

Rethinking women and work

Epitaphs for the good & chaste

Much of our surviving evidence for women in the ancient world comes from funerary inscriptions. Typical inscriptions reference the piety of the deceased, her role as a wife and mother, her house-keeping skills, and her virtue. Few of them mention other aspects of women's lives. What conclusions can we draw from such inscriptions?

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

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

ANNIAE
ISIADI
MATRI
DULCISSIMAE
SERGIUS ASINIUS
PHAINUS

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

AELIAE TRYPHERAE
CONIUGIS RARISSIMAE
ET ULTRA MODUM
SEXUMQUE MULIEBREM
SANCTISSIMAE
CASTISSIMAE

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

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

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

Devoted wife & mother

Beloved sister and daughter

An inspiration to us all

Remembered with love

Gone, but not forgotten

An inspiration to us all

At rest with God

Rest In Peace

In loving memory of...

How much do you think we can learn from ancient inscriptions about women's lives?

What conventions do we use in funerary inscriptions?

What aspects of a person's life do epitaphs capture?