1. Grave stones

Here I lie, a matron named Veturia. My father was Veturius. My husband was Fortunatus. I lived for twenty-seven years, and I was married for sixteen years to the same man. After I gave birth to six children, only one of whom is still alive, I died.

Titus Julius Fortunatus, a soldier of Legion ii, provided this memorial for his wife, who was incomparable and showed outstanding devotion to him.

Psamate, Furia’s hairdresser, lived nineteen years. Mithrodates, the baker of Flaccus Thorius, put up this tombstone.

Aurelia Nais, a freedwoman of Gaius, sold fish in the warehouses of Galba. Gaius Aurelius Phileros, a freedman of Gaius, and Lucius Valerius Secundus, a freedman of Lucius, paid for this.

To Italia, dressmaker of Cocceia Phyllis. She lived twenty years. Acastus, her fellow slave, paid for this tombstone because she was poor.

2. Women and men

*Didn't I tell you to stop messing about with the colour of your hair? Now you have no hair left to dye! If you had left it alone, who had hair thicker than you? And when you let it down it used to hand to your waist. It was very fine – like the silk fibers the Chinese produce, or the threads which the spider spins with her slender legs when she weaves a delicate thread. But it was neither raven black nor golden blond; it was a mixture of the two, the colour of cedar wood when the bark has been stripped away.*

*I used to cry out to you, ‘it's a crime, a real crime, to burn such naturally lovely hair with dyes. You cruel woman, have pity on your head!*

*Now your hair has fallen out and you alone are responsible. You yourself mixed the poison and put it on your head. Now Germany will send you her captured locks of hair, and a conquered rave will save you from the embarrassment of baldness!*

Ovid, Love Affairs

*Dinners and banquets offer easy access to women's favour, and the pleasures of the grape are not the only entertainment you may find there.*

*As soon as his wings are drenched with wine, Cupid grows drowsy and stirs not from his place. But soon he'll be up and shaking the wine from his wings, and beware the man or woman who receives a sprinkling! Wine fills the heart with thoughts of love and makes it prompt to catch on fire.*

*Then is the time for laughter, the poor man plucks up courage and imagines he's a millionaire. Brows unpucker and hearts expand; every tongue's inspired by truthfulness, and calls a spade a spade.*

*We've often lost our heart to a pretty girl at dinner. Bringing love and wine together is adding fuel to fire indeed. Don't judge a woman by candle-light, it's deceptive. If you really want to know what she's like, look at her by daylight, and when you're sober. Night covers a multitude of blemishes and imperfections. At night there is no such thing as an ugly woman! If you want to look at precious stones, or coloured cloth, you take them out into the light of day; and it's by daylight you should judge a woman's face and figure.*

Ovid Ars Amores (The art of love)

3. Women and education

Really annoying is the woman who, as soon as she takes her place on the dining couch, praises poets such as Virgil, compares and ranks the various other poets, and weighs Virgil and Homer on a pair of scales. Grammar teachers, surrender! Professors of public speaking, defeated! Guests, silent! Not even a lawyer will get a word in. so loud and shrill are her words that you might think that pots were being banged together and bells were being rung!

If she wants to appear learned and eloquent she should wear a man’s clothing. Don't marry a woman who speaks like a politician – or who knows every history book. There should be some things in books which she doesn’t understand. I hate a woman who reads books on grammar, who obeys all the alaws about correct speech, who quotes verses of poets I’ve never heard of, moldy old stuff that a real man shouldn’t worry about. Let her drone on to her stupid girlfriend!

Juvenal *Satires* 6.434-456

4. Women and politics

*If each of us men, fellow citizens, had decided to keep the authority of the husband we would have less trouble with groups of women. But as it is they are now afflicting our political decisions!*

*They want to get rid of the Oppian Law, which stops women spending precious money on their mad desires! Gold jewellery, expensive clothing and feasts! What a disgrace! What a waste! That money could be put to far better use!*

*Indeed, to get to this meeting, I had to come right through a crowd of women. If I had not thought for their husband’s embarrassment, I would have shouted “What kind of behavior is this? Running around in public and blocking streets and talking to other women’s husbands? It is not right, even in your own homes, for you to concerns yourselves with which laws are passed or removed. That’s what I would have said.*

*Our ancestors were not willing to let women conduct any business. They wanted them to remain under the control of their fathers, brothers and husbands. We, for heaven’s sake, now allow them to mingle with us! They desire freedom in all matters! I do not wish to live in a state that lets them have this!*

Marcus Porcius Cato being quoted by Livy (The Oppian Law was removed!)

5. Scandalous behavior!

The Roman writer Sallust writes about a Roman woman named Sempronia. Sempronia an intelligent, well-educated, and talented upper class Roman, had supported a Roman terrorist (Catiline) and thereby scandalized the “decent” citizens of Rome.

‘Fortune had blessed Sempronia with beauty and good birth, and then with a husband and children. She had studied Greek and Latin literature. She could play instruments and dance, although with more skill than is necessary for an honest woman. There was nothing she valued less than honour and decency; it was difficult to decide what she wasted more – her money or her reputation. She was so filled with burning lust that she more often made advances to men then they did to her. She had often broken promises, dishonoured credit agreements, been an accessory to murder, and plunged headlong into poverty because of her extravagance.’

6. Emotional control and patience

In this letter to his friend Nepos, the Roman writer Pliny describes the courage of Arria, wife of Caecina Paetus. When her husband was ordered by the emperor Claudius in AD 42 to end his own life, he hesitated to do so.

‘Arria’s husband, Paetus, was ill. So was her son, and neither was expected to recover. The son died, who was so dear to his parents. Arria made arrangements for the funeral and attended the funeral without her husband knowing. In fact, whenever she entered his room, she pretended that their son was alive and even feeling better. Then, when the tears which she held back for a long time overwhelmed her, she left the room. After she had wept, she dried her eyes, regained her composure and returned calm.

Her best known deed was, of course, heroic, when she unsheathed the sword, stabbed herself in the breast, pulled out the sword and handed it to her husband, saying these immortal words: “Paetus, it does not hurt.’

The Romans maintained a double standard for sexual loyalty in marriage (fidelity). A wife was considered adulterous if she had sexual relations with any man except her husband, but a man was adulterous only if his sexual partner was the wife of another man. A good wife, moreover, put up with her husband’s affairs without complaint.

‘Tertia Aemilia, was a woman of such generosity and patience that, although she knew that one of her slave girls was attracting the sexual attention of her husband, she pretended not to notice. For she considered it inappropriate for a woman to make charges against a great man such as her husband. In fact, after her husband had died, Tertis freed the slave girl.’

Valerius Maximus ‘Memorable words and deeds’

7. Virtues of women

*‘Praise for all good women is simple because their qualities do not require a variety of words. Since it is difficult for a women to earn praise in different areas we must celebrate the things of which they are worthy. My mother, who was very dear to me, deserved greater praise than all the others because in modesty, moral integrity, chastity, obedience, wool working and loyalty she was equal and similar to other excellent women, nor was any other woman greater than her in hard work, virtue or wisdom.’*

Funeral oration to Murdia