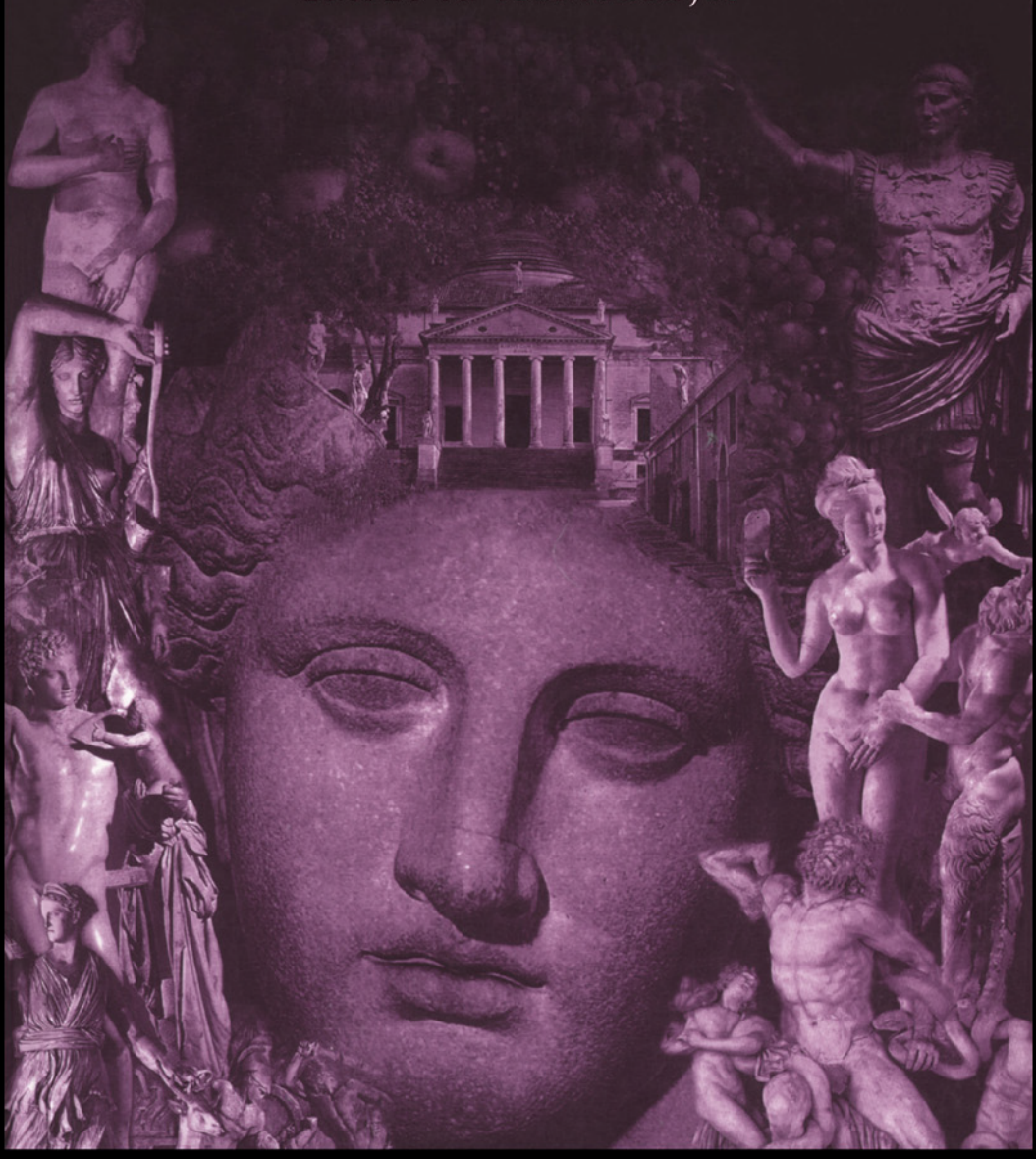
MATRONA DOCTA

Educated women in the Roman élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna

EMILY A. HEMELRIJK



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TO SJOERD

TO MY CHILDREN RUBEN, ESTHER
AND DANIËL

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My father went through the entire text more than once and with remarkable patience corrected my English, insisting on a simple style of writing. My mother has read the final version with painstaking care, signalling even the smallest inconsistencies in spelling and grammar. Of course, all faults remain my own.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband Sjoerd and my children Ruben, Esther and Daniel for their loving support throughout the years of writing. The book is dedicated to them.

Emily Hemelrijk

Haarlem, October 1998

ABBREVIATIONS

The names of ancient authors and their works are abbreviated according to the standard practice used in Liddell—Scott-Jones' *A Greek—English Lexicon* and Lewis and Short's *A Latin Dictionary*. Abbreviations of periodicals are those of *L'Année philologique* with the following additions:

AE	*L'Année épigraphique,* Paris 1888–.
ANRW	Temporini, H. and Haase, W. (eds) (1972–) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung,* Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.
AP	*Anthologia Palatina.*
A. Pl.	*Anthologia Planudea.*
BE	*Bulletin épigraphique* in *Revue des études grecques.*
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum,* Berlin 1825–77.
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum,* Berlin 1863–.
CLE	Bücheler, F. *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* vols 1, 2 and 3 *(Supplementum* by E.Lommatzsch), Leipzig: Teubner, 1894–1926 (repr. Amsterdam, 1972).
Dig.	*Digesta Iustiniani.*
F. Gr. H.	Jacoby, F. (1923–) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker,* Berlin and Leiden.
FOS	Raepsaet-Charlier, M.-Th. (1987) *Prosopographie des femmes de l'ordre sénatorial (Ier—IIe siècles)* (2 vols), Louvain: Peeters.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae,* Berlin 1873–.
IGR	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes,* Paris 1906–27.
ILLRP	*Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae,* ed. A.Degrassi (Florence 1957–63).
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (3 vols), ed. H.Dessau (Berlin 1892–1916).
MSG	Jan, C. von (1962) *Musici Scriptores Graeci,* Hildesheim: Olms (1st edition, Leipzig 1895).

PIR[1]*, PIR*[2]	*Prosopographia Imperii Romani,* Berlin 1897–8; 2nd edition, Berlin and Leipzig 1933–.
RE	Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswis-senschaft,* Stuttgart 1894–.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum,* Leiden 1923–.
SHA	*Scriptores Historiae Augustae.*
Syll3	Dittenberger, W. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum,* Leipzig 1915–24 (3rd edition).
Tituli 4, 5	*Atti del Colloquio Internationale AIEGL su Epigrafia e ordine senatorio* (2 vols), Roma 1982 (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura).
TLL	*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae,* Leipzig 1900–.

SOME USEFUL DATES

The start of the late republic is usually dated 133 BC with the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus (the eldest son of Cornelia). The imperial period starts in 27 BC, when Octavian adopted the title Augustus. Most of the following dates are necessarily approximate; in some cases only the year of marriage (m.) or death (d.) is known. Names of emperors are printed in small capitals with the dates of their reign.

Aemilia Pudentilla (Apuleius' wife)	2nd century AD
Agrippina Maior	14 BC–AD 33
Agrippina Minor	AD 15–59
Antonia Minor (daughter of Octavia)	36 BC–AD 37
Argentaria Polla	*c.* AD 45–after 98
Attica (daughter of Atticus)	51 BC–?
AUGUSTUS	27 BC–AD 14
Caerellia (Cicero's friend)	1 st century BC
CALIGULA	AD 37–41
Calpurnia (wife of Pliny the Younger)	m. AD 104
CARAGALLA	AD 211–17
Catullus	84–54 BC
Cicero	106–43 BC
Clodia Metelli	*c.* 95–after 45 BC
Cornelia (mother of the Gracchi)	2nd century BC
Cornelia (wife of Pompey)	m. 55 and 52 BC
Cornificia	1 st century BC
Dio Cassius	*c.* AD 164–after 229
Domitia Longina (wife of DOMITIAN)	d. between AD 127 and 140
Domitia Lucilla (MARCUS AURELIUS' mother)	2nd century AD
DOMITIAN	AD 81–96
ELEGABALUS	AD 218–22
Fronto	*c.* AD 95–166
Fundania (Varro's wife)	1st century BC

HADRIAN	AD 117–38
Helvia (mother of the younger Seneca)	*c.* 25 BC–after AD 41
Hortensia	1 st century BC
Jerome	*c.* AD 347–420
Julia (daughter of AUGUSTUS)	39 BC–AD 14
Julia Balbilla	d. after AD 130
Julia Domna (SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS' wife)	m. AD 187, d. AD 217
Julia Mamaea	d. AD 235
Julia Soaemias (mother of ELEGABALUS)	*c.* AD 180–222
Juvenal	*c.* AD 60–after 130
Laelia	*c.* 150–after 90 BC
Livia (wife of AUGUSTUS)	58 BC–AD 29
Livy	59 BC–AD 17
Lucan	AD 39–65
Lucian	2nd century AD
Marcia (daughter of Cremutius Cordus)	*c.* 25 BC–after AD 41
MARCUS AURELIUS	AD 161–80
Martial	*c.* AD 40–104
Matidia the Younger	*c.* AD 85–after 160
Minicia Marcella	AD 93–105/6
Musonius Rufus	*c.* AD 30–101/2
Nepos	*c.* 110–24 BC
NERO	AD 54–68
Nicomachus of Gerasa	between AD 50 and 150
Octavia (sister of AUGUSTUS)	m. 54 BC, d. 11 BC
Ovid	43 BC–AD 17
'Perilla' (Ovid's stepdaughter?)	m. AD 12, d. before AD 58
Plautus	*c.* 205–184 BC
Pliny the Elder	AD 23/4–79
Pliny the Younger	*c.* AD 61–112
Plotina (wife of TRAJAN)	d. AD 123
Plutarch	*c.* AD 50–after 120
Pompeia (daughter of Pompey)	m. 54/3 BC
Pompey	106–48 BC
Poppaea (NERO'S wife)	*c.* AD 32–65
Propertius	*c.* 50 BC–?

Quintilian	*c.* AD 35–before 100
Sabina (HADRIAN'S wife)	*c.* AD 84–137
Sallust	86–35 BC
Sempronia	1st century BC
Seneca the Elder	*c.* 50 BC–AD 40
Seneca the Younger	before AD 1–65
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS	AD 193–211
Statius	AD 45–before 96
Suetonius	*c.* AD 70–130
Sulpicia the elegist	late 1 st century BC
Sulpicia Caleni	d. between AD 95 and 98
Tacitus	*c.* AD 56–after 120
TIBERIUS	AD 14–37
Tibullus	*c.* 50–19 BC
TRAJAN	AD 98–117
Tullia (Cicero's daughter)	79–45 BC
Ulpian	d. AD 223
Ummidia Quadratilla	AD 27–107
VESPASIAN	AD 69–79
Vibia Perpetua	AD 182–203

INTRODUCTION

The education of Roman women is veiled in obscurity. Ancient sources do not pay much attention to it and modern historians, when addressing the problem at all, usually restrict themselves to vague generalizations, such as that Roman women of the late republic were 'inconspicuous in intellectual life', that 'upper-class women could be well-educated', or that 'the majority of women within the aristocracy must have been, in the cultural sphere, as highly educated as their brothers'.[1] These general and, sometimes, contradictory statements are not founded on any systematic investigation; rather, they are imprecise impressions, usually based on one or two well-known examples of educated women which are repeated again and again in modern studies and are quoted as if representing Roman upper-class women in general. In spite of the continuous interest in the study of ancient women during the last twenty-five years and the earlier wave of interest in this subject around the beginning of this century, no modern study is devoted to the education of Roman (upper-class) women, its aims, impediments and controversies, and to the place of women in the educated society of their days.[2] The present study is an attempt to remedy this omission.

Its aim is twofold: first of all, I wish to present and discuss the main evidence for the education of upper-class women and their activities in the world of literature and learning in order to provide a useful survey for future study. Second, I have tried to explain and evaluate the obscure and, as it seemed, insignificant role of women in the field of learning and the disparity between the education of a few individual women named in our sources and the majority of women of the same class whose education is left unmentioned. In order to avoid the danger of distortion as a consequence of studying only a small number of, perhaps exceptional, upper-class women, I have examined Roman opinions regarding educated women in general and other factors that may have influenced the opportunities of upper-class women to receive an education; such factors are, for example, the period they lived in, their domicile, class and wealth, the circumstances and disposition of their families, their age at marriage and their marital state. The assessment of the relative importance of these aspects and their interaction with gender plays a considerable part in this study. The way in which the results are represented is mainly synchronic since I seek to describe the extent and limitations of women's participation in the various fields of education and the complex relations between gender and the various social

factors that were responsible for the nature and scope of their education and for the obscurity of Roman women in the field of learning. Less attention is, therefore, paid to the chronological development; the more so since the scarcity and unevenness of the evidence make it almost impossible to trace any such development with confidence.

In treating 'educated women' I limit my attention to women of the upper classes in Rome and Italy during the central period of Roman history (second century BC–AD 235). Upper-class women of the Latin-speaking western provinces are occasionally discussed as they are affected by Roman culture; because of the difference in cultural tradition, women of the Greek-speaking eastern provinces and Christian women are excluded. The restriction in this study to women of the upper classes (the senatorial, equestrian and decurial orders), which formed only a tiny fraction of the Roman population, needs some justification. Despite considerable diversity in birth, wealth and social prestige among members of the governing classes and the gradations of status that existed in each of these orders, the upper classes can be regarded as more or less homogeneous in respect of culture and moral values.[3] Moreover, any education women of the lower classes might receive was usually meant to prepare them for a profession.[4] Needless to say, our sources, especially the literary ones, are relatively rich in references to women of the élite in comparison to women of the lower classes. It should be noted that, as regards the former, most of our evidence relates to women of the leading senatorial families and the female relatives of the emperors; much less is known of the life and education of women of equestrian and decurial families.[5]

In order to reconstruct the opportunities upper-class women had to get an education and their activities in the field of learning I have systematically searched the literary sources for information. Besides, epigraphical and archaeological evidence has been used whenever relevant testimonies could be found, but in this respect I do not claim that my research has been exhaustive. In examining the ancient sources the following questions were taken as a point of departure. What were the scope and nature of the education of Roman upper-class women, and why do we hear so little of it? How did upper-class women acquire their education? In what fields and to what level were they educated before they married and what opportunities did they have to add to their education in adult life? Was their education somehow different from that of men of their class and if so, how and why? What aims did their education serve and what obstacles and impediments did they meet? What feelings did educated women provoke? Did they arouse praise or contempt, or were they judged more soberly? How are we to relate the very few upper-class women whose excellent education is mentioned in the literary sources to the majority of women of the same class about whose education we know so little? Were they the proverbial 'exception to the rule' that women usually lacked an education, or do they represent, so to speak, the 'tip of an iceberg', implying that there were many more educated women who are unknown to us? What role did upper-class women play as patronesses of literature and learning, and how do their activities in this field compare to those of male patrons? What did women write and

why is so little of their writing left? Was it somehow lost, or did Roman women actually write so very little?

In the following chapters these and other questions concerning the education of upper-class women are discussed. Chapter 1 surveys their social position as a background to their educational opportunities and their place in educated society. This short chapter deals with modifications in the role and position of an upper-class woman during the course of her life from an unmarried daughter to a wife, mother and, eventually, a widow. Further, it discusses the women's uncertain and indirect relation to the leading *ordines* (that is, as depending on their male relatives) and the norms and rules prescribing the behaviour of the upper-class *matrona*.

The second chapter examines the opportunities upper-class women had to acquire an education. Starting with the education of unmarried girls, the influence of the period they lived in, their domicile, class and wealth, family background and age at marriage are discussed. It is argued that the education of upper-class girls depended to a greater degree on such circumstances than that of boys of their class; consequently, it was bound to be more haphazard and to vary more widely. As regards the opportunities of adult women to add to their education, several are examined, such as: tuition by a husband or father or by a private teacher, participation in social life (by attending cultured dinner parties or recitations and by visiting the theatre), self-study and the use of (private) libraries. The irregularity of such studies, access to which depended on factors similar to those for the education of girls, confirms the haphazard nature of the education of women.

The third chapter falls into two parts. The first discusses the aims and ideals underlying the education of upper-class girls, in other words, the question: why did Roman upper-class families give their daughters a literary education? Four possible reasons are surveyed and their relative importance estimated. It is concluded that motives connected with the social position and duties of the upper-class *matrona* and with the prestige resulting from a literary education formed the main consideration, and that ideals of moral education and 'educated motherhood' as propagated by moralistic authors served to justify the education of women rather than forming the actual reasons for it. The second part is devoted to ancient opinions on educated women. As will be shown, such women provoked contradictory feelings in Roman society ranging from admiration to disgust. In this part an attempt is made to unravel the conflicting feelings and controversies regarding women's education and to trace possible developments and changes in fashion in the course of the roughly four hundred years between the second century BC and the early third century AD.

The fourth chapter deals with patronage of literature and learning. It is asked what role upper-class women played in this field as compared to male patrons. In studying patronesses of literature and learning, both within the imperial family and outside it, attention is paid to the motives these women had to exercise patronage, the conditions that favoured it and the impediments they met, the services they exchanged with their protégés and the terms in which they were praised. The relatively rich evidence for certain individual patronesses allows us not only to outline more

clearly the limitations of women's patronage, but also to discover the tactics women adopted to cope with the restrictions imposed upon them and how they used notions of traditional female behaviour to their own advantage.

The fifth and sixth chapters are concerned with the writings of women, with poetry and prose respectively, and with their place in Roman literary life.[6] Apart from the discussion of the female authors whose names are known to us and the few remains of their work, they address the problem of the meagre amount of women's writings and the possible causes of if. It is argued that explanations that have been proposed so far ('because women wrote so very little' or 'because their work was somehow suppressed') are unsatisfactory. Instead of choosing between these views we shall investigate a wider range of social factors which led not only to the relative rarity of women's writing, but also to the nearly total loss of their work. The concluding chapter comprises a summary of the main arguments of each chapter.

At the end of this introduction some words are needed about the ancient sources which form the basis of this study First, the limitations of the literary sources have to be noted. Since they contain mostly fragmentary and anecdotal information on women and may be biassed towards the exceptional, they cannot always be regarded as representative of (the education of) upper-class women in general. This makes it risky to generalize and does not allow firm conclusions on, for instance, the numbers of educated women within the élite families or the precise level of their education. In interpreting any particular passage the rules of the genre, the bias and purpose of the author, and the intended audience must be kept in mind, the more so since much evidence consists in biassed comments in favour of, or against, women's education and praising or criticizing educated women. Fortunately, the argument based on the literary texts can, in some instances, be checked by epigraphical or archaeological evidence; nevertheless, we often cannot go beyond formulating probabilities, and much of what follows is, therefore, conjectural in nature.

Because of their close association with family life and female values most women probably lived quiet lives ignored by our sources. This, however, calls for caution as regards the relative 'silence' of our sources on their activities in the field of education: it should not simply be assumed that this 'silence' is a direct reflection of a dearth, or even absence, of educated women in actual life. As in the case of other non-dominant groups in Roman society, women, even those of the upper classes, are largely omitted from the historical narrative and, if mentioned at all, they are often described according to certain fixed characteristics, such as the devoted mother, the evil stepmother, the domineering, or the self-effacing, wife, etc. Education is only rarely part of such standard portrayals and, therefore, it is apt to be ignored. Consequently, other explanations seem possible to account for the relative 'silence' of our sources on the education of upper-class women: for example, a lack of interest in the male-authored sources concerning the education of women, their preference for the salacious and the spectacular, a tendency to describe women in traditional female terms disregarding activities outside the female preserve (except for scoffing at them), and, perhaps, uneasy feelings as regards educated women in

general. In the following I have tried to fit the scattered evidence into a meaningful whole, taking into account the various possible interpretations of the relative 'silence' of our sources. Though in the individual chapters the evidence may seem meagre, the total sum of the evidence presented all through the book will, to my mind, make it sufficiently clear that the education of women was a matter of serious concern in Roman upper-class circles and that, unlike the education of men, it brought its recipients not only prestige but also problems.

1
THE SOCIAL POSITION OF UPPER-CLASS WOMEN

When studying educated women in Roman society one is struck by the scarcity of women of learning mentioned in our sources. Not even the term *matrona docta,* used in the title of this study, is found in Roman literature. It is a concoction of *matrona,* the married Roman woman of rank, and *puella docta,* the 'learned girl' whose praises were sung in love poetry.[1] Both terms are loaded with moral values. The *matrona* is closely associated with traditional female values such as chastity, modesty, austerity, domesticity and devotion to husband and children. In contrast, the *puella docta* of Augustan love poetry was praised for her cultural accomplishments (in poetry, music and dance), but in traditional Roman eyes her morals raised suspicion; moreover, the typical *puella docta* does not seem to have belonged to the élite. Of course, words and social practice do not always coincide, but the lack of a term for a respectable 'learned' woman to counter-balance the doubtful reputation of the *puella docta* indicates how ambivalent Roman feelings were as regards women's education.

Since in the Roman society of our period there were no Christian convents in which girls could be taught and to which women could retreat to devote their life to study and prayer (as almost all women who were famous for learning in the Middle Ages did), and as no other institutions, customs or opportunities existed which offered women an alternative to marriage and motherhood,[2] it is perhaps understandable that we hardly hear of any famous learned women in Roman society. Yet, as we shall see, some upper-class women were highly educated. So, what may have caused their obscurity in the world of education?

We should keep in mind that in Roman society education and learning were typically male pursuits; knowledge of literary culture and the liberal arts was the mark of the upper-class 'gentleman'. For upper-class men education, apart from its practical value for a political career, was a field of competition and an instrument of class differentation: the enjoyment and display of education distinguished members of the élite from members of other classes. Yet, though learning conferred prestige and though education was essential for one's social status, intellectual pursuits, insofar as they did not contribute to serious aristocratic activities such as politics and the practice of law, belonged to leisure *(otium)* and were therefore, according to the old republican notion, of secondary importance. During the principate there was a shift in the attitude towards education: with the peace and prosperity of the

principate and the decline of political power of the senatorial class intellectual activities gained esteem. This gave more scope for pursuits that had little practical value or had been considered frivolous before (such as the writing of light poetry), but members of the senatorial class always remained amateurs in literary and other intellectual pursuits—or so they pretended—being 'good without seeming to try'.[3] The pretence of amateurism as regards intellectual activities was of great importance for the attitude of the upper classes towards education, and a life entirely devoted to study was uncornmon, as it was among the members of the equestrian and decurial class (though less so).

This amateur ethos also affected the women of the upper classes; on the one hand, it may have facilitated their participation, and on the other, it prohibited a life devoted to study, since this ran contrary to the traditions of their class (and gender). Of course, women's 'leisure' differed fundamentally from that of the men of their class: being barred from politics, public office-holding and military matters, upper-class women, whose lives passed, or were expected to pass, in the privacy of their homes and families, were condemned to a life of *otium* (which is not to say that they had nothing to do).[4] Did this allow them to devote their leisure hours to study which was comparable to the *otium honestum* of their male peers? Needless to say, it did not. There is no female counterpart of the respectful qualification *vir doctus,* which denotes a man of culture, trained in the liberal arts and civilized in conduct; *docta* is sometimes used for a woman, but it is not always meant as a compliment.[5] This does not imply that education was considered unsuitable for all women and that distinctions of class were of no consequence. As we shall see, matters were more complicated: class, wealth, family background and other factors connected with the social position of upper-class women interacted with gender in determining the nature of their education.

Therefore, in the present chapter, before we start our inquiry into their education, some words are needed about the social position of upper-class women. Fortunately, in recent years a number of excellent studies have appeared on the life of women, their juridical, financial and social position in Roman society and their place within the Roman family; therefore, a brief survey with some references to further reading may suffice here.[6] This survey focusses on the last decennia of the republic and the first two centuries of the empire, and sketches in a synchronic way aspects of the social position of upper-class women in so far as these are relevant to our study. Three issues are of importance: the changing position of upper-class women within the family at the different stages of their life (daughter, wife, mother and widow), their relation to the three leading *ordines,* and, third, the norms and rules prescribing the behaviour of the upper-class *matrona.* It is argued that the social position of upper-class women was marked by ambiguity and by contradictory demands of class and gender. Besides, their life was closely circumscribed by their family background and by the various roles they fulfilled within the family in the successive stages of their life.

As regards the position of daughters, not much can be said. Emotionally, according to J.P.Hallett, a daughter was highly valued, even more highly than a son, at least in upper-class families, and her 'structurally central' position in the élite

family paved her way to prominence as an adult.[7] This view seems too positive: examples of high emotional valuation of daughters (such as the extraordinary devotion of Cicero to Tullia) are counterbalanced by the frequent unfavourable treatment of daughters in wills,[8] and the cold-blooded use of daughters as marriage-partners to negotiate political alliances.

For Roman girls childhood was brief: upper-class girls married young, somewhere between the age of 12 (the legal minimum age fixed by Augustan legislation) and their late teens; this in contrast with girls outside the élite, who married somewhat later (in their late teens or early twenties). Marriage was a major transition in the life of an upper-class girl, changing her, rather abruptly, from a girl into a *matrona;* as a symbol of this transition she dedicated her dolls and other toys to Venus or to the household gods on the eve of her marriage.[9] Since in Rome virtually all women married, upper-class girls invariably became *matronae.* A girl's marriage was arranged by her parents, sometimes in conjunction with other relatives. Though the formal consent of the bride was needed, a 15-year-old girl was in no position to resist the wishes of her family and in most cases she must have submitted to their choice. In a first marriage her husband might be about ten years older, upper-class men marrying around their mid-twenties, unless, of course, she married a man entering upon his second, third or subsequent marriage, in which case the difference in age (and probably the inequality in power) would be considerably greater. On the other hand, the second or third marriage of a woman might lead to a greater equality in age between the partners and, in some cases, a greater influence of the woman on the choice of a husband; we may also assume that an adult woman in her second or third marriage would be less compliant and submissive than a young girl in her first.[10]

The arrangement of her marriage and the choice of a husband was a matter of serious concern to the family, for a marriage was, in the first place, a deal between families. Though harmony and affection between the partners was desirable—during the empire the ideal of matrimonial *concordia* was fashionable—the most important thing was that the match was suitable, and to this end it was of great importance that the partners were equal in birth, wealth and social standing, though shortcomings in one of these might be compensated by a high position in the others.[11]

As a wife and a (potential) mother an upper-class woman occupied a position of authority in the house and participated in all its social activities. Though in a large town-house or villa she might have her own private apartments, she was not confined to them, nor were there rooms from which she was excluded; as the mistress of the household she moved freely through the entire house. The *atrium,* the central and most public area of the house where her husband received his morning callers, was the place from where she—probably at different hours—directed and supervised the work of the household slaves. Marriage brought full participation in social life: wives were expected to entertain their husbands' guests and to accompany their husbands on social visits and to dinner parties. Behind the scenes a wife might be involved in her husband's business, the management of his estates and his political career. Though debarred from active political life, she was expected, for instance, to maintain his political connections

and inform him of the situation in Rome during his absences abroad for military duties, governorship of a province, or in the turmoils of civil war. From the reign of Tiberius onwards wives were allowed to accompany their husbands when they went as magistrates to the provinces, and so, it seems, many of them did.[12]

The integration of women in the house and the social life of the family went hand in hand with a marked division along gender lines of tasks and social activities and a segregation of husband and wife for part or most of their daily activities. For instance, when guests were invited, the wife was to issue invitations to the ladies while her husband invited the male guests. When receiving guests the wife (or if she was absent, the mother, daughter or sister of the host) acted as a hostess to the female guests; for a man to receive guests of both sexes on his own was considered inappropriate. Similarly, at official celebrations the emperor might feast the senate (or the people) of Rome, while the empress was expected to invite the leading ladies.[13] Some of the social activities were fulfilled separately by husband and wife, though we are less well informed of the activities of the wife. Like men (and sometimes together with them) women attended birthday parties, weddings, funerals or religious gatherings and visited the games and the theatre; they travelled freely and exchanged invitations with their female friends for visits or a short holiday They had their own personal attendants and, often, their own staff of slaves. Like their husbands, they received visitors and callers (relatives, friends, clients, servants, bailiffs, etc.) at home, where they conducted their private business and administered their possessions and estates. Further, time was spent on their toilet, the supervision of domestic work, the upbringing of their children, their husbands' needs, the care of their relatives during illness and other traditionally 'female' tasks, whereas men engaged in a public career and in political and intellectual discussions with male friends in which wives, though they were sometimes present, are usually not mentioned as participating.

A woman's status and her authority in the family grew when she became a mother, especially of sons. As has been shown by S.Dixon, a Roman upper-class mother had an authoritarian and disciplinary role in the upbringing of her children, which did not differ much from that of the father.[14] Her authority increased when she was widowed: thanks to her wealth and the respect due to her as a parent, an upper-class widow could exercise great power over her sons, despite her lack of legal *potestas* over them. It was through sons, more than through husbands, that some high-born women exercised political power (Agrippina Minor being a notorious example), and it was as widows, especially as wealthy elderly widows, that women could come into the limelight managing their own affairs, supervising the education of their sons, occupying a position of respect in their families and, in some cases, in their cities in general because of their wealth and the public use they made of it.[15]

To summarize, a woman's life and social position were far from static: in the course of her life things changed according to the circumstances of her family and the successive stages of her life, which usually brought her a position of increasing authority. Generally speaking, the position of a woman within her house and family was ambiguous: it was marked by both integration in the social life of the family and

segregation as regards most tasks and daily activities. As women were debarred from active political and military life, their lives centred on the house and family. Yet, as we have seen, they were not confined to the house or to domestic concerns; because of their wealth, their elevated position as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers of upper-class men and the blurring of the social and political spheres in Rome they could expand their influence well outside the house and engage in various social, financial and even (in an indirect way) political activities.

This brings us to the second issue to be dealt with: their relation to the three leading *ordines*. As regards the relation between class and gender, upper-class women were in an uncertain position: as members of the ruling class but of the subordinate sex they shared some of the prestige and distinctions of their class, but at the same time they were regarded as socially inferior to the men of their class or were ranked with minors.[16] This contradictory position was due to the ambiguous way in which upper-class women were connected with the three leading orders. Whereas men belonged to the senatorial, equestrian or decurial order by virtue of their birth, wealth and public career, women were bound to these orders only indirectly: their claim to social rank depended on that of their fathers or husbands, since they received their fathers' rank at birth and adopted that of their husbands at marriage.

As regards a woman's rank, marriage superseded birth: when marrying, a woman received the rank of her husband, whatever her rank at birth (though in practice the social gap between the marriage-partners was seldom wide). Thus, marriage could bring social change. This social 'mobility' could be upwards or downwards: a woman gained senatorial rank by marriage to a senator, if she herself was of a family of inferior (in most cases equestrian) class, and she kept this rank when widowed or divorced. But, as can be attested from about the middle of the second century AD onwards, a woman of senatorial rank (whether she inherited it from her father or acquired it through marriage) lost her senatorial dignity when she (re-)married a man of inferior status. Thus, for such a woman a marriage beneath her station meant lowering her status.[17] Yet, as her family remained of consequence, her high birth might facilitate the social rise of her male descendants.

As women were only indirectly bound to the upper classes, their connection with the élite orders was uncertain. With the exception of senatorial rank, which from the Augustan period onwards became a hereditary rank extending also to daughters, the élite orders strictly speaking were all male; girls born in equestrian and decurial families did not formally belong to these orders. However, in practice, equestrian and decurial dignity extended also to close female relatives of members of these orders, especially their wives and daughters, and during the empire a semi-hereditary status, analogous to that of women of senatorial rank, seems to have been established also for women from equestrian families.[18] Thus, it seems justified to speak of women of equestrian or decurial rank when denoting wives and daughters of equestrians or decurials who, though strictly speaking they did not inherit this rank, were included in its dignity and liable to its constraints.

As upper-class women had no independent claim to rank, their social status was somewhat ambiguous.[19] This is reflected in the comment of the early third-century

jurist Ulpian on the question of precedence of class or gender in determining social hierarchy:

> That a man of consular rank always takes precedence over a lady of consular rank is a point no one doubts. But whether a man of prefectorial rank takes precedence over a lady of consular rank remains to be seen. I should think he does, because greater dignity inheres in the male sex.
>
> *(Dig.* 1.9.1 *pr.)*[20]

Admittedly, Ulpian lived at a time when senatorial power was in decline and was giving way to the increasing power and prestige of the leading equestrians; yet, to allow a man of high equestrian rank to take precedence over a woman married to a consul (or ex-consul) shows how uncertain and subordinate the position of women was within the upper classes.

The uncertainty of the relation of upper-class women to the élite orders is somewhat compensated by the puzzling *ordo matronarum.* This 'order of matrons' seems to have come into being in analogy with, and in imitation of, the élite orders of men, but since it was not a formal order, it is not clearly defined. Its origins perhaps go back to the early republic, but as an organization of women it comes to the fore mainly during the empire. The term *ordo matronarum* is used loosely in our sources to denote married upper-class women when acting as a group in public, as distinguished from women of the lower 'orders'. Thus, for example, the *matronae* of the plebeian nobility gathering for the cult of Pudicitia Plebeia in the early third century BC were marked off by Livy from the '*feminae* of all (other) orders', and Plautus has two freedwomen of the 'order' of courtesans jealously complaining about the closely knit group of high-born matrons. Closer inspection of these and other examples tells us that the term *ordo matronarum* is nearly always used to denote women of senatorial rank when acting in concert in a public role.[21]

In some respects the *ordo matronarum* duplicated the senatorial order. The criteria for membership of the *ordo matronarum* (high birth, wealth and marriage) were similar to those of the senatorial order and, as was the case with men, their privileged station in life was justified by their supposed moral excellence—women's virtues being regarded as different from, but complementary to, those of men.[22] Also their insignia of rank were comparable to those of the male senatorial order; they comprised the distinctive dress of the *matrona* (*stola, vittae* and the use of purple)—the equivalent of the *toga* and the *latus clavus* (the broad purple band) of male senatorial dress—and the use of certain carriages within the city: the two-wheeled covered carriage, the *carpentum,* and its four-wheeled luxury version, the *pilentum;* during the empire the use of the *carpentum* within the city of Rome was a special mark of distinction permitted only to very few matrons, mainly of the imperial family As the *ordo matronarum* was not a formal order and therefore lacked a formal grant of insignia, these symbols of status were alleged to have originated in legendary times when upper-class women were said to have received them by

senatorial decree as marks of honour awarded for courageous actions or in gratitude for contributions of money or gold to the state in periods of crisis.[23]

The marks of distinction symbolizing the high status of the *matronae* emphasized the social distance between them and women of inferior rank. But there was also an internal hierarchy within the *ordo matronarum,* which was probably shown by subtle gradations in these outward marks. Birth, wealth and the career and social standing of her husband determined a woman's position within the privileged group of women who formed the *ordo matronarum* and the scant evidence of the puzzling *conventus matronarum,* the assembly of matrons of Rome attested during the empire, points to an intense competition for status among them.[24] Their preoccupation with status and hierarchy is ridiculed in the disputed, and probably at least partly fictitious, account of the *Historia Augusta* of the so-called 'women's senate' established by the emperor Elegabalus and presided over by his mother Julia Soaemias. This senate is said to have issued:

> absurd decrees concerning rules to be applied to matrons, namely, what kind of clothing each might wear in public, who was to yield precedence and to whom, who was to advance to kiss another, who might ride in a chariot *(pilentum),* on a horse, on a pack-animal, or on an ass, who might drive in a carriage *(carpentum)* drawn by mules or in one drawn by oxen, who might be carried in a litter, and whether the litter might be made of leather, or of bone, or covered with ivory or with silver, and lastly, who might wear gold or jewels on her shoes.
>
> (*SHA Elegab*. 4.4; Loeb trans.)[25]

Though much of this account is mockery, ridiculing both Elegabalus and women's preoccupation with status by presenting their petty discussions in terms of senatorial decrees, it is not impossible that it refers to actual rules of precedence negotiated in the assembly of women of senatorial class. In any case, the *ordo* and *conventus matronarum,* meeting for religious and other purposes on certain festal days and on special occasions and discussing matters of importance to them, point to an organization of senatorial women in imitation of that of the male senatorial order, by which they established their place in Roman society vis-à-vis that of upper-class men and that of women of other classes and in which in a finely graded hierarchy they competed for status among themselves.

Thus, women of senatorial class were marked off from women of lower rank by this pseudo 'order' and the assembly of matrons formed on the model of the male senatorial order. At the same time, however, there existed another division of society which, disregarding distinctions of class and status, threw women together. 'Women' are sometimes mentioned as a group or an 'order' as distinct from other groups of society (such as the people, equestrians and senators);[26] this may point to a division in society on the basis of political privilege which excluded women of all ranks. Such a division is found in the seating arrangements in the theatre and amphitheatre, where women were relegated to the top rows at the back of the theatre (in between

the sections for the slaves, the non-citizens and the urban poor), whereas men were seated according to class and to other divisions of status, senators occupying the front rows, equestrians the 'fourteen rows' behind them and the people, subdivided according to age, marital state and other criteria, being seated in separate sections in the middle rows of the auditorium. Only very few women were excepted from this segregation according to gender: the Vestal Virgins and the women of the imperial family had privileged seats near the front.[27]

To summarize, upper-class women's connection with class was indirect (*viz.* dependent on their fathers or husbands, through whom they gained their rank) and contradictory: on the one hand, they were distinguished from women of the lower classes by the symbols of their rank and their organization in the *ordo matronarum,* but on the other, women of all ranks were seen as an undifferentiated mass and segregated from men without regard for their social distinctions.

A similar ambiguity of rank and gender is found in the third and last problem to be discussed in this chapter: the norms and rules prescribing the behaviour of the upper-class *matrona*. Besides her role as a wife and mother in the private sphere of the house, an upper-class woman was known as a *matrona* in relation to the outside world. This term not only indicated her married state and her (potential) motherhood, but was also closely bound up with the traditional female virtues of chastity, modesty, simplicity, frugality, reticence and domesticity. *Matronae* were expected to live a retired life, to be chaste and devoted wives and mothers and to marry only once, remaining faithful widows after their husbands' death *(univirae)*.[28] To distinguish them from unmarried girls, non-citizens and women who were disreputable *(infames)* such as adulteresses, prostitutes, actresses, entertainers and women occupied in catering, *matronae,* when in public, wore a special dress as a mark of their respectability: they were allowed to wear the *stola,* a long overgarment covering the ankles, which is also indicated with the word *instita* (a disputed term probably referring to the seam or the shoulder-straps of the *stola*). In her hair she wore *vittae* (woollen fillets or bands).

Though by the Augustan period or perhaps even earlier both *stola* and *vittae* had gone out of fashion and may have been worn only on formal occasions, these terms continued to be used as indicators of the respectability of the *matrona,* whose moral behaviour was the object of Augustus' legislation on marriage and adultery. So Ovid, when pretending to warn the respectable married women against reading his *Ars Amatoria,* writes: 'Keep far away, slender fillets, symbol of modesty, and the long skirt that hides half the feet in its folds.'[29] Thus, *stola, instita, vittae* and *matrona* were used to denote the respectability of the legally married Roman citizen-woman. Apart from a shift from the concrete to the morally charged, there seems to have been a narrowing of the range of women to whom these terms could be applied, but this development is not altogether clear. The following is, therefore, somewhat speculative, and the usage of these terms may, in fact, have been vaguer and less strict than here described.

During the republic *matrona* seems to have been used for any respectable married woman, her social rank perhaps being shown by stripes woven into her *stola,* just as

broad and narrow stripes respectively marked senatorial and equestrian male dress. However, during the first two centuries of the empire the terms *matrona* and *stola* (with their connotation of respectability) were used increasingly, and from the Flavian period onwards perhaps even exclusively, for women of senatorial rank (though towards the end of our period they appear also to have been used for women of equestrian rank). A remark by the elder Pliny reflects this change. When complaining of the excessive use of gold by wealthy women he exclaims: 'are even their feet to be shod with gold, and shall gold create this female order of knighthood, intermediate between the *stola* and the common people?'[30] Distinguishing women of senatorial rank from women of the other classes by the *stola,* he sketches a mock-official hierarchy of women analogous to that of men, with a female equestrian order (distinguished by gold ornaments, comparable to the gold ring of the *equites*) in between. Thus, as we have seen above, the terms *matrona* and *stola* not only signified respectability, but during the empire came to be used as marks of senatorial (or perhaps more generally, upper-class) status as well.

In contrast with the various social obligations of upper-class women, and the financial and political activities that followed from their eminent station in life and their family background, the norms and rules prescribing the behaviour of the upper-class *matrona* were highly restrictive and remained so during our entire period. The tension between these restrictive norms and the manifold demands made on upper-class women in daily life is apparent in many aspects of their life, but here attention is only paid to its effects on their activities in the field of education. In the following chapters the ambiguity in the social position of upper-class women and the contradictory demands of class and gender must be constantly borne in mind. Women's dependence on the circumstances of their families and their changing familial roles, their indirect and uncertain relation to the élite orders and the traditional values prescribing the behaviour of the upper-class *matrona* will recur again and again. Together, these three aspects constitute a framework which enables us better to understand both the educational opportunities of upper-class women and the limitations imposed upon them.

2
THE EDUCATION OF UPPER-CLASS WOMEN
Opportunities and impediments

> The young woman had many charms apart from her youthful beauty. She was well versed in literature, in playing the lyre, and in geometry, and had been accustomed to listen to philosophical discourses with profit. In addition to this, she had a nature which was free from that unpleasant meddlesomeness which such accomplishments are apt to impart to young women.
>
> (Plut. *Pomp.* 55; Loeb trans., modified)

> In birth and beauty, in her husband also and children, she was abundantly favoured by fortune; she was well read in Greek and Latin literature, able to play the lyre and dance more skilfully than a respectable woman need, and had many other accomplishments which minister to voluptuousness.
>
> (Sall. *Cat.* 25; Loeb trans., modified)

These texts, Plutarch's portrait of Cornelia (Pompey's last wife) and Sallust's portrait of Sempronia, show us two women of leading senatorial families during the late republic who had a similar education but were judged quite differently.[1] Whatever the historical truth of these portraits, literary education, supplemented with music and, in the case of Cornelia, with geometry and philosophy, seems to have been a regular element in it. Are we allowed to conclude from such examples that upper-class girls, as a rule, received a thorough education in Greek and Roman literature, and perhaps in music, mathematics and philosophy, or were such women exceptional and was that the reason why they attracted the attention of our sources? So far the education of Roman girls and women has not been treated as a separate subject of study. Since the ancient sources usually do not speak of the education of girls or are prejudiced when the education of women comes up for discussion, even the most basic facts are hard to establish. Childhood as such did not much interest Roman authors and, whereas boys were cherished for their promise of a future career, girls did not figure prominently in public life and were simply omitted from record.[2] Since our sources hardly speak of the education of girls, we have to gather

our information from what is implied, comparing it with what we know of the education of boys.

In the present chapter an attempt is made to reconstruct the education of upper-class girls and women on the basis of those sources that deal directly with their opportunities to receive an education; the next chapter is devoted to the objectives of women's education and to ancient opinions on educated women. Though the educated women discussed in the following chapters bear witness to the level and content of their education, they are, as a rule, not discussed here in order to avoid repetition. Three questions will guide us: did upper-class girls, as a rule, receive some education, and, if so, during how long a period and to what level? Second, what opportunities did they have to continue their studies after their wedding-day? Third, did the nature and scope of their education during girlhood influence their possible studies in adult life? Before starting the discussion a few words should be said about the organization of Roman education in general.

Roman education

Roman education is usually divided into three stages.[3] The first stage, primary or elementary education, comprised reading, writing and some arithmetic and was taught by a *magister ludi* or a *litterator.* This stage is usually thought to have started at the age of 7 and to have ended at about 11. After this stage some of the boys (both ancient and modern discussions speak almost exclusively of boys) came under the tuition of a *grammaticus,* who taught literature, especially poetry, which was read, explained and evaluated; this formed the basis for further study of grammar, orthography, metrics, and other subjects, such as mythology or geography Near the end of the 'grammar' course there were some preliminary exercises in prose-composition, but, strictly speaking, this was the field of the rhetorician.[4]

At about 15 or 16, the age at which boys exchanged the *toga praetexta* for the *toga virilis,* the third and most important stage of education was reached: rhetorical training, which prepared upper-class boys for a public career. For most of them the study of rhetoric was the final stage of their education and as such it was the main formative influence on adult life. However, since the toga of manhood now allowed them some freedom of choice, some of them chose to study philosophy together with rhetoric, or after they had finished their course in rhetoric; and to complete their education upper-class young men might tour the Greek-speaking world and visit Athens, or another Greek city, to study with a Greek rhetorician or philosopher.[5]

This traditional division of Roman education into three clear-cut stages is, of course, too rigid: in practice, the distinction between the successive stages was vaguer, especially in the case of home tuition; also, the age at which the boys were taught by a *magister,* a *grammaticus* or a *rhetor* could vary widely.[6] Moreover, this three-stage division dates from the last decennia of the republic and especially from the imperial period. In earlier days education was much more informal and, according to sources of later date which idealized old times, it was kept within the

family under the strict guidance and personal tuition of the father; practical training and moral precepts formed an important part.[7] In those days, an upper-class boy when reaching the age of 16 (when the man's toga was assumed) was entrusted to a distinguished man of politics to learn the ways of the forum and to study under his guidance, instead of entering a school of rhetoric.

The greatest change in Roman education took place in the second and first centuries BC, when the Greek ideal of a general education *(enkuklios paideia)* was taken over by members of the Roman aristocracy. The *artes liberales,* disciplines appropriate to a freeborn man (or rather, a gentleman), as they called the subjects of this Greek-inspired education, consisted of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and musical theory However, in practice, the study of 'grammar' (language and literature, chiefly poetry) and rhetoric were the most important subjects of Roman education and the mathematical sciences tended to be neglected or were only superficially taught as a preliminary to the study of philosophy.[8]

The introduction of Greek education in Roman upper-class circles and the influx of teachers and scholars from the Greek-speaking world caused grammatical and rhetorical education to be mainly taught by Greeks and in Greek, especially in the earlier days when there was no Latin literature to speak of. In those days, *grammatici* taught chiefly Greek poetry (foremost Homer, the tragedians and Menander) and some older Latin poetry, such as Ennius, Naevius, Plautus and Terence. Thus, for the Roman upper classes a liberal education and bilingualism went hand in hand. However, as time went on, the curriculum changed. In the first century BC schools of Latin rhetoric appeared next to the Greek ones and despite initial resistance they attracted many pupils; moreover, during the reign of Augustus the new Latin poetry (Virgil, Horace and the elegiac poets) was introduced into the curriculum of the *grammaticus* and partly replaced the older Latin writers.[9] As the new Latin poetry could challenge Greek poetry, it posed a threat to Greek education. During the early principate the increase of Latin education resulted in a separation of the *grammaticus Graecus* and the *grammaticus Latinus*—as it had led to separate teachers of Greek and Latin rhetoric before—possibly to the detriment of the knowledge of Greek language and literature among all but the wealthy upper classes.[10] Thus, fluency in both languages and knowledge of Greek and Latin literature were marks of distinction among the upper classes as they required an expensive literary education.[11]

During the principate educational facilities, such as schools and libraries, steadily increased. From Vespasian onwards emperors subsidized higher education in Rome by appointing a Latin and a Greek rhetorician at a regular salary and in some Italian towns a *grammaticus* was hired 'publicly' or a school founded by a wealthy benefactor, for example, by the younger Pliny in his home-town.[12] Schools, which probably were mainly, but not exclusively, attended by children of the sub-élite,[13] areattested at various places in Roman Italy (though most evidence, as is to be expected, comes from Rome). As a consequence, literary education seems not entirely to have been restricted to the upper classes during the empire, though, apart

from a small group of professionals, it remained on the whole the privilege of well-to-do families in Rome and other major urban centres.

The increasing number of schools has led to the view that education, at least at the elementary level, was fairly widespread in Rome and Italy during the late republic and the first two centuries AD. This optimistic view of Roman literacy has been criticized by, among others, W.V.Harris, who argues that even during the late republic and the principate only a small proportion of the Roman male population and an even smaller percentage of the female population were fully literate, though he believes in the probability of complete literacy among the upper classes, both male and female.[14] Harris is perhaps somewhat pessimistic in his estimate of Roman literacy, but the lack of a state-supported school system and the fact that the responsibility for the education of children was left to their parents caused Roman education to be far from homogeneous and seriously diminished opportunities for the less wealthy boys, especially those living in the countryside. It also restricted opportunities for girls, even those of the upper classes. To them we may turn now.

The education of upper-class girls and women

In ancient societies women were less favoured than men in respect of literacy and education: in the schools female pupils, if present, were vastly outnumbered by male ones and, as a consequence, fewer women than men were literate. Moreover, since men studied longer, they reached a higher level. This general condition also obtained in Rome, but we cannot tell exactly what proportion of women were literate and how far their education lagged behind that of men.[15] The scant evidence for female education has given rise to widely different opinions ranging from a somewhat naive belief in equal opportunities for Roman boys and girls (at least at the elementary level) to the assumption that only a very small proportion of girls received any education at all.[16] Even when we restrict our inquiry to women of the upper classes, some of whom, as we shall see, were highly educated, it is impossible to estimate the proportion of educated women among the upper classes or the extent of their education—though it seems likely that among them illiteracy was rare, at least from the late republic onwards.[17]

Before discussing the evidence two points should be mentioned which distinguished the education of upper-class girls and women from that of their male peers. First, the education of upper-class girls lacked the main objective of that of boys: to produce good public speakers. As we have seen, upper-class boys were, as a rule, trained for a public career which required a thorough education in oratory (and sometimes law) following on the study of 'grammar' and some general education in the liberal arts. This common purpose gave a certain unity and coherence to their education. For upper-class girls, however, there was no such fixed aim: unlike boys (of all classes) and girls of the lower (mostly servile) classes—some of whom were trained for a profession (for instance, as a hairdresser, midwife, secretary, musician or even bookkeeper) or worked in bars and shops—[18] women of the upper classes had no profession or career open to them.

Second, upper-class girls did not enjoy a period of adolescence which in the case of boys of their class was devoted to study and preparation for their future career and went on until the age of 19 or 20, or even beyond. A Roman upper-class girl usually married in her early or mid teens.[19] Marriage meant a decisive change also in respect of her education, as it put an end to her life (and education) as an unmarried daughter under the care of her parents. Though, as we shall see, some women went on studying during marriage, or were able to resume study when widowed, the much shorter period before their marriages reduced their education.

As upper-class girls were not trained to become public speakers and married early, the usual three-stage division of education (elementary, grammatical, rhetorical) cannot be applied to them: since marriage was the main transition in their life, a division into a pre-marital and a married stage of education is to be preferred.

Pre-marital education

There is not much information on the way upper-class girls learned to read and write and only slightly more on their more advanced education, in what is usually called the 'grammar' phase. In order to provide a tentative reconstruction of their education, and to find out how common such an education may have been among upper-class girls, the evidence for girls going to school or being taught at home will be discussed first; after this we shall look in some detail at the possible factors influencing their opportunities (such as the period they lived in, their domicile, class, wealth, family background and age at marriage).

Sources speaking of girls going to school or being taught at home begin in the late republic. There is some evidence suggesting that from this period onwards girls (of unspecified class) attended school together with boys, both in the elementary and in the grammar phase.[20] Apparently, some schools were mixed, not only at the elementary level but also at the grammar stage. The matter-of-fact tone of the sources, most of them stemming from Rome in the late republic and the principate, seems to imply that in Rome during this period it was not felt to be exceptional for girls to go to school. However, we are totally ignorant of the number of girls in question, and it seems reasonable to assume that they formed only a minority among the pupils. Generally speaking, schoolgirls belonged to well-to-do urban families who had a school in their home-town and could afford to send both their sons and daughters to it.

Most upper-class families hired (or bought) private tutors to teach their children at home, at least for the elementary and grammar stages of their education. Since in families with sons and daughters usually only the sons are mentioned, we are at a loss as to the extent to which the daughters were taught. We do hear, however, of families without sons which employed teachers for the education of their daughters: Cicero's friend Atticus kept a slave *paedagogus* for the elementary education of his only daughter Caecilia Attica and a freedman *grammaticus,* the famous Q.Caecilius Epirota, for her education in grammar. During the principate Minicia Marcella and her sister, the daughters of one of the friends of the younger Pliny, had their own

paedagogi for their elementary education and *praeceptores* for grammatical education and the liberal arts; and inscriptions mentioning *paedagogi* of girls show that these examples were not the only ones.[21]

Considering the dearth of information on home-tuition of upper-class girls, it is not clear whether in families with children of both sexes the girls profited from the presence of private tutors and if they were perhaps actually educated together with their brothers. It should be noted that remarks about private teachers employed for the education of children (in the masculine plural) do not necessarily refer exclusively to sons; girls may have been included, though concealed by the masculine form. For instance, when Strabo reports that Aristodemus of Nyssa, a well-known grammarian and rhetorician, was a tutor of the children of Pompey the Great, we should perhaps not accept (as is usually done) that Gnaeus and Sextus were his only pupils, but conjecture that Pompey's daughter, Pompeia, was taught by him as well.[22] From an anecdote in Plutarch's section on inopportune quotations it appears that she received a thorough education in both Greek and Roman literature from a private tutor: at Pompey's homecoming from his great campaigns in the East 'the tutor of his daughter arranged a demonstration of her progress: after a book was brought, he gave the child the following line to start from: "You came back from the war; I wish you had died there."'[23] The quotation from the *Iliad,* a line spoken by Helen to Paris, was obviously a most unhappy choice for Pompeia to read to her father at his return from his eastern campaigns (which had kept him away from home for several years). However, if historical, it shows that, like her brothers, Pompeia received the bilingual education that was a distinctive mark of her class and that, at the early age of about 8 or 9 she had already progressed so far as to read Homer, an author usually associated with the beginning of the 'grammar' phase in Roman education.[24]

Similarly, when we are told that Augustus appointed the grammarian M. Verrius Flaccus,[25] a very successful teacher, as tutor of his grandsons and made him move his school to the palace, paying him a salary of a hundred thousand sesterces a year, it seems likely that Verrius was also employed for the instruction of Augustus' granddaughters, Julia and Agrippina. At first sight, this is contradicted by Suetonius, who relates that 'in bringing up his daughter and his granddaughters he [i.e. Augustus] even had them taught spinning and weaving, and he forbade them to say or do anything except openly and such as might be recorded in the household diary'.[26] Augustus tried to revive within his own household the ideals of traditional Roman education, which laid great stress on the moral virtues and domestic accomplishments of daughters. This agrees with his legal policy of reviving traditional morality, in which he prided himself on having set an example.[27] But we should not misunderstand Suetonius' words: they do not imply that Augustus' daughter and granddaughters were exclusively taught domestic duties and nothing else, like the girls of the good old days. On the contrary, they appear to have received a thorough literary education. In a section on the sayings of Augustus' daughter Julia, Macrobius mentions her 'love of letters and great erudition, not hard to come by in her house' and in a letter, quoted by Suetonius, Augustus praises the

rhetorical talent of his granddaughter Agrippina (Maior) but exhorts her 'to take care not to write and talk affectedly'.[28] Augustus, who according to Suetonius preferred a simple and unaffected style of speaking and writing, probably urged her not to use far-fetched words or an ornate style. Apparently, Agrippina had followed a full course in 'grammar' including the preliminary exercises in prose-composition which some grammarians taught as a preparation for the study of rhetoric.[29]

Thus, Suetonius' account of the traditional education which Augustus prescribed for his female offspring is somewhat misleading and should not be taken at face value. By having his daughter and granddaughters taught spinning and weaving Augustus kept up an appearance of conforming to traditional ideals of female education, but this did not prevent him from providing his female relatives with the extensive literary education of their class and from taking great interest in their progress. This discrepancy between norms and practice partly accounts for the reticence of our sources.

To return to our initial question, *viz*. whether in families with both sons and daughters the girls also profited from the presence of private teachers, the answer should, in my opinion, be tentatively positive, although we cannot tell how many upper-class girls were educated in this way, or whether they took their lessons together with their brothers. As to the level and content of their education, the evidence, meagre though it is, is consistent in showing that elementary education and a 'grammar' course formed its core, while some even progressed as far as the exercises in prose-composition which formed the transition to the study of rhetoric. As is to be expected, there is no indication that girls were given a formal rhetorical training, but the way in which they were taught at both the primary and the 'grammar' stage seems not to have differed from that of boys: we find girls reading the same school authors as boys, such as Homer and Menander, and in late antiquity little Paula, daughter of a high-born Roman family turned Christian, still learned her alphabet in the way prescribed by Quintilian.[30]

However, the evidence is, of course, far too meagre for definitive conclusions. Rather than attempting to generalize on the basis of insufficient evidence it seems useful to study the differences in the education of girls according to the period and place they lived in, their wealth and class, family background, age at marriage and the like. In the following sections it will be asked how these factors influenced the educational chances of upper-class girls, the substance of their studies and the level they might reach before marrying.

The period in question

Roman society underwent great changes during our period, and so did its literary culture and education. In the second century BC Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, must have been taught by a Greek grammarian since she was fluent in Greek and able to entertain, and patronize, Greek scholars and men of letters in her villa in Misenum. Moreover, she had received enough training in Latin rhetoric to be noted for her excellent style of speaking and writing, and her letters were

published and admired for their style.[31] So comprehensive an education of a girl at so early a date may seem surprising; as tradition has it, early Roman education of girls was confined to spinning and weaving and other domestic tasks. Of course, because of the growth of Greek cultural influence, education was changing rapidly in Cornelia's days, but she must have been among the very first girls of her class to benefit from the higher education which Greek scholars and tutors provided.[32] Leaving aside, for the moment, the influence of her family, to which I shall return, I shall first examine what effect the period in which she lived had upon her education.

Cornelia's proficiency in Greek literature and in Latin rhetoric was remarkable—in the eyes of ancient authors too. Her proficiency in Greek is perhaps to be expected in the light of what was taught by the grammarians of the time,[33] but her competence in rhetoric was uncommon for a woman. It may be explained by the fact that in Cornelia's days rhetorical training had not yet been institutionalized: no schools of Latin rhetoric existed as yet and prospective politicians learned the art of public speaking during their *tirocinium fori* (from which, needless to say, women were excluded). Such rhetorical courses as there were were taught by grammarians in combination with a course in grammar and thus, we may conjecture, they were more easily accessible to upper-class women than they were in later days.[34] Though Cornelia may have possessed a natural gift for rhetoric, we may suspect that her style of speaking and writing was cultivated by the rhetorical training she received from a grammarian.

From the first century BC onwards schools and other educational facilities, such as libraries, steadily increased. With the spread of education in the first two centuries of the empire we hear of more well-educated women. Not only in the upper classes but probably also among well-to-do urban sub-élite families, daughters were now sent to school or taught at home at the elementary stage and (part of) the grammar stage. Yet, we are ignorant of what percentage of girls had access to such teaching; the increase from the middle republic seems considerable, but we should keep in mind that it may be partly due to the increase in the number and variety of our sources.[35]

As compared to Cornelia's training there were innovations also in the curriculum, the most conspicuous being music-lessons (mainly singing and playing the lyre), which now became popular with some élite families—though they were still disapproved of by the more traditional-minded among the upper classes.[36] The introduction of music in Roman education led to the combined literary and musical education of Cornelia (Pompey's wife) and Sempronia, the two women with whom we started this chapter. Their education seems representative of a (small) group of daughters of 'progressive' upper-class families during the late republic and the early empire, which were open to this rather controversial aspect of Greek education.

The growth of interest in philosophy, apparent from the late republic onwards, led certain women to study philosophy in adult life,[37] but we have no indication that it formed a regular part of the education of girls, nor were they formally taught rhetoric. The institution of schools of Latin rhetoric in the first century BC curtailed

the little rhetorical training that some women may previously have had under the tuition of a grammarian and, with the exception of Hortensia, the daughter of the famous orator Q.Hortensius Hortalus hardly any Roman woman was known for rhetorical proficiency. Yet, at the very end of our period, when rhetoric had developed from public speaking in the political and juridical arena into the show-oratory of the sophists, we find the empress Julia Domna studying rhetoric; as far as we know, she was the first woman to do so since Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi.[38]

Domicile

Our sources, especially the literary ones, mainly deal with Rome and leave the Italian municipalities in the dark. It is doubtful whether we may apply our knowledge of the situation in Rome to Italian municipalities. Are we to assume that there was a degree of cultural uniformity in the cities of Italy after the social war, or at least from the start of the principate onwards, so that the education of girls in the Italian municipalities was more or less like that in Rome?[39] Though the larger cities provided good educational facilities, more remote and smaller towns seem to have lagged behind, which induced ambitious families to send their sons to a neighbouring town, or even to Rome, for the completion of their education.[40] But what happened to their daughters?

A letter of the younger Pliny may throw some light on local customs. Pliny's home-town Comum had no school for grammar education.[41] Therefore, some fathers sent their sons to Mediolanum (Milan). Girls are not mentioned and it seems unlikely that they should have gone to Milan to attend school, since they would have had to stay with relatives or in lodgings, or perhaps in a sort of boarding-school, like the boys. We do not know for certain whether the boys in Pliny's letter were from upper-class families,[42] but their families were at least sufficiently well-to-do to be able to send their sons to Milan for an education. Apparently these families were not in a position to engage private teachers. This does not necessarily mean that they did not belong to the municipal élite. There was plenty of variation in wealth between the *decuriones* of different towns, mainly dependent on the size of the town. In a small town, like Comum, the local élite was of modest means: the census qualification for decurions was 100,000 sesterces, a sum that the freedman-tutor Verrius Flaccus earned in a year by teaching Augustus' grandchildren—but his salary was, of course, uncommonly high for a mere grammarian.[43] However, these families apparently possessed enough money between them to establish a 'grammar' school in their home-town and to pay the fees of the teachers; in addition, Pliny promised to contribute one-third of what they collected and wished them to appoint teachers of such repute that they would attract pupils from the neighbouring towns and villages as well.

No word about the education of girls in this story Presumably they were sitting at home or had married at the age their brothers went to Milan to study. Apparently, it was not for them that Pliny's educational foundation was created, though we may

suspect that, once the 'grammar' school had been established, not only boys, but also some girls benefited from it. Most of the wealthier girls are likely to have had private teachers, but we hear only of the moral training they received, such as Pliny's wife Calpurnia had been given by her aunt in Comum. Calpurnia Hispulla closely supervised her orphaned niece's education, giving her moral precepts and her own good example, an old-fashioned education that may have remained customary in small municipalities. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that Calpurnia had teachers at home for the grammar stage of her education (she probably had in view of her proficiency in adult life), but we are not told so. On the whole, the Italian municipalities were more conservative than Rome in questions of family life and moral values, and this must have influenced the education of girls.[44] Unlike boys, girls were not sent for study to Rome, or to a town in the neighbourhood. Thus, with the exception of the wealthiest among them, who probably employed private teachers, their education depended wholly on the presence of local schools. As most upper-class girls lived in urban centres, or in Rome, for the greater part of their lives, they had, of course, much better opportunities than girls (or even boys) of the lower classes living in the countryside,[45] but it surely made a difference whether a girl was the daughter of a decurion of a little town (like Comum) or the daughter of a senator at Rome.

Wealth and class

The Roman upper classes were far from homogeneous. Apart from the traditional distinctions between the three leading orders, senators, *equites* and the municipal élite, the *decuriones,* there was a great variation in wealth and social status among the members of each of these orders. Though, theoretically, members of the upper classes shared the same literary culture and education, we should not assume that they all educated their daughters to the same extent.[46] Most women discussed in this study stemmed from senatorial families, and it seems reasonable to assume that because of their wealth and their residence in Rome women of the senatorial class stood the best chance of a good education. However, our evidence is distributed very unequally over the three élite orders: the women of the highest rank (those of the imperial household and of the leading senatorial families) enjoyed disproportionately greater attention than the much more numerous women of equestrian and decurial families. Therefore, the reticence of our sources about the education of women of equestrian and decurial families should not make us believe without due consideration that women of these classes were, as a rule, less educated. Rather, we should try to find out how their chances of an education compared to those of women of senatorial rank.

Though the evidence is limited, it seems that the education of daughters of the wealthier equestrian families closely followed that of girls of senatorial rank. Among the wealthy and prominent *equites* in Rome who tried to emulate the senatorial way of life, education in the 'liberal arts' was in high esteem as one of the ways to enhance their status. When among the leading senatorial families the education of

girls came into fashion, the less distinguished families probably followed suit. A good example is that of Attica, the daughter of Cicero's wealthy and cultured friend Atticus, who, as we have seen, had private teachers both for the elementary and the grammar phase of her education. The wealth and learning of her father (and perhaps her own education) procured a great rise in status for her family: in spite of her equestrian birth Attica married the senator M.Vipsanius Agrippa (Octavian's friend) and her daughter Vipsania Agrippina was to become the first wife of the later emperor Tiberius.[47]

Anecdotes offer us further glimpses of the practice of female education among people of non-senatorial status, such as the case of the *eques* Pontius Aufidianus, who killed both his daughter and her *paedagogus* Fannius Saturninus because of their suspected love-affair, thus displaying, according to Valerius Maximus, a remarkable strength of character.[48] The matter-of-fact tone in which Valerius Maximus tells this story suggests that he does not find it out of the ordinary that a girl of equestrian family received an education. From outside the capital (indirect) evidence may be added: in view of her literary interests and accomplishments as an adult Calpurnia, the wife of the younger Pliny, must have been taught by private teachers in her native town of Comum during the elementary stage of her education and (part of) the grammar course; and a surprisingly outstanding education (considering her domicile) is evident in the case of Aemilia Pudentilla, a wealthy widow of equestrian family in the city of Oea in the Roman province of Africa, who was fluent in Latin and Greek both in reading and in writing.[49]

It seems likely that equestrian families, at least the wealthier among them, followed senatorial example, but families of the municipal upper classes may also have done so in due course, though here we have very little to go on. The wealthier among them may have had private teachers for their sons, and perhaps also for their daughters, but many others must have relied on schools in their home-town, or have sent their sons, but not their daughters, to a larger town nearby. In these less wealthy groups the education of girls must have depended to a much greater extent than that of boys on the presence of schools in their home-town.

Family background

Though a good education was, as a rule, held in high esteem among the upper classes, families and individuals varied in their interest in literature and learning. As the education of upper-class girls lacked the main objective of that of the boys of their class, *viz.* a career as a public speaker, it depended on the choice and inclination of a family whether, and to what extent, daughters were educated. The discussion of the motives and objectives of families in giving their daughters a literary education will be left to the next chapter, but as (private) education was expensive and, in the earlier period, uncommon for girls, wealth and a tradition of learning running in a family were very important factors, as were the presence of teachers and books. It seems likely that apart from their more formal training by private tutors, girls in wealthy and well-educated families might improve their

education by daily association with, and by imitating the example of, their fathers and brothers, and by reading books from the family library. As we shall see, such informal ways of learning were also characteristic of the education of adult women. We may assume, for instance, that the excellent education of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, depended on the great wealth, high standing and intellectual interests of her family, which was among the first of Roman senatorial families to embrace Greek culture and education. She probably received home-tuition, perhaps together with her brothers and sister, but the great learning of the male members of her family and their Greek tutors and famous Greek library (shipped home by her uncle, Aemilius Paullus, from his campaign in Greece) must have furthered her education.[50]

In the following chapters the influence of the family will return again and again. Especially important are the father and, during marriage, the husband. The father's influence and his example (apart from hereditary talent) were held responsible for the uncommon proficiency some women displayed in the field of oratory, and we sometimes find education and eloquence running in a family through several generations, displayed and transmitted not only by the male but also by its female members.[51] Here education by private tutors and by daily association with the male members of the family went hand in hand. By contrast, very little is said about the part mothers may have had in the intellectual education of their daughters. Though mothers and other female relatives played an important role by supervising not only the education of their sons, but also, and perhaps more frequently, that of their daughters, we hear only of moral guidance where the education of daughters is concerned—this in contrast with the attention paid to mothers supervising their sons' studies.[52]

Age at marriage

As has been said above (p. 21), upper-class girls usually married in their early or mid teens, that is, at an age when most boys were only halfway through the second stage of their education (the tuition by a *grammaticus*). Consequently, girls lacked the time to complete their education before marriage: on their weddingday they were, as a rule, only half educated as compared to their much older husbands. However, though upper-class girls were allowed to marry from the age of 12 onwards and though many of them actually married before the age of 15, not all were destined to marry at so early an age and so we hear of certain upper-class girls who, for some reason or other, married only in their late teens or early twenties.[53]

This variation of age at first marriage must have entailed differences in education, and we may suspect that a girl who married at the age of about 18, had completed her 'grammar' course—if she had been given such a course—whereas a girl who married at the age of about 13 had not. The level of education of those who married early cannot be ascertained—because of the variations found in private teaching it may have varied widely[54]—but in view of the time boys needed for their grammatical education most of these girls must have been no more than half educated at the time

of their marriage (i.e. about halfway through their grammatical curriculum). Girls marrying late stood a better chance of completing their grammar course. Though this is, of course, hard to prove, it may be illustrated by two examples of upper-class women who are set widely apart in respect of wealth, rank, domicile and period: first, as we have seen, Agrippina Maior, who married at the age of about 18, seems to have been given a full course in 'grammar' including the preliminary exercises in prose-composition that belonged to the field of the rhetorician; and second, we may infer from the 'prison-diary' of the early third-century North African martyr Vibia Perpetua, who married at the age of 18 or 19, that she was educated to the same high level.[55]

To summarize, we may draw the following conclusions. First, it seems likely that from the late republic onwards—when education had spread to include girls of the sub-élite—most, if not all, upper-class girls were educated at least to the level of basic literacy Beyond this, matters become less simple. Evidently some girls (also of urban sub-élite families) went on to the next stage, instruction by a grammarian, perhaps continuing to attend school until puberty. Girls of the upper classes, at least the wealthier ones, mostly received home-tuition instead of going to school, and they may have continued their studies until the day of their marriage. There are no indications that the education of girls differed in substance from that of boys, or was tailored to their future condition as wives and mothers (but many of them were probably taught spinning and weaving, and other domestic skills, as well); rather, in the first and second stage of Roman education they followed the education of boys, while the third stage (rhetorical training) was, as a rule, denied them.

Further, as we have seen, beyond the elementary stage the education of an upper-class girl depended to a greater extent on personal circumstances, such as the period and town she lived in, her wealth and class, the disposition of her family and her age at marriage. Moreover, differences in the capacity and interest of individual girls and the uncertainties of private teaching must have produced considerable variation in the level of education they reached before marriage. Some of these factors also affected the educational opportunities of boys, but usually less so or in a different way: for instance, the establishment of schools of Latin rhetoric in the first century BC increased the opportunity of boys to study rhetoric, whereas it diminished that of girls, who were excluded from such schools. Similarly, residence in a small town with few or no educational facilities proved an impediment for girls from less wealthy upper-class families, but not to the same degree for boys of the same class since they might be sent to school in a larger town in the neighbourhood.

In short, we cannot speak of *the* education of *the* upper-class girls in Rome and Italy, as if they formed a homogeneous and unchanging group, nor may we assume that the changes in Roman education that occurred in the course of time affected girls in the same way as boys of their class. Therefore, to our initial question whether the education of women like Sempronia and Pompey's wife Cornelia was representative of that of upper-class women in general, no clearcut answer can be given. Obviously, what we know of their education cannot be applied to all, or even the majority, of upper-class women during the whole of our period, but their