

Rethinking women and work

Domestic work

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

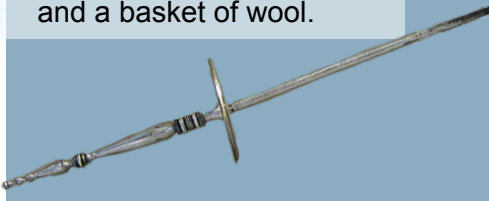
Wool-working

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

This tombstone (right) commemorates a freedwoman called Regina, and was found near Hadrian's Wall.



She was a British woman, but was married to a man from Palmyra (Syria). She is depicted holding a spindle and distaff (now damaged), and at her feet are the symbols of her role as a manager of a household: a strongbox, used for holding money, and a basket of wool.



Left: woman using drop spindle. Middle: distaff, 1st c AD (British Museum). Right: Tombstone of Regina from Roman fort at Arbeia (British Museum).

Child-rearing



Left: 2nd c AD sarcophagus (Capitoline Museums). Middle: Imperial sarcophagus (Vatican Museums). Right: 1st c AD sarcophagus (Vatican Museums)

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

How much value is placed on the work of 'stay at home' parents nowadays?