

SEMINAR ON WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH:
1. *Women in the Græco-Roman world of the New Testament*

1. Roman funerary epitaph:

Lucius Aurelius Hermia, freedman of Lucius, a butcher from the Viminal hill. She who has gone before me by reason of fate, chaste in body, my only wife, loving, was possessed of my heart. She lived faithful to a faithful husband with equal devotion. She never let avarice keep her from her duty. Aurelia, freedwoman of Lucius.

2. Tertullian *To His Wife* 2.8, trans. William P. LeSaint, *Tertullian, Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage* (1951 ed.; repr. New York/Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, n.d.), 35–36:

What kind of yoke is between two believers, who share one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service? Both are brethren, both fellow servants, with no difference of spirit or of flesh—nay, they are truly “two in one flesh.” ...Neither hides anything from the other; neither shuns the other; neither is troublesome to the other.

3. Melissa (3rd century BC), Letter to Clearete:

Melissa to Clearete, greetings.

Of your own volition it appears to me that you have the characteristics of what is good. For you wish zealously to hear [teaching] about a wife’s adornment. It gives a good indication that you intend to perfect yourself according to virtue. It is necessary then for the free and modest [*sōphrona*] wife to live with her lawful husband adorned with quietness, white and clean in her dress, plain but not costly, simple but not elaborate or excessive. For she must reject garments shot with purple or gold. For these are used by courtesans in soliciting men generally, but if she is to be attractive to one man, her own husband, the ornament of a wife is her manner and not her dress. And a free and modest [*sōphrona*] wife must appear attractive to her own husband, but not to the man next door, having on her cheeks the blush of modesty rather than of rouge and powder, and a good and noble bearing and decency and modesty [*sōphrosynēn*] rather than gold and emerald. For it is not in expenditure on clothing and looks that the modest woman [*sōphrona*] should express her love of the good but in the management and maintenance of her household, and pleasing her own husband, given that he is a moderate man, by fulfilling his wishes. For the husband’s will ought to be engraved as law on a decent wife’s mind and she must live by it. And she must consider that the dowry she has brought with her that is best and greatest of all is her order and trust in both the beauty and wealth of the soul rather than in money and appearance. As for money and looks, time, hostility, illness and fortune take them away: rather the adornment of soul lasts till death with women who possess it.¹

¹ Trans. Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 72–73.

4. Valerius Maximus, 6.3.9 in Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Weidemann, *Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 47:

Egnatius Maecenius killed his wife by beating her with a stick for being drunk on wine. Not only was he not summoned to court for doing this, but he was not even criticized by anyone; all right thinking men considered that she deserved what she got because of her lack of self-control. It is agreed that any woman who drinks without restraint puts any virtue she may have at risk and risks falling prey to every vice.

5. Katherine G. Evans. "Domestic Violence and Women's Rights in Roman Egypt: The Case of P. Oxy. VI.903", *Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature* (1992): 4:

Concerning all the insults he spoke against me. He shut away his own slaves and mine together with my foster-daughters and his agent and son for seven whole days in his cellars, having assaulted his slaves and my slave Zoe and half killed them with the beating, and he applied fire to my foster-daughters, having stripped them completely naked which is contrary to the laws. He also said to the same foster-daughters, "Give up all of her things," and they said, "She has nothing with us." To the slaves he was beating he said, "What did she carry out of my house?" But they said while being tortured, "Nothing at all was carried out but everything is safe and sound." Zoilus went to see him because he had shut away his foster-son, and he said to him, "Did you come on account of your foster-son or on account of such a woman, to babble about her?" He swore in the presence of the bishops and of his brothers, "Henceforward I will not hide all my keys from her (he trusted his slaves but would not trust me) and I will stop and I will not insult her." And so there was a wedding, and after the agreement of these things and the oaths, he again hid all the keys from me. When I had gone out to the church at Sambatho, he had the doors shut before me to turn me aside saying. "For what reason have you come to the church?" Then he said many cruel things to my face and through his nose. And concerning 100 *artabae* of wheat due to the state in my name, he paid nothing, not a single *artaba*. He shut away the books having laid hold of them saying, "You pay the price of the hundred *artabae*." He paid nothing which has been said. He said to his slaves, "Provide helpers to shut her away also." His assistant Chooos was carried off to prison, and Euthalamus provided a surety for him which was insufficient. So I took it upon myself to provide a little more for him, namely Chooos. Then I encountered him at Antinoopolis having my bathing-bag [?] in which I had my ornaments. He said to me, "I will take for myself what you have with you on account of what you gave for my assistant Chooos as surety because of his imprisonment." His mother will provide witness concerning all these things. And concerning his slave Anilla, he continues to distress my soul, both at Antinoopolis and here, saying, "Get rid of this slave because she knows equally well how to get what she wants," probably wanting to entangle me, and on this pretext to take away whatever I have myself. But I refused to get rid of her, and he continued to say, "In the course of a month I will take a mistress for myself." God knows these things.



TERENTIUS NEO AND HIS WIFE



FUNERARY STELE OF LUCIUS AURELIUS HERMIA



GRATIDIA AND GRATIDIUS LIBANUS