślić, że silny ładunek ideologiczny i moralny dotyczy nie tylko źródeł narracyjnych, ale również inskrypcji (głównie epitafiów). Znalazło to także swój wyraz w tekstach prawnych republiki i wczesnego cesarstwa. Dodajmy, że właściwie wszystkie źródła prezentują męską optykę. Wobec takiego stanu rzeczy zmuszeni jesteśmy wypracować subtelne metody analizy źródeł, które pozwolą uzyskać obraz możliwie najmniej zmącony. Jednocześnie wydaje się konieczne zadawanie źródłom pytań o przyczyny i konsekwencje tak silnej ideologizacji przekazów. Szcześliwie źródła narracyjne i epitafia możemy uzupełnić o inskrypcje na cegłach, dachówkach, instrumenta domestica, jak również papirusy. Zderzenie tych dwóch grup źródeł daje wiele do myślenia o tym, co badacze nazywaja "wykluczeniem kobiet" (exclusion of women) z publicznego dyskursu. Przykład inskrypcji na cegłach i dachówkach z okolic Rzymu uzmysławia, że udział kobiet w gospodarce rzymskiej zaznaczał się nie tylko w sferze produkcyjnej (czego, prawdę mówiąc należało sie spodziewać), ale także (wbrew tonowi świadectw literackich) także na poziomie zarządzania własnym biznesem. Co więcej, odsetek kobiet dzierżawiących figlinae i występujących na czele officinae jest zaskakująco wysoki. Te proporcje układały się jeszcze korzystniej dla kobiet w "przemyśle odzieżowym". Niniejszy artykuł daje zwięzły przegląd także i tych sektorów rzymskiej gospodarki, w których udział kobiet był bardzo niewielki lub śladowy.

Nie ulega wątpliwości, że badanie zaangażowania kobiet w przedsięwzięcia ekonomiczne ma głęboki sens, nie tylko na gruncie wspomnianych "studiów genderowych", ale również (a może przede wszystkim) w odniesieniu do gospodarki rzymskiej jako pewnej całości. Mimo wielkiej niedoskonałości dostępnych źródeł można wiele obiecywać sobie po systematycznych studiach nad papirusami z rzymskiego Egiptu, a także (w nieco mniejszym stopniu) świadectwami epigraficznymi.

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HAEC MIHI IN ANIMIS VESTRIS TEMPLA STUDIA CLASSICA IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR LESŁAW MORAWIECKI

Edited by Piotr Berdowski and Beata Blahaczek

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