

Obra galardonada con el
Premio Géza Alföldy 2021
de la *Societas Internationalis*
Epigraphiae Graecae et Latinae



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INSTRUMENTA



SUMPTUARY SPECIALISTS AND CONSUMER ELITES IN ROME'S WORLD ORDER

Jordi Pérez González



UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA

Edicions



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A mi madre, a mi padre y a J  ssica

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INTRODUCTION

The work presented here is the result of a five-year study of the sumptuary trade within a specific time and space. It starts at the end of the first century BC, when Augustus took the reins of Rome's government, and spans until the first third of the third century AD, at the time of the Severan dynasty, when the presence of epigraphic samples (which were so numerous in previous time periods, and gave us first-hand knowledge of the characters linked to this trade) began to decline. In this sense, we are dealing with a historical period commonly accepted as the peak of Rome's historical splendour, which also coincides with the golden age in the long-distance trade in Classical antiquity.

Since Augustus' creation of the new State, this trade was linked to the figure of the *princeps*. The emperor ruled the recently conquered territories with the help of trusted individuals, who acted as an extension of his person in the Roman provinces. The continuous transformation of the Roman Empire, the riches of the elites, the new consumption models tied to the exhibition of luxury developed by the Imperial house and its elites, and the spread of an ever more dynamic economy with extensive commercial networks, permitted – once contact with the eastern people had been established – international exchanges to develop at a scale never seen before.

From a spatial perspective, this study has two ambits. The first and foremost is the capital of the Empire, Rome. Here, the great concentration of riches belonging to the urban elites promoted the apparition of new sumptuary crafts, as well as an increase in the number of intermediate characters involved in the commercialisation of luxury products. The second spatial ambit of analysis are the territories whose singularity allowed the exploitation and production of those goods that are the focus of the present work. The great majority of these territories are located to the east of the Roman Empire and are mostly territories or nations with coast on the Indian Ocean, as well as the distant *Serica* (present day China).

To understand where the goods favoured by the urban elites came from, we must go beyond the provincial borders of the Empire and look at the other states that were involved in the international trade between continents throughout Classical antiquity.

At certain points, the present study will venture outside the established temporal framework in order to visit certain case studies that are needed to better understand the subject at hand. This gives the study a certain flexibility, one that extends also to the spatial frame, as we must include certain epigraphic evidences from outside the metropolis in order to better understand the true etymological meaning of some of the artisans here studied.

This work is not isolated, but part of a line of research that started during the 1980s inside the field of Classical History, with several works focused on the interprovincial distribution of food and how this influenced the politics and economy of the Roman Empire (for example the works by the CEIPAC research group, started in 1986 by Remesal, and later continued by Revilla 1993, Carreras, Funari 1998, Carreras 2000, Aguilera 2002, Rovira 2004, Berni 2008, Pons 2009, Bermúdez 2014; 2017, Garrote 2015, Marimon 2017 and Moros 2019).

These works show the coexistence of a directed and free market, as the Roman State was in control of many basic goods, while their distribution and transportation were left to privates. They also bring to light the inner workings of the relationship between the state and the private entities who took part in the wholesale inter-province trade. This state-controlled distribution of basic goods was utilised by the free trade in luxury goods, which made use of its structures and trade routes.

Until now, this line of research has focused on the relationship between the Roman State and the private entities in the ambit of wholesale goods.

We soon realised, however, that the aspect that most interested us had received little attention.

In this sense, the bibliographic production regarding the retail trade, especially the sumptuary trade, is much lower, with few specific works. The general trend has been to follow the line of works by Friedländer (1862; 1864; 1871), Carcopino (1939), Paoli (1942), Etienne (1966) or Pavolini (1986). All of them addressed the retail trade in some way, including the distribution and the commercial topography of Rome, but none analysed the small trade in such a global way as the work done by Ruyt (1983), or more recently by Holleran (2012). So far, there have been very few works that focus on the last phase of the distribution and commercialisation of goods in the city of Rome. Therefore, by choosing this topic we intend to partially reduce a gap in the literature, which has only been considered in its entirety by Holleran and, more recently Giacomo (2016a), who places special emphasis on the urban artisans dedicated to the commercialisation of jewels in Rome.

* * *

According to the *Real Academia Española*, the word *lujo* comes from the Latin *luxus*, and offers three definitions: “1. (m). Demasía en el adorno, en la pompa y en el regalo. 2. (m). Abundancia de cosas no necesarias. 3. (m). Todo aquello que supera los medios normales de alguien para conseguirlo”. It follows that three basic characteristics are what define the sumptuary specialists of goods, namely that they are exuberant, superfluous and expensive. In addition to these, other characteristics may have been considered during the Classical era. In any way, several elements were needed to establish the difference between a good that was sumptuary and another that was not.

One way to characterise a good as precious was its origin. Roman luxury considered the distant origin of many goods that were perceived as being ‘very’ different from their own. In the

next chapters, we detail their places of extraction and production, and how their exotic nature increased its value in the international trading network. The rarity of these goods within their own production places added to this particularity in some occasions, in general giving them a higher worth. As an example, the best silk, pearls and gemstones were always from the foreign Indian territories and the distant *Serica*, which by itself made them the most coveted among the Roman elites. These goods were sold to the urban elites and the most select consumers, who emulated the consuming behaviour of the aristocracy and believed themselves to be part of the same group by participating in the same elements.

The rarity of the good and its distant origin were both linked to two other characteristics that made the product more expensive: the cost of the long-distance transport, and their singularity. This latter aspect has been treated by authors such as Hirsch (1976), who was the first to coin the term ‘positional good’ to refer to certain objects. According to the author, there are, as a general rule, a certain number of naturally rare goods that cannot be made, merely redistributed. In this sense, precious metals such as gold and silver are a clear example. Owning them generates a degree of satisfaction to the owner above that of other individuals (who are not owners) and, due to the reduced number of them available in the market, the prices they reach are affordable only to the richest.

In this respect, the originality of several products must also have been understood a sumptuary characteristic (Veen 2003).

Another element that gave prestige to a product was its authorship by a renowned artist. The importance of works made by painters such as *Spurius Tadius*, *Arellius*, *Cornelius Pinus*, or architects such as *Facundus Novius* or *Apollodorus* of Damascus, along with many others, contributed to their works being in greater demand and, thus higher priced. This was possible, firstly due to the fame acquired by the artists, and secondly due to the quality of their work.

The economic conjuncture of the period (1st to 3rd century AD) caused many of the Greco-Oriental artists to emigrate to the city, where the urban elites were eager to compete for obtaining their services. We must not forget that after Greece’s conquest, people of this territory were able to carry on living in a manner that was very similar to how they had been. Since the beginning, the many arts developed in the periods of splendour in the history of Rome were notably influenced by Greek culture, to the point where it was normal for Roman nobility to prefer to be educated according to Greek philosophy and science. Quoting Horatio, *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit in agresti Latio* (Epist. 2. 1, 156). Greek artists took advantage of this pro-Greek sentiment among the Romans and became the true *influencers* of their time.

In addition to the artist’s fame and the quality of the work, the final cost of the product was related to the difficulty of the work and the time needed to make it. In this sense, trends also defined the market value of certain products in a preindustrial economy.

Lastly, the other important element that defined a good as sumptuary resided in its own age, namely the antiquity of the object.

All these factors were crucial in increasing the prices of these products. As a consequence, their rising cost made them exclusive enough that they would have only been accessible to a select few. Among this select group, luxury was understood as “un modo de vida propio, que no todos pueden disfrutar, sino que está reservado a las capas sociales superiores, siendo el equivalente latino

del concepto griego de *tryphe*” (Martínez-Pinna 1996, 36), and its consumption by the big owners had three causes: “la derivada de su propia condición de ciudadanos acomodados, el placer de su uso y disfrute, y la ostentación pública de las mismas” (Ferrer Maestro 2012, 247).

* * *

There were many luxuries in Roman times: spices, works of art, food, slaves, etc. However, the present work is dedicated exclusively to the wearable, ornamental luxuries that Romans (both males and females) used, especially in public. Here we are speaking of jewels, dresses and ointments.

To go deeper into the subject, it was necessary to analyse it from a new perspective, highlighting the epigraphic testimonies that have been rarely used until now. Although some original samples of jewels, dresses and ointments have survived until the present day, most of the precious metals were re-melted, the pearls and gemstones either lost or removed during the many pillages suffered by Rome, the best fabrics decomposed, and the finest perfumes lost to the passage of time. Therefore, by resorting to epigraphy as a source, we can know the different agents involved in the sumptuary trade in Classical antiquity, and how they related to the different members of the Roman elite.

Among the works carried out, the reviewing of the multiple *corpora*, databases and other works that mentioning the artisans of interest has been the most fruitful.

The different inscriptions that reference the sumptuary merchants and specialised urban craftsmen were initially gathered in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL). We have included a catalogue with a total of **231** funeral inscriptions where these artisans are mentioned. The production of this *corpus* is a novelty, as it is the first time that the information present in the principal online epigraphic databases has been gathered together.

Of the several databases of monumental epigraphy that we have considered, three are the most relevant, either due to the high quantity of data stored there, or due to the quality of the data. In this respect, the following databases stand out: Epigraphic-Datenbank Clauss-Slaby (EDCS, <http://www.manfredclauss.de>); Epigraphic Database Roma (EDR, <http://www.edr-edr.it>); and Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (HD, <http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de>).

After consulting the literary sources containing social information (which had already been dealt with by contemporary authors), it was also necessary to review the legal sources gathered in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, which offers us information regarding the legal organisation that affected the Roman merchants. This was needed in order to better understand the normative character of this type of commerce.

We have also relied on the study of different topographical and archaeological sources from Rome. These have allowed us to locate the position of the commercial businesses of the merchants, rebuilding the commercial map of the city during different time periods. In this way, we can see whether existing buildings, streets or neighbourhoods specialised in the commerce of certain goods.

* * *

In the first part, we focus on the routes most used by Italo-Roman merchants, and review the entry points for prestige goods arriving from the East. The farther the merchants reached, the greater the difficulties they encountered, but also the greater the profit. By analysing the role played by the *inter imperia* merchants, we can see how organised the trade in these goods was, and which policies were adopted by the different states that took part in this international commerce. At this point, we discuss the existence of multiple routes for accessing the far East along the well-known ‘Silk Road(s)’, and how they were travelled in search of the silk that was being produced at *Serica*, which was later sold thousands of miles away by the *sericarii*. On the border between the Roman Empire and Han dynasty China, both powers clashed against the interests of Parthia and Kushan India, whose geostrategic position within the trade network made them a mandatory waypoint between the West and the East. Once trade relationships were established, it was clear that the Parthians and Kushans wished to keep their role as middlemen in the lucrative international trade, and had the means to stop Romans and Chinese from progressing any further. This idea is supported by several references, which mention attempts by the Parthians to stop embassies and expeditions sent by China to Rome.

For the first time, a comparison of the Chinese and Indian chronicles with classical (Roman) sources has allowed us to verify the similarity of the comments regarding the riches of the region, which encompasses the territories from Egypt to the Near East. This, in addition to the results obtained via the application of Network Theory by Stanley Milgram in 1967, show the main sumptuary markets as being a series of cities, located between continents, which stand out by being mandatory waypoints, that is *hubs*, in the trade network.

These cities were usually at the end of trade routes that traversed seas and deserts before finally reaching Roman territory. The results of our research shows a preferred use of several cities in Egypt and the Near East as required stops by the merchants involved in this international trade, including Alexandria, Coptos, Berenice, Myos Hormos, Clysma, Petra, Palmyra, Tyre, Byblos, Seleucia Pieria, etc. These cities acted as centres for the demand and sale of sumptuary goods coming from the East. In this way, the increasing demand for sumptuary products caused a major development of their infrastructures, as well as improving the condition of the routes, with the aim of ensuring and accelerating this lucrative trade.

The third chapter marks the beginning of the second part of the present work. It is dedicated to deepening our understanding of the craftsmen and merchants directly related to the commercialisation of luxury goods that are mentioned in the Roman monumental epigraphy. For the sake of readability, where a text mentions one of these individuals, we have added a reference to the *corpus* of inscriptions, showing the inscription’s catalogue number between brackets, e.g. {222}. In this way, the reader can easily access the complete text of the inscription and all the other data that is recorded in the individual entry that is available for each inscription.

The second part is divided into three main sections: the first devoted to the artisans and merchants who made and sold jewels, the second to the dyers and traders of the best purples and the most famed fabrics and dresses, and the third focused on the artisans dedicated to the commercialisation of the most valued ointments. We put special emphasis on those cases that allow us to establish a relationship with notable Roman families, as well as on merchants related to the Imperial House, or merchants who, despite being members of the same family, performed different roles within the collectives of interest.

The opening of the first section deals with jewels, and is devoted to the commercialisation of gold and the main protagonists of this retail in Rome (the *aurifices*). Again, we begin the chapter with a brief explanation on the major areas of exploitation. We then explore the etymological diversity used by specialised urban artisans according to the different production phases in the crafting of gold goods, and study the more than forty *aurifices* accounted for in the epigraphy. Thanks to a reading of the *tria nomina* and the discovery of certain texts inside columbariums owned by the Imperial *family*, we have been able to establish a connection between these goldsmiths as members of the Imperial House, especially during the Julio-Claudian dynasty. We also provide a topographic definition of the different commercial areas where these merchants were present. Finally, we make a series of proposals regarding the importance of the ownership of this mineral to the emperor and the *fiscus*, which relate to the hypotheses revealed in the second chapter.

Next, in chapter four, we analyse the pearl merchants (*margaritarii*) present in the city of Rome. We address several issues regarding the status of this trade, along with its main actors. The principal issues are: studying the origin of the most desired pearls; determining the most paradigmatic cases of their commercialisation; and understanding how belonging to this select group of merchants helped to socially promote several members of the collective. In another direction, we also study the topography of the business premises owned by these merchants.

The fifth chapter closes the first section, wherein we analyse the importance of the origin of the gemstones as a part of their added value in Roman markets. In this regard, Pliny's catalogue of gemstones (one of the biggest compilations of gemstones in classical antiquity) has allowed us to know first-hand the properties of each of these stones, their colours and places of extraction. An analysis of the origin of these stones supports the idea that on many occasions the exotic provenance of the object prevailed over the worth of the object itself. In this sense, the most coveted gemstones in the Roman markets came from the East and Africa. Their crafting and commercialisation in Rome was carried out by the *gemmarii*, who were joined by other artisans dedicated to the production of jewels and other precious goods. The title they used to define themselves changed based on the task they performed within the different production phases of these objects. Within the chapter, we identify up to thirty different formulas used to name them.

In this respect, we discuss the aforementioned *margaritarii*, pearl sellers, and the *gemmarii*, gemstones sellers. In the role of engraving stone, we note the figure of the *cavator*, *signarius*, *insignor* and *gemmarum sculptor*, the latter being an engraver of gems. In this same line, it is also worth noting the roles of *sculptor* and *gemmarius sculptor*. Regarding the embedding of gemstones and other reliefs on precious metals, the technique called *chrysographia* and the *crustarii* stand out, both of whom were artisans with expertise in that technique. Other workers of precious metals were the *caelator*, the *samiator*, the *anaglyptarius*, the *excusor*, and the *tritor*, all part of the collective of artisans devoted to the making of reliefs, prints, carvings and engravings on raw metal. In the same line of work, there were other experts focused on the making of crockery and candelabra: the *vascularii* and *candelabrarii*, and not forgetting the *fabri argentarii*. We also note the *argentarii*, the individuals devoted to the commercialisation of silver objects, as opposed to those related to banks. In another line, we note the bronze traders, the *aerarii*, and those who traded in gold, the *aurifices*. Closed related to the working of gold are the roles of *deauratores*, *inauratores*, *brattiarii*, and *barbarii*. At the point where these precious metals were added to the best fabrics, other specialties came up, namely the *aurivestrix* and the *stragularii*, who applied metal threads (the former) and metal embroideries (the latter) on fabrics. In a similar fashion, and

related to the making of metal plaques, was the role of *segmentarius*. Lastly, we note the role of *coronarii* as makers of metals crowns of gold and silver, and the *anularii* as makers of rings.

Chapter six addresses, within a second section, the production and commercialisation of purple in Roman times. While for the previous chapter the number of studies are few and highly specific, in the case of purple it is the exact opposite. The interest in this topic has made it one of the most fertile subjects at the historiographic level. The fame of certain colours soon grabbed the attention of the Roman elites, and during the Imperial era purple became a matter of state, as its use was restricted to a very limited number of people related to the emperor's family. We conduct a brief review of the different *leges sumptuariae* that, since republican times until the rule of Nero, limited its public use and made it harder for the private merchants of this dye to make a profit. In addition to discussing the most prominent places of extraction of this dye, we also review the multiple production techniques of Mediterranean and Atlantic purple.

The role of *purpurarius* is attested in Rome on a dozen occasions. A complete reading of the names of the craftsmen found in these inscriptions allows us to know the agents involved in the purple trade in Rome at the end of the Republic and during the first years of the change of era. Among these are the *Veturii*, the *Bennii*, the *Livii*, the *Vicirii*, the *Clodii*, the *Modii*, and the *Plutii*. This collective showed a great deal of interest in determining the location where they would carry out their business, which gives us a first-hand knowledge of the zones they worked within. The methodology used during the first part of this chapter allows us to deepen our knowledge of the *vestiarii*, a group of artisans that made and commercialised dresses and fabrics in the metropolis.

To close the second part of the book, chapter seven offers a general overview of the perfume and ointment trade in the early Roman Empire. As with the previous chapter, we start with an introduction to the topic, before commenting on the methods and techniques used to make the ointments. In order to analyse the role of these merchants (*unguentarii*), we follow the same schema employed along the second part. We first address these characters as individuals, discussing their social and civil status, gender, age, origin, etc.; then, we look at them as members of a *familia* or *gens*; third, we take into account the place where they worked; and lastly, we consider the time period in which they performed this role.

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