## Rethinking women and work

Interpreting images

Consider the following images of women at work:

Source 1: Fresco from a bar in Pompeii



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

- A: Hoc [poculum mihi est]
- B: Non! Mia est!
- C: Qui vol, sumat!
- A: This cup is mine
- B: No! It's mine!
- C: Whoever wants it, pick it up!

Fresco from Caupona of Salvius, Pompeii.

Source 2: Reliefs of doctors/pharmacists from Gaul

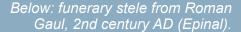


This limestone funerary stele (left) shows a female doctor, carrying a small box in her right hand. The monument is damaged, so the first half of the inscription is missing, but the remaining part reads:

[...]INI · FIL[ia] · MEDICA daughter of (father's name), doctor

Above: funerary stele from Roman Gaul, 2nd-3rd cent. AD (Metz).

The funerary relief on the right features a female doctor or pharmacist (?). She has a book on her left knee, and sits at the centre of a busy workshop (pharmacy?). Next to her someone is stirring a mixture over a burner (A), and on the other side a woman adds material to a vat (B). Below her, liquid is distilling into vats (C).





What do you think the profession of the girl in the fresco was? What do you think the professions of the women in the reliefs were?

## Source 3: fresco of a street vendor



In this fresco, an elderly street vendor (right) seems to be offering cupids for sale to the well-dressed ladies on the left - she holds one forward, one stands at the seated woman's knee, and the vendor has another in a cage (could this be a metaphor for something

Fresco from Villa Ariadne, Stabiae

Do you think we can learn anything from this scene, though it seems fanciful?

## Source 4: fresco of painter

In this fresco, a woman (left) completes a painting of a figure, while a woman sitting to the right of her observes (she looks over her shoulder to the painting).



Fresco from the House of the Empress of Russia, Pompeii.

## Source 5: relief of hairdressers



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



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

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

What difficulties did you encounter when interpreting these images?