

## Rethinking women and work

### Wool-working



*Bronze statuette of old servant spinning wool. Greek, 1st century BC (Getty Villa)*

Good wives and women were often praised for being good wool-workers, but this wasn't just a hollow compliment. In the early Roman period spinning wool and weaving clothes was one of the most important jobs of women in the household. Later on too, poorer families might have had to make their own clothes.

Funerary inscription (CIL 6.15346):

*[Claudia] loved her husband with all her heart. She bore two children, one of whom she left on earth, the other beneath it. She had a pleasing way of talking and walking. She tended the house **and worked wool**. I have said my piece.*

But for upper-class women it became an unnecessary practice as they could afford to buy new clothes or get their slaves to do the weaving for them. So why did they continue to do it or at least why did the compliment of being a good wool-worker continue to appear on tombstones and in eulogies?

Livia, the wife of the emperor Augustus kept up an image of traditional matronly morality and modesty. She was famously said to have been good at spinning and weaving. Suetonius wrote about Augustus:

... ueste non temere alia  
quam domestica usus est, ab  
sorore et uxore et filia  
neptibusque confecta ...

*Suetonius Augustus 73*

*On all but special occasions  
he wore house clothes  
produced for him by his sister,  
wife, daughter and grand-  
daughters.*

*Head of the empress Livia, late 1st  
century BC (Walters Art Museum)*



Do you think it was true that the emperor Augustus only wore home-made clothes?

Why do you think this is an image he would have been keen to propagate?

Does the story about Livia change your interpretation of tombstones that praise women's wool-working?