Odour, Perfume, and the Female Body in Ancient Rome

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Lady with phials of perfume, Villa Farnesina, Museo Nazionale,
Rome [Giordano 2007 p. 54 Fig. 21]

‘The room smells of lemon oil, heavy cloth, fading daffodils, the leftover smells of cooking that have made their way from the kitchen or the dining room, and of Serena Joy's perfume: Lily of the Valley. Perfume is a luxury, she must have some private source. I breathe it in, thinking I should appreciate it. It's the scent of pre-pubescent girls, of the gifts young children used to give their mothers for Mother's Day; the smell of white cotton socks and white cotton petticoats, of dusting powder, of the innocence of female flesh not yet given over to hairiness and blood. It makes me feel slightly ill, as if I'm in a closed car on a hot muggy day with an older woman wearing too much face powder.’

Margaret Atwood (1986), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Boston) 80

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of the scented female body in the literary culture of late Republican and early Imperial Rome. Recent years have seen increasing scholarly interest in odour and olfaction in antiquity, building on anthropological and sociological research on the cultural relativism of olfactory perception and its associations and interpretations. Through its connections to sexuality, bodily fluids, and corporeal corruption, odour provides a fascinating lens through which to scrutinise the ancient female body.

To this end, this thesis draws together the fields of sensory studies, the body in antiquity, and ancient gender and sexuality, in order to facilitate the first holistic examination of the ways in which scent was used as a means to categorise and evaluate the character, behaviour, and morality of women in ancient Rome. After an analysis of ancient medical associations surrounding odour and the female body, the thesis examines the key properties and thematic concerns of perfumes, first across a range of Roman texts and then in the detailed assessment of perfumes by Pliny the Elder. It then demonstrates that female odour and perfume were deeply embedded in mythical traditions that were richly adapted by Roman poets and themselves extended to embrace female figures that populated the urban environment of Imperial Rome.

It argues that the relationship between the female body and odour was frequently employed as a means of reasserting Roman hierarchies of gender and power. However, it also argues that the odour of the female body was powerful. Odour invaded, captivated and polluted the bodies it touched, and it was also the sense that best correlates to the traditional ambiguities, dangers, and wiles with which women were associated. The sensory manipulation enabled by perfume stoked these ambiguities and anxieties, permitting women a level of control over the ancient sensorium, potentially deceiving discerning male noses and thus disrupting the very hierarchies which characterised women as socially and biologically inferior.

Contents

Introduction

A woman smells right when she smells of nothing (*mulier recte olet ubi nihil olet*)

Plautus, *The Haunted House* 274[1]

In the 190s BCE, the Roman comic playwright Plautus put these words into the mouth of an elderly female slave, upbraiding her attractive courtesan mistress not to make use of scented unguents.[2] The climax of an extensive adornment scene, in which the slave Scapha urges with increasing force against a variety of beauty treatments, this statement positions scent as central to the assessment of the female body, and as a feature of female sensorial interaction with the world that had to be kept under control. It sets up the premise that women smell (for better or for worse), and then denounces this corporeal property. From this we understand that, to a Roman audience, female odour and perfume use was both expected and condemned. An odourless woman is, Scapha claims, the only acceptable kind, a case which she reinforces through a vivid description of the pungent results of perfume use by malodorous *vetulae:* 'what they smell of you don't know, except for this: you know that they smell bad!'[3]

One and a half centuries later, a recurrence of this sentiment in a letter of Cicero to his friend Atticus suggests that 'a woman smells right when she smells of nothing' may have been something of an adage. Cicero equates his friend's unpretentious, unembellished prose with the unperfumed female body, once again asserting that 'as with women, it smells good because it seems to smell of nothing'.[4] In both cases, the female body is framed as a locus of conflict between virtuous Roman *simplicitas* and implicitly or explicitly inferior *ornamenta;* the battle itself is being

[1] All translations from the Latin are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] On the dating of this play: Fontaine 2014, 517.

[3] Plautus, *The Haunted House* 278. That the audience was expected to share Scapha's disapproving attitude is indicated by several humorous asides on Philolaches' part: 'it's true, and most of you know it': Plautus, *The Haunted House* 80-81; Bradley 2015b, 138.

[4] His own writing, on the other hand, makes liberal metaphorical use of both perfume and cosmetic pigment: *meus autem liber totum Isocrati myrothecium atque omnis eius discipulorum arculas ac non nihil etiam Aristotelia pigmenta consumpsit*: Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 21.1. For further discussion of cosmetics and perfumes as metaphors for elaborate literary style and *odor* in Cicero see Stevens 2008.

fought with and determined by scent. The two combined indicate a cultural norm outside of just one Plautine comic character; that it was not enough for a woman to avoid foul odours, but rather that she should ideally be entirely scentless.

In the context of contemporary Roman society, such an ideal seems remarkable. Perfumed unguents and exotic spices were already widespread in the middle Republic, and this would only increase in the centuries following as Rome further extended its reach into and control over North Africa and the Middle East.[5] Plautus' own corpus itself attests to and often appears to revel in these luxury products, and his plays are filled with fragrant and scented female bodies. Inherent in *The Haunted House's* adornment scene is an underlying tension between cultural ideals and social reality. Perhaps because of this increasing access to perfume and other finery, the social and legal mores of Plautus' day seemed particularly interested in controlling female sensory interaction with the environment.

Ostentatious visibility by women in the public sphere was famously at issue in the Lex Oppia, which forbade the wearing of multi-coloured and purple-trimmed clothing, the use of carriages, and limited the amount of golden jewellery that women could wear.[6] Livy recounts that these sumptuary measures came to an end 195 BCE – contemporary with *The Haunted House* – largely due to the civil disobedience of wealthy Roman women, who took to the streets to demand for its repeal.[7] A few years later, a censorial edict was passed banning the sale of *unguenta exotica* (foreign perfumes). As this edict survives only as a brief reference in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, it is not possible to say with certainty that this explicitly targeted female perfume use, but there seems little doubt that this would have been its effect; perfumed unguents, although also used by men, seem to have been predominately the remit of women.[8] Women's sensorial

[5] Gowers 1993, 64; Allen 2015, 29-30.

[6] On the *Lex Oppia* and Roman sumptuary legislation: Segal 1968, 11-14; Johnston 1980; Faure 1987, 217; Dauster 2003; Rosivach 2006; Zanda 2011, 19-25, 114-117. Patricia Johnston examines in detail a passage from Plautus' *The Little Carthaginian* which seems to directly interact with contemporary debates over sumptuary laws like the Lex Oppia.

[7] Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 34.1.3-4, 8.3; Orosius, *History Against the Pagans* 4.20.14; Tacitus, *Annals* 3.33.4; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 9.1.3; Zonaras, *Extracts of History* 9.17.1; Pomeroy 1975, 177-181; Culham 1982, 786-793; Gowers 1993, 70; Zanda 2011, 114-117.

[8] There is some controversy regarding the dating of this edict. Pliny attributes it to the censors Publius Licinius Crassus and Lucius Julius Caesar which, if correct, would put the edict at 89 BCE rather than 189 BCE. However, David Potter argues that it may well be the censorship rather than the date which

interaction with the social environment of Rome was a subject of enduring anxiety, and attempts to police female bodies and behaviour extended far beyond the aphorisms of literature.

Such attempts to control the female body and its sensory engagement with the social environment might well seem strikingly familiar. The history of Western Europe and beyond is littered with social censure of female odour and perfume use; the figure of the perfumed seductress, to take one example, has proven exceptionally tenacious, as has that of the foul-smelling whore.[9] Although contemporary society seems to be experiencing a time of increased flexibility and questioning regarding many such established markers of gender or sexuality, the fact remains that for the most part this association between perfume and women persists. The longevity and cultural reach of such stereotypes make it tempting to view the relationship between odour, gender, and society as static and universal, but both historical and anthropological investigation demonstrates conclusively that this is not the case.

Comparative studies of different cultures, such as the Ethiopian Dassanech, the Ongee of the Andaman Islands, and the Colombian Desana also indicate that attitudes towards odour are far from universal.[10] To take one example of olfaction which is intimately tied to sex and gender, the taboo surrounding menstruation appears alarmingly stubborn and widespread across both time and cultures, with malodour being a common characteristic attached to menstrual blood and to menstruating women.[11] The sensory aversion expressed in Roman sources, as this thesis shall

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is incorrect, since the return of the Roman armies from Asia, to which Pliny makes reference, is touted as 'a turning point in the history of luxury at Rome': Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 39.6.7; Lintott 1972, 628; Griffin 1976, 93; Astin 1988, 26; Connors 1997, 305; Potter 1999, 184-185; White 2012, 128. Connors even goes so far as to suggest that the audience's reaction to another scent-heavy Plautine play, *Casina* (185 BCE) might have been influenced by the recent passing of this edict. On Pliny and perfume see chapter 3.

[9] An Elizabethan priest talks of the 'inchanted odors' with which 'Harlots deck and adorn themselves' to attract men, John Donne speaks of 'a leprous harlot's breath' in the 17th century, and 18th century improvements in sanitation were thought to be accompanied by both a disappearance in foul odours and prostitutes; Corbin 1986, 143-144; Classen 1992, 142-143; Reinarz 2014, 118-125. Another female body which often appears throughout both classical antiquity and later European society as foul-smelling or dangerously fragrant is the witch or enchantress: Classen 1992, 143-144.

[10] Classen et al. 1995; Reinarz 2014; Allen 2015.

[11] An olfactory disgust is attached to menstrual blood and menstruating women in cultures as disparate as the Desana of Colombia, the Hua of Papua New Guinea, and the Amazonian Bororo, and can also be seen in the ritual bathing encouraged in the wake of a period among Arabic cultures: Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, 29, 143; Kanafani 1983, 74-75; Meigs 1984, 70-71; Crocker 1985, 60; Buckley and

discuss, similarly paints menstruation and menstruating women as polluting and malodorous. The case of the menstruating woman encapsulates neatly the many competing and complicating factors involved in the perception and evaluation of odour. Early anthropological research posited the existence of a universal menstrual taboo, which positions menstrual blood as 'inherently dirty' and as naturally eliciting repulsion by men, who do not experience this physical phenomenon.[12] However, this has been challenged by more recent work noting the great diversity of cultural attitudes towards and beliefs about menstruation; the Dassanech positively value menstrual blood, as do the Ongee, for whom a woman's ability to rid herself of blood grants her the ability to regulate her odour, rather than inflicting malodour upon her body.[13]

The degree of taboo and disgust sometimes attached to menstruation is shaped not by any universal, biological, or 'natural' aversion. In fact the biological reality of menstrual odour often seems irrelevant, as indicated by the persistence of such aversions in modern British society, in which social norms surrounding hygiene and physical interaction render menstruation more or less olfactorily undetectable outside of specific intimate contexts.[14] The foul odour so often assigned to menstruation and to menstruating women speaks far more to cultural attitudes towards the female body and sexuality than it does to biological reality. Olfactory perception and evaluation is determined to a great extent by cultural attitudes as well as by personal experience, inclination, and situational context.[15]

Gottleib 1988; Classen et al. 1994, 135-138. The image of the menstruating woman as a locus of pollution has historically been an enduring aspect of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, accompanied by religious and social exclusion for menstruating women: Phipps, 1980; Steinberg, 1997; Cohen 1991, 286; Dawson 2005, 472; Koren 2009. Recent studies of beliefs about menstruation in India recorded that female participants reported the existence of a smell which could cause food to go bad – not unlike the polluting, corrupting odour of menstruating women described in Pliny's *Natural History*, as explored in chapter 1, pp. 37-45: Garg and Anand 2015, 184-186; Kumar and Srivastava 2011, 594-604.

[12] McArthur 1992, 127.

[13] Almagor 1987, 111, 115, 474; Buckley and Gottleib 1988; Classen 1992, 141; Classen et al. 1994, 137; Hoskins 2002, 299-301; Reinarz 2014, 110, 117; Van de Walle and Renne 2002.

[14] See Hite 1989; Laws 1991, 58, 60-61.

[15] Classen et al. 1994, 1-4. The individual and subjective nature of scent is widely understood: Herz 2007, 39. As Allen notes, this leads to something of a paradox in which 'preference for odors is indicative of a certain cultural like-mindedness, but on the other hand remarkably specific to the individual and also susceptible to deliberate manipulation': Allen 2015, 2-3. Since the project which I am undertaking aims to explore the broad cultural associations of scent, these characteristics of olfaction will be only occasionally relevant. Nevertheless, the paradox which they create certainly adds to the

With all of this in mind, this thesis explores the ways in which literary sources as diverse as myth, medicine, poetry, theatre, and natural history interacted to construct the odour of the female body in the literary culture of late Republican and early Imperial Rome. This thesis explores the role of scent in the representation of the female body by the Roman literary elite. It aims to provide a holistic examination of the ways in which scent, both natural and unnatural, was used as a means to categorise and evaluate the character, behaviour, morality, and intent of the woman to whom it belonged. It argues for the existence in Roman society of olfactory codes which associated foul odours with undesirable female bodies and behaviour, and fragrance with the inverse.

Odour conveyed important information about the state of the body, and about behaviour and character. This was true for the entire spectrum of Roman society, but the odour of women was particularly fraught. 'The body' in Greco-Roman society was already a central focus of olfactory anxiety, but it was also generically male. The female body was at best a divergence from this norm, and at worst an aberration, but it was also their defining characteristic.[16] Maria Wyke's discussion of the Roman rhetoric of female adornment makes the case that woman in antiquity was 'essentially a bodily being'. This alignment of women with their bodies at the expense of their minds reinforced the social hierarchies which subordinated women to men, and denied them 'full status as both human and citizen'.[17] Lacking the mental and moral capacity of men, it was therefore not only justifiable but necessary for men to have control over female bodies; this was important both to the maintenance of the social and natural order and to ensuring the legitimate inheritance of power and resources from one generation to the next. The necessity of Roman society and of individual men to assert control was reinforced by the well-established and enduring belief that women themselves were incapable of adequate self-control. One of the ways in which this bodily infirmity manifested was through a greater susceptibility to, and propensity to emit smells.

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inherently unsettled and unsettling nature of olfaction – which resists capture, categorisation, and description – and perhaps goes some way to explaining why odour so often seems such a point of tension, anxiety and contradiction.

[16] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 728a18, 737a, 775a14-20; *On the Parts of Animals* 650a8; King 1998, 10; Doherty 2001, 139. See chapter 1.

[17] Wyke 1994, 135.

The tension between the reality of odour and its cultural reception is particularly marked with odours attached the body, above all those associated with sex, excreta, disease, and death. These bodily odours speak to many deeply significant determinants of social value in the Greco-Roman world, including class, gender, age, state of the body, and even character.[18] Odours connected to sex might be constructed as positive, erotically attractive and linked to procreation and pleasure, but equally might be denounced as the foul stench of depravity. Sweat and other bodily odour could be, among other things, positively valued as evidence of graft and honest labour, or else martial or athletic achievement, or alternatively as indicators of the poor hygiene, menial labour and squalid living conditions of the poor. The odours of excreta, disease, and death, are, unsurprisingly, rarely if ever positively valued, and it is these scents which reveal something of the power of odour. Odours associated with or deemed indicative of these states point to a danger, and are often constructed as active agents of harm, exuded from the offending bodies in an intangible and invasive force.

It is this intangible, invasive nature which contributes to anxieties surrounding odour, making scent a potent force and olfactory perception simultaneously powerful and dangerous. Kate Allen's work on odour in Roman literature identifies two key features of scent, as a locus of knowledge and identity, and as a phenomenon with the ability to cross boundaries and to cause contamination.[19] Smelling requires the inhaling of odorous air into the body, and hence while the sense can grant the sensor vital knowledge, the act of smelling (active or passive) renders the sensor potentially vulnerable to the scent's influence. As this thesis will demonstrate, these themes of knowledge, identity, boundary-crossing, and contamination are particularly relevant when applied to the odours of the female body specifically. Incapable of controlling their own bodily boundaries, female bodies were not only acutely vulnerable to odour's influence, but also posed a unique threat. Their foul-smelling bodies could render others in the vicinity similarly malodorous or even cause them physical harm, while sweet scent (although pleasant) also granted women an uncomfortable degree of power with which to seduce and control men.

[18] Harvey 2006, 1-2.
[19] Allen 2015, 12.

Into this already pungent mix, my thesis adds a crucial ingredient: perfume. As a scent applied to the skin and hair, perfume could exert a significant degree of influence over the body and mind, and the strong odours derived from exotic spices rendered a perfumed body not merely a pleasant sensory object but gave it the potential to alter the bodies of others. The application of perfumes to the body was also often characterised as a uniquely feminine practice – although, as shall be discussed, there is good reason to believe that both men and women regularly wore scented unguents.[20] The influx of spices and *unguenta* from the East throughout the late Republic and early Empire stoked Roman anxieties surrounding perfumes as decadent, corrupting and effeminising foreign *luxuria*. Perfumes were also, due to the influence of odour over the mind and senses, potent tools for deception and seduction with the ability to dupe the senses. In a society where the physical makeup of the female body was central to explanations of the female sex's subordination to the male, the ability of perfume to warp others' perceptions of that body held a dangerous potential to undermine or reverse established power dynamics.

1. Modern scholarship

a. Sensory studies

Anthropological studies which examine the senses across many different historical and contemporary cultures reveal the highly subjective and culturally constructed nature of sensory perception, and also striking points of cross-cultural parallel.[21] Sensory studies in the humanities, after trailing behind a much more established body of scholarship in the social sciences, are currently enjoying something of a boom. Recent years have seen many new publications exploring this topic, including Mark Smith's *Sensing the Past*.[22] The sense most explored thus far has been vision, which has been privileged above the other senses across much of Western history, but the balance is steadily being redressed, through studies of other

[20] See chapter 2, pp. 97-103.

[21] For more anthropological publications on the senses see Bull and Back 2003; Classen 1993; Howes 2003; 2005; Classen 2005; Korsmeyer 2005; Drobnick 2006; Edwards and Bhaumik 2008; Classen 2012; Classen and Howes 2014; Reinarz 2014.

[22] Smith 2007.

individual senses or volumes dedicated to the senses as a whole.[23] Bloomsbury's six-volume series *A Cultural History of the Senses*, edited by Constance Classen, considers the entirety of the sensorium across broad swathe of history, beginning with an edited volume dedicated to the senses in antiquity.[24] Another related field which has embraced sensory studies is archaeology, as in the recent volume edited Eleanor Betts, *Senses of The Empire*, which approaches the Roman archaeology through a sensory lens, strongly informed by the phenomenological approach developed by Heidegger.[25] Attesting to the current popularity of the field in Classics, the past few years have also seen another series of six volumes on *The Senses in Antiquity*, edited by Mark Bradley and Shane Butler.[26]

Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses, the first volume in the series, is particularly relevant for this thesis, as it establishes that smell played a part in 'the broader sensorium' of Greco-Roman literary culture.[27] It establishes a use of the term synaesthesia – separate from the neuroscientific definition of actual sense-confusion or cross-stimulation – as the 'sensory blending' experienced by the audience of a text (and perhaps also of art).[28] Bradley's chapter in this volume argues that ancient colour perception was 'an object-centred experience', with colour terminology pertaining not to abstract wavelengths of light but to specific objects or kinds of object. Colour was therefore often inherently multi-sensory and laden with associations.[29] Odour is more ambiguous and elusive than colour, but the Roman experience of odour was nevertheless often object-centred. The language of scent was heavily dependent upon comparison, and many of the odours explored throughout this thesis were closely tied

[23] Vision was touted as the most reliable of the senses, and was tied closely with Humanist emphasis upon observation as a foundation for knowledge. Allen 2015, 7. Sight in the classics: Elsner 1995; Fredrick 2002; Villard 2002; Clarke 2003; Merker 2003; Zanker 2004; Maiatsky 2005; Morales 2005; Salzman-Mitchell 2005; Smith 2005; Villard 2005; Bartsch 2006; Elsner 2007; Bradley 2009; Lovatt 2013; Lovatt and Vout 2013; Squire 2016. Sound in the Classics: Kaimio 1977; Edwards 2002; Moore 2012; Butler and Nooter 2019. Taste in the Classics: Gowers 1993;
Rudolph 2018.

[24] Toner, 2014; Newhauser 2016; Roodenburg 2016; Vila 2016; Classen, 2016; Howes, 2016

[25] Betts 2017. See also: Tilley 1994; Bartosiewicz 2003; Fahlander and Kjellström 2010; Avery 2013; Day 2013; Weddel 2013; Murphy 2013; Hamilakis 2014; Koloski-Ostrow 2015; Haug and Kreuz 2016;

[26] Butler and Purves 2013; Bradley 2015a; Squire 2016; Rudolph 2018; Purves 2018; Butler and Nooter 2019.

[27] Butler and Purves 2013; Bradley 2015a, 8.

[28] Butler and Purves 2013, 1.

[29] Bradley 2013, 131-132.

to a specific object referent. One example that Bradley highlights when considering colour illustrates this: Tyrian purple (*purpura*) carried with it associations of wealth and prestige but was also linked to the fishy stink of the murex snails from which it was harvested.[30] While this might mean that the colour purple conjured up these associations, the same associations of expense and colour accompanied the distinctive odour as well.

The increasing interest in sensory studies across Classics more broadly has also been reflected, in a growth in the study of odour and olfaction in historical societies.[31] Alain Corbin's *Le miasme et la jonquille* (1982) established the significant role played by odour in both everyday life and the broader social order in eighteenth-century France, and was instrumental in encouraging scholars to consider the previously unstudied importance of olfaction and olfactory perception in historical societies, and since then the field has expanded considerably.[32] Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott's *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* is similarly significant in bridging the divide between pre-existing sociological and anthropological work on smell and the less-explored study of the history of smell.[33] It is divided into three parts, the first discussing odour throughout the history of Western Europe from Greco-Roman antiquity to the twentieth century, the second exploring ethnographic accounts from across the world, and the third examining smell in the modern West. A more recent monograph, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* by Jonathan Reinarz, similarly covers a broad sweep of history, highlighting in particular the enduring cultural role of odour in delineating and enforcing hierarchies and control, and the inclusion and exclusion of bodies within a society.[34] Despite the criticisms levelled against both of these studies that the attempt to cover such diverse cultures and periods of history encouraged them to fall prey to uncritical use of sources and overgeneralisation, and, in the case of Classen et al., some issues with the ethnographic section of the book, both are underpinned by the central argument which is fundamental to this thesis: that smell is a phenomenon shaped by culture and which

[30] Bradley 2013, 138.
[31] Allen 2015, 8;
[32] Corbin 1995 (1982); Mennell 1987, 727-729; Gruérer 1988; Rindisbacher 1992, on Modern European Literature; Drobnick 2006, 2-4; Dugan 2011, on Early Modern England; Wrigley 2012, on 18th and 19th century Rome; Reinarz 2014, 2-3.
[33] Classen et al. 1994.
[34] Reinarz 2014.

can function as an epistemological tool for understanding, categorising and evaluating the world.

b. Odour and olfaction in antiquity

Just a few years ago, I would here have taken the opportunity to lament the scarcity of scholarly work on the smell in antiquity. However, although odour and olfaction certainly remain understudied in comparison with many other areas of research, and in comparison with scholarship on sight in particular, recent years have seen a substantial increase in publications on this topic within Classics. Saara Lilja's *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity* (1972) stood out for several decades as the only monograph dedicated to the topic.[35] Written before anthropological and sociological approaches to the senses had begun to filter into the humanities, Lilja's book remains an invaluable resource, which draws together an enormous number of references to odour in a range of Greek and Roman literary genres. The nature of the book– its breadth and comprehensiveness – means that Lilja does not place as much emphasis as later work upon the cultural meaning or coding of the odours she discusses. However, the structure of the book, which groups references to odour into different categories such as 'odours associated with divine beings', 'unguents and perfumes', 'odours particular to human beings', allows for a fascinating exploration of classical literary smellscapes, and although I do not always choose to categorise references to odour in the same manner as Lilja, her approach is a significant influence.

Published in the same year, Marcel Detienne's *Les jardins d'Adonis* (1972) is a structuralist analysis of spices in Greek mythology, focusing in particular on the myth of Adonis and the fourth- and fifth-century Athenian festival, the Adonia. Over the course of six chapters, Detienne pursues a specific and consistent goal, that of demonstrating that the 'myths' surrounding spices (and other vegetation in general) function according to a set of discoverable, overlapping yet consistent olfactory 'codes' – botanical, cosmological, olfactory, sociological, and so on.[36] He outlines three key uses of spices in ancient Greece; culinary, religious, and erotic, for all of which odour is a central factor. Whilst odour is not his sole focus, it is ever-present

[35] Lilja 1972. Other early work on smell in antiquity: Schwenk 1861; Spaeth 1922.
[36] Detienne 1994 (1972).

throughout the book, and its ability to traverse boundaries, to inspire disgust and to enflame sexual and gustatory appetites is central to many of his arguments.

Detienne's interpretation of the concept of 'myth' is very broad, encompassing both those stories commonly associated with the term, above all myths of metamorphosis, where unfortunate individuals are transformed into fragrant spices, as well as any other stories surrounding spices which he considers to be fantastical, as in Pliny's account of the flying snakes which were said to guard cassia trees.[37] His discussion of Myrrha, in which he argues that her myth lent to the actual substance myrrh an erotic significance, will be particularly relevant to this thesis' discussion of perfume, the female body, and myth.[38] As is so often the case in structuralist approaches, Detienne has been accused of ignoring historical context and generic considerations, and of over-manipulating the evidence to support his arguments. [39] His interpretation of the Adonis myth and of the festival of the Adonia, the central foci of the book, are particularly vulnerable to this kind of critique. Detienne draws into one interpretation of the myth several strands which do not appear together in any extant version, and his claims concerning the role of spices in the Adonia are based on somewhat shaky evidence.[40] Nevertheless, Detienne's work has been fundamental to much of that which followed, and it is unusual to find a cultural exploration of odour in ancient society which is not indebted to his work.

Written some decades later, Susan Ashbrook Harvey's *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* is influential as one of the first in-depth examinations of odour and olfaction in a specific, ancient cultural context, making it a useful and well-researched source of material and methodological model.[41] Harvey highlights the power of metaphorical odour and olfaction, in which the relationship between God, Christ, and humanity could be conceived in olfactory terms.[42] This metaphorical potential of smell is particularly relevant to this thesis'

[37] Detienne 1994, 17-20. This breadth is of advantage for my own research, as it means that this influential book is relevant to several of the chapters of this thesis rather than being restricted to my discussion of myth proper.
[38] Detienne 1994, 36-34.
[39] Scarborough 1980, 177.
[40] Eichholz 1979, 234.
[41] Harvey 2006. See also: Caseau 1994.
[42] Harvey 2006, 3-6.

discussion of the Greco-Roman olfactory codes that categorised and evaluated women, which could function independently from 'real' smell. Harvey also argues also for the importance of specific context for Christian value judgements of odour, a feature of scent and olfactory judgment for which this thesis also argues. Scented products and perfume in the Roman world defied consistent or easy categorisation or evaluation, and could therefore change depending upon the use to which such products were put and upon the perspective, purposes and attitudes of those writing about them.

One volume from the aforementioned Routledge series focuses entirely on odour and olfaction. *Smell and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Mark Bradley, is both a rich and varied source of contemporary scholarship on the subject and an indication of the many directions that future research could take, encompassing philosophy, medicine, religion, literature, dining, and more.[43] Laurence Totelin's chapter on 'Smell as a sign and cure in ancient medicine' argues that the sense of smell was an epistemological albeit flawed tool for ancient medical diagnosis and prognosis, and emphasises the connection between odour and bodily fluids. Totelin also discusses the use of odour in medical treatment, and notes in particular its perceived efficacy in treating gynaecological disorders. Both of these lines of argument inform and compliment this thesis' position that the physical makeup of the female body in ancient thought rendered it particularly prone to smelling, and vulnerable to external olfactory influence.[44] Ashley Clements' discussion of odour and olfaction in ancient religion, 'Divine scents and presence', similarly engages with many central concepts concerning the role of scent in communing with and identifying the divine which I explore, despite its focus on classical Athens.[45] Bradley's chapter 'Foul bodies in ancient Rome' touches upon many of the sensory arenas discussed in this thesis, exploring olfactory interactions between spaces and bodies which populated the ancient city.[46] Shane Butler's 'Making scents of poetry' represents perhaps the most in-depth exploration of one particular scent, *amaracus*, and its use in poetry. Butler demonstrates the many and complex associations one scent could have, and his

[43] Bradley 2015a.

[44] Totelin 2015. See also Han Baltussen's exploration of odour in ancient philosophy, Jane Draycott's chapter on trees, flowers, and herbs, David Potter on Roman dining, and Neville Morley on the smell of the urban environment: Baltussen 2015; Draycott 2015; Morley 2015; Potter 2015.

[45] Clements 2015.

[46] Bradley 2015b. For an exploration of odour and power in Roman society in a similar vein: Potter 1999.

methodology of drawing upon a wide range of literary sources to achieve this is greatly influential to my own approach.[47]

One recent doctoral thesis exploring odour in Roman literature, Allen's *Stop and Smell the Romans* (2015), is perhaps the piece of scholarly work most comparable to my own project of which I am aware. In this, Allen attempted to redress the inconsistent coverage of the topic that she argued was often found in earlier literature on the smell in the ancient world by taking an entirely literary approach, exploring the ways in which odour and olfaction (both literal and metaphorical) are shaped by both the genre and the individual themes and perspectives of each of her chosen source studies: the comedies of Plautus, Latin epic, and the epigrams of Martial.[48] Since both Plautus and Martial are rich sources for perfume and for odours associated with or located upon the female body, there is naturally some overlap between the material that Allen covers, particularly in the final chapter of my thesis. However, my specific focus on the odours of the female body allows me to approach the topic in new ways and lends itself to a more comprehensive understanding of a specific facet of odour in Roman literature and thought. Furthermore, the breadth of my study enables me to identify common themes and attitudes which appear pervasive and consistent across a variety of sources, and thus moves beyond Allen's analysis of odour within specific sources to identify the overarching olfactory codes which underpinned Roman cultural attitudes towards and representations of the female body.

c. Perfumes, cosmetics, and *cultus*

Intersecting with research on odour and olfaction in antiquity is scholarship on bodily adornment in the ancient world. A field which has in the past been deemed academically trivial, the study of bodily adornment and dress has over the past thirty years or so experienced a flourishing of popularity, addressing the issue in a variety of historical periods and societies.[49] As is often the case with more recent developments in cultural history, Classics has been slow to explore this avenue of research, although

[47] Butler 2015.
[48] Allen 2015, 11-12.
[49] For other periods and societies: Hughes 1983; 1992; Perrot 1994; Roche 1994; Jones and Stallybrass, 2000.

the last few decades have seen a steady increase in scholarly interest.[50] The majority of such work focuses on the most visible and tangible elements of dress, above all clothing and jewellery, and cosmetics and perfumes tend to receive fairly limited treatment, taking up at most one chapter in substantial works on clothing and the body.[51]

Perfumes have tended to receive somewhat less extensive treatment than cosmetics, and are particularly neglected in English-language scholarship.[52] In addition to the more technical, archaeological literature on the subject, for example Carlo Giordano and Angelandrea Casale's *Profumi, unguenti e acconciature in Pompei antica* (2007) and Alfredo Carrante and Matteo D'Acunto's *I profumi nelle società antiche* (2012), there have been several works discussing the cultural significance of perfume in the ancient world. One recent monograph dedicated solely to perfume in the ancient world is Giuseppe Squillace's *Le lacrime di Mirra* (2015), which addresses the topic from a variety of different thematic angles.[53] The first section, *Il Mito* discusses the mythological associations of various scents, emphasising the seductive fragrance of Aphrodite and the many instances of metamorphosis resulting in the creation of odorous substances, and highlighting the strong connection between perfume and the East, as seen in legends of the phoenix and the alluring scent of the panther.[54] This book provides, through its thorough and systematic methodology and many references to a wide range of primary sources – in particular Theophrastus and Pliny the Elder – a highly accessible and useful starting place for future research. *Le lacrime* functions as an effective sourcebook for those interested in perfumes in the ancient world, presenting well-researched and well-organised, easily accessible

[50] Llewellyn-Jones 2001, vii described the subject as 'shamefully undervalued'. See for example Sebesta and Bonfante 1994; Llewellyn-Jones 2001; Croom 2002; Llewellyn-Jones 2003; Chausson and Inglebert 2003; Cleland, Harlow, and Llewellyn-Jones 2005; Edmondson and Keith 2008; Olson 2008; Harlow 2017. See also Totelin 2008, which discusses the use of perfumes in ancient medicine.

[51] See Fletcher 2005; Shumka 2008.

[52] Miller 1969; Grillet 1975; Groom 1981; Fauré 1987; Dayagi-Mendels 1989; Brun 2000; Dalby 2000; Dierichs and Siebert 2006; Giordano and Casale 2007; Bodiou, Mehl, and Frère 2008; Verbanck-Piérard, Massar, and Frère 2008; Squillace 2010; Bodiou, Mehl, and Bergé 2011; Carannante and D'Acunto 2012; Squillace 2014.

[53] Squillace 2015. See also: Squillace 2010; 2014.

[54] Of particular interest to this thesis is Squillace's discussion of the myth of Myrrha in chapter two of *Il Mito*. Squillace 2015, 29-30. On the scent of the panther and the phoenix see also: le Guérer 1988, 37-42; Connors 1997, 306-307; Lallemand 2008a, 43-44.

information. However, it also highlights the need for more English-language scholarship of a similar nature.

Cosmetics in antiquity have received somewhat greater scholarly attention than perfumes, with an increasing number of articles and monographs dedicated to exploring the subject in more detail.[55] Often, as in the case of Kelly Olson's *Dress and the Roman Woman* (2008) and Susan Stewart's *Cosmetics and Perfumes in the Roman World* (2007), perfume appears as a short section in a larger discussion of the nature, use, and attitudes towards cosmetic adornment. This is appropriate given the often blurred boundaries between perfume and cosmetic, and the multisensory nature of all ancient cosmetic products, but there is certainly plenty of room for more explorations of this connection. One recent monograph by Marguerite Johnson, *Ovid on Cosmetics* (2016), takes a different approach, examining not cosmetics in general but specifically within Ovid's corpus, in *Cosmetics for the Female Face*, *Art of Love,* and *Cures for Love.* It largely takes the form of a commentary, examining five extracts from the above works. Throughout, Johnson uses a multidisciplinary approach to dissect Ovid's account of female cosmetics, focussing in particular on the concept of *cultus* (translated by the author as 'cultivation').[56] Johnson's methodology and structure are an innovative departure from the majority of previous work on cosmetics, combining literary commentary, discussion of specific ingredients, and recipes derived from Ovid's text. Another notable exploration of cosmetics is one section of Bradley's *Colour and Meaning* (2009), which focuses on Roman colour perception, categorisation and cultural significance. This provides a relatively rare example of scholarship which approaches female cosmetic use specifically through a sensory lens. Bradley argues that the well-attested discomfort displayed by many Roman literary sources was intimately tied to the idea that to alter or obscure one's natural *color* was inherently suspicious and indicated a desire to dupe the senses of the onlooker. This

[55] See Balsdon 1962, 260-265; Forbes 1965; Grillet 1975; Green 1979; Rosati 1985; Dayagi-Mendels 1989; Virgili 1989; 1990; Sharrock 1991; Wyke 1994; Richlin 1995; d'Ambrosio 2001; Dubourdieu and Lemirre 2002; Wyke 2002, 115-54; Gibson 2003; Saiko 2005; Stewart 2007; Olson 2008; 2009; 2014; Johnson 2016.

[56] Johnson 2016, 16. For a discussion of *cultus,* see Gibson 2003, 128-129, who lists 'care of for the person', 'adorning of the body', 'style of appearance', and 'trimness' or 'smartness'. See also: Myerowitz 1985, 198; Richlin 1995; Bartman 2001. The theme of *cultus* in Ovid has received considerable scholarly attention: Green 1979; Watson 1982; 2001; Gibson 2003; 2006.

provides an interesting point of comparison to the more unstable, imperfect and yet insidious deception attributed to perfume.[57]

One discussion of female adornment which is both especially relevant to and influential for this thesis is Maria Wyke's chapter entitled 'Women in the mirror: the rhetoric of adornment in the Roman world' (1994). Wyke's chapter emphasises the centrality of the female body in ancient discourses of adornment. She presents the Roman rhetoric surrounding female adornment as a way of socially and sexually differentiating the female body from that of the male citizen. Such rhetoric, found in literature as diverse as satire, elegy, comedy, history, and agricultural writing, was used to 'sustain a gender hierarchy and enact male control over the female', but it also revealed anxieties about the potential disruption of this hierarchy which the adorned female body could affect.[58] Above all, Wyke emphasises the near-impossibility of moving beyond the warped reflection of Roman women left to us by the overwhelmingly male sources; all the female bodies which remain to us, rouged or bare-faced, are 'made-up'.[59] Also of great influence to this thesis, and a significant influence upon subsequent scholarship on female cosmetic adornment is Amy Richlin's article 'Making up a woman, the face of Roman gender', which argues that female cosmetic use in Roman thought was connected to a cultural disgust with the raw state of the female body. Like Wyke, she argues that discourses on cosmetic use often form a key part of the systems which sought to exert social control over women and reinforce the existing gender hierarchy.[60]

d. Gender and bodies

In keeping with its goal of exploring the cultural significance of female odour and perfume in Roman society, this thesis synthesises research on odour, olfaction, and perfume in the ancient world with several other related areas of scholarship. One of the most significant of these is that of the female body in the ancient world, which, as Wyke's work demonstrates, is acutely relevant to a rich understanding of the

[57] Bradley 2009, 162-174.
[58] Wyke 1994, 148.
[59] Wyke 1994, 134. This theme of constructing the female is also explored in Sharrock 1991.
[60] Richlin 1995, 194-196.

gendered nature of scent.[61] Much of Richlin's work on women and gender in Roman, humour, invective, and erotic literature is particularly influential here, above all her monograph *The Garden of Priapus* (1992).[62] Although she does not approach the subject through the lens of sensory studies, her research makes clear the extent to which Roman literature defined women by their bodies, primarily by their status as desirable or undesirable sex objects.[63] *The Garden of Priapus* clearly demonstrates within many Roman literary sources, both satirical and erotic, a near obsession with the odours of the female body, and explores the ways in which this formed part of a broader framework which equated women with their bodies and transformed them into erotic fantasies or grotesque monsters.

One substantial area of scholarship on the female body in Greco-Roman antiquity with which my work engages is that on the body, sex and gender in medicine. In this field, the work of Helen King, Rebecca Flemming, and Laurence Totelin is particularly significant. Helen King's monograph *Hippocrates Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (1998) emphasises the complex reciprocal relationship between ancient medical ideas about the female body and the construction of that body in antique culture more broadly.[64] Smell is not a focus of her research, but she emphasises the importance of olfaction and odour therapies in gynaecological treatment, arguing that the use of such therapies was closely tied to medical ideas about female physiology and physiological difference from men.[65] Rebecca Flemming's *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (2000) represents a departure from the generally Greek-focussed scholarship on the female body in ancient medicine, and demonstrates the tenacity of central ideas concerning the nature of the female body – as wet, permeable, and

[61] See Montserrat 1998 for an overview of the growth of interest in the ancient body during the second half of the 20th century. See Cleland *et al.* 2005, xii for a criticism of the tendency for studies of the ancient body to ignore clothing. It should come as little surprise that a large proportion of the work on the body focuses largely on art: see Alexandridis 2010, 252-279; Bonfante 1989; Bradley 2011

[62] See also: Richlin 1984; 2014.

[63] Richlin 1992a, esp. 69.

[64] King 1994; 1995; 1998; 2004; 2013a; 2013b; 2018. See also King and Toner 2014, which takes a sensory approach towards ancient medicine, but does not explicitly focus on the female body. See also King 2018, which challenges Thomas Laqeur's 'one-sex model' of the human body, demonstrating the fundamental physiological differences between male and female evident in many ancient medical sources.

[65] King 1998, 25, 32.

inherently inferior to the male – throughout Greco-Roman antiquity.[66] It also argues for the active participation of women in medicine in the ancient world.[67] Such participation lends itself to the possibility of seeing women as exerting control over their bodies in other ways, most pertinently as active participants within the ancient sensorium.[68] As this thesis will demonstrate, male sources clearly feared the power that perfume might grant women, a fear perhaps exacerbated by the fact that the perfuming of the female body was almost exclusively women's work, performed by the women themselves, their friends or family members, or *ornatrices*. Totelin's chapter in *Smell and the Ancient Senses*, discussed above, makes the connection between sensory studies and ancient medicine, and her approach will be particularly relevant to my own discussion of the female body, odour, and medicine in the first chapter of this thesis.[69]

Work on the female body in literature and the female body in medicine are interrelated; medical concepts concerning the nature of the female body were influenced by and in turn affected wider cultural concepts. This was particularly the case amongst the sections of society (elite, educated males) whose texts are available to modern researchers. One scholar who takes a cultural approach to these medical concepts is Ann Carson, in her chapter 'Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity' (1990; 1999).[70] Carson draws together medical, philosophical, literary and mythological ideas to argue that Greco-Roman society saw women as wet, leaky, and incapable of controlling their bodily boundaries. Carson's emphasis on bodily boundaries and the danger and pollution conjured up by the crossing of these boundaries is highly pertinent to this thesis, as it is one of the most significant ways in which odour and the female body overlap; the former by its very

[66] For studies of women in Greek medicine: Hanson 1990, 309-338; Dean-Jones 1991; 1994a; 1994b; King 1995; 1998.

[67] Flemming 2000, 35-37. This ties in with a move visible in other research away from representing women as simply passive subjects of male physicians towards exploring their roles as active agents in the medical process: Korpela 1987, 18-20; Parker 1997, 131-150; Flemming 2007. See also Helen King's argument that women were admitted to have a degree of 'experience' concerning their own bodies when it came to medical matters: King 1998, 107, 110.

[68] In particular as conscious curators of the sensory image broadcast to society through their use of cosmetics and perfume.

[69] See also Totelin 2018 on taste in ancient medicine and botany.

[70] Totelin's work on breastfeeding in antiquity similarly emphasises the connection between medicine and culture: Totelin 2017. See also: Walters 1997.

nature violates boundaries, and the latter has no control over its own. Dirt, pollution and disgust are intrinsic elements of the malodorous female body in antiquity, since all three elements – odours, femininity, and corporeality – were foci of deep cultural anxiety. I will therefore be indebted to scholarship on these subjects, including Mary Douglas' seminal *Purity and Danger* (1966).[71] Within classical scholarship, Mark Bradley and Kenneth Stow's edited volume *Rome, Pollution, and Propriety* (2012), as well as Donald Lateiner and Dimos Spatharas' edited volume *The Ancient Emotion of Disgust* (2017) both afford illuminating examinations of the ways in which the boundaries of the body, along with its (often noisome) physiological functions caused cultural discomfort in many and varying areas of ancient life and thought.[72] Many of the female bodies that I discuss are constructed in terms which evoke, and indeed seem to relish evoking, revulsion and it is clear that ascribing odour to an already polluting, filthy body was a potent means of compounding this disgust.

2. Research questions

In the light of all of the above, one challenge that remains is how to integrate these disparate yet interconnected areas of scholarship: body, gender, and the senses. To this end, this thesis will explore the following questions. In order to fully explore the topic at hand, it will address two key contextual issues. Firstly, it will examine how odour and olfaction functioned in ancient thought. What were the predominant theories concerning odour and olfaction in Greco-Roman antiquity? What did these theories have in common, both with each other and with theories regarding other forms of sensory stimuli and perception? Is it possible to identify some overarching and consistent beliefs about how odour in particular functioned? Was olfaction, as it has often been presented, truly a 'lower' or less important sense, and did this impact or devalue its role as a diagnostic tool?

The second contextual theme that must be explored is the role of perfume in Roman society. As discussed further in chapter two, the modern concept of 'perfume' cannot be neatly mapped upon Roman use of scented substances, and so this thesis will discuss the many and varying uses of scented products in Roman society. What were the different forms of scented product that were used, and in which contexts were

[71] See also: Bahktin 1968; Douglas 2003.
[72] See also: Miller 1997; Bendlin 2007.

they used? How did perfume use vary over space and time, and between different demographics of society? What were the primary associations and values ascribed to perfumes?

Having established these contextual parameters, the thesis will explore the physical relationship between the female body and odour. It considers the role olfaction played, both in medicine and more broadly, in the diagnosis and assessment of the physical state of the female body. It examines the ways in which the female body was conceived as being physically more prone to emitting odour, and the kinds of odours specific to the female body. It will also consider the vulnerability of the female body to odour. To what degree were odour therapies and other medicinal treatments involving scented substances primarily used upon women, and what are the implications of such treatments for wider cultural beliefs about the relationship between odour and the female body? Greco-Roman thought posited a significant link between the physiological and psychological makeup of the body, and I aim, therefore, to demonstrate that odours emitted from the female body were thought to reveal the fundamental nature of women's bodies, minds, and characters.

A central issue which draws upon the previous set of questions concerns the associations present in literary constructions of the scented female body. This encompasses all scented female bodies, 'real' and mythical, human, mortal, or monstrous. What odours were female bodies seen to emit and in what contexts? In what circumstances, in what ways, and for what reasons was a female body 'fragrant' or, alternatively 'foul'? In the realm of mythological women, how did olfactory codes of gender intersect with cosmic olfactory codes? How interconnected was the depiction of mythological female bodies with that of 'real', or at least mortal female bodies – do similar associations, anxieties, and codes arise? In what ways can we use these male literary elite constructs of female bodies to understand the lived experience of women in ancient Rome and their interactions with the Roman sensorium? What were the possibilities and limitations surrounding how women might be able to control and influence that world?

The theme of male anxiety concerning female odours, both natural and especially unnatural, will be a recurring motif, and this thesis aims to explore the sources and manifestations of this anxiety. It will also consider how far the inherent

ambiguity of odour, for instance its spatial and linguistic elusiveness, served to further stir up such anxieties. Odour transgressed boundaries, invaded bodies, and could be manipulated or hidden through the use of artificial scent. How does the existence and use of perfume complicate the relationship between odour and the female body? I hope to explore the ways in which perfume acts to influence and disrupt established olfactory codes. How far was the perfumed female body dangerous, powerful, and socially disruptive? The idea of olfaction as a diagnostic tool by which the perceptive male nose could sniff out feminine flaws and wiles will also be a central theme of this thesis. How potent and how accurate a means of sensory diagnosis was olfaction? How reliably could the male nose expose and therefore overcome the threat posed by artificial scent?

Finally, previous work on the senses and olfaction in antiquity has established the importance of multisensoriality or synaesthesia. Therefore, this thesis will explore to what degree the scented female body was a necessarily multisensory artefact. Is it possible to consider the senses in isolation, particularly in relationship with the body? In what ways were perfumes inherently multisensory artefacts? How important was the interplay of the senses to literary depictions of the scented body? How do sources make use of senses other than olfaction in order to evoke odour, or to shape the nature of olfactory impressions of the female body?

3. Methodology

My thesis aims to establish an intermediary point between the exclusive literary focus of studies like that undertaken by Allen and the focus on the 'reality' of perfume use emphasised in much of the pre-existing literature on the ancient perfume industry. It will make use predominantly of literary sources, but these will be drawn from a diverse array of source material, including medical and philosophical texts, accounts of perfume use and production, and mythology, in addition to some of the most odiferous literary genres, elegy, satire and epigram. I argue that our reading of female odour and perfume use in Roman literature is enriched and informed by an examination of these diverse subjects. The literary tradition of the Roman elite was rife with complex systems of cross-fertilisation, and individual sources' depictions of odour, gender, and the body were informed and shaped by the literary culture that surrounded and preceded them. Furthermore, Olfactory codes are defined

simultaneously by their fluidity and their broad cultural reach, and so I contend that a holistic approach will allow for exploration both of the nuances and natural inconsistencies influenced by specific historical context, generic convention, personal inclination and so on, while also demonstrating the arresting stability of the overall system.

One comparative methodological approach can be found in Butler's study of *amaracus*, discussed above. This study draws from a broad range of literary sources – including Theophrastus, Lucretius, Virgil, Pliny the Elder, and Dioscorides, all of whom appear in my own research – in order to explore how 'well-known smells worked to structure the experiences of ancient literary readers'.[73] Butler's approach emphasises the cultural functioning of odour, and emphasises that those olfactory associations which he identifies 'stretch back in time and across the classical world'.[74] This approach, which maintains a literary focus but also seeks to acknowledge, tease out and explore cultural attitudes that transcend and traverse specific texts is fundamental to this thesis. Butler also highlights the close connection between scent and bodies, both divine and human – he emphasises the links between the plant/perfume *amaracus* and the eroticism both of the goddess Venus and of those human bodies which interact with the heavenly scent. This corporeality of scent is self-evidently a central tenet of my own research. However, while Butler chooses to focus on one specific scent, this thesis will consider an array of different kinds of scents, from perfume to bodily fluids. The uniting focal point will be the female body around which these scents are centred.

Another central tenet of my approach will be the exploration of the inherent multisensoriality or 'synaesthetic' nature of odour and of the body.[75] The body is an inherently multisensory artefact, both in that it experiences itself and its environment through multiple senses, and in that it itself is a source of many different kinds of sensory stimuli. Perfumes are also multisensory artefacts; they have texture, colour, and taste, in addition to odour. Ancient perfumes involve an even greater level of

[73] Butler 2015, 74.

[74] Butler 2015, 47.

[75] Although synaesthesia or 'sensory blending' can be identified in ancient literary sources, the term 'multisensory' is perhaps a more inclusive term which also invites fewer opportunities for confusion with the medical condition of the same name; for this reason I will primarily make use of this term. Butler and Purves 2013, 1.

sensory blending and interaction than contemporary, alcohol-based perfumes, manifesting in a wide array of consistencies and colours, and often being used in ways that would necessitate interaction with their texture and flavour. As such, I will throughout bear in mind the impact of this inherent multisensoriality, mindful that odour is seldom experienced alone.

One challenge inherent to this project arises due to the limitations of olfactory vocabulary, both in antiquity and in modern English.[76] Ancient commenters sometimes connected this linguistic paucity with the supposed position of olfaction as a 'lower sense', one which was less refined in humans and therefore less important.[77] Both Aristotle and Theophrastus, author of an entire work dedicated to odour and thus rich in examples of ancient Greek olfactory vocabulary, claimed that the human sense of smell was the weakest in the entire animal kingdom, a claim later echoed by Pliny the Elder.[78] Smell is often difficult to describe, often limited to general terms else requiring metaphor, simile, and metonymy.[79] It is also often the case that the vocabulary used to describe or evoke odour need not necessarily suggest it, for instance in the case of words for breath and air.[80] Perhaps appropriately for a sense so tied up with ambiguities and tied into more subconscious associations, it is often the case that you need to look closely for odour in ancient texts in order to find it. It might well be possible to read some of the passages I discuss in this thesis without factoring in odour at all – indeed earlier scholarship often does just this – but I argue that considering the ways in which the sense of smell is evoked even in passages not obviously redolent with scented language can enrich our readings of texts. References to flowers, for instance, might well primarily evoke colour, but they also imply scent even when it goes unmentioned. Perhaps less obviously but no less powerfully, many

[76] Bradley, 2015, 8-9. This thesis will not attempt a thorough survey of the vocabularly of odour, but for more on this see Lilja 1972, 274-275; Stevens 2007; Lallemand 2008b. Key Latin terminology includes: *odor* (odour) and *nidor* (odour usually connected to smoke or vapour); *olere*, *fragrare*, and *putere* (to emit a smell – generally neutral, positive, and negative connotations respectively); *odorari*, *olfacere*, and *olfactare* (to smell/sniff); *odorare* (to perfume). Ancient commentators demonstrated awareness of the limitations of olfactory language: Aristotle, *On Animals* 2.9.421a26-b3; Plato, *Timaeus* 67a; Galen, *On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs* 4.22 (11.699-702 Kühn); Oribasius, *Medical Collections* 14.6 (CMG 6.1.2 p. 186 Raeder); Nutton 1993, 275; Boehm 2002, 79, 93; Johansen 2007, 227; Totelin 2015, 25.

[77] Baltussen 2015, 30-31.

[78] Aristotle, *On Sense and Sensibile Objects* 441a1-2; Theophrastus, *On Odours* 4.

[79] See chapter 3, p. 110 for further exploration of olfactory vocabulary in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History.*

[80] *Aura*, *halitus*, *spiritus.* These latter two had related verbs in the form of *halare* and *spirare*, both of which could suggest fragrant breath or air.

references to dirt, filth, and pollution rely heavily on olfactory associations for the visceral disgust they conjure up.[81]

I aim to temper my broad cultural approach by employing in different parts of my thesis a synthetic approach to texts and in-depth scrutiny of specific key sources, in order to explore smell as a discourse with which different individuals with their own contexts and attitudes interacted and contributed to. With this in mind, my thesis will begin with a chapter examining Greco-Roman ideas about the physical constitution of the female body. It looks at the writings of the physicians Soranus and Galen, alongside work by the encyclopaedist Celsus and Pliny the Elder, to see how the female body is described. It discusses the importance of humoral theory to ancient constructions of the body, drawing a link between the role of liquid (in the form of humours) and air (in the form of *pneuma*) in the body and the importance of both of these substances for the creation and transmission of odour. It examines the main physiological differences between male and female, in particular that of the greater liquidity, porousness, and frigidity of the female body, and the importance of this aspect of female physiology in reinforcing and justifying ideas about the natural inferiority of women. It argues that the physical makeup of women rendered them both more inclined to emit odours, particularly malodorous bodily fluids such as menstrual blood, and also more sensitive to the influence of odour, as demonstrated by the 'wandering womb' theory and the dominance of odour therapies in gynaecological treatments. It also discusses interesting ambiguities and issues raised by the importance of scented substances in treating medical conditions, where products often comprised of the same ingredients as are used in cosmetics and perfumes possess the ability to physically alter the bodies of their subjects.

Chapter two will move from examining perfumes as gynaecological treatments to considering the many other ways, both medical, ritual, and recreational, in which perfumes played a part in Roman life. It takes the form of a survey of the kinds of perfume available in Roman society, particularly during the late Republic and high Empire. This survey, like the discussion of Greco-Roman medicine in the previous chapter, provides crucial contextual information, which can inform and enrich our interpretation of literary depictions of female perfume use. It makes use primarily of

[81] Bradley 2012, 38-39; Bradley 2015, 10.

literary evidence, including the work of Pliny the Elder and Dioscorides among others, and also considers the material evidence available in order to establish what perfumes were used, where these perfumes and their constituent ingredients came from, and how they were prepared. It looks at the ambiguity of scented products, which often have multiple different potential applications as perfume, cosmetic, incense, and medicine, and argues that for the significance of context in determining the cultural interpretation of these products. It examine the demographics of perfume use; which sectors of society used them, and to what degree the use of scented products was a gendered pursuit.

Chapter three will interrogate the assumptions of the previous chapter by demonstrating that the literary sources used in order to reconstruct perfume use in ancient Rome also participated in the cultural discourses surrounding perfume and gender. It takes the form of an in-depth analysis of perfume in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. As a particularly influential source cataloguing the wealth of Flavian Rome, it is also one of our main sources for the use, production and composition of perfume in the contemporary Roman world and its antecedents. While undeniably an invaluable source due to its wide-ranging and detailed account of perfumes themselves and the aromatics of which they are made, it is also full of contradictions, inaccuracies, and fantastic tales. The chapter examines the anxieties and prejudices which underpin the ways in which Pliny talks about both perfumes and the substances which make them, and argues that perfumes allow him to articulate many of the central themes of the *Natural History.* It discusses the ways in which Pliny's understanding of the nature of the cosmos and humankind's relationship with both earth and the divine impacts upon his construction of perfume use. The growing wealth and geographic reach of the Empire of which perfume were a notable symptom, and perfume's association with the perceived increase in decadence and feminisation of Roman society rendered them an ideal focus for the moralising traditionalist rhetoric of writers like Pliny

While Pliny at times seems to deny the legitimacy of spices and perfumes in religious ritual, chapter four discusses the complex role perfume was thought to play within the cosmos, both in the form of incense meant to connect the mortal realm with the divine, and in the form of mythological female bodies that smell either divinely fragrant or hellishly rank. Looking at the fragrance of Venus, it will discuss how the

erotic and religious roles of scent interweave. On the other end of the cosmic olfactory spectrum, it studies the stinking, menstruating Harpies and the cursed, husband-murdering Lemnian Women, dissecting the ways in which monstrous femininity can be conceived in olfactory terms. Alongside the broader olfactory coding which contrasts the ambrosial heights of Olympus with the sulphurous underworld, it argues that both these fragrant and foul female characters are also characterised within the context of an olfactory code specific to the female body. It then moves on to discuss the myths surrounding the most famous scented substances, frankincense and myrrh, particularly on the versions in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In particular it focuses on the myth of Myrrha, discussing the ways in which Ovid's account of her story of female lack of control, deceit, and sexual and social transgressions negotiates the multiple functions of the substance myrrh in Greco-Roman life. Myth was a significant means of formulating Greek and Roman identity, and of illustrating the ways in which the world was meant to work. Therefore, this chapter considers the ways in which constructions of scented divine and reeking infernal female bodies establish olfactory archetypes which provide ancient writers with powerful mythical precedents which could be appropriated for use in characterising non-mythical women.

The final chapter will consider the difficulty in parsing out the difference between the constructed bodies of myth and the equally 'made-up' bodies purporting to have real-life referents. Drawing together elements from the preceding chapters, it highlights the problematic nature of odour, which crosses boundaries, has the ability to affect/pollute those it touches, and is all the more insidious for its invisibility. It discusses how female fragrance and malodour, and use of or avoidance of perfume was weaponised in elegiac and satirical poetry as part of a sensory code which evaluated and categorised women primarily into 'attractive' and 'unattractive'. It examines how the playwright Plautus, as well as poets such as Propertius, Catullus, Martial, Ovid, and others associate fragrant smells with beautiful, virginal, young women, and foul smells with ugly, aged, morally questionable women. It demonstrates the enduring and pervasive nature of this olfactory code throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, and particularly discusses perfume's ability to subvert this dichotomy, disguising the foul as the fragrant and thereby duping the male sensor and potentially disrupting the natural order of society.

In sum, this thesis will through five distinct but complementary windows onto the role of odour in the context of the female body demonstrate not only that scent was a pivotal factor in the expression, evaluation, and formation of female identity, but also that it provides us with a complex and innovative lens through which to understand Roman concepts of gender and power.

1. Fetid Fluids: Female Physiology and Odour

Rebecca Flemming characterisies the body in Hippocratic medicine as 'essentially a fluid entity'.[82] Greco-Roman medicine, from the Hippocratics onwards, was largely based on humoral theory. This asserted that all human bodies contain varying quantities of a range of different humours – liquid substances which perform different physiological functions and convey different physiological and psychological symptoms. Each individual possessed a unique natural balance of these humours, and illness was caused by imbalance, which physicians would seek to redress through therapy and changes to regimen.[83] Added to this liquid body was an element of air, the *pneuma*, a vaguely-defined substance often linked to the air inhaled with the breath.[84] The food, climate, air, along with a whole host of other factors, could without much difficulty invade the body and alter the natural balance of the humours.[85]

It was these aspects of ancient physiology which rendered all bodies vulnerable to the influence of odour. Odour could function both as a symptom of disease, exuding from the bodies of the afflicted, and as an agent of harm, penetrating into the body from the environment or from other bodies, and causing a disruption of the volatile fluid and gaseous substances which are central to health.[86] So, is odour always symptomatic of humoral imbalance? One comment by Galen suggests not: 'In some people the smell of the entire body and mouth is by nature unpleasant, as in others it is irreproachable'.[87] Unpleasant odour was sometimes simply a natural by-product of a body. Odour did not necessarily indicate a *medical* issue, and it was up to the

[82] Flemming 2000, 95.

[83] The number of humours thought to exist varies across different sources, only settling on the canonical four – black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood – in Galen: Flemming 2000, 96; Nutton 2005, 115-119; Totelin 2015, 18.

[84] Galen, *On the Use of Breath* 1.2 (80 Furley and Wilkie); Flemming 2000, 98-99.

[85] Hippocratic Corpus, *Affections* 1; *Nature of Man* 7; Flemming 2000, 96; King and Toner 2014, 140.

[86] Laurence Totelin even argues for an interpretation of *miasmata*, at least in some contexts, as denoting a foul-odoured air indicative of disease; if this interpretation is correct (which I am inclined to believe), then references to the ill effects of miasmatic air in medical texts can be added on to the anxieties expressed in Galen about foul smell. Hippocratic Corpus, *Breaths* 5; Jouanna 2001; Totelin 2015, 18. See also: Parker 1983.

[87] Galen, *Commentary on the Hippocratic Epidemics* 6.4.10 (17b.151 Kühn), trans. Totelin 2015; Totelin 2015, 21.

discerning nose of the physician to determine whether an individual's stench was a symptom of illness or not.[88] Indeed, while medical texts often seem to subscribe to the Theophrastian model which associated sweet, pleasant scents with healthfulness and life and foul odour with corruption and rot, they certainly do not shy away from the use of foul-smelling substances in pharmacological remedies. The power of foul odour could be utilised for medicinal good, and in many cases the other qualities of a substance outweighed its olfactory unpleasantness. It does not necessarily follow, however, that in cases where foul smell was not a symptom of disease the odour was entirely neutral in the eyes of medical texts. As shall be discussed further below, medical texts from the Hippocratic corpus to Galen demonstrated an interest in achieving appropriate body odour, both among patients and among the physicians themselves.[89]

This chapter will discuss the ways in which the medical and philosophical ideas about the female body in the Roman world represented women as particularly prone to giving off, and vulnerable to the effects of, the humour-disrupting powers of scent. It also examines the medical implications and powers of scent, in particular the role of odour therapies in ancient gynaecological therapeutics. It explores the uneasy relationship between physicians and perfume, and the often indistinct boundary between useless luxury and indispensable cure. It will look at medical and philosophical sources from the first and second centuries CE, along with works such as Pliny's *Natural History* which provide an insight into the ideas from medicine and philosophy being circulated amongst the elite in the early to mid-Empire. It will also draw from medical and philosophical works from earlier in Rome's history and from Classical Greece, which formed the cultural and intellectual backdrop to later work – crucially the substantial Hippocratic Corpus, Aristotle, and Theophrastus' writing on the nature of the body and of odour.

While odours might emanate from and physically alter all humans, Greco-Roman physicians and philosophers consistently portrayed the female body as both more odiferous and more susceptible to the power of scent than the male. As this

[88] Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates' the Humors* 2.1 (16.214-216 Kühn); Boehm 2002, 93-94; Totelin 2015, 22.
[89] Hippocratic Corpus, *Precepts* 10; Galen, *Commentary on the Hippocratic Epidemics* 6.4.10 (17b.151 Kühn); Mattern 2008, 35; Totelin 2015, 22.

chapter will demonstrate, there was a close link between ancient medical ideas about the physical makeup of the female body and those surrounding its relationship to odours, both in the form of natural olfactory emissions and in the form of artificially scented substances.

1.1. Liquid bodies and permeable boundaries

Roman philosophical and medical thought, as well as the Greek sources and ideas by which it was influenced, conceived of odour as a property which could not only make physical contact with, but also make its way into, the body. Smell was therefore a means by which to perceive things external to the body, and also had the ability to alter the bodies with which it came into contact. The trained physician (or even well-informed amateur) could use olfaction as part of a sensory tool kit to examine the body and sniff out disease, disorder, or good health, while foul-smelling substances or fragrant perfumes could play a key role in medical cures, or, alternately, cause serious physical harm.

While different medical and philosophical authorities put forwards various theories of olfaction, some fairly common elements of such theories are illustrative of the ways in which the nature of scent makes it of particular concern in medical matters. The first of these is odour's reliance upon the elements of air and water, elements which are also fundamental to the shaping of the body in the form of the humours and of *pneuma*.[90] Aristotle argues that odour must operate through a medium, and since both animals which dwell above and below water seem to be drawn to their food by its scent, therefore both air and water must be carriers of odour.[91] These two elements are similarly instrumental in the actual production of odour; Plato conceives of smells as created in the transformation of water into air or vice-versa, an idea explicitly adopted by Galen:

[90] Plato, *Timaeus* 66c; Totelin 2015, 20.
[91] Aristotle, *On the Soul* 421a.

> [Smell] is a fifth sense faculty, even though there are not five elements, since the category of smells is in nature intermediate between air and water, as Plato said in this passage of the *Timaeus*: 'as water changes to air, and air to water, all odours have arisen between'
>
> Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 7.6[92]

This characterisation of odour as the intermediary between air and water further emphasises smell's resistance to solid categorisation and description. Whereas Galen, like Plato before him, aligns each of the other five senses with an element – earth, fire, air, or water – smell remains nebulous and fluid.[93] At the same time, its position between or encompassing both air and water reflects the ways in which the sense of smell is intimately linked with the other senses, above all taste and touch.

The importance of the media of air and water for human olfactory perception is demonstrated in a minor curiosity discussed by Aristotle. He states that humans are apparently unique among animals in that they must inhale in order to perceive odour, 'even if the object of smell is placed inside and in contact with the nostril'.[94] This could be seen as indicative of the weakness of human olfaction – animals do not need this extra process in order to experience scent. It also suggests that human olfaction involves a much greater penetration of the substances conveyed in fragrances into the body than that of other animals – the experience of odour does not simply work through contact with the nose, but rather requires the human body to take deep into itself that which is being sensed. Galen and some Hippocratic texts located the organ for sensing odour in the brain, while some other physicians and philosophers locating it within the nasal passages.[95]

Where other sense-organs were located on or near the surface of the body, the internal position of the sense organs gives odour a peculiar ability to enter the body, as discussed here in Lucretius: 'Again, you see many things which give off both colour and taste along with smell: primarily those many offerings [which enkindled are

[92] 5.628 Kühn, trans. Totelin 2015, 20.
[93] Eastwood 1981; Totelin 2015, 20.
[94] Aristotle, *On the Soul* 421a.
[95] Galen, *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 7.5 (5.628 Kühn); Siegel 1970; Boehm 2003; van der Eijk 2010; Totelin 2015, 18-19.

accustomed to make the altars of the gods smoke]… for the fumes penetrate into the limbs, where colour cannot'.[96] In this passage, Lucretius notes the multisensoriality inherent to the sensing of many substances, while also illustrating the ways in which odour differs from other characteristics. Here, colour is sensed, but does not itself pass into the body which perceives it, whereas odour does. Thus, although Lucretius has promoted a theory of the senses dependent upon tactility, in which all the senses in one way or another function through bodily contact between the perceiver and the substance being perceived, the sense of smell involves a particularly invasive kind of tactility, in which the contact being made does not take place on the surface of the body but within it.

The consequences implied by these features of odour and olfaction appear vividly in a later book of *On the Nature of Things*, in which Lucretius makes clear the danger which some odours posed to the body.

> There is also a tree in the great mountains of Helicon, which by the foul stench of its flowers is wont to kill people… And when a night-light recently extinguished offends the nostrils with an acrid vapour, it stupefies on the spot one who due to illness is wont to fall to the ground and froth at the mouth. The strong scent of castor makes a woman fall unconscious, dropping her refined work from her soft hands, if she has smelt it during the time of her menstruation.
>
> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 6.786-796

Odour here can inflict disease, cause unconsciousness, and in extremis, even death. That some substances were harmful to all was a common idea stretching back to Aristotle, who claims that human bodies are 'destroyed' (*phtheiromena*) by strong smells (*ischurōn osmōn*), in particular bitumen and sulphur.[97] Galen warns of the acrid air of extinguished coals, which could suffocate a person, and the smell of a snuffed oil lamp, which could cause miscarriage.[98] Even those parts of the body designed to deal with odour – the olfactory organs – were not safe from powerful smells – Aristotle

[96] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 2.680-683.
[97] Aristotle, *On Dreams* 459a.22-24.
[98] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.43; Galen, *On the Use of the Breath* 4.4 (4.496 Kühn); Oribasius, *Medical Collections* 9.18.1 (CMG 6.1.2, p. 17 Raeder); Debru 1996, 232; Totelin 2015, 17.

claims that excessively strong smells could damage the olfactory organ, in the same way that loud sounds could damage the hearing.[99] In another case, Galen warns of the dangers to health posed by the 'putrid humours' of a house in which an ill person lives.[100] The relationship between the body, odour, and health is interesting in this case, as the foul smell given off by the invalid transforms the entire environment, which in turn affects the body of the invalid (and presumably anyone else remaining in that house for a significant amount of time), making them more 'stinky' (*dusōdeis*) and hence more ill.

Olfaction was also a key diagnostic tool for the ancient medical practitioner. Galen denounces another medical writer for failing to mention the importance of examining blood as a means for discerning the state of a body, either its humoral disposition or its state of health, citing in particular the importance of odour.[101] Odour was a sense which could be used in conjunction with other sensory information to better understand the body of a patient. In his discussion of the use of the senses to diagnose the character of a patient's blood, Galen echoes the common idea that precise descriptions of odour are very difficult.[102] However, he claims, this does not reduce their usefulness to the discerning practitioner, as even if they cannot be described, they can be understood.[103]

Odour, therefore, was a means of discerning both what was wrong with a patient, and how severe the problem was. It is in this second arena where the odour of the body and its excretions become most important. Very often listed among signs that a patient was soon to die was unusually foul odour, particularly of substances excreted by the body, such as urine and faeces.[104] In addition to being a diagnostic tool for the physician, the sense of smell (or changes to it) could also be a symptom in itself. According to Galen, the onset of disease is often marked by weakened senses,

[99] Aristotle, *On the Soul* 421a: 'So men become deafened by loud noises and have their sense of smell damaged by strong odours, and so on'.
[100] Galen, *On Different Kinds of Fevers* 1.3 (7.279 Kühn); Debru 1996, 235; Totelin 2015, 18.
[101] Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* 2.8.108-109 (Loeb 71.169-171).
[102] Galen, *On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs* 4.22 (11.699-702 Kühn); see introduction, p. 23.
[103] Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* 2.8.109 (Loeb 71.171).
[104] Celsus, *On Medicine* 2.12, 24.

including a weaker sense of smell.[105] Alternatively, disease or disorder could be marked by, and therefore identified by an increased sensitivity to odour.[106]

While the physical makeup of all bodies rendered them vulnerable to the effects of foul odour and the disease which might accompany it, many of the specific features of the female body suggest that it was more vulnerable to both the production of and invasion by odour. The Hippocratic Corpus' construction of the female body places primary importance on the difference in the nature of male and female flesh. Female flesh was seen to be loose, soft and spongy, and therefore to have a tendency to retain and absorb more liquid than the tougher, more solid male flesh. The porous nature of female flesh therefore caused the female body as a whole to be wetter in a way that created some of the main physical features which separated men from women: breasts swelled with liquid, monthly menses were required to counteract the liquid build-up, and the excess blood could be used as a food source for embryos, thereby enabling women to have children.[107] An alternative theory about the female body, originating with Aristotle, was more reliant upon the cooler temperature of women than upon the texture of female flesh. In his model, women were wetter because they lacked the necessary heat to be able to use up their blood properly as men did, either as fuel or by converting the excess into sperm.[108]

The theories expounded by the medical treatises of the Hippocratic corpus and the philosophical writings of Aristotle both reflected and defined ideas about the female body in the Greek world, and provided a highly influential theoretical background to Roman medical writing on the subject. Galen, in particular, emphasised that female physical inferiority was inextricable from her colder, wetter constitution.[109] Even in cases where Roman writers display a tendency to rebel against

[105] Galen, *The Medical Arts* 21 (1.361-363 Kühn); Siegel 1970, 156-157; Boehm 2002, 93-94.
[106] Aretaeus, *On the Causes and Symptoms of Acute Diseases* 1.5; *On the Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases* 1.1. The Hippocratic Corpus ascribes sensitivity to the smell of earth to those suffering from a 'thick disease' (*pachu*): *Internal Afflictions* 50.
[107] Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 1.1; *Regimen* 1.34; King 1995, 136; 1998, 28-29; Flemming 2000, 117. Being the work of many different authors across several hundred years, there are naturally some incongruences in this Hippocratic model – for instance, some treatises claim that, since the excess liquid women contain is largely thought to take the form of blood, which is hot, women must logically be hotter than men rather than colder, as most medical texts assert. See King 1994, 106.
[108] Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals* 650-658; *On the Generation of Animals* 775a14; Flemming 2000, 117.
[109] Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 14.6-7 (11.295.27-296 Helmreich).

Greek medical ideas, the basic concepts remain relatively constant; women were softer, wetter, and colder than men, and, most importantly, this was proof of the inherent weakness and inferiority of the female sex.

This concept of the female body tied into a wider discourse which viewed the female body as a fluid entity comprised of penetrable, flexible, and porous boundaries. The softness of female flesh and the excess of liquid are seen to render the boundaries between the female body and the outside world less solid, more prone to transformation, and more vulnerable to outside influence. Ann Carson has noted the many mythological examples of female characters who demonstrate an inability to control their bodily boundaries.[110] The foul-smelling Harpies, who leak stinking bodily fluids uncontrollably, provide perhaps the most explicit example of odour and the porous, wet female form combined into one unpleasant whole.[111] These ideas of permeability and flexibility were also linked to the enduring concept of female lack of control. The inability of women to control the boundaries of their bodies provided a biological explanation for and confirmation of the widespread belief that women were unable to control their actions and desires, particularly in relation to their supposed excessive sexual urges and alcohol intake.[112] The presence of such examples of female mutability in myth, and the link between social stereotypes and medical theory demonstrates that the medical concepts of the female body have a complex relationship with other areas of the ancient world – the works of Galen and other medical writers are unavoidably influenced in their theories not only by their own experience and the work of earlier writers but also by ideas about the female body from other areas of ancient literature and thought, and their works in turn served to perpetuate these ideas.

Returning to the field of medicine, these concepts of female permeability and lack of control are particularly significant for our understanding of medical ideas about odour and the female body. The female body, with its weaker boundaries and lack of control, was necessarily more prone to smelling and also be easily affected by smells. As seen above, there are several examples of the power of scent over the human body

[110] Carson 1999, 77-78.
[111] See chapter 4 for further exploration of the Harpies and other female bodies of myth.
[112] Carson 1999, 81-82.

which apply only to women; the lethargic effects of camphor, and the power of a snuffed lamp to cause miscarriage, for example.[113] At the same time, references to foul bodily odour specific to one sex in medical texts almost exclusively concern women. The Hippocratic Corpus mentions at various times the bad smell of specifically female fluids and bodily parts.[114] Soranus references the potential for breastmilk to smell foul or vinegary due to a nurse's faulty regimen, a concern echoed by Galen in situations in which a wet-nurse has conceived:[115]

> As a consequence, I myself would recommend that, if a woman nursing an infant should become pregnant, another nurse should be found, considering and assuming her milk would be altogether better in taste, appearance and odour (*gala geuseu kai opsei kai osfrēsei*) And for those tasting and smelling the sweetness and looking at it, the best milk will be seen as white and uniform, and is midway between watery and thick. Poor milk is either thick and very cheesy, or watery and whey-like, livid and variable in consistency and colour, and is very bitter to those tasting it. And it will give the impression of saltiness or some other unusual quality. Such milk is not sweet to the smell (*to de toioūton oude pros tēn osmēn hēdu*).
>
> Galen, *Hygiene* 1.9[116]

Once again, odour is interwoven with other sensory characteristics: texture, taste, colour, and so on. The sensory toolkit mentioned in Galen's discussion of blood reappears here, but instead of as a means of diagnosing disease, it is employed to discern whether a fluid produced by the female body is suitable for consumption by another body, one which is even less in control of its physical and mental faculties.

The longevity and broad reach of ideas about the foulness of female bodily emissions can be seen in Plutarch's advice to men not to share baths with women as

[113] Pliny also ascribes this power to a plant called *dracunculus*: Pliny, *Natural History* 24.143.

[114] Hippocratic Corpus, *Coan Prenotions* 516 (menstrual blood); *Diseases of Women* 1.36 (lochia); *Nature of Women* 65 (female genitalia). Even in the case of bodily functions that are not specific to women, such as urine and faeces, female odour is highlighted in a way not seen in men: Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 1.50; Totelin 2015, 24.

[115] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.22; Galen, *Hygiene* 1.9 (6.47 Kühn).

[116] Trans. Johnston 2018 (Loeb 535.67-69).

their excretions defile the air and the water, and as late as the fifth century CE, when Aetius speaks of the stench of female flux.[117] Conversely, there is only one reference to a specifically male foul odour, in relation to the goatish smell of foam produced due to the condition of satyriasis, and even then it should be noted that women were thought to be able to suffer from this condition as well.[118] It is perhaps particularly revealing that most of the references to foul female smell can be linked to specific fluids. As women were seen to be physiologically wetter than men, they consequently exuded more liquids which were often at least perceived to be smelly. Therefore, the wetness of the female body and the perception of women as the more odiferous sex can be seen as intrinsically linked.

1.2. Monstrous menstruation

Of all the fluids contained within the ancient female body, by far the most defining and controversial was menstrual blood. The degree to which menstruation was deemed 'taboo' in ancient Rome is somewhat debated, but it does seem that the majority of Roman literature, like that of the Greeks, avoided the topic where possible, suggesting that it was at least a source of discomfort.[119] There is little evidence that menstruating women were banned from religious festivals, rituals, or spaces, a surprising difference from the more extreme and explicit isolation of women in early Judaism or Christianity.[120] However, there is a strong case to be made that menstrual blood and menstruation in general was perceived as polluting, unclean, and malodorous by much of the Roman world, particularly when outside of specific medical contexts.[121] One of the most explicit (and perhaps most entertaining) examples of the superstition surrounding hostility towards menstrual blood can be found in book 28 of Pliny's *Natural History*, in which he chronicles the manifold supernatural qualities of the fluid:

[117] Plutarch, *Fragments* 97; Aetius 16.109 (Zervos).
[118] Soranus, *On Acute Diseases*, 3.18.178; Aretaeus, *On the Causes and Symptoms of Acute Diseases* 7; Gourevitch 1995, 156.
[119] On menstruation and taboo, see Parker 1983, 100-104; Gourevitch 1984, 95-103; Cohen 1991, 273; Richlin 1992a, 281-282; Classen 1993, 87; Lennon 2010, 71-87.
[120] Cohen 1991, 273; Lennon 2010, 82.
[121] Lennon 2014, 81-88; Ripat 2016, 108-111.

> Truly fearful and unspeakable things have been raved about the menstrual discharge itself (*dira et infanda vaticinantur*), the other magic (*monstrificus*) of which we have indicated in its proper place. Of these things, one might mention without shame that if the female power [menstruation] coincides with an eclipse of the moon or sun, its effects are incurable, not the less also when the moon is not shining; then sexual intercourse is fatal and noxious to men (*coitusque tum maribus exitiales esse atque pestiferos*). At this time also purple is polluted by the woman's touch (*purpuram quoque eo tempore ab his pollui*): so much greater is her power.
>
> Pliny, *Natural History* 28.77-78

Menstrual blood had the power to drive away storms, ruin purple cloth and linen, blunt razors, and tarnish razors. It was repulsive to animals and plants, devastating vines and medicinal plants, driving bees from their hives or even killing them, killing other insects, sending dogs into madness.[122] The mere sight of a woman who was in the midst of her first period, or the touch of any menstruating woman, could cause mares to spontaneously miscarry. Humans, too, were vulnerable to the harmful effects of menstrual blood: women, as Pliny says, were not safe from this plague of their sex (28.80, *feminis malo*), suffering miscarriage as a result of the slightest contact with or even proximity to the substance, and a man foolish enough to engage in sexual relations with a menstruating woman was potentially risking his life.

The language Pliny uses throughout his discussion of menstruation suggests not only destructive and even deadly potential, but also monstrosity and shame, as well a sense of pollution and infection. Menstrual blood was a magical, monstrous, or strange (*monstrificus*). Much like a disease, it polluted on contact (*polluere*), and altered the state of everything it touched (28.80, *mutare*), usually very much for the worse, rendering them infected, stained, or spoiled (*infectae*). Its effects were wide-reaching, affecting even things it has not directly touched, simply through sight or

[122] On menstruating women as devastating to crops see also Columella, *On Agriculture* 11.3.38, 50. On the connection between the moon and menstruation in ancient thought, see Dean-Jones 1989, 185-191.

proximity. Its effects were destructive or deadly (*exitialis*), pestilential, baleful, or noxious (*pestifer*), and incurable (*inremediabilis*).

The various effects of menstrual blood related by Pliny were manifested through a range of senses. Menstrual blood could cause harm through direct touch – through the fluid directly touching other substances, whether that be during coitus or from an accidental or deliberate smear (28.81, *inlitu*), or less directly (but with no less horrifying consequences) through the touch of a woman who is menstruating. Taste, the intermediary between odour and touch, also made an appearance as the means by which menstrual blood sends dogs into madness.[123] In addition to touch and taste, menstrual blood could transmit its effects through the medium of air. The presence of menstruating women walking semi-clothed around a field were enough to drive away or kill 'caterpillars, worms, beetles, and other vermin', apparently without the need for either the blood itself or the woman bleeding to make direct contact with them. Pliny also recounts the claims of Bithus of Dyrrhachium that menstruating women could tarnish a mirror.[124] This phenomenon is also recorded in Aristotle, where he explicitly links it to the power of the eye – the blood within the woman was somehow conveyed to the mirror through an invisible mechanism of sight which alters the air on the surface of the mirror.[125] Elsewhere, Pliny suggests a similar phenomenon when he claims that 'the mere sight at however great a distance' is in some cases enough to cause a mare to miscarry.[126] The similarities between the ways in which sight and smell function in ancient philosophical thought are particularly explicit here; both reach out invisibly beyond the physical bounds of their source, infecting and altering those bodies or objects with whom they come into contact.

One specific effect of menstrual blood deserves particular attention, as it is the most explicit reference to odour in Pliny's account. Like some of the other claims, it is mentioned twice by Pliny in two different books: 'bronze and iron are immediately seized by rust, and an awful smell fills the air.[127] In both of these instances, metals are not only tarnished through physical contact, they become surrounded by and begin to

[123] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.65: 'to taste it drives dogs to madness and infects their bites with an incurable poison'.
[124] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.64; 28.82.
[125] Aristotle, *On Dreams* 450b-460a.
[126] Pliny, *Natural History* 28.79.
[127] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.65; 28.79.

give off a foul odour. Here the language Pliny uses is significant; in the first case, the brass object does not simply become malodorous, it receives the smell (*accipere*) from the blood which touches it. In the latter, the phrase *corripit odorque dirus aera* positions the 'horrible smell' as the subject – it takes hold of (*corripit*) the air in the same way that the rust takes hold of the metal, a choice of words by Pliny which goes even further to suggest that the odour originates not with the metal, but with the menstrual blood itself. Bees, noted by Pliny for their keen olfactory sensibilities and horror of malodour, flee from or are killed by proximity to menstrual blood and menstruating women, again suggesting foul scent and dangerous power.[128]

Pliny, as determined as ever to catalogue the entire span of natural phenomena, does also mention several beneficial and even medical uses of menstrual blood. Its dreadful and monstrous powers could sometimes be put to good use – calming storms, for instance, has obvious positive uses, and menstruation's lethal effect on insects could be put to good use as a pesticide, in a somewhat undignified ritual Pliny ascribes to one Metrodorus of Scepsos.[129] He notes, albeit with a somewhat sceptical tone, that some claim that this great plague (*tanto malo*) makes a liniment for gout, and that the touch of a menstruating woman could ease scrofula, parotid tumours, abscesses, erysipelas, boils, and eye fluxes (28.82). Citing two women, Lais and Salpe, as well as one Diotimus, he also mentions the use of menstrual blood to cure fevers, as well as the bite of a rabid dog. Sotira, a midwife, suggests the application of menstrual blood to the feet in order to treat fever and to revive one from an epileptic fit (preferably without the knowledge of the patient, for unclear reasons, 28.83). The ashes of burnt menstrual blood, combined with rose oil, relieved women's headaches, and combined with soot and wax, these ashes could heal the sores of work animals (28.4-5). Even sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, so dangerous in other contexts, is purported to cure fever in the right circumstances, at least according to the physician Icatidas (28.4). Pauline Ripat has argued that the apparently paradoxical curative powers of menstrual blood arose from ideas in folk medicine that it was possible to cure like with like; 'hence menstrual blood threatened the integrity of

[128] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.64; 11.45; 28.79. Bees' sensitivity to odour is such that they also loathe perfume, attacking those who wear it: Pliny, *Natural History* 11.61.

[129] Pliny, *Natural History* 28.78: '[women] walk, therefore, through the middle of fields with their clothing above their uncovered buttocks, elsewhere it is the custom that they go barefoot, with their hair and girdle loosened.' See also: Lennon 2010, 80.

healthy crops, but it provided a cure for crops ailing from a force like itself… As a form of putrefaction, it could help running sores; as a coagulating, dessicating fluid, it could cure evaporating fever'.[130]

Despite these few saving graces, the reader is left with little doubt that menstrual blood is, to Pliny at least, potent, dangerous, and in all but a few contexts, destructive and polluting. Indeed, Pliny chooses to undercut all of the beneficial applications of this substance by ending his account thus: 'This is all which it would be right (*fas*) to repeat, and much of it I do not say without shame. The rest is detestable and unspeakable (*reliqua intestabilia, infanda*)'.[131] The positioning of this plea to decency and loud protestations that the rest is just too horrible to relate immediately at the end of the discussion of menstrual blood is significant. Jack Lennon points to the use of the term *fas* ('right'), which implies the presence of uses which were *nefas* ('unspeakable'), a term which often carried with it connotations of religious offences, sexually impure acts, and of physical pollution. By mentioning the existence of *nefas* or *infanda* uses of menstrual blood, Pliny is reinforcing the obscenity of the substance, but by refraining from actually describing them, he is avoiding the potential 'linguistic infection' which might accompany the utterance of such obscene words.[132] Such omission also works as an effective literary device, encouraging the reader to imagine for themselves what might be so terrible that Pliny is unable or unwilling to describe it. Having examined more or less the entire contents of the human body, from saliva to excrement, menstrual blood is the furthest Pliny is willing to go.

Menses were, in the medical discourse of female physiology, a symptom of woman's cold wetness, two characteristics of environments which were thought to be conducive to decay and the development of foul odour.[133] The monthly evacuation of this fluid by the female body was evidence of its failure to achieve maleness, but it was also, according to Galen, Celsus, and others, vital to female health and fertility.[134] The excess fluid gathered in a woman's body due to her cool temperature and spongy flesh had to be evacuated regularly; if this did not happen, the build-up of blood could

[130] Ripat 2016, 111. See also: von Staden 1992, 14.
[131] Pliny, *Natural History* 28.87.
[132] Lennon 2010, 8. See also: Richlin 1992, 30.
[133] Detienne 1994, 10-11; Classen, Howes, and Synott 1994, 48.
[134] Celsus, *On Medicine* 2.7.7; *Venesection against Erasistratus* 5 (11.164-165 Kühn).

inhibit fertility and cause serious health problems or even death.[135] Recommendations for bloodletting and the encouragement or inducement of nosebleeds and vomiting to facilitate the expulsion of excess fluid in cases where menstruation does not occur point to the importance of this process.[136]

Some groups of women – the prepubescent, the aged, and the pregnant – were not expected to menstruate, as they lacked the surplus fluid which might pose a threat: the bodies of young girls had not yet become porous enough to collect liquid, the elderly had dried with age, and the excess blood in pregnant women was put to use in the generation of her child.[137] For many ancient physicians, it seems that these were the only exceptions to the rule. In the case of Phaethousa in the Hippocratic Corpus demonstrates, the consequences of retaining menstrual blood could be dire, leading to masculinisation and eventual death.[138] One ancient physician who bucks the trend is Soranus, who argues, based on experience, that it was perfectly possible for women to be healthy even without menstruation. Even so, he concurs with others in designating menstruation to be the 'first function' of the womb, and refers to it as a *katharsis,* denoting the purging or cleansing of the body from unwanted excess.[139] In the majority of the Greco-Roman medical texts, therefore, menstrual blood emerges as a necessary and relatively neutral substance.

Although there is little suggestion in the medical texts of the disgust exhibited by some other sources towards menstrual blood, nor of healthy menses as particularly characterised by a foul odour, there are certainly indications that vaginal discharge could be repulsively malodorous. Two examples in the Hippocratic corpus depict the fetid vaginal excretions which were possible when the female body was not functioning properly:

> Then on the fifth or seventh day the cavity is sometimes set in motion,
> and she passes dark very ill-smelling stools and also from time to time

[135] Flemming 2000, 116-117.
[136] Hippocratic Corpus, *Aphorisms* 5.32-33; Galen, *Venesection against Erasistratus* 5 (11.164-165 Kühn); Demand 1998, 79; Flemming 2000, 311-312.
[137] Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 1.25; King 1994, 107.
[138] Hippocratic Corpus, *Epidemics* 8.8.31; King 2013 126-127: an important distinction here that King makes is that in the Hippocratic account Phaethousa becomes masculinised but does not become a man – the account continues to use feminine forms even as her body becomes hard and hairy.
[139] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.6; Dean-Jones 1994a, 197; King 1998, 29; Flemming 2000, 235-236.

> something like ass's urine. If these come down, the patient will seem to improve, and on being quickly attended to she will recover. If she is not treated, she will be in danger of an attack of violent diarrhoea, and her lochia will stop... If cleaning occurs suddenly in a woman as the result of her medications or even spontaneously—for this too may happen, if her uterus opens up at its mouth on being overpowered by a mass of blood suddenly descending and breaking through—ill-smelling purulent material will be discharged, sometimes also dark, she will be relieved, and on being looked after she will recover.
>
> Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 1.36[140]

In this passage, the odour of female excretions – in the form of particularly bad diarrhoea, copious and pungent urine, and discharge of black, lumpy, stinking blood from the uterus – are prominent in the list of symptoms, but their emission from the body is also exactly the purgation required to restore health. The bloody emission in question here is not the usual menstrual blood but rather the lochia in the wake of childbirth. However, the blood retained in the uterus to nourish and form the child during pregnancy, and therefore that which is expelled after birth, was thought to be the same which would otherwise form the menses.

In a second example, the olfactory consequences of ill-health and sterility are long-lasting and pungent: 'In fact, the ulceration persists for a long time, like those which are in ears; the woman exhales a bad odor; sometimes fetid humours flow from the genital parts; and, as long as the ulceration lasts, there is no conception, because the uterus does not retain sperm'.[141] Again, the genitals excrete a foul-smelling fluid (whether this should be thought of as bloody or not is unclear), and the odour of ill-health is such that it exudes not just from the reproductive organs but from the whole body. Conception in this state is impossible – the writer ascribes this to the inability of the uterus to retain sperm rather than the due to the odour itself, which is more of a symptom than a cause – however, one could well imagine that the repulsive smell given off by such a female body might act as its own contraceptive.

[140] Trans. Potter 2018 (Loeb 538.88-91).
[141] Hippocratic Corpus, *On Sterility* 213, own translation based on Littré 8.410.

Elsewhere, there are more subtle indications that menstrual blood was foul-smelling. In *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle compares menstruation to diarrhoea, and refers to the ability of pungent foods to alter menstruation: 'some pungent foods cause a noticeable increase in the amount [of diarrhoea]… Just as lack of concoction produces in the bowels diarrhoea, so in the blood-vessels it produces discharges of blood of various sorts, and especially the menstrual discharge'.[142] Within the space of a few lines, Aristotle makes two comments about menstruation which allude to odour. The first of these is the comparison he draws between menstruation and diarrhoea. Both, he says, are due to a 'lack of concoction', and this is his explicit reason for drawing the comparison – both are fluid substances which are expelled from the body due to a lack of the requisite heat. However, just as the consumption of pungent food is suggestive of odour, it is possible to see another link between diarrhoea and faeces. Aristotle elsewhere ascribed to failures of concoction foul odour, particularly in the case of generative fluids which he describes as particularly potent.[143] The juxtaposition of menstrual blood, elsewhere characterised as pollutive, foul, and malodorous, with loose stools, implies an olfactory equivalence between the two. In fact, outside of the realm of medical and philosophical thought there are some indications of an association between menstrual blood and faeces; a fragment of Lucilius places the two substances side-by-side as examples of defilement, and, as discussed in chapter four, it is possible that there was a deliberate ambiguity as to whether Virgil's Harpies were dripping blood or droppings.[144]

Secondly, Aristotle mentions the potential influence pungent (*drimeōn*) foods might have upon the menstrual process, serving to increase the volume of fluid produced. The ability of 'pungent' food to increase blood flow appears elsewhere, notably in Soranus' *Gynaecology*, in which it features on a list of potential factors which might alter the production of menstrual blood.[145] The term *drimus* carries connotations of both taste and smell, and it seems reasonable to suggest that both are at play in this instance.[146] Furthermore, the ability of strong-smelling food to cause

[142] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 1.728a, trans. Peck 1942 (Loeb 366.103).
[143] [Aristotle], *Problems* 4.12.
[144] Lucilius, *Fragments* 1186 Marx: 'This one fouls you with menses, whereas that one fouls you with dung (*haec inbubinat, at contra te inbulbitat*)'. See chapter 5, pp. 204-205
[145] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1.21.
[146] Pseudo-Aristotle elsewhere uses the phrase *drimuteron ozein* to refer specifically to a 'pungent smell': [Aristotle], *Problems* 907a13.

unpleasant odour in bodily fluids was well established. Aristotle himself remarks upon the power of garlic to alter the odour of urine, as does one contributor to the Hippocratic Corpus.[147] In the realm of female fluids, Soranus makes several references to the power of astringent food or that with 'bad juices' to spoil a wet-nurse's milk.[148] In addition to suggesting an olfactory pungency native to menstrual blood itself, Aristotle's assertion in this passage is that the menstruating body was subject to the influence of strong scents. This vulnerability of the menstruating female body to particular odours can be seen in Lucretius' claim that the 'heavy scent' of castor, a pungent excretion from the glands of a beaver, could cause menstruating women to fall into a faint – a phenomenon to which Galen also makes reference.[149]

In differing ways, therefore, menstrual blood emerges from these texts as a pungent, potent substance. For Pliny, menstrual blood was supernatural, the most hateful substance emitted from any human body, its pollutive influence conveyed through many different senses, sometimes simultaneously. Just as the *miasmata* referenced in medical texts carry an implication of malodour, so too does his depiction of the pollution and corruption transmitted by menstrual blood suggest stench.[150] While medical texts generally do not exhibit the strong distaste found in Pliny, nor the fearful silence of so much of the rest of Roman literature, menstrual blood and other uterine excretions were quick to become viscerally foul-smelling when the female body was in disarray, and it was only when the stinking substance has been ejected from the body that it could become healthy again. Looking beyond Pliny and the medical texts, there are other indications that menses were seen as a reeking pollutant. The accusation of cunnilingus, a taboo even greater than fellatio, both of which were often associated with malodorous breath, could be made yet more damning by the suggestion that the object of the activity was menstruating at the time, as in Seneca's depiction of Mamercus Scaurus.[151] In the myth of the infamously smelly Lemnian women, it has been suggested that their stench was that of menstrual blood, and Debbie Felton has argued that the foul-odoured discharge (*feodissima ventris proluvies*) and

[147] [Aristotle], *Problems* 13.6; Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 4.56.
[148] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.24, 56.
[149] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 6.779-780; Galen, *On the Nature and Powers of Simple Medications* 11.1.15 (12.337-341 Kühn).
[150] Totelin 2015, 18.
[151] Seneca, *On Benefits* 4.31.3; Lennon 2010, 74-75. For more on Mamercus Scaurus see chapter 5, pp. 210.

polluting presence of the Harpies in Virgil's Aeneid (and indeed possibly in the earlier writings of Apollodorus) was intended to be understood within the context of attitudes towards menstruation.[152] While menstrual blood epitomises the foul odours which might leak from the wet, cold, malodorous female body, there was one aspect of female anatomy which most encapsulated and demonstrated its natural vulnerability to the influence of external odour: the womb.

1.3. The beastly womb

> In the middle of the flanks of women lies the womb… closely resembling an animal; for it is moved of itself hither and thither in the flanks, also upwards in a direct line to below the cartilage of the thorax, and also obliquely to the right or to the left, either to the liver or spleen; and likewise is subject to prolapses downwards, and, in a word, it is altogether erratic. It delights, also, in fragrant smells, and advances towards them; and it has an aversion to fetid smells, and flees from them; and, on the whole, the womb is like an animal within an animal.
>
> Aretaeus, *On the Causes and Symptoms of Acute Diseases* 2.11[153]

Perhaps the most infamous feature of the female body in Greco-Roman medical thought, particularly in regards to the subject of odour, was the so-called 'wandering womb'. This theory, supported or rejected to different degrees by different Greek and Roman physicians, claimed that the womb was not fixed in place, but rather could move around the body causing miscellaneous health complaints.[154] During the second century CE, Aretaeus of Cappadocia put forward the vivid depiction of an apparently sentient womb quoted above. According to Aretaeus, the womb was like 'an animal within an animal', given not only freedom of movement but also its own olfactory capacity, and even its own scent-preferences. This image of the roving, sensitive womb was a controversial one amongst medical writers in antiquity, but it certainly had a long history.[155] In the fourth century BCE, Plato's *Timaeus* also

[152] Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.227-228; Apollodorus, *Library* 1.9.17; Jackson 1990, 81-82; Felton 2013, 411-412.
[153] Trans. Adams 1972.
[154] Totelin 2015, 27.
[155] Hanson 1991, 82; Dean-Jones 1994a, 200; King 1998, 38, 242; Flemming 2000, 117, 335-336; Dasen 2002, 171-173; Faraone 2011, 1-6.

claimed that the womb was like a separate sentient being (*zoōn*) or animal within the female body, roaming around in an attempt to satiate its need to be filled either through sexual intercourse or pregnancy.[156] A key difference between Plato's depiction of the womb and that of Aretaeus' is the absence of any olfactory element. Plato's womb, while sentient, is not sensitive, and appears to be unaffected by any external factors save from that of the act of procreation and subsequent gestation of a child. Despite this, the two accounts do characterise the womb as similarly erratic and mobile, ready at a moment's notice to cause serious harm to or even threaten the life of the body which it inhabits.

The irrationality and animalistic character of the wandering womb in these two passages is shaped by a long and broad tradition in Greco-Roman antiquity which associated femininity with wild nature and animals.[157] Helen King has traced links between Greek medical theories about the womb, both in its wild, lustful nature and its centrality to constructions of the female body, back to the myth of the first woman, Pandora. Pandora was defined by her bestial nature and her womb; Hesiod says she possesses 'the mind of a bitch' and a *gaster* (belly or womb), which is always hungry.[158] The hunger and wildness of the womb as portrayed in Aretaeus and Plato suggests that these stereotypes about the nature of women permeated many areas of Greco-Roman medical and philosophical thought no less than every other facet of ancient literature. While in *Timaeus* the womb's desire for sexual intercourse clearly corresponds to stereotypes about female erotomania and to the value placed upon women's procreational abilities, Aretaeus' emphasis on its hunt for sweet smell warrants further exploration. Principally, this acts as a theoretical justification for the (often alarming) uses of scent in gynaecological therapy, and also reflects the ways in which, as seen throughout this chapter, the female body was in general thought to be more odour-sensitive. However, it might also be suggested that playing a role was the widespread stereotype that women were excessively interested in fragrant perfumes and other such luxuries, a concept which, as demonstrated below, was certainly familiar to physicians such as Galen.[159] Interpreted thus, the womb became almost a

[156] Plato, *Timaeus* 91b-d; Dean-Jones 1991, 121.
[157] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 4; Carson 1999, 85.
[158] Hesiod, *Works and Days* 67; King 1998, 27: 'a late creation, a construct, an artifice, and an illusion, containing a bitch-mind and a womb-jar'.
[159] See below, pp. 59-60.

separate, independent entity within the female body which compelled the body it inhabited to seek out odour, both in therapeutic contexts and in life more generally.

Although Aretaeus' account demonstrates that the theory of the wandering womb was well and alive in the second century CE, this was not without opposition. As far back as the Hippocratic Corpus, other medical explanations for the movement of the womb were based more on the mechanics and humoral changes of the body. The writer of *Diseases of Women* explains movement through changes in moisture within the body: when deprived of the moisture provided, for example, by regular intercourse, the womb dried out and became lighter, and was then attracted up the body towards wetter organs such as the liver and the lungs.[160] Alternatively, its lack of proper anchoring within the body meant that violent disruption such as childbirth or even sneezing could cause it to prolapse – in fact, it has been suggested that the very real fact of uterine prolapse may well have been a key contributor to the belief that the womb could move elsewhere within the body itself.[161]

During the first few centuries CE, writers such as Celsus and Galen and all rejected the idea that the womb could move at all.[162] Ever practical, Soranus of Ephesus explicitly rejects any notion of a sensitive, discerning womb, saying that 'the uterus does not issue forth like a wild animal from the lair, delighted by fragrant odours and fleeing bad odours'.[163] This reads almost as a direct response to Aretaeus, but, since he is writing some time before, possibly under the reign of Trajan, he must in fact be contradicting the claims either of his contemporaries or of earlier physicians. It stands to reason, therefore, that the image of the animate womb, sniffing out sweet scents and fleeing foul, is likely to have been widely-disseminated.[164] In practice, as will be explored further below, many of the therapies proposed in all of these texts seemed to function on the underlying assumption that the womb was mobile, and, crucially, sensitive to odour.

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[160] Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 1.7; 2.153-154; Hanson 1991, 82-83.

[161] Dean-Jones 1991, 122; King 1998, 68-69; Totelin 2015, 28.

[162] Galen, *On Affected Parts* 6.5 (8.420 Kühn); Celsus, *On Medicine* 4.27.1a. Pliny's use of language is rather ambiguous – he makes use of terms like *conversione* and *versa*, which could refer either to movement out of its place or just to its alignment or shape: Pliny, *Natural History* 7.175; Flemming 2000, 175.

[163] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.29.

[164] Faraone 2011, 7.

1.4. Odour therapies

So far, this chapter has discussed the propensity of all human bodies to emit odour, and has argued that the female body was constructed as being physiologically more inclined to do this, due to their greater quantity and variety of bodily fluids, and their inability to exercise control over their bodily boundaries. It has examined the ways in which the Greco-Roman body was sensitive to the influence of external odours, arguing again that the female body was particularly sensitive and vulnerable, both as a whole, and due to the organ which defined it as female – the womb. This section will discuss the use of perfumes or other odiferous products in the treatment of disease and disorder of this sensitive body.[165]

As noted by Totelin in her discussion of smell in ancient medicine, perfumes and other scented substances played a prominent role in the treatment of many different kinds of medical conditions in the Roman world.[166] The use of perfumes and other scented products in or as medicaments is mentioned all across Greco-Roman medical literature, from the Hippocratic Corpus to the works of Galen. In the Hippocratic Corpus, perfumes appear only in treatments for women, and their prominence in the treatment of specifically gynaecological issues continued throughout Greco-Roman antiquity. As time progresses, therapies involving perfume and odour began to seep into other areas of treatment as well. Dioscorides, for instance, described the potential uses of perfumes in the treatment of skin and ear complaints, as well as for digestive issues and headaches.[167] Fragments preserved in *The Learned Banqueters* of Athenaeus (late second century CE) from the first century BCE physicians Philonides and Apollodorus also mention the use of perfumes in the treatment of headaches.[168] Pliny's *Natural History* dedicated thirteen out of thirty seven books to the subject of medicines derived from the *rerum natura*, many of which make use of perfume and other scented products.[169] Myrrh and frankincense, two

[165] Odour therapies were part of one department of ancient medical practice, pharmacology – treatment through the use of medicaments (*pharmaka*); Flemming 2000, 110-112.
[166] Totelin 2015, 26.
[167] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.56, 57, 58; Riddle 1985, 35, 89; Totelin 2009, 231. Some perfumes, such as narcissus oil, would however cause rather than cure headaches; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.53.
[168] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 675a-e; Totelin 2015, 26.
[169] Flemming 2000, 133. See chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of Pliny and perfume.

particularly prized substances for use in perfumes and incense, were also thought to be particularly and variously efficacious. Frankincense-based medicaments are recommended by Dioscorides in the treatment of sores, wounds, ulcers, and warts.[170] Pliny similarly recommends use of myrrh to cure sores.[171] Rose, another popular ingredient in perfumed unguents in the ancient world, was incorporated into many remedies, including a cure for stomach ache, and a deodorant.[172] Many highly fragrant pharmacological treatments were not specific to women; just as all bodies could stink or be made ill by miasmatic air, so too were all bodies open to the healing influence of odour therapies.

By the nature of the ingredients used, a large proportion of the compound medicaments used in Greco-Roman medicine would have had some kind of odour, often a rather strong one, whether or not this olfactory element was thought to be important to the treatment's efficacy. And, as is so often the case with references to substances which we know to emit odour, it is by no means the case that ancient compilers of pharmacological recipes and treatments explicitly make mention of it. This is hardly surprising. Given the pervasiveness of pungent materials in *pharmaka*, combined with the limitations of Greek and Latin olfactory vocabulary, it is perhaps only to be expected that Greco-Roman medical texts might find overt references to scent unnecessary – their readership was surely aware that, for instance, roses had a particular odour, and could be expected to understand that a treatment for stomach problems using rose petals will be fragrant without being told so.[173]

It is often hard to tease out when the odour of a substance was relevant to and impacted upon its therapeutic value. In some cases, it is clear that the main therapeutic value is in the other properties of the substances being used, and this might lead one to assume that the olfactory element was irrelevant. Nevertheless, the odour of

[170] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.68. For other frankincense-based remedies, see Celsus, *On Medicine* 5.5 and Theophrastus, *On the Causes of Plants* 9.11. See also: Majno 1975, 207-217; Miller and Morris 1988, 78-80, 298-305; Olson 2009, 301; Johnson 2016, 75-75.

[171] Pliny, *Natural History* 24.154. For more myrrh-based remedies, see Celsus, *On Medicine* 5.5-6; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.64; Pliny, *Natural History* 12.66-70; 24.86; 28.214; 30.116; See also: Majno 1975, 217-218; Miller and Morris 1988, 82-83, 304-305; Olson 2009, 301, 307; Johnson 2016, 76-77.

[172] Pliny, *Natural History* 21.125; Olson 2009, 307.

[173] Pliny, *Natural History* 21.125. See chapter 3, p. 111 on Pliny's olfactory vocabulary and introduction, p. 23.

medicaments might often have been an important part of their perceived effect. Adding sweet-smelling substances to remedies which might otherwise smell very unappealing, particularly those which were to be in some way taken into the body or placed upon the body for an extended period of time, might serve to make the experience more tolerable or soothing. Alternatively, medicaments with a particularly pungent, vivid scent might increase their perceived efficacy.[174] However, the most prominent and enduring area of therapy that featured odiferous substances and perfumed medicaments, often explicitly *because* of their odour, was gynaecology. Regardless of the professed beliefs of individual physicians concerning such contested issues as the mobility and sensitivity of the womb, the profusion of odour therapies used when dealing with female bodies, particularly for conditions specific to women, does appear to point decisively to a vision of the medical female body as more influenced by the powers of scent than the male norm.

Medical authorities held varying views as to how far there existed a set of medical conditions specific to women, but many agreed that there were a range of ailments which could be attributed to changes in the womb.[175] The womb was deemed the cause of many and varied physiological and psychological problems, one of the most dangerous being uterine suffocation. Although other treatments were prescribed – tight bandaging, bathing, cupping or massaging of various body parts, and, in the case of uterine prolapse, suspension upside down from a ladder – many of the treatments rely on or at the very least make use of highly fragrant or fetid compresses, pessaries and other concoctions.[176] The therapy most clearly beholden to the idea of a mobile, scent-sensitive womb was the process of fumigation, during which sweet and fragrant smoke was directed via a tube into the uterus, while pungent and unpleasant odours were held near the patient's nose.[177] This example from Aretaeus paints a somewhat intense olfactory image of an appropriate treatment for uterine suffocation:

> [Encourage the] smelling of fetid substances – liquid pitch, hairs and burnt wool, the extinguished flame of a lamp, and castor, since, in

[174] Pliny, *Natural History* 22.67, 236; 28.74; Stannard 1982, 16; Totelin 2015, 17.
[175] Fleming 2000, 174.
[176] Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 2.128, 2.131, 2.143; *Nature of Women* 4-5; Dean-Jones 1994b, 73-74.
[177] Celsus, *On Medicine* 4.27; King 1994, 107.

> addition to its bad smell, it warms the congealed nerves. Old urine greatly rouses the sense of one in a death-like state, and drives the uterus downwards. Wherefore we must apply fragrant things on pessaries to the region of the uterus – any ointment of a mild nature, and not pungent to the touch, nard, or Egyptian bacchar, or the medicine from the leaves of the malabathrum, the Indian tree, or cinnamon pounded with any of the fragrant oils… Should the patient partially recover, she is to be seated in a decoction of aromatics, and fumigated from below with fragrant perfumes.
>
> Aretaeus, *Therapeutics of Acute Diseases* 2.11[178]

Aretaeus' prescribed treatments are, deliberately, overwhelmingly pungent, and is quite clear about the intended effects of the odours he recommends. The unpleasant odours would 'rouse the senses', and 'drive the uterus downwards', and so bring relief to the upper parts of the body which it is affecting. The pleasant odours are, it is worth noting, not simply fragrant but in fact rather luxurious ingredients which might be more readily associated with exotic perfumes. It seems very likely that such therapies, which corresponded so directly to the idea of a womb that was drawn towards sweet scents and driven from foul, stem from an underlying belief in a womb that is influenced by odour.[179] It is therefore significant that these odour therapies were highly recommended even by those who reject the theory, as is the case in the words of Galen.[180] One physician who appears to deny the effectiveness of many such therapies is Soranus.[181] His *Gynaecology* is the only work of its kind still surviving, and seems to have been founded on a reasonable amount of practical experience. It is perhaps his focus on the treatment of women which led Soranus to reject many more extreme forms of treatment, especially those based on the notion of an odour-sensitive womb, as demonstrated in this passage:

[178] Trans. Adams 1972.
[179] Hanson 1991, 81-82.
[180] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Place* 10.10 (13.320 Kühn); *Therapeutics to Glaucon* 1.15 (11.47 Kühn): 'Also to these women [apply] very foul-smelling odours to the nose and pleasant odours to the womb'.
[181] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.26-29; Hanson 1991, 82.

> The majority of the ancients and almost all followers of the other sects have made use of ill-smelling odours (such as burnt hair, extinguished lamp wicks, charred deer's horn, burnt wool, burnt flock, skins, and rags, castoreum with which they anoint the nose and ears, pitch, cedar resin, bitumen, squashed bed bugs, and all substances which are supposed to have an oppressive smell) in the opinion that the uterus flees from evil smells. Wherefore they have also fumigated with fragrant substances from below, and have approve of suppositories of spikenard [and] storax, so that the uterus fleeing the first-mentioned odours, but pursuing the last-mentioned, might move from the upper to the lower parts.
>
> Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.29[182]

Soranus lists a noxious catalogue of substances used in odour therapy, and attacks those physicians who choose to use them. His main concerns with this treatment seems to be twofold: firstly, such treatments were based on fanciful theory and so are ineffective, and secondly, that many of the more pungent substances used in odour treatments caused irritation of the body parts to which they are applied, and so were actively harmful in addition to failing to achieve their goal.[183] Fumigation, whether with fragrant or foul substances, he characterises as particularly harmful, as the forcing of air into the uterus only exacerbated the tension caused by inflammation.[184] While this perspective from Soranus demonstrates that there were some in the Roman Empire who were sceptical of the long tradition of odour therapy, it also reinforces the fact that such practices must have been common. As Soranus states, 'the majority of the ancients and almost all followers of the other sects' promoted odour therapies for the treatment of many illnesses of the female body; the attitude taken by Soranus therefore seems to be in the minority.[185]

While it seems clear that many of his objections to odour therapy were based on the non-olfactory harm which the substances used could do, there are certainly

[182] Trans. Owsei Temkin 1991.
[183] Hanson 1998, 85-87.
[184] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.29.
[185] Faraone 2011, 6-7.

indications that some of the harm was being caused by the unpleasant odour. It was not that Soranus is denying the power of odour to affect the body, rather that flawed theory (that the womb can move) rendered the specific therapies being employed either ineffectual or actively harmful to the female patient. Indeed, elsewhere Soranus does not always demonstrate a disdain for odour therapy or for the role of odour and olfaction in medicine. As discussed above, odour is one of the factors he specifically highlights as a means of discerning whether breastmilk is of a good quality, suggesting that foul odour can be a symptom of a failing of the female body.[186]

He is also not averse to some more gentle uses of odour in gynaecological therapies, recommending the preparation of various 'things to smell' to aid a woman during childbirth, and the use of 'harmless things to smell' in order to revive a woman whose labour proves difficult.[187] This emphasis on harmlessness, which seems to correlate to either fragrant perfumes or to substances with only a gentle odour, seems to suggest that Soranus is, far from denying the power of odour, actually presenting an image of odour which had the potential to enact serious harm. It is perhaps for this reason that he felt the need to explicitly denounce the use of such harmful substances by his fellow physicians.

Despite his vehement rejection of the theory of the wandering womb, the effectiveness of odour therapy seems so pervasive a belief that even Soranus occasionally slips into recommendations which only make sense in the context of this theory. In the treatment of uterine prolapse, he recommends that 'sweet-smelling aromas [be] held to the nostrils continuously'.[188] The reason for this is not explained, but it seems to be in line with the idea that the womb would be drawn up into the body towards the fragrance, thus curing the prolapse. That even Soranus includes such olfactory remedies is a testament to their wide, often unthinking acceptance in Greco-Roman medical thought, and perhaps also elite society more broadly.

Even besides those treatments designed to realign the womb, the importance of odour is markedly constant. Several medical treatises recommend scented herbs

[186] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.22: Soranus highlights the fact that corruption of the milk in this way can be due to a 'faulty regimen' on the part of the nurse, placing the responsibility and the blame squarely on the shoulders of the wet-nurse, her habits and character.
[187] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 2.2; 4.7.
[188] Soranus, *Gynaecology* 4.37; Totelin 2015, 28.

such as pennyroyal, white violet, parsley and others as a means to stimulate menstruation.[189] A common means of testing the fertility of a woman appears to have been by placing garlic at the vaginal entrance, and seeing if it could then be detected in the woman's breath.[190] This particular treatment relies on the theory that the female body had an internal tube, a *hodos*, running from her mouth to her vagina, which is in some accounts the reason that the womb had so much freedom of movement, being able to move around the body by means of this passageway.[191] Here, once again, Soranus seems to stand apart from the crowd, denouncing a physician named Diocles, amongst others, for subscribing to what he sees as bad medicine:

> He [Diocles] pays the greatest attention to an indication by means of vaginal suppositories made of such substances as resin, rue, garlic, nosesmart, and coriander; for if upon insertion their property [i.e. smell or taste] is carried up as far as the mouth, he declares the woman capable of conception; if not, the opposite is the case. And Euenor and Euryphon placing the woman on a midwife's stool, made fumigations with the same substances. All this is wrong… the substances made into suppositories and fumigations will be carried up through certain invisible ducts even [if] a person is unable to conceive
>
> Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1.35[192]

In fact, although he disavows these methods of testing for fertility, he does not seem to be denying the connection between the womb and the mouth. Rather, his problem is with the idea that this connection could be so blocked as to prevent the passage of odour. Once again, while on the one hand Soranus demonstrates that there were those in the second century CE who were sceptical about odour therapies, it simultaneously reaffirms the fact that such therapies were clearly widespread – in this

[189] Celsus, *On Medicine* 5.21; Pliny, *Natural History* 24.154 recommends myrrh for the stimulation of menstruation; Soranus, *Gynaecology* 3.28 mentions suppositories which include lily or henna oil, amongst other fragrant substances, to soothe menstrual cramps; Flemming 2000, 117.
[190] Hippocratic Corpus, *Aphorisms* 5.59; *Barrenness* 214; *Diseases of Women* 1.78; *Nature of Women* 96; Dean-Jones 1991, 124; King 1998, 31; Hanson 2004, 296-298; Totelin 2009, 103-104, 181-182; 2015, 25.
[191] Manuli 1980, 399; 1983, 157; Hanson 1981; King 1998, 28; 37; Hanson 1989; Totelin 2015, 25;
[192] Trans. Owsei Temkin 1991.

short passage alone, Soranus pits himself against three others who believe in the effectiveness of odour as a medical test.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, pungent and unpleasant scents could also cause miscarriage. This is where the influence of odour on the female body transformed from useful cure to serious threat. The permeability of the female form was thought to far exceed that of the male, depriving her of control over the smells she emits into the world. However, the prominence of odour therapies suggests that the reverse is also true, that women cannot physically control the effects of odour from the outside world on their internal workings. Pliny seems very aware of this danger, when he remarks that he feels shame at 'how precarious are the beginnings of the proudest of animals, if the smell of a freshly extinguished lamp really can cause an abortion'.[193] The power of odour to affect the world around it thus means that the biological weakness of the female form puts not just herself but the entire human race at risk.

1.5. Medicine and perfume

The line between perfume and medicament in Greco-Roman medicine and society is a somewhat blurred one. Many of the perfumed oils used in medicine, for example to lubricate pessaries, seem to be indistinguishable from those used to scent the body.[194] In addition to the use of simple perfumes, many recipes for compound *pharmaka* look strikingly similar to the recipes for luxurious perfumes, for example:

> Of spurge, balsam, oil of myrrh, two ounces of each; of foaming nitron, three ounces; of wax, one ounce; of oil of the cinnamon-tree leaf, one pound; of *foliata*, saffron, spikenard oil, a fragrant perfume, and amaracus, half-a-pound; prepare in the customary manner
>
> Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka according to Type* 7.12[195]

[193] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.43.
[194] Totelin 2015, 26-27.
[195] Trans. Flemming 2007, 265.

This *murakopon* (myrrh-based unguent) described by Galen is attributed to a woman named Aquilia Secundilla.[196] It eased nerve pain and arthritis, as well as helping with weakness, trembles, and convulsions. Rubbing the unguent on the back or the mouth of the womb (or stomach) soothed pain in that area.[197] This particular unguent contains many of the substances present in non-medicinal perfumes: oil of myrrh or stacte, balsam, cinnamon-leaf oil, saffron, spikenard oil, and amaracus, along with this unnamed 'fragrant perfume'. This rivals some of the most luxurious perfumes described in Pliny's *Natural History* and elsewhere, and its method of application – rubbing onto the skin – is also similar to the ways in which perfumed unguents might be applied for erotic purposes. One might well wonder in what way, apart from the context of use, this substance could be distinguished from any other, non-medicinal perfume.

Beyond pharmacological recipes, many medical texts also include sections on cosmetics, which contain descriptions of many perfumes. The first book of Dioscorides' *On Medical Materials,* for example, includes a vast array of recipes for perfumed unguents.[198] Medical texts also often contain the only extant fragments of many lost works on cosmetics, for instance the *Cosmetics* of Crito, which is partially preserved in Galen's *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place,* and several works on perfumes by the Hellenistic physicians Philonides, Apollodorus, and Apollonius the Herophilean, fragments of which are preserved in Athenaeus' *Learned Banqueters*.[199] Such collections further reinforce the ways in which the categories of 'perfume' and 'medicament' intermingled in ancient thought; since the spices which made up perfumes were believed to possess therapeutic qualities, so too were the end products, as stated explicitly by Theophrastus in the fourth century BCE:

> It is to be expected that perfumes should have medicinal properties in view of the virtues of spices: for these too have such virtues (*eulogōs*

[196] Flemming 2007, 265. A fuller examination of whether the treatments or theories remaining to us from female medical practitioners present a different image of female relationship to odour would be fascinating, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[197] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Type* 7.12 (13.1026 Kühn).
[198] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.43-63; Totelin 2009, 231; 2015, 26.
[199] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Place* 1.3 (12.448 Kühn); Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 675a-e, 676c, 688-689b, 691; Aetius 8.6 (CMG 8.2.408.18-21); Flemming 2007, 269; Totelin 2009, 227; 2015, 26. For more on Crito and other cosmetic texts preserved in medical sources, see Totelin 2017, esp. 139-141, 146-147.

> *de ta mura farmakōdē dia tēn tōn arōmatōn dunamin. kai gar ta arōmata toiaūta*). The effects of plasters and of what some call 'poultices' prove what virtues they display, since they disperse tumours and abscesses and produce a distinct effect on various other parts of the body, on its surface, but also on the interior parts: for instance, if one lays a plaster on his abdomen and breast, the patient immediately produces fragrant odours along with his belches.
>
> Theophrastus, *On Odours* 12.59[200]

Theophrastus uses this simultaneously amusing and repulsive image of a sick man belching sweet perfumes to illustrate the close relationship between perfumes (*mura*) and medicines, and the medicinal qualities of perfumes are attested to in other sources, notably in Pliny's *Natural History*. *Rhodinum, megalium, amaracinum,* and *mendesium*, for example, all popular perfumes for scenting the body, were also used as a laxative, as an anti-inflammatory, to soothe piles, and to relieve aching muscles respectively.[201] The inclusion of these recipes does not necessarily denote acceptance, however; as Totelin has noted, Galen for one expressed a dislike for the cosmetics arts, including perfume for cosmetic purposes.[202]

There seemed to exist with perfume a similar distinction as that which applies to cosmetics (*kommōtikos*) and comseceuticals (*kosmētikos*) in Greco-Roman medicine.[203] The latter, which were designed to preserve beauty and keep the body at its most presentable, generally seemed uncontroversial in pharmacological and medicinal texts, whereas the former, which aimed to add 'unnatural embellishments', drew much more criticism.[204] A subsection of these products included those designed to control, enhance, or add to the natural odour of the body – although often the

[200] Adapted from Hort 1916 (Loeb 79.379-361).
[201] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 8; Ovid, *Cosmetics for the Female Face* 91, 98; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.43, 58, 59; Stewart 2007, 56.
[202] Grillet 1975, 15-18; Totelin 2009, 231. Compare this to the much more positive (albeit perhaps ironic) prescription of fragrant and pungent cosmeceutical products in Ovid's *Cosmetics for the Female Face*, which displays none of this concern for waste or misuse: Ovid, *Cosmetics for the Female Face;* Johnson 2016, 22-25.
[203] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Place* 13.338-342 (12.432-435; 445-446 Kühn); Johnson 2016, 8.
[204] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Place* 13.340-341 (12.434 Kühn); Forbes 1965, 43; Grillet 1975, 11-18; Rosati 1985, 46; Gibson 2003 174-175; Saiko 2005, 220-34; Johnson 2014, 8-9.

division between substances designed to improve different sensory impressions overlapped, for instance in the case of a sweetly scented face cream, which might at once alter texture, appearance, and odour. Some moderation of the body's natural odour was an important part of hygiene, and so helped to keep the body healthy. The Hippocratic Corpus includes recommendations that physicians control their bodily odour as part of cultivating a professional medical presence; they should be 'clean and sweet-smelling'.[205] Galen's account of the stench of his heavy-drinking mentor similarly indicates that allowing oneself to reek was somewhat antisocial.[206] However, this was not to be taken as permission for physicians to douse themselves in exotic perfumes – to smell excessively fragrant was suggestive of quackery and extortionate fees just as much as foul odour was repellent. Similarly, cosmetic uses of perfume in general were suspect.

The main concerns in Galen and other medical texts regarding perfume appear to be twofold: firstly, that those creating perfumes for non-medical consumption lacked the necessary knowledge of the fragrant substances required to make the most of them, thereby wasting useful and valuable pharmacological ingredients; secondly, that perfumes were one symptom of the luxurious and vain tastes of contemporary Roman women. On the first of these anxieties, Galen often reproaches perfumers for their lack of botanical and medical knowledge.[207] In manufacturing ineffectual perfumes, whose only quality was to artificially improve the odour of the wearer, along with a range of other drugs and remedies, perfume makers were seen to have 'encroached on physicians' territory', co-opting a craft which ought properly to be used mainly to promote health and wellbeing, under the guidance of Galen and his colleagues.[208]

The second anxiety is one which will appear repeatedly throughout this thesis; the widespread social belief that women were more desirous of luxury than men, and that this was a social ill and potentially indicative of decadence and decline. This certainly can be seen in some medical texts, perhaps most prominently in the works of

[205] Hippocratic Corpus, *On Medicine* 1; *Precepts* 10; Totelin 2015, 22.
[206] Galen**,** *Commentary on the Hippocratic Epidemics* 6.4.10 (17b.151 Kühn); Totelin 2015, 22.
[207] Galen, *Antidotes* 1.4, 5, 10 (14.24, 30, 53 Kühn); Forbes 1965; Korpella 1995; Totelin 2008; Totelin 2015, 26.
[208] Totelin 2016, 26.

Galen. Galen seems to consider Roman women in particular to have a weakness for this kind of luxury, often making some reference to vanity and luxury when he mentions them.[209] Galen draws a connection between the excess of Roman women and perfume in his repeated remarks that the perfumes *foliata* (which makes an appearance in the unguent of Aquilia Secundilla above) and *spicata* were among those expensive luxuries which only the richest women could afford.[210] Galen appears to harbour a particular dislike of wealthy Roman women and their love of luxury, which he contrasts unfavourably with the rustic, less vain women of the Pergamene countryside and the past.[211]

1.6. Conclusion

In *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place*, Galen gives an account of a pungent hair dye, used by the women inhabiting the rustic, hilly countryside near his hometown of Pergamon. This dye, named *kedria*, possessed such a potent smell of liquid pitch (a central ingredient, designed to blacken the hair), that the odour was not only repellent to *truphōsai* (dainty/luxurious women), but could even so overwhelm their sensitive bodies with its chilling influence that it might even be fatal to them.[212] Artificial scent, here, is no trifle – it is literally a matter of life and death. That the rustic, robust women of the Pergamene countryside are immune to scents which are deadly to softer Roman women serves to emphasise two things; firstly, that not all bodies are equal, even among the same sex. We have been speaking of 'the female body' as an homogeneous entity, but sex was not everything – as shall emerge throughout this thesis, the relationship between a woman and perfume is both shaped by and dependent upon the kind of woman she is, and it is in these differences that the olfactory codes shaping Roman ideas about women and perfume emerge. Secondly, Galen's scorn for the fancy, pampered ladies of Rome highlights that, just as the elite of Rome were not ignorant of the main medical ideas of the day, so too were physicians not cut off from broader cultural attitudes. Elsewhere, the disdain Galen and his peers

[209] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place* 1.2, 2.1 (12.434, 512 Kühn); *Therapeutic Method* 8.5, 13.22 (10.574, 934 Kühn); Flemming 2000, 259. See also Celsus, *On Medicine* 6.5.1 on cosmetic treatments for spots and freckles: 'it is not possible to tear women away from care for their appearance'.
[210] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place* 2.1 (12.512 Kühn); Totelin 2015, 26.
[211] Flemming 2000, 270.
[212] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place* 1.3 (12.440-442 Kühn); Flemming 2000, 269.

express for the work of perfume makers, supposedly for the most part based on a belief that this profession failed to use potentially medically efficacious plants to their full potential, falls in line with the disapproval of the same profession and their products exhibited elsewhere in the Roman empire.

Medical and philosophical theories concerning the female body in antiquity existed in a complex reciprocal relationship with other contemporary literary genres. The elite poets and playwrights discussed throughout the rest of this thesis all very likely had a degree of familiarity with contemporary and earlier medical writings, as well as with texts like Pliny's *Natural History*. Whether consciously or not, their depictions of women and odour were contributing to, responding to, and working within the cultural constructs of the female body that were both shaped by and in return shaped medical theory.[213] Within medical literature over time and between different schools of thought there existed a similarly interactive and responsive relationship. Although there can never be one cohesive concept of the female body and odour in medicine, by examining some of the key aspects of the image of the female body which emerges, particularly those elements that appear fairly constant (at least in their core features) between authors or over time, it is possible to tease out some aspects of this incoherent and ever-shifting phenomenon.

Roman and earlier Greek medical theories concerning physiology and treatment clearly set up women as being, by their very nature, the odiferous sex. References to foul bodily odours, wherever there is a gender divide, almost always refer to the various odours of women and their associated fluids, hence providing a scientific and biological precedent for the perception and depiction of women as particularly inclined to produce odour, whether foul or fragrant. The biological model of women as cold and wet, constantly in a state of change and emitting various fluids, means that women could be seen to have many more opportunities to smell than their male counterparts. The 'wandering womb' theory, although far from universally accepted by medical writers, is a particularly interesting insight into ancient ideas about the relationship between women and olfaction – not only were women themselves deemed naturally more inclined to emit smells than men, they also appear to be more sensitive to it. Regardless of whether medical professionals (or, indeed,

[213] Dean-Jones 1991, 112.

anyone else) would actually have accepted the idea of the womb as actually possessing a sense of smell or as functioning essentially as an independent animal, the tenacity of odour therapies in treating gynaecological issues seems to indicate that the concept of the female body as particularly responsive to and able to be manipulated by scent was deep-rooted and enduring.

The close connection between fragrance (or stench) and the female body in Greco-Roman medicine parallels and interacts with the broader social conception of women as both 'the stinky sex' and as the chief consumers of perfumes.[214] The characterisation of the female body as porous, soft, and liquid, and of simultaneously emitting smells to the outside world and being influenced by external odours with ease reaffirms the stereotype of women as the weaker sex. Theories concerning female physiology provided a medicinal explanation and justification for the broader cultural conception of women not only as mentally lacking in control (and thus prone to dipsomania and erotomania), but equally physically lacking. Such associations in conjunction with one another set up women perfectly as physically inferior and as a potential danger to society. When women are so lacking in physical control that something as mundane and insubstantial as a snuffed lamp could cause the female body to miscarry, then it was the responsibility for the more robust sex to maintain a degree of control over these vulnerable minds and bodies: scent is configured into justification for subjugation and control.[215]

Medical approaches to odour and olfaction similarly have important implications for the chapters that follow. Scent emanating from the body was indicative of the state of that body, and therefore through careful use of a discerning, self-controlled [masculine] sense of smell, one could learn a great deal about the world and about others. Also significant is the idea that scent could act upon the body in very real, very dangerous ways. As the latter part of this chapter has demonstrated, perfume and other scented products**,** many markedly similar to or even indistinguishable from those that will feature throughout this project in manifold contexts, are in the Roman world far from just frivolous, inconsequential luxuries – although they could certainly be wasted as such. As their many therapeutic applications, or alternatively their

[214] Totelin 2015, 24.
[215] King 1994, 110.

horrific physical effects demonstrated, scents had the potential to cause serious disruption both to individual bodies and to Roman society more broadly.

2. Perfume in Roman Society

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, odour in the ancient world was not simply a matter of sensory experience. It had the power to both reveal to the outside world one's physical nature, and also the power to invade the body and fundamentally alter it for good or ill. Greco-Roman physicians like Soranus and Galen put this principle into practice, using perfumes, scented ointments, fumigation, and other therapies based on aromatic substances to diagnose and treat a wide range of conditions. However, as they themselves acknowledged, aromatic substances were far from the preserve of ancient physicians. From incense- and myrrh-laden funerary pyres to the myrrh-laced wine of dinner parties, from the unguents smeared onto feet, arms, and hair to the scented water which refreshed the crowds at the theatre, perfumes saturated many different areas of Roman life.

With this in mind, this chapter will survey the availability, nature, and use of perfume in ancient Rome. The purpose of this is to provide a contextual framework within which to examine in future chapters the ways that literary sources represented the use of such products, and bodies upon which they were poured, smeared, or sprinkled. There are a number of key questions which this survey will explore. What were the main uses of perfume in ancient Rome? How far were these different uses separated into distinct categories, and how far did these categories intersect? It will discuss the different substances that went into the making of perfumes and other scented products, and consider from where these substances originated, both in reality and according to contemporary sources. It will discuss the main forms which perfumes took, and the ways in which these products were produced, stored, and distributed. It will then go on to examine the consumers of perfume: how far were perfumes the reserve of the elite, and how far was the use of perfume on the body a pursuit mainly or only undertaken by women?

The sources available when researching Greco-Roman perfume production and consumption come from a variety of different genres. Medical literature, encyclopaedic, botanical, and philosophical works, along with poetry and prose of various genres can be combined with examples of Roman art and archaeological

findings to create a rich, if often rather patchy image of the nature of perfume use. Four of the most substantial sources for perfumes and their ingredients are Theophrastus' *On Odours* and *Enquiry into Plants*, Dioscorides' *On Medical Materials* and Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, and Athenaeus' *Learned Banqueters*. Theophrastus was a Peripatetic philosopher writing in the late fourth and early third century BCE, well before the period upon which this chapter is focussing. However, his work, particularly his theory that argued that odours were produced either by heat and dryness (pleasant smells), or by cold and damp (putrid smells), was influential on subsequent odour theories, and his catalogue of the various origins, descriptions, and properties of plants and their produce is a vital source for studying such ingredients.[216] Written in the first century CE, Pliny's work provides plenty of information on the ingredients used in various perfumes, as well as considerable discussion of the other properties of these ingredients and of the spice trade which facilitated their spread across the empire.[217] Dioscorides, writing in the mid-first century CE, was a Greek physician who practiced both in Rome and as an army doctor, and much of his work contains recipes for perfumes and unguents, along with a discussion of the medical properties of many spices and plants.[218] One of the main limitations of the ancient sources for perfume production in the Roman world is that they are often vague concerning the quantities of the substances used in the creation of perfumes. Dioscorides stands out as an exception, often including the specific amounts of each substance to be used in his recipes, and this makes him particularly useful as a source in this regard.[219] Athenaeus lived and wrote in the late second century CE. His *Learned Banqueters* contains quotations from over a thousand earlier authors, and as such his account of perfumes in the fifteenth book, framed as an eridute discussion during an extravagant dinner party, provides us with a variety of otherwise-lost sources on the subject that clearly retained their cultural relevance throughout the first few centuries of the Roman Empire.[220]

[216] Miller 1969, 3; Detienne 1994, 11; Harvey 2006, 32.
[217] Harvey 2006, 33. See chapter 3, pp. 112-121.
[218] Totelin 2004, 26.
[219] Donato and Seefried 1989, 14.
[220] McClure 2003, 6, 37; Olson 2007, ix.

2.1. Uses of perfume

The use of perfumes, spices and other aromatic products in the Greco-Roman world can be loosely divided into several categories. Firstly, and most pertinent to this thesis, are perfumes used to scent the body. As shall be examined more closely below, there was great variation even within this first category as to the form which this perfume might take. It encompassed a wide range of oils, unguents and powders, ranging in consistency from solid to liquid, and was used to fragrance all parts of the body from head to toe, including and especially the hair. Oil-based perfume, most often referred to in Latin as *unguentum*, and in Greek as *muron*, is the most commonly mentioned form that *aromata* (aromatic herbs and spices) took to be applied to the body, but it was not the only form.[221] Also commonly mentioned are *diapasmata*, powdered perfumes which could be sprinkled on the body in order to act in a manner somewhat akin to a scented deodorant and antiperspirant.[222] Less frequently mentioned but nonetheless striking are solid perfumes, which could be worn around the neck to function as both a visual and olfactory adornment.[223] As shall be explored in both this chapter and this thesis more broadly, it was in the scenting of the body that perfumes were most overtly and consistently gendered; being in direct contact with the body, perfumes were more likely to be considered to have an impact upon or relationship with the gender of that body.

A second category, often overlapping both in form and function with the first, was that of perfumes used to scent the domestic environment. Perfumed powders could be sprinkled onto clothing and bedsheets, stuffed into cushions in the form of dried flowers, and smeared onto walls and even favourite pets.[224] Lamps were filled with perfumed oil, and when guests came around for dinner they might have their feet

[221] For *unguentum*: Plautus, *The Weevil* 1.2.5; *The Haunted House* 1.1.41, 3.115; *The Little Carthaginian* 3.3.88; Cicero, *Against Catiline* 2.3.5; *Against Verres* 2.3.25; *For Caelius* 11.27; *For Sestius* 8.18; *Tusculan Disputations* 5.21; Horace, *Odes* 2.3.13, 7.23; *Poetic Arts* 375; Propertius, *Elegies* 3.16; Ovid, *Fasti* 3.561; Martial, *Epigrams* 11.54. For *muron:* Herodotus, *Histories* 3.22; Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.19.2; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.42; Squillace 2015, 105. The term *aromata/arōma* is attested as far back as Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.5.1, and although the term itself is not always used in the texts I discuss, it serves as a useful overarching term.

[222] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 8; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.7; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19; Plutarch, *Morals: Table Talk* 624e; Squillace 2015, 105.

[223] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.131.

[224] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 12.58; Celsus, *On Medicine* 23.3; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.22-25; Donato and Seefried 1989, 55; Classen et al 1994, 18-20; Stewart 2007, 13.

washed in scented water.[225] The perfuming of the environment also extended beyond the private sphere into the public. Public baths appear to have been intensely odiferous spaces (for better or for worse), and finds of glass pyxides (perfume bottles) and other cosmetic implements in bath complexes such as the Stabian Baths in Pompeii suggest that the application of perfumed oils was an intrinsic part of bathing, and that these communal social spaces may well have included a range of beauty parlours.[226] Indeed, in his discussion of perfume production in Delos and Paestum, Jean-Pierre Brun links the growth of public bathing to a 'democratisation of perfume', the access to scented products afforded to a wider range of people by the increasing wealth of the empire and by the growing affordability of scents.[227] A particularly impressive and deliberate example of the scenting of public spaces was the practice of sprinkling perfumed water, *sparsiones*, onto crowds at the theatre or amphitheatre to provide pleasant refreshment from the heat. Jo Day has highlighted in particular the multi-sensory nature of *sparsiones* at public games and performances. Such perfumed sprinklings provided not only a pleasant odour but also colour, and, through their cool wetness, a pleasant haptic sensation as well.[228]

Intertwined with both the public and private use of scent is the perfume and incense used in religious ritual. In addition to incense offerings, rituals surrounding the body after death were also saturated with perfume. Cremation, the predominant form of Roman funerary rite in the early Empire was a highly odiferous affair. One inscription in Pompeii tells of a certain Marcus Obellius Firmus, for whose funeral one thousand sestertii of perfume were purchased and thirty pounds of incense burned.[229] Although this was probably an extreme example, other accounts attest to the practice of incorporating spices into funerary rites, including Persius' description of the sprinkling of cinnamon onto the bones of the deceased.[230] A far rarer practice in Roman Italy was the embalming of the corpse; this involved the application of honey and a multitude of spices to the body and even inside it. Nero's wife Poppaea was apparently embalmed and her body stuffed with spices as part of an extravagant

[225] Horace, *Odes* 2.7.23; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12, 10.38.
[226] Balsdon 1962, 27; Stewart 2007, 54; Allison 2015, 110-112; Johnson 2016, 9.
[227] Forbes 1965; Amouretti 1986, 185-189; Faure 1987; Brun 2000, 1.
[228] Day 2017, 182-184.
[229] Giordano 2007, 41.
[230] Persius, *Satires* 6.35.

funeral during which, according to Pliny, an enormous quantity of spices were burned.[231] It is striking that, of the few other cases of which we are aware through either literary sources or archaeological evidence, almost all of them also involve female bodies. Both of the archaeological discoveries of embalmed Roman corpses were of young women, and Statius reports that a member of Diocletian's household had his wife Priscilla embalmed and buried in a marble sarcophagus, as part of a funeral which, like Poppaea's, involved the burning of an enormous quantity of exotic spices and flowers.[232]

Another use of spices and perfumes was as *condimenta* – spices, condiments, or seasonings – to add to the taste and smell of food or drink.[233] A fourth- or fifth-century CE collection of recipes attributed to the first century gastronome Apicius includes many recipes which use *condimenta* to spice up recipes, including a recipe for the intriguingly named 'Spiced Wine Surprise' (*conditium paradoxum*).[234] The perfuming of wine with herbs, spices, and honey seems to have been fairly common; Theophrastus, in the course of his discussion of artificial perfumes, repeatedly mentions the perfuming of wine for the purpose of improving both its scent and flavour.[235] Later, Dioscorides dedicates a substantial portion of his fifth book to the various kinds of perfumed or spiced wines, including one he claims to have been the finest of his day, *Aromatites.*[236] While Pliny asserts that the perfuming of wine,

[231] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.83; Tacitus, *Annals* 16.6; Miller 1969, 20; Counts 1996, 189.

[232] Statius, *Silvae* 5.194-196, 225-231; Counts 1996, 193-195. The two archaeological discoveries are of a young girl from c.150 CE, found in the so-called 'Tomb of Nero' on the appropriately-named Via Cassia in Rome, and of a woman from the 3rd century CE, in the Statuario on the Appian Way. The exception is Mark Anthony, who according to Cassius Dio was embalmed by Cleopatra in the wake of his suicide: Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.11.15. This seems something of an outlier, since Anthony was in Egypt at the time, and had infamously developed an affinity for Egyptian culture, and the actual embalming was performed by Cleopatra, who was the epitome of foreign femininity.

[233] Plautus, *Casina* 2.3.3; *Pseudolus* 3.2.31; Cicero, *On the Ends of Good and Evil* 2.28.90; Columella, *On Agriculture* 12.51.2; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 272.

[234] Baker 2018, 138; Grocock and Grainger 2006. The attribution of the recipes to Apicius is likely spurious; more probably the recipes are collected from a range of sources. However, earlier sources also mention both the man himself and his recipes, often noting in particular both his discerning senses and his gluttony: Martial, *Epigrams* 3.22; 10.73; Pliny, *Natural History* 9.66; 10.133; 19.137; Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 1.7a-d; 12.543c. See also: Grocock and Grainger 2006, 54-58.

[235] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 3.9; 7.32.

[236] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 5.54; Miller 1969, 6; Detienne 2007, 37.

although common, ruined it, the many references to the perfuming of wine in order to provide a pleasurable sensory experience suggests that his was a minority view.[237]

Finally, the medical importance of spices and aromatics in Greco-Roman medicine can hardly be overstated. As discussed in the previous chapter, spices were believed (sometimes correctly) to possess therapeutic qualities that were to varying degrees related to their odour, and forms of odour therapy were employed to treat various maladies, playing a particularly important role in the treatment of gynaecological issues.[238] In addition to strictly medicinal purposes, many cosmeceuticals, particularly breath fresheners and deodorants, straddled the line between pharmacy and adornment.[239] Both *aromata* and compound perfumes were also notable for their protection against poisons and function as antidotes (*theriaca*), and these medicinal benefits also had their more suspect analogue in the form of potions and in other magical concoctions.[240] Once again the gendered nature of odour and scented substances rears its head; witches (not always but often women), both in Greco-Roman myth and in contemporary Roman society, were strongly associated with the pungent herbs they employed in their potions and enchantments.[241] Furthermore, medicine, magic, and religious ritual uses of *aromata* and of other odours were often interwoven, particularly when connected with the female body, female practitioners, and gynaecology.[242]

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[237] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.25; 14.107-8. To Pliny, the scenting of wine was evidence of luxury and excess. Columella, on the other hand, suggests an alternative explanation – that perfumes helped to preserve wine and 'prevent any bad odour or flavour', thus categorising the practice as a practical measure rather than debauched sensuousness: *On Agriculture* 12.28. See also Theophrastus, who claimed that perfuming wine enhanced the flavour, whereas perfuming food spoiled it: Theophrastus, *On Odours* 3.10; Harvey 2006, 32.

[238] Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women* 2.123, 128, 131, 142; Celsus, *On Medicine* 4.27; Hanson 1991, 81-82; King 1994, 107; Totelin 2015, 26. See chapter 1, pp. 49-56 for further discussion of the role of fragrant products in gynaecological treatment.

[239] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.22. See chapter 1, pp. 49-50.

[240] Miller 1969, 2; Potter 1999, 175; Stewart 2007, 62; Faraone 2011. Resin balm, iris perfume, balm of Gilead, *malabathrum,* and *kyphi* were all recommended as antidotes. On spices and perfumes in magic, see Pliny, *Natural History* 24.160; 28.259; 30.1-3; Miller 1969, 2.

[241] See chapter 4, p. 160. In myth, Medea makes use of *aromata*: Ovid, *Heroides* 6.93-94; Blum 183, 196. In Roman society, Horace's Canidia employs perfumes and noisome potions to control men: Horace, *Epode* 17.23-27; Pollard 2013, 11-12; Ripat 2016, 122-123. There seems to be a disconnect in Greco-Roman antiquity between the idea of magic as feminine and the reality as indicated by Greek magical papyri, which suggest that men practiced magic more frequently: Ogden 2002, 78; Pollard 2013, 12.

[242] See Faraone 2011.

The loose subgroups outlined thus far in this chapter already expose the difficulty of separating artificial into neatly delineated categories. Where, for instance, is the line between the scenting of the body and of the environment? Turning once again to Theophrastus, we see how methods of personal perfumery could in fact extend outwards from the body itself: '[compound perfumes] are used to impart a pleasant odour to clothes, while the powders are used for bedding, so that they may come in contact with the skin'.[243] Such use of perfume occupies an uneasy space in between scenting of the body and of the environment. The perfuming of clothing, which Theophrastus here considers in the same breath as that of bedding, occupies a particularly liminal position between scenting of the body and the environment.[244] Theophrastus claims that this was a particularly popular practice among men, suggesting that indirect scenting was considered more appropriate for men than the anointing of the body more associated with women.[245]

In addition to the overlap of categories, identical or very similar substances might be used in different contexts and for different purposes, and with very different social implications. Many of the unguents named by Pliny in his discussion of luxurious perfumes also appear in Dioscorides, with the latter emphasising above all – indeed, often solely – the medicinal properties of those same unguents.[246] Expensive perfumes which might in some contexts be worn to increase the sensory enjoyments of lovers or of attendees at a dinner party might also be rubbed into the skin of or even inserted into a corpse for the purposes of preservation and to mitigate the unsettling scent of death and decomposition.

Also working to thwart simple distinctions is the nature of ancient perfumes as multi-sensory artefacts. Both cosmetics and cosmeceuticals, such as skin creams and emollients, would have been scented – either by design or simply due to the ingredients of which they were composed. Whatever the primary purpose, such products were inescapably multi-sensory; the *cyprinum* (henna) which could be used to lighten hair

[243] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 12.58, trans. Hort 1916, (Loeb 79.379).

[244] Crito's *Cosmetics* also included perfumes for clothing and 'house perfumes': Crito, *Cosmetics* 2.19-21; Totelin 2017, 147.

[245] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 12.58.

[246] Pliny explicitly points out this phenomenon of identical contents for different contexts at *Natural History* 14.107-108: 'I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost exactly the same ingredients as perfumes'.

would simultaneously perfume it, and *rhodinum* (rose perfume) was often tinted pinkish-red with alkanet (*anchusa*) or madder and so could be used to achieve the desirable rosy-cheeked complexion.[247] This flexibility and permeability of lines between cosmetic and perfume poses some difficulties. In her discussion of odour in poetry, Saara Lilja argues that, in references to scented substances, one needs to discern whether the source actually intends to evoke a fragrance – something it is often difficult or impossible to prove.[248] However, it might be argued that a more productive approach to this problem is to accept that multisensoriality is often implied or assumed, particularly in cases where the source mentions specific spices – a cosmetic product known or specifically stated to contain fragrant spices, or which contains (or is thought to contain) foul substances like crocodile dung will naturally conjure up in the audience's mind not just a visual but also an olfactory image.[249]

This multiplicity of function and categorisation does not however mean that Greco-Roman society simply lumped them all into one group. As Galen's cosmetics/cosmeceutical delineation indicates, along with the stark line often drawn in moralising literature, there were often very distinct cognitive lines drawn between perfume and medicament. The late first-century CE writer-philosopher Dio Chrysostom makes use of these categorical distinctions in the following passage:

> Why, that would be just as if, when a man is ill and suffering from brain fever, though the proper treatment, no doubt, would be to put him to bed and apply a poultice, one were to rub him with perfume (*murōi*) and administer a garland! These things are a luxury for the well, for those who have no affliction.
>
> Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 48.12[250]

It seems not to trouble Dio Chrysostom that, in practice, the *muron* being rubbed onto the sick patient might be comprised of many of the same substances with

[247] Donato and Seefried 1989, 53; Brun 2000, 277; Stewart 2007, 13.
[248] Lilja 1972, 10.
[249] Bradley 2015a, 8 argues for a multisensory approach to such sources, stating that 'the ancient senses should not be considered in isolation'. See introduction, pp. 8, 22
[250] Trans. Lamar Crosby 1946 (Loeb 376.287). See also *Discourses* 32.10: 'For it is as if a physician when visiting patients should disregard their treatment and their restoration to health, and should bring them flowers and courtesans and perfume.'

which the poultice is made, nor that the perfumed oil might well be an effective treatment in its own right. It might be that, to a discerning and practiced nose (and eye, and touch), subtle nuances between perfumes for pleasure and perfumes for medical uses might have been detectable. However, as will be explored below, the recipes in sources such as Theophrastus and Dioscorides indicate the opposite. What this passage seems to indicate is most clearly stated by Plutarch, who uses the distinction as an analogy for that between a true friend and a flatterer:

> There is a pleasant odour in a perfume, there is a pleasant odour in a medicine. But the difference is that the former has been created for pleasure and for nothing else, while in the latter the purgative, stimulative, or tissue-building principle that gives it value is only incidentally sweet-smelling… What, then, is the difference? Is it not plain that we shall distinguish them by the end for which they are employed?
>
> Plutarch, *Morals: How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* 54f-e[251]

Here Plutarch explicitly discusses the difference between medicinal scents and scents for adornment as being primarily a difference in *purpose*, not in form. While both the perfume and the medicament might smell (or even be) identical, the thing that gave it its identity and value was the *intent* behind its creation and use: was a scented substance being used to heal? Was it being used to improve air quality, or as protection from dangerous odours? Was it being used to create an atmosphere fit for the gods? To display wealth, power, or social rank? Or was it being used to make the body more sexually attractive? In a society where perfumes and aromatics permeated so many areas of public and private life, and in which the value and identity of such substances derived not only from their contents but also from the circumstances and purpose of their manufacture, it is particularly important to examine these very factors – for it was these that to a large extent shaped the literary representation of perfumes, and consequently the bodies that they scented.

[251] Trans. Cole Babbitt 1927 (Loeb 197.293-295).

2.2. Perfume origin and the spice trade

Greco-Roman literature typically considered perfumes and their constituent ingredients, both the substances themselves and the practice of perfume use, to come from the East. Strabo claimed that, for example, while Europe was excellent at producing fruit, metal, and other things 'necessary for life', spices and other luxuries had to be imported from abroad.[252] As in Strabo, this was often positioned this as part of a narrative of geographical determinism which linked the perceived superiority of the Greeks, Macedonians, and particularly the Romans to the moderate climate of Europe, and which justified Roman imperial rule over the 'naturally savage' inhabitants of less environmentally blessed regions.[253]

A biological justification for the preponderance of scented plants which originated from Arabia and other eastern lands had been established at least as far back as the fourth century BCE. According to the *Problems*, which are often attributed to Aristotle, but are more likely the product of several Peripatetic philosophers, the explanation was simple: '[The earth] is fragrant in hot places like Syria and Arabia, and the (plants) from there are fragrant, because they are dry and hot'.[254] Theophrastus is more tentative, pointing out that, although arid countries did lend itself to a greater quantity of fragrant plants, there were many examples of plants which did not fit this model.[255] His nuances, however, seem rather to have fallen to the wayside in favour of the general principle of heat and aridity leading to fragrance; by the early Roman Empire, Plutarch was citing Theophrastus to explain the supposed fragrance of Alexander the Great:

> Now, the cause of [his fragrance], perhaps, was the temperament of his body, which was a very warm and fiery one; for fragrance is generated, as Theophrastus thinks, where moist humours are acted upon by heat. Wherefore the dry and parched regions of the world produce the most

[252] Strabo, *Geography* 2.26.

[253] Such associations could be used to benefit foreign traders: Cicero recounts that sailors landing in Sicily, suspected by Verres of being soldiers or allies of the rebel Sertorius, made use of their cargo of incense and perfumes, among other exotic luxuries, as evidence of their true identity as traders from distant lands and thus of their innocence: Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.56.146.

[254] [Aristotle], *Problems* 12.3.16-21, trans. Mayhew 2011 (Loeb 316.425); 13.4.35; Mayhew 2011, xvii-xviii.

[255] See Theophrastus, *On the Causes of Plants* 6.18.1-3.

> and best spices; for the sun draws away the moisture which, like material of corruption, abounds in vegetable bodies.
>
> Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 4[256]

Above all, Arabia was seen as the chief producer of aromatic plants, and was frequently given the title *Eudaimon* or *Felix,* as a result of its wealth of spices.[257] Its only rival in fragrance was perhaps India, which was so associated with fragrance that there were stories of a remote and mysterious people who lived entirely on the perfumes of flowers.[258] It is a common trope of the anti-cosmetic and anti-luxury literary tradition of Rome to complain that spices and perfumes were products of the effeminate, effeminising East.[259] Despite the rhetoric, there was a great deal of truth in this. The periods following Roman expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, the war with the Seleucids in 192-188 BCE, and later the annexation of Egypt in 29 BCE all saw an increase in the trading of luxury goods, as Rome gained wealth, as well as access to and control over trade routes.[260] The anonymous *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, dated to roughly the first half of the first century CE provides a geographical guide to trade routes along the coasts of Arabia, India, and the Horn of Africa, and includes many references to the aromatic substances which could be procured at the various ports along this route.[261] Most probably written by a Greek in Egypt, it is unclear how far other sources would have interacted with this particular account, but its existence demonstrates the flourishing trade in aromatics and perfumes in the early Empire, and that the longer (predominantly Greek) tradition of exploration was still ongoing.[262]

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[256] Trans. Clement 1969 (Loeb 424.233). See also: Plutarch, *Morals: Table Talk* 623e-f.

[257] Herodotus, *Histories* 3.107-113.1; Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 2.49; Lallemand 2008a, 42-43; Squillace 2015, 177. See chapter 3, p. 112.

[258] Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 9.4.10-11.

[259] Stewart 2007, 135. See chapter 3 for more on the image of spices and perfumes as Eastern.

[260] Strabo, *Geography* 16.781; Pliny, *Natural History* 6.28; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 53.29; Donato and Seefried 1989, 47; Brun 2000, 201; Parker 2002, 40-95; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 269-270; Pollard 2009, 309.

[261] *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 54, 57; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 270; D'Hautcourt 2008, 317-318; Squillace 2015, 172.

[262] Earlier, fragmentary texts include Agatharchides of Cnidus, *On the Red Sea* (2nd Century BCE). See Squillace 2015, 172-173.

Many of the spices which can be found in the majority of perfumes in the Roman world came from outside of Italy. India was seen to be an important source of spices, producing nard, *malabathrum*, *costus*, *calamus*, cardamom and spikenard.[263] The Far East provided cassia, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, saffron, and cloves.[264] Arabia, according to Pliny, provided frankincense and myrrh, along with *stacte* (oil of myrrh), *mastic*, terebinth resin, labdanum, and *calamus odoratus* (sweet cane).[265] Africa was a source of the valuable perfume base, *balaninum*, along with *bryon* (scented lichen), camphire, *cyprinum*, *aspalathus* and *maron*, all of which featured in various unguents.[266] Syria and Palestine were significant for their position as (according to some Roman sources) the locations of the only two sources of the highly prized balsam, which was believed by Pliny among others to only grow in the royal gardens of Jericho and Jerusalem.[267] The only category of aromatic plants which bucked this trend was that of flowers, in which several regions of Italy were particularly rich. Campania, Praeneste and Tusculum were all famed for their roses, with the latter two also renowned as cultivators of violets.[268] Pompeii's perfume industry thrived on the growth of roses, lilies and violets, as can be seen in the so-called 'Garden of Hercules'.[269]

Cassia and cinnamon, two spices which were frequently paired together much like frankincense and myrrh, were both the subjects of some confusion amongst the sources in regard to their provenance. Pliny relates the apparently popular myth that cinnamon and cassia were found in the nest of the phoenix, a tale which he claims was first recounted by Herodotus and which has been used ever since by cynical traders to drive up their prices.[270] Less fantastically, the two were said to come from 'the cassia and cinnamon country', which appears to have been somewhere between the Somali coast and the Nile marshes.[271] Dioscorides associates cassia with Arabia, in particular

[263] Pliny *Natural History* 12.21, 41-46; 16.161-163; Miller 1969, 8; Donato and Seefried 1989, 49.
[264] Miller 1969; Donato and Seefried 1989, 49.
[265] Theophrastus, *History of Plants* 9.7.1-2; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.16-17; Pliny, *Natural History* 12.51-53, 104-105.
[266] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.100, 107-8.
[267] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.115-116.
[268] Theophrastus *On Odours* 24-25; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.5-6; 21.6, 14-20, 27; Bonsangue and Tran 2007, 254.
[269] Stewart 2007, 136.
[270] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.85-86.
[271] *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 8; Miller 1969, 8.

the Mosylitic, and is even vaguer concerning cinnamon, which he simply says comes in various kinds, all of which are named after the ports or places where they can be purchased.[272] According to Pliny, cinnamon and cassia came from Africa, specifically a region named Trogodytica, which might be identifiable with Somalia.[273]

The confusion and myth surrounding the provenance of cassia and cinnamon highlights some of the main issues surrounding records of the spice trade in antiquity. As so many products arrived in Rome from so far away, after having been transported across continents and round complex trade routes, it is not surprising that authors frequently seem to conflate the places from which the spices entered Rome with the actual places from which the spices originally came. The mythology surrounding cinnamon and cassia, and indeed the more mundane myth surrounding balsam (which surely cannot all have been confined to two gardens of twenty acres or less each), also demonstrates the sense of mystery that could surround these foreign objects, harvested in unimaginably distant lands by strange people that a Roman would never meet.

Just as individual *aromata* were connected with geographic locales – whether as vague as 'Africa' or as specific as 'Jerusalem', and whether or not these connections were actually accurate – so too were the products which were derived from these spices. The importance of provenance for some perfumes is so great that the place of their production or manufacture was reflected in their names. While many perfumes derived their names from their principle ingredient, for example *irinium,* many others bore names stemming from their geographic origin. [274] One famous example of these was *mendesium,* comprising *balaninum,* myrrh (*murra*), cardamom (*cardamomum*) and a Persian or Syrian resin called *galbanum,* came from the Egyptian city of Mendes (Djedet).[275] A few perfumes were named after individuals credited with their invention, such as *megalium/megaleion,* which contained *balaninum,* balsam (*balsamum*), rush (*iuncum*), reed (calamus), resin (*resina*), and *cassia,* named after a Sicilian perfumer named Megallos.[276]

[272] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.13-14; Miller 1969, 8.
[273] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.87.
[274] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.4-5; Stewart 2007, 11. This practice has an analogue in the Roman names for different kinds of marble, which often referenced the origin of the stone, for instance *marmor Phrygian* (Phrygian marble). See Bradley 2006, 1.
[275] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.59; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.4-9.
[276] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.58; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.13.

As is the case in modern society, it would seem that the taste for different perfumes changed over time. In the fourth century BCE, Theophrastus mentions *megalium/megaleion* multiple times in his discussion of perfumes, singling it out as one of the best perfumes for women, and one the most expensive and complex perfumes available in his day, alongside Egyptian perfume.[277] In Athenaeus' *Learned Banqueters*, it appears that at least one centre of perfumery, Ephesus, had ceased production of the scent – perhaps, given that Apollonius was a near contemporary of Theophrastus, even within his lifetime. By the first century CE, it was somewhat passé – worthy of mention only to make an account 'all-inclusive', according to Dioscorides.[278] Pliny, too, seems unconcerned with this perfume, and indeed uses it as an example of the changing tastes of perfume consumers.[279]

A fragment from the lost second-century BCE work *On Perfumes* by Apollonius, preserved in Athenaeus, outlines this close relationships between perfumes and their places of manufacture:

> The finest perfumes are associated with specific places, according to Herophilus' student Apollonius in his *On Perfumes*, where he writes as follows: the best iris-root is found in Elis and Cyzicus, whereas the finest rose-perfume is found in Phaselis—so too the type from Naples and Capua—and [the finest] saffron-perfume is found in Cilician Soli and Rhodes; [the finest] nard-perfume comes from Tarsus; [the finest] dropwort-perfume comes from Cyprus and Adramyttium; and [the finest] marjoram and quince perfumes come from Cos. Egyptian henna-perfume is considered the best, while the Cyprian and Phoenician (especially the Sidonian) varieties come in second. What is known as Panathenaic perfume [is best] in Athens, and metopion and Mendesian perfumes are best when produced in Egypt... But what makes the best perfume, he claims, is the people who supply the raw materials, the materials themselves, and the workers, not the locales. In

[277] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 6.30; 10.42.
[278] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.58.
[279] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.13.

> the past, in fact, he says, Ephesus produced excellent perfumes, in particular Megalleian, but it no longer does so today.
>
> Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 15.688e-689b[280]

This passage suggests that the finished product carried with it much more specific associations – while myrrh might grow naturally in Arabia due to its conducive climate, compound perfumes were not only products of their environment, but are also direct products of specific peoples. Apollonius makes a point of stressing that, although different cities were famed for the production of different perfumes, by far the most significant factor in the quality of those perfumes was the people who supply the raw materials, the materials themselves, and the workers. This serves somewhat to undermine the perceived biological link between the East and perfume posited by Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, and many others, placing the emphasis rather on the cultural and anthropological link; people, not places, are positioned as responsible for the production of perfumes.

Immediately following the extract quoted above, the passage attributed to Herophilus in Athenaeus goes on to draw a link between the fame of perfumes from particular cities and famous women with which these cities were associated:

> The varieties made in Alexandria were also outstanding, because of the city's wealth and because Arsinoe and Berenice took an interest in them. In addition, excellent rose-perfume was produced in Cyrene during the period when Berenice the Great was alive. In ancient times the dropwort-perfume produced in Adramyttium was of indifferent quality, but later it became the top variety due to Eumenes' wife Stratonice.
>
> Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 15.689a-b[281]

It is not entirely clear from Athenaeus' account whether the influence of these elite women over the perfume industry took the form of an active interest and involvement in the industry, or rather whether, for instance, Stratonice's preference

[280] Trans. Olson 2012 (Loeb 519.127-129).
[281] Trans. Olson 2012 (Loeb 519.129).

for dropwort-perfume inspired a fashion for the scent, and hence an increased level of production and quality to meet demand. Either scenario, or indeed any other possible explanation, is remarkable – that specific scents would warrant intervention in the industry by royal women, or else that the exact perfume used by such a woman might be so widely known as to inspire a fashion for the scent, demonstrates the social importance of perfumes across societies of the ancient Mediterranean. If the latter, this is somewhat reminiscent of the well-documented trend in women's hairstyles of the imperial period, in which elite women (and, to a lesser degree, men) copied the fashions of imperial portraits in their own.[282] While there is some debate as to how far this extended into the real-life fashions of elite women and how far it was restricted to portraiture, a trend in perfumes would have had to have been a real social phenomenon – while hairstyles could be reproduced in the form of a portrait without the subject ever needing to adopt the style themselves, no such facsimile of the subject's scent could be made. Indeed, there is certainly evidence of olfactory trend-setters in the Roman period – there seems to have been a perfumed face cream associated with the empress Poppaea, for example.[283] Even if treated as an invention of Herophilus, the association drawn here between elite women and perfume is significant. It positions women as actively involved with and responsible for the trade in and production of scents. Furthermore, that such a trend, whether real or not, was still being touted as such centuries later in Athenaeus is a testament to the enduring association between perfume and the female body.

1.3. Perfume production

Herophilus' account of the cities famous for perfumes in the second century BCE, echoed and updated in Pliny's account in the first century CE, highlights the fact that perfume production was by no means a purely foreign pursuit. Despite the many hubs of perfumery in Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor, and further afield, Italy itself also contained many renowned centres of production. According to Pliny, the region of

[282] Bartman 2001, 20.

[283] Juvenal, *Satires* 6.462. This must of course be accompanied by the caveat that calling the substance *pinguia Poppaeana* might serve solely as a literary device in order to link the wearer to the supposed luxurious excess of the empress, but even so it seems perfectly possible that such a 'Poppaean cream' might have existed. Pliny the Elder also claims that Poppaea's 'amber-coloured' (*sucini*) hair was also trend-setting, inspiring other women to adopt the same hair colour: Pliny, *Natural History* 27.50. See chapter 3, pp. 138-139 for more on amber.

Campania grew to be one of the most famous producers of unguents in the ancient world, second only to Egypt.[284] Capua, Naples and Paestum were all hubs of perfume production within this region, and there is evidence that Pompeii too had its own small-scale involvement in the unguent industry.[285] Jean-Pierre Brun, in his discussion of archaeological remains identified as perfume workshops in Paestum and Delos, notes that it is difficult to distinguish, archaeologically, a perfume workshop from a range of other manufacturing processes, but nonetheless one or two workshops have been convincingly identified, and the wealth of epigraphic and literary evidence suggests that there were many more, including two on the Via Sacra in Rome.[286] A marketplace in Capua, the Seplasia, was so known for its perfumery that its name became a term for perfumer, *seplasarius*.[287]

Many epigraphic sources from the Republican period through to Late Antiquity mention the profession of *unguentarius* (maker and seller of perfumed unguents), as well as other related and often overlapping professions such as *seplasarius* (perfumer and or pharmacist), *pigmentarius* (dealer in paints or unguents), *thurarius* (incense-seller), and *coronarius* (maker or dealer in garlands).[288] Inscriptions from Pompeii, Praeneste, and Rome attest to the existence of *collegia* of *unguentarii, seplasarii, aromatarii, pigmentarii, coronarii,* and *thurarii*.[289] Here and there among these inscriptions, there are records of female perfumers, *unguentariae,* such as Biena, whose monument dating to early Imperial Rome suggests that she worked in the city of Rome, two freedwomen, Trebonia Ammia and Trebonia Irene, and Trebonia Hilara, an *unguentaria* from Sestos.[290]

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[284] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.26; Giordano 2007, 19.

[285] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.4-5; Brun 2000, 285-289; Mello 2003, 82-91; Giordarno 2007, 25, 49. Giordano points to four inscriptions referencing *unguentarii* in Pompeii, including one Phoebus whose name can be found on a brothel wall: *CIL* 4.609e, 1839, 2184, 9932a; 10.892.

[286] Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 129-131; Brun 2000, 277.

[287] Brun 2000, 290; Squillace 2015, 106.

[288] Jean-Pierre Brun collates fifty-six inscriptions mentioning the profession of *unguentarius* or seplasarius: 2000, 302-306.

[289] Pompeii: *CIL* 6.502, 609, 9932a; Praeneste: *CIL* 1.3060; Rome: *CIL* 6.384, 4414, 9796, 36819; Squillace 2015, 127-128.

[290] *CIL* 1.1091, 1092; 6.10006. See also: *CIL* 10.1965, Licinia Primigenia from Pozzuoli, *CIL* 4.5737, 5741, Gavia Severa, who was credited with inventing *lomentum*, a skin cream. Squillace 2015, 126.

Roman literature often regards perfume makers and sellers with contempt, deeming it to be a low art unworthy of an upstanding member of society.[291] This did not prevent some perfumers from gaining fame (or, perhaps, notoriety) for their work. As early as the fifth or fourth century BCE, the perfumer Megallus appears to have been notable enough for a perfume, *megaleion*, to be named after him, and is mentioned several times in surviving sources.[292] In the early Roman Empire, Cosmus seems to have been renowned for his perfume – Martial makes reference to his wares many times throughout his epigrams – so much so that perfumed unguents were sometimes called 'Cosmian' in his honour.[293] Vendors of these luxury goods were not immune to their appeal – rather they are often portrayed as having a particular proclivity for material excess. According to Athenaeus, one Greek perfume vendor from the fourth century BCE, Deinias of Egypt, had an addiction to luxury which led to torrid and expensive love-affairs, and eventually even to self-castration.[294] The emphasis placed here upon Deinias' luxurious tastes, licentious entanglements, and (self-) destructive lack of control casts him in a rather effeminate light.[295] His violent self-castration completes this feminisation – his unmanly behaviour and character leads to his physical unmanning. Athenaeus retells this story in the late second century CE alongside other extremes of behaviour, for instance the extreme gluttony and drunkenness of a man nick-named 'wineskin' (*Askos*), suggesting that such behaviour by a perfumer, whose wares were also often deemed luxurious and effeminate, was perfectly believable.

Despite the presence of female makers and sellers of perfume in the epigraphic record, women are almost completely excluded from literary sources. A striking outlier in this regard can be found in an epigram of the fourth-century CE poet

[291] Terence, *The Eunuch* 255-258; Cicero, *The Duties* 1.150; *The Augustan History, Elagabalus* 30.1; Brun 2000, 301. Perfumers were often foreigners or freed slaves: Squillace 2015, 106-107.
[292] Aristophanes, *Fragments* 549; Strattides, *Fragments* 34; Squillace 2015, 111.
[293] Martial, *Epigrams* 1.87; 3.55, 82; 9.26; 11.8, 18; 12.55, 65; 14.59, 110, 146; Juvenal, *Satire* 8.86; Petronius, *Fragments* 18; Squillace 2015, 123-124. Other perfumers from the Roman period included Niceros and Attius: Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 214.2; Martial, *Epigrams* 6.55; 12.65.
[294] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 12.552f-553. Other perfumers from this period who reportedly sank into debt and depravity include Hyperides, who, despite owning three perfume shops, was taken to court for his dishonesty, and Aeschines, who in addition to his financial indiscretions lusted after the septuagenarian wife of a fellow perfumer: Hyperides, *Against Athenogenes: First Discourse* 5.5-12, 19; Lysias, *Fragments* 1.5; Squillace 2015, 110-112.
[295] See chapter 5 for further discussion of these stereotypes.

Ausonius, who makes reference to a scent-seller (*vendentem odores*) named Phyllis.[296] It is not clear whether Phyllis is involved in the manufacture of perfumes (in contrast to the Treboniae above, for instance), but her profession is not treated by Ausonius as particularly unusual. Phyllis does not escape the unfavourable depictions levied at her male counterparts – she is a participant in one of the most taboo sexual practices in Roman society – but it is notable that she is characterised both by the exotic fragrance of her wares but also by the stench which lurks underneath the nard and costus; male perfumers might seek out perfume, but Phyllis is defined by her scent.[297] It is possible that casting Phyllis as a perfumer created a particularly good contrast with Eunus, as, according to Plutarch at least, perfume vendors were thought to possess an unusually discerning sense of smell, which, much in the same way a sensitive palate was important for a cook, or keen eyes for a painter, enabled them to create particularly fine products.[298]

Moving on from the people who produced perfume to the products themselves, it is helpful to turn to Theophrastus, who lays out the basic principles behind the production of perfumes in antiquity:

> Next we must endeavour to speak of those odours, and also those tastes, which are artificially and deliberately produced. In either case it is clear that improvement is always what we have in view; for that is the aim of every artificial process… to speak generally, the result is usually obtained by a mixture, and accordingly such mixtures are of two things (or classes of things), a liquid and a solid… the method of the makers of spices and perfume-powders is to mix solid with solid, that of those who compound unguents or flavour wines is to mix liquid with liquid: but the third method, which is the commonest, is that of the perfumer, who mixes solid with liquid, that being the way in which all perfumes and ointments are compounded.
>
> Theophrastus, *On Odours* 3.7-8[299]

[296] Ausonius, *Epigrams on Various Matters* 82.
[297] See chapter 5, pp. 202-203 for more on this.
[298] Plutarch, *Morals: Fragments from Other Named Works* 134.
[299] Trans. Hort, 1916 (Loeb 79.335).

Perfumed unguents in the Greco-Roman world were fat or oil-based, and were usually composed of a mixture of oil, astringents (often mixed with wine or water), the flowers or other plant parts which provided the fragrance, and resins or gums, which act as a fixative to help the perfume to keep its fragrance, and which often also contributed to the overall odour.[300] As Theophrastus mentions here, *diapasmata*, scented powders, were the only perfumes which did not involve this liquid base of oil or wine, although elsewhere Pliny indicates that some of these scented powders, called *magma*, were made of 'the dregs of unguents', which suggests that they would indeed have contained oil or wine which had since dried.[301] In the realm of oils, olive oil (*oleum*) was the most frequently used, being cheap and plentiful, but other rarer and more expensive oils such as ben nut oil (*balaninum*), sesame oil (*sesaminum*), and almond oil (*amygdalinum*) were used. Oils could also be extracted from flowers, leaves and seeds, such as in the case of rose oil (*rosaecum*). An alternative was the replacement of oil with the juice of unripe olives or other fruits, such as grape, and this *omphacium* was one of the most common perfume bases in the Roman world.[302]

Ancient perfumes could be created by one of three methods of production. The first and most ancient of these was pressing, in which petals or other fragrant products are placed over a layer of animal fat, then pressed using either cloth torsion presses (the Egyptian method) or put in a screw press (in the Greco-Roman world), with the aromatic substances being replaced regularly until the fatty substance has taken on the odour of its ingredients.[303] This method was simple but took a long time – up to several weeks – and was later replaced by the process of steeping in oil. Cold steeping simply involved soaking aromatic substances in cold oil, along with various astringents and fixatives, and then filtering. Hot steeping was more complex but also more effective and less time-consuming, and involved the same combination of substances but mixed into hot oil instead. This seems to have been the most common form of perfume production, and is represented by Theophrastus as being the norm, and as being less

[300] Theophrastus, *On Odours.* 14, 17, 55; Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 100; Brun 2000, 277; Stewart 2007, 12.
[301] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19.
[302] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.100-103, 130-131; 13.6, 11; Giordano 2007, 30.
[303] Donato and Seefried 1989, 14; Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 96-97; Brun 2000, 277.

wasteful than cold steeping, as the aromatic substances imparted their fragrance to the oil more easily when heated.[304]

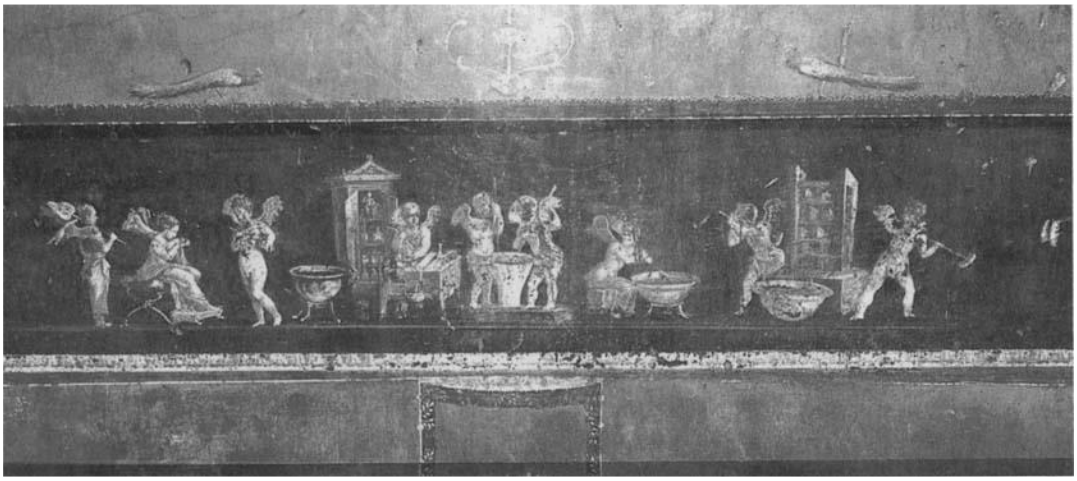

Fig 1: Cupids and Psyches in perfume workshop, House of the Vettii, Pompeii [Mattingly 1990, p. 72 Fig. 1]

The process of pressing, followed by hot steeping is depicted in a frieze in the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, which represents cupids and psyches as perfumers (Fig. 1).[305] In this image, the process of perfume-making is depicted from right to left; first a pair of cupids are using hammers to tighten a press, squeezing oil from their chosen base substance. To their left a psyche stirs a cauldron over a small fire – this is probably depicting hot steeping. Two more cupids stir another large container, which might indicate cold steeping, although given the presence of hot steeping it seems more likely that this contains ingredients which are to be added to the psyche's oil rather than depicting two alternative methods of perfume production at once. Further left another cupid appears to be in the process of selling the perfume, which is in small containers in a cabinet behind him. The final group on the right depicts a cupid bringing a bottle of perfume and a small spatula to a psyche customer, who tests it on the back of her wrist, accompanied by another winged female figure probably acting as her slave attendant.[306]

[304] Theophrastus *On Odours* 22-23; Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 100.
[305] Brun 2000, 297; Devroe 2008, 299.
[306] Mattingly 1990, 73-74. Mattingly also notes that it is possible that pharmaceutical products might also have been made in perfume workshops.

Scenes such as this frieze appear to have been relatively common in Pompeii and further afield – David Mattingly catalogues four further examples, with depictions of cupids and psyches engaged in other industrious tasks.[307] Although the characters populating this scene are of course not those who would have been producing or purchasing unguents in real life, the actual activity seems to plausibly reflect what might have been going on in perfume workshops in Pompeii and elsewhere, and also tallies well with the description of perfume making given in Theophrastus and Pliny.[308] The image of a female client testing perfume in this manner is also depicted on another wall painting from the Villa Farnesina (Fig. 2). The method of testing perfume on the wrist is mentioned by Pliny and by Theophrastus, suggesting that this was a common practice.[309] Indeed, pulse points such as the wrist and neck are to this day popular sites for the application of perfume, as it is thought that the proximity to one's blood flow heats the perfume up in a way which encourages it to release its scent more effectively, a phenomenon also commented upon by Theophrastus.[310]

Fig. 2: Lady with phials of perfume, Villa Farnesina, Museo Nazionale, Rome [Giordano 2007 p. 54 Fig. 21]

[307] Mattingly 1990. The other examples are a now-lost painting from house 7.7.5 (74), an image of unknown provenance now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (75), and another example from the Casa dei Cervi in Herculaneum (77).

[308] Indeed, Mattingly has taken the depictions to be close enough to actual practice to argue that they present evidence for an elsewhere-unknown form of perfume press, the wedge-press: Mattingly 1990, 87-88.

[309] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 53; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19. In fact, there is little evidence that this makes a substantial difference: Parish and Wolf 2007, 85-86.

[310] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 53.

While the Cupid and Psyche frieze gives us some idea of the goings on in an *unguentaria*, we must turn to literary sources for information as to the perfumes such a workshop might have produced. While Pliny, whose discussion of perfumes will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, list the ingredients which go into some perfumes in circulation in the early Empire, far more precise descriptions of ingredients, quantities, and method of production can be found in the recipes in Dioscorides' *On Medical Materials*. Dioscorides describes over six hundred plants, alongside various mineral substances, and substances derived from animals, and details the many medicinal uses of these substances. The first book in particular is useful as a source for aromatic oils and unguents, and although Dioscorides is primarily concerned with their pharmacological applications, the recipes he provides give a good indication of those which were available for non-medicinal use.[311] It is worth noting here that, in many cases, the exact ingredients that supposedly go into different unguents can vary greatly from author to author, a fact which might be attributed to inaccuracies on the part of one or more writer, but more likely indicates that a variety of different perfumes could be purchased under the same name.

Dioscorides' recipe for the preparation of *irinon*/*irinum* demonstrates the time commitment and complexity which perfumery could entail, even for those perfume which could be made primarily of ingredients found relatively close at hand.[312]

> But others recommend the following procedure: boil nine *litrai* five *oungiai* olive oil with five *litrai* two *oungiai Mecca* balsam wood, chopped as specificedl then removing the Mecca balsam wood, add nine *litrai* ten *oungiai* chopped sweet flag and a lump of myrrh moistened with aromatic wine; then taking fourteen *litrai* of the thickened and aromatized oil, steep it in an equal weight of chopped iris; leave it for two days and two nights and strain it by pressing hard and vigorously. And should you wish it to be stronger, steep in like manner two and three times the same weight of iris and strain. The best

[311] See particularly Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.39-41, 43, 48-76, also 1.77-78, 841-885 for discussions of myrrh and frankincense as incense. See also: Squillace 2015, 158-160.
[312] According to Pliny, the iris was most famously grown in Illyria: Pliny, *Natural History* 13.18.

> smells only of iris and of nothing else. Such is the unguent of iris that is made in Perge of Plamphylia and that made in Elis of Achaia
>
> Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.56.2-3[313]

Multiple stages of maceration and straining, over a period of two days or more (and that is assuming one does not choose to repeat the process to render the final product more odorous, are required to create this scent – and there are several other recipes with far more processes involved: lily perfume (*susinon/susinum*) involved yet more ingredients and complex instructions, and saffron perfume (*krokinon/crocinum*) took a minimum of six days to concoct.[314] Notable is Dioscorides' means for determining the quality of the final product, which was somewhat unsurprisingly by its scent.[315] The best indication of quality was for a compound unguent to smell of its central ingredient, in this case the iris – this also appears in both lily and saffron perfume, of which the best varieties were those with intense fragrances of their eponymous ingredients.[316] In the case of *krokinon*, Dioscorides qualifies this further: 'The best smells strongly of saffron, and it is this kind that is fit for medical use; Second best is that which smells like myrrh'. Not only is this an indication of Dioscorides' priorities – the pharmacological utility of these unguents – it is yet another suggestion that the odour of the unguent in question has a bearing on this efficacy.[317]

The designation of myrrh as the second-most desirable fragrance might well be reflective of a privileging of myrrh as an odour in unguents in general. Myrrh appears very regularly in perfume recipes, both in *On Medical Materials* and elsewhere, and also across Greco-Roman literature as a perfumed oil.[318] Myrrh was

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[313] Trans. Beck 2017.

[314] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.52, 54.

[315] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.54.

[316] This somewhat goes against Theophrastus' assertion that, in the realm of compound perfumes 'the aim and object is not to make the mixture smell of some one particular thing, but to produce a general scent derived from them all.': *On Odour* 57.

[317] Diocorides regularly emphasises olfaction as a means of discerning the quality of unguents: Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1. 55, 56, 62, 64, 65, 66 and more. See chapter 1, pp. 49-55 for further discussion of the link between *aromata* and medical treatment.

[318] Pliny calls myrrh as the chief product of Arabia, alongside frankincense: Pliny, *Natural History* 12.51-54. Myrrh in perfumes: Theophrastus, *On Odours* 17, 28-30, 35, 38, 42, 44; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.60-66, 68, 71-76; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.10-11; 15-18; Myrrh as perfume: Plautus, *Curculio* 99-100; *Mostellaria* 309; Varro, *On the Latin Language* 6.87; Tibullus, *Elegies* 3;

also noted as a highly-prized perfume in its own right, in the form of stacte, the liquid sap which exudes from the tree – according to Theophrastus, it was considered by some to be the only non-compound perfume, in that it required no additions to function as a perfume.[319] Dioscorides' recipe suggests only the addition of 'a small quantity of water', making it certainly the simplest unguent he describes, noting that it is 'highly aromatic', and that 'even the tiniest amount possesses a great deal of strength'. This simplicity of composition does not, however, correlate with affordability – in addition to its sweet scent it is also 'very expensive'.[320]

Dioscorides does not often mention the costs of the substances with which he is working, nor indeed the products (although the large quantities used in his recipes are certainly suggestive of commercial production). One exception appears in his description of sweet marjoram unguent (*amarakinon/amaracinum*), which he claims is made more expensive through the addition of cinnamon.[321] The addition of cinnamon for questionable purposes appears on several occasions, for example in the recipe for mendesium, where Dioscorides specifically that this addition is useless, as substances which are not cooked together with the other ingredients 'do not release their properties'.[322] Although the addition of cinnamon is by no means always superfluous – just two recipes later is that for cinnamon perfume (*kinnamominon*), but comments such as these indicate a belief by Dioscorides that some producers of perfumes might deliberately include unnecessary and expensive ingredients, perhaps with the hope of driving up the cost of the finished product. As shall be explored further in chapter three, other sources (in particular Pliny) go to great lengths to arm their audience against such malpractice, and that this should appear even in Dioscorides, who is in general unconcerned with such matters, demonstrates the level

Horace, *Odes* 3.14; [Seneca the Younger], *Hercules on Oeta* 374; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12; Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 15.688c-d.

[319] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 29. Theophrastus does, however, acknowledge that some combine stacte with ben nut oil. See also: Pliny, *Natural History* 13.17.

[320] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.60, trans. Beck 2017.

[321] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.58. In a particularly striking instance of disagreement between sources, Theophrastus asserts that the very best *amarakinon/amaracinum* does not contain any sweet marjoram, and indeed that 'this is the only spice which perfumers do not use for any perfume': Theophrastus, *On Odours* 30. As Pliny also lists sweet marjoram as a perfume ingredient on several occasions, if this were true in Theophrastus' time, then it does not seem to have remained so: Pliny, *Natural History* 13.12. See Butler 2015, 76-77 for more on amaracus and *amaracinum*.

[322] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.59, trans. Beck 2017.

of mistrust of perfumers, and perhaps goes some way to explaining their unfavourable depiction, as seen above.[323]

A final recipe from *On Medical Materials* that is worthy of special attention is that of *rhodides*, rose-scented perfume balls:

> The so-called *rhodides* are prepared in this way: forty *drachmai* of fresh, roses, free of moisture and withered, five *drachmai* of Indian spikenard and six *drachmai* myrrh, ground up, are molded into small disks of three obols and are dried in the shade; they are stored in an unpitched earthen jar sealed tightly all around. But some add also two *drachmai* costusroot and an equal amount of Illyrian iris, mixing them with honey and Chian wine. Women use them hung around their neck instead of fragrant wreathes, because they take away the bad smells of perspiration. They use them also ground up in after-the-bath powders, also in ointments, and they wash themselves out with cld water, after they have dried.
>
> Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.131[324]

Rose appears to have been a product popular in the Roman world not only for use as an unguent but also as scented powder for setting makeup and scenting the skin, as a deodorant, antiperspirant and a cure for ulcers.[325] Dioscorides' recipe for rose unguent, *rhodinon*, takes pride of place as the first ointment he discusses.[326] The primary form which *rhodides* took was as a solid perfume, worn as a kind of perfumed necklace – according to Dioscorides solely by women.[327] However, there were several variations upon this recipe, with some crushing the solid balls into *diapasmata*, and sometimes even mixing this powder into unguents. As mentioned above, rose perfumes were often tinted pink, and so could function both as perfume and makeup,

[323] See chapter 3, p. 118.
[324] Adapted from Beck 2017.
[325] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 25, 33-34, 35, 45-48, 51-52; Ovid, *Cosmetics for the Female Face* 91, 98; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.6, 43; Pliny, *Natural History* 21.125; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.88; Stewart 2007, 55; Olson 2009, 307; Johnson 2016, 78.
[326] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.43.
[327] This is reminiscent of carrying around or wearing balls of amber, which, when warmed by one's body heat, would give off its pleasant scent and perhaps impart some medicinal benefits, a practice also linked to women: Pliny, *Natural History* 37.45, 51; Martial, *Epigrams* 11.8; Juvenal 6.573.

and *rhodides* adds yet another interweaving of the senses, where perfume could not only be smelled, nor even just smelled and seen, but touched as well. It also bridges the gap between perfuming of the body and perfuming of the environment; much like the perfuming of clothing, the perfume is rather carried around with the (female) body, and yet is still a separate entity. The changing forms and functions of this perfume once again point to the flexibility inherent to ancient perfumery.

Once created in the larger quantities suggested by Dioscorides' recipes, perfumed unguents were stored in individual containers, both to preserve them and to enable their transportation and sale to customers. Pliny makes mention of the virtues of alabaster as a material for perfume bottles, alongside lead, as both of these substances protected unguents from the light and heat which to which they were thought to be particularly vulnerable.[328] Dioscorides does not often give details concerning the final destination of the unguents he describes, but does suggest placing *kyphi*¸ the perfume and incense favoured by Egyptian priests, into earthenware jars, which he also recommends for the *rhodides* balls.[329] Bottles which might possibly have contained perfumes (*unguentaria, balsamaria,* or, when short and round, *aryballoi*) are common archaeological finds.[330] They range from simple blown-glass bottles (Fig. 3) to elaborate vessels made from luxurious substances such as this find from Aquileia, dated to the second century CE (Fig. 4).[331] This amber perfume jar is decorated with cupids vintaging and with a wine-cup of Bacchus, gesturing to the erotic and symposiastic contexts within which it might have been used. It is also decorated with a panther, an animal reknowned for its sweet-scented, alluring breath.[332] Furthermore, as chapter 3 will discuss further, the material it is made out of itself would have impacted upon and enhanced the odour of its contents; amber's pleasant odour was well known in antiquity, and was sometimes used as a perfume itself.[333]

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[328] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 41; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19. Other sources also attest to the use of alabaster: Martial, *Epigrams* 7.94.

[329] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.25, 131. Other materials mentioned include onyx: Propertius, *Elegies* 3.10.22; Horace, *Odes* 4.12.17; Martial, *Epigrams* 11.4.

[330] Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 106; Price 2005, 179-180; Eckardt and Crummy 2008, 37; Allison 2015, 110; Johnson 2016, 9. See Cool 2004, 366, for association between these and Roman Baths.

[331] Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 274-274.

[332] See chaper 3, p. 122.

[333] See chapter 3, pp. 136-138.

Fig. 3: Glass unguentarium, Insula of the Menander, Pompeii Collection, CB [Allison 2008, cat. 347]

Fig. 4: Amber perfume pot, 100-120 CE, Aquileia [British Museum Online Collection no.1866,0412.3, viewed 27 May 2019]

Just as the lack of equipment specific to perfume production makes it difficult to identify perfume workshops, so too here are the archaeological remains difficult. There is very rarely substantial material remains of such containers' contents, and even in cases where traces of the contents remain, it is often difficult to know whether the contents were to be used for medicinal, hygienic, cosmetic, or scenting purposes; the similarity in the composition of many of these substances is compounded by the

chemical degeneration which has taken place over the intervening centuries.[334] Nevertheless, the sheer quantity of such finds are a testament to the importance of unguents to life in the Roman Empire. The discovery of makeup boxes, known as a *capsa* or *alabastrotheca,* in the excavations of sites near Mount Vesuvius allow for an intimate and personal insight into the makeup routine of some first century CE women. A makeup box found in Villa B at Oplontis, which contained seven glass *unguentaria* along with a makeup kit and some other items, and the two boxes found at the House of Menander in Pompeii, also containing several bottles which may have contained perfume, reveal how intrinsic the use of perfumes and cosmetics were to the lives of some.[335]

Such containers were a central part of the sensory experience of perfume, both as sources of haptic and visual experience, and the meaning and experience of perfume might have been substantially altered by its vessel, by the texture, colour, and expense of the material from which it was made, by its shape and the way it felt in the hand, and by the simplicity or intricacy of its design. They could also alter the olfactory experience as well – *alabastra* and vessels made from blown glass would remain fairly unaltered, the earthenware jars recommended for *rhodides* might take on the scent of their contents, and jars made from amber like the one above were valued in their own right as a source of perfume. Another particularly costly and fragile substance apparently used on occasion to hold perfume, fluorspar (*murrina*), was reinforced with resin in order to prevent it from breaking, and Andrew Dalby has suggested that its Latin name might indicate that myrrh was often used for this purpose.[336] Such vessels would, much like the amber perfume pot above, become sources of scent in themselves, further reinforcing their importance as part of the complete artefact of 'perfume'.

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[334] Baraldi et al. 2004; Chemical analysis is occasionally possible as in the case of a container discovered in England containing traces of almond oil, beeswax, styrax, cinnamon, sweet flag, and bitter almond: Devroe 2008, 295-296, 300.

[335] Giordano 2007, 23. The term *alabastroteca* relates to such boxes' use in storing the highly-prized *alabastra*; unguent containers made of alabaster. Alabaster was believed to be the best material for perfume containers, as it kept the unguents cool and dark, and would not allow perfumes to absorb into it like the more porous pottery containers: Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19; Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 104; Bonsangue and Tran 2007, 255.

[336] Propertius, *Elegies* 3.10.22; Pliny, *Natural History* 33.5; 36.198; 37.21-22; Martial, *Epigrams* 10.80; Healy 1999, 232-233; Dalby 2000, 188.

2.4. Perfumes and social status

So, for whom were all these perfumes being produced? The literary record presents perfume almost exclusively as luxury product. Elite society, members of which made a concerted effort to differentiate themselves from the lower classes through thorough, regular bathing, by taking care of their personal appearance or, in this case, bodily odour, and by surrounding themselves by what Jerry Toner refers to as a '*cordon sanitaire*'.[337] Perfume formed part of this attempt to frame class division in terms of hygiene, with the social elite olfactorily separated from the the unpleasant odours of the non-elite, particularly those who had physically demanding jobs or were employed in the less fragrant parts of the city.[338] Accounts of the extravagant use of perfume by the wealthy elite indicate the role perfume could play in elaborate displays of wealth, for example in Nero's Domus Aurea, which according to Suetonius contained dining rooms equipped with ceiling mechanisms which could release showers of petals, and systems of pipework which could sprinkle perfumes onto guests.[339]

Perfumes were a stock element of the material trappings of wealth, alongside such others as Tyrian purple dye, fine clothing, jewellery, and so on. In the late third or early second century BCE a character in Plautus' *The Pot of Gold* includes perfumes in the group of luxuries which might drain a man in love of his wealth, a sentiment echoed a little over a century later by Lucretius, just as the Roman access to exotic perfumes was expanding: 'duties are neglected, good name totters and sickens. Meanwhile wealth vanishes, and turns into Babylonian perfumes'.[340] Indeed, ancient perfumes were labour intensive, could be comprised of many exotic ingredients which needed to be transported over long and precarious distances, and did not last in the way that modern, alcohol-based scents do.[341] This being the case, it is little surprise that at least the more elaborate, highly-prized perfumes of antiquity could be fabulously expensive.

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[337] Toner 2014, 5.

[338] Toner 2014, 6; For example those who worked as tanners or fullers. This masking of one's true odour is an issue which causes Roman writers much anxiety, as will be discussed below.

[339] Suetonius, *Nero* 31.2.

[340] Plautus, *The Pot of Gold* 505-516; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.1121-1125.

[341] Stewart 2007, 116.

Pliny, who fastidiously lists the prices of various *aromata*, makes a point of noting their high cost.[342] Costus was (relatively) inexpensive at five denarii, myrrh could cost between three and fifty denarii, whereas nard cost one hundred denarii per pound.[343] One variety of cassia could reach a massive three hundred denarii for the same amount.[344] Cinnamon could reach far greater extremes, rising to as much as one thousand five hundred denarii per pound.[345] Judean balsam, however, was the pinnacle of expensive luxury, and could cost more than one thousand denarii per pound. The value of balsam is demonstrated by Pliny's account of an attempt by Jews in the rebellion of 70 CE to destroy their crop of balsam in order to keep it out of Roman hands.[346] Compound perfumes he characterises as far more expensive even than this, although he is generally vaguer about their prices that with the raw ingredients; he deems it sufficient simply to make it clear that they are very expensive. *Cinnamomum,* one of the few unguents for which Pliny provides a price, ranged between thirty-five and three hundred *denarii,* although, somewhat irritatingly, he does not specify what quantities might draw these prices, something he is fairly consistent with elsewhere.[347] At one point, he claims that they (he does not specify a particular scent) could cost 'more than four hundred *denarii* per pound' – a substantial sum.[348] Galen also comments on the costliness of perfumes, singling out two in particular, *foliata* and *spicata,* which he claims were only affordable for rich women.[349] The existence of highly ornate *unguentaria* and *unguentaria* made of expensive materials such as alabaster and silver also demonstrate perfume's position as a luxury item – some of the more elaborate examples were clearly intended for wealthy customers, for whom the fineness of the bottle itself might have been part of the perfume's appeal.[350]

Another valuable source, albeit fragmentary, is Diocletian's *Edict on Maximum Prices,* issued in 301 CE, an effort to control inflation. The state of the Roman economy was, of course, substantially different from that of the first century

[342] Devroe 2008, 296; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 273-274.
[343] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.41-44, 70-71.
[344] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.98.
[345] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.93.
[346] Theophrastus, *History of Plants* 9.6; Strabo, *Geography* 16.2, 41; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.19; Pliny, *Natural History* 12.111-113; Bonsangue and Tran 2007, 254.
[347] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.15.
[348] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.20.
[349] Galen, *On Compound Pharmaka According to Place* 2.1 (12.512 Kühn). See chapter 1, p. 60.
[350] Caseau 1994, 16; Giordano 2007, 22; Olson 2008, 77.

CE, but comparing the prices fixed for perfumes and their ingredients with the wages set for different workers is illuminating. The edict put the daily wage of labourers at between twenty-five and seventy-five denarii (although many wages were calculated differently, for instance in the case of tailors who were fixed at between two and two hundred and fifty denarii an item), and that of teachers at between fifty and two hundred and fifty a month per pupil. It set the price of cassia at one hundred and twenty denarii per pound, costus at two hundred and fifty, trogodiytic myrrh at four hundred denarii (the same price as a sheep or female goat), balsam at six hundred denarii, and saffron up to two thousand denarii per pound (the same price as a cow).[351] Perfumed oils could cost between thirty and one hundred denarii per pound.[352] As a point of comparison, this means that *aromata* did not, pound for pound, approach the prices of other luxuries such as gold (seventy-two thousand and six thousand denarii respectively), or purple-dyed fabric (up to fifty thousand for one pound of dyed wool, one hundred and fifty for unprocessed silk).[353] Furthermore, customers would not be purchasing a whole pound of balsam, but rather far smaller quantities of perfumed oils or other perfumed products.

The oils mentioned in the edict might therefore be fairly affordable, in comparison to purple-dyed cloth or to gold, although the small quantities required is somewhat compromised by perfume's ephemeral nature – it would need replacing more regularly than other luxuries (a fact which was emphasised by its detractors). Clearer estimations of perfume's expense is made more difficult since it is not clear that these prices correspond to more complicated compound perfumes or simply to the pure oils – if the latter than it seems reasonable to assume that compound perfumes would have been more expensive. Scholars studying Roman economics such as Dennis Kehoe and Walter Scheidel have suggested that workers would have possessed the purchasing power required to achieve a 'bare bones subsistence', but that they were relatively poorer than their early-modern counterparts, and so even the cheapest scents would have been out of reach.[354] However, the increased consumption of luxury goods indicated by the literature and material culture of the Roman period also

[351] Diocletian, *Edict on Maximum Prices* 32.16, 18, 20; 36.1, 5, 14, 38.
[352] Diocletian, *Edict on Maximum Prices* 36.43-53.
[353] Diocletian, *Edict on Maximum Prices* 24.1-4; 30.1, 9.
[354] Allen 2009, 337-338; Scheidel 2010, 430-435; Kehoe 2013, 126-127.

suggests that the range of people within the empire who might be able to afford such products was growing, particularly among urban consumers.[355]

It is possible that, while the upper classes indulged in the finest *mendesium* and *metopium* money could buy, and smothered their home and their bodies in expensive unguents, those who were less well-off may have been able to afford simpler, cheaper perfumes in smaller quantities.[356] Pliny, alongside his discussion of the more extreme examples, does indicate that one could purchase cheaper versions of some popular spices. He goes into detail on the different prices of nard, which could range from large pills for fourty *denarii* to smaller-leaved *microsphaerum* for seventy-five *denarii*. He also suggests that other substances, such as *amomum* could be purchased in cheaper varieties, quoting as the lowest price per pound forty-eight *denarii*.[357] Given the fairly liberal attitude displayed by those such as Theophrastus as to exactly what ingredients ought to make up specific perfumes, it seems likely that more expensive spices could be swapped for cheaper alternatives, and hence made more affordable.[358]

Indications that there were different levels of expense available both between different perfumes and in variations upon the same basic scent do appear here and there among our literary sources. Dioscorides mentions that *nardinon* (nard oil) can be prepared moe cheaply using olive oil, rush, calamus, costus, and spikenard.[359] Theophrastus makes several references to the existence of cheaper perfumes. He notes, in his discussion of the dying of perfumes, that 'all the cheaper kinds' are left undyed.[360] He also mentions one specific cheap perfume, made from laurel. This however, along with all cheap perfumes, apparently is inclined to cause headaches, although Theophrastus does not explain why this might be.[361] Even Pliny admits the existence of 'cheaper kinds of oil', specifically those made using myrtle and laurel, 'with the addition of marjoram, lilies, fenugreek, myrrh, cassia, nard, rush, and cinnamon'. It is possible that he includes in this category of 'cheaper oils' *melinum*

[355] Erdkamp 2013, 256-258.
[356] Mattingly 1990, 80-81; Kleiner and Matheston 1996, 160; Olson 2008, 78.
[357] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.43-44, 49.
[358] Mattingly 1990, 81; Forbes 1965, 34.
[359] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.62.
[360] Theophrastus, *On Odour*s 6.31.
[361] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 10.42.

(quince oil) but this is not entirely clear.[362] Another perfume, made from sweet flag, is singled out (very unfavourably) by Plautus in *The Little Carthaginian*, as the unguent worn by cheap prostitutes 'who smell of the brothel' – this, at least, was affordable, although if Plautus' depiction of it is anything to go by, its associations might have made it an unappealing option.[363]

The invention of glass-blowing in the first century BCE made it much easier to produce cheap glass bottles in larger quantities to meet the growing demand for perfume and other cosmetics.[364] By the reign of Nero, Petronius' Trimalchio was admitting somewhat sheepishly that he almost prefers glass vessels to gold, even though 'these days… they are cheap'.[365] The sheer quantity of blown glass *pyxides* which begin appearing in the first century BCE not only suggests an increased availability of such products in the wake of the technical innovation of glass blowing, but also that at least some of the fragrances on the market must have been relatively affordable.[366] Also available were wooden vessels, which might also have served as a more budget option.[367] It may have been the case that perfumes, when purchased occasionally and in tiny amounts, could have been within the reach of the poorer sections of society. Where perfume was perhaps the norm for the upper-class *matrona* or *puella*, it may have been reserved only for special occasions, such as marriage (a particularly fragrant event), for those less financially fortunate. Crucially, however, perfume carried with it the associations of wealth and high social status, and these associations may have made it a particularly appealing commodity to those lower down the social ladder who wished to climb up a rung.[368]

[362] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.10-11.
[363] Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian* 264; Brun 2000, 291.
[364] Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 105.
[365] Petronius, *Satyricon* 50; Stewart 2007, 130. It should be said, however, that what Trimalchio deems 'cheap' is not necessarily a good guide to true affordability!
[366] Dyagi-Mendels 1991, 105.
[367] Kleiner and Matheson 2000, 164; Olson 2009, 292.
[368] Devroe 2008, 302-303; Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 271.

2.5. Perfume and the *mundus muliebris*

Just as perfume was stereotypically deemed an expensive luxury product, so too was it stereotypically a woman's business – part of the *mundus muliebris*.[369] Within this chapter, many of the sources that refer to a specific gender or person assume that those using perfumes are women, or at the least that they ought to be. Dioscorides' discussion of *rhodides* mentions only women as those who wear the perfume around their necks, and who sprinkle or anoint it onto their bodies after bathing.[370] Equally, Lucretius and Plautus' comments about the wealth-draining effects of perfume imagine a male lover who is buying perfumes for and at the behest of his mistress.[371] When considering the cost of perfumes and spices, Pliny specifically ascribes this to the desires of the women of Rome.[372]

Looking beyond literature, the image of a predominantly female perfume consumption is, largely, sustained. There are, perhaps understandably, relatively few depictions in art of the use of perfume, but of those few all involve female use of perfume. As noted above, there exist one or two Roman wall paintings in which women are depicted testing perfume on the backs of their hands. The image of a woman testing perfume on the back of her hand is also attested to by Pliny, suggesting that depictions such as this may well be an insight into the reality of perfume purchasing and use.[373] Perfume bottles sometimes appear in depictions of the paraphernalia of the *mundus muliebris*, as in the case of two stelae from Italy, dating to the second century CE.[374] Archaeological investigation into grave goods from Germany and Switzerland have concluded that women are, in general, more often

[369] Although the origin of this phrase is unknown, it appears in texts as early as the second century BCE describing the tools used in female adornment. It was enshrined into law in the *Digest* of Justinian (6th century CE) 34.2.25. See also: Accius, *Tragedies* 654; Lucilius, *Fragment* 519; Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.129; Stewart 2007, 13; Shumka 2008, 177. For more on literary depictions of perfumed women, see chapter 5.

[370] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.131.

[371] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.1121-1125; Plautus, *The Pot of Gold* 505-516.

[372] Pliny, *Naural History* 12.84; see chapter 3, pp. 132-133.

[373] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19. On this subject, it might be possible to make the observations that such depictions present women as actively leaving their private sphere to seek out perfumes without the assistance of any male relative or lover – the Vetti frieze shows the woman accompanied only by her female slave. Might this have a bearing on the anxiety seen in male sources discussing the female use of perfume?

[374] Eckardt and Crummy 2008, fig.5; Shumka 2008, 178-180; Allison 2015, 111.

buried with perfume bottles than men, although such bottles were also found in male-sexed graves.[375] Penelope Allison, among others, argues that the connection is indeed strong enough to justify a connection between finds of such artefacts and female presence or spaces.[376] Such archaeological finds do suggest that the literary depiction of perfume as a 'woman's thing' had some basis in reality, although of course the burial context is simultaneously helpful and unhelpful: on the one hand, it attaches the objects to specific, sexed individuals, but on the other hand it must not be forgotten that the grave goods hold symbolic value as much as (or even more than) they reflect usage during life.

The issue of who wore perfume in the ancient world was also intersectional. Wealthy women might be attended by a whole host of *ornatrices* (slaves involved in the process of adornment) whose job was to cover her in perfumed unguents from head to food after her bath, in which case such a woman would spend her days constantly exuding fragrance.[377] Susan Stewart has made the insightful observation that the application of perfumes did not only cost money, it also cost time. Perfumes (and other cosmetics) did not last long, due to their oil base, and may have needed to be reapplied several times in one day.[378] Interweaving with the idea of perfume as a signifier or wealth and status, the luxury of maintaining a constant scent becomes something akin to the luxury of elaborate clothing or delicately coiffed hair. It is perhaps unsurprising then that we have little to no evidence of working women wearing perfume, unless they were involved in the provision of sexual services.[379]

Despite their tendency to present perfume as a 'woman's thing', literary sources do indicate that perfume usage was not, in reality, restricted to women. Several writers of the early Empire note (despairingly) the increased use of perfume by urbane men in contemporary Roman society. One such disapproving voice is that of Dio Chrysostom, who writes of contemporary first-century CE society that perfume, along

[375] Allison 2013, table 5.3; Allison 2015, 112.
[376] Allison 2015, 112.
[377] Juvenal, *Satires* 6.491; Donato and Seefried 1989, 53.
[378] Stewart 2007, 116.
[379] Stewart 2007, 114. It is worth noting that, at least in the literary world, prostitutes are by far the most common kind of 'working woman', so it may well be either that any working woman who wore perfume might be cast as a whore, or that male authors simply weren't interested in the adornment habits of women who were neither of their class nor likely to provide them with sex.

with other forms of adornment, is 'nearly the same for both sexes today'.[380] The younger Seneca, too, remarks upon the increased interest in perfume and indeed all forms of 'feminine' adornment:

> When Horace wants to describe a notorious dandy, what does he say? 'Bucillus smells of perfumed pastilles.' These days you would speak of Bucillus as if he smelled of goat – he would take the place of the Gargonius whom Horace in the same passage contrasted with Bucillus. It is not enough to put on perfume, unless you refresh it two or three times a day, so that it not evaporate from your body.
>
> Seneca the Younger, *Epistles* 86.13

Of particular interest here is Seneca's intertextual reference to Horace.[381] Horace himself was no stranger to perfumed locks (or at least according to his own poetry).[382] That Seneca should take an example of a man singled out in Horace as excessively perfumed, only to claim that – by contemporary standards – he would seem repulsively *au naturel*, suggests a dramatic increase in [male] perfume use during the decades of the first century CE which separate the two writers. In addition to the indication that elite males of Seneca's time were likely wearing perfume, this source is also a reminder that perfume use is not necessarily static, and that ancient sources themselves certainly did not perceive it to be. At the same time, one can find instances from almost any time in Greco-Roman history in which a source compares contemporary perfume (or broader luxury) consumption to previous generations characterises their own time as more excessive.

One highly masculine environment in which perfume use appears is the army camp. Pliny, in his extensive discussion of historic and contemporary perfume use, makes scathing reference to the practice of soldiers perfuming their hair underneath their helmets, and of smearing scented oil on military standards.[383] Suetonius, too, makes multiple references to perfumed soldiers, remarking that Julius Caesar saw no harm in his troops 'reeking of perfume', since he did not believe it affected their

[380] Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 7.117.
[381] Horace, *Satires* 1.2.27; See Rimell 2013, 9-10.
[382] Horace, *Odes* 2.7.
[383] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.23; Donato and Seefried 1989, 51.

martial abilities, while Vespasian refused a commission to a young man expressly because of his perfume use, stating 'I would rather you had smelt of garlic'.[384] Suetonius uses the different responses of the two emperors to this practice to develop their respective characters, with Vespasian (of whom he paints a broadly favourable picture) giving a response more straightforwardly fitting with the image of a good emperor and military commander. Vespasian sets up an olfactory spectrum between perfume and garlic, within which the ideal Roman soldier ought to smell of neither. The existence of multiple references to perfumed soldiers do suggest that this was a real phenomenon, and clearly also one which invited some controversy – these specific instances need not have actually occurred for this to be true. The discovery of glass bottles in a military camp at Ellingen in Saxony have been associated with the presence of women in the camp, but could also suggest their use by the soldiers themselves.[385] More broadly, the discovery of so many bottles which might have held unguents in public baths in general cannot be assumed to have been solely associated with women.[386]

In addition to the many disapproving depictions of perfumed men in Roman literature, there are a number of instances of male sources depicting themselves wearing perfume. Poets such as Propertius, Horace, and Ovid all refer to the practice of wearing perfumed hair oil.[387] Here and there in the literary record, there are even some suggestions that certain perfumes might be deemed more appropriate for men or for women. Martial, for one, mentions balsam and cinnamon as scents appropriate for use by men, writing in one epigram: 'Balsam for me! This is the perfume for men. Smell of Cosmus' favourites, you young wives'.[388] Although this is a relatively rare claim, one somewhat unexpected source that also makes reference to scents appropriate for different genders is Theophrastus: 'The lightest are rose-perfume and *kypros*, which seem to be the best suited to men, as also is lily-perfume. The best for women are myrrh-oil, *megaleion*, the Egyptian, sweet marjoram, and spikenard: for

[384] Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 67.1-2; *Vespasian* 8.3.
[385] Allison 2015, 113. Archaeological work has established that bathhouses were common and integral features of permanent camps, and by the Flavian period bath complexes appeared even in Britain, in Exeter, Caerlon, and Chester, which would presuppose some use of scented unguents: Revell 2007, 231.
[386] Allison 2007, 347.
[387] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.4.5; Horace, *Odes* 2.11.13-17; Ovid, *Amores* 6.38.
[388] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.63; 14.59; Stewart 2007, 96; Toner 2014, 11.

these owing to their strength and substantial character do not easily evaporate and are not easily made to disperse, and a lasting perfume is what women require'.[389]

Theophrastus does not seem to agree with Martial – or rather, Martial with Theophrastus, given their relative historical contexts – on exactly which scents suited men and women. Instead of balsam and cinnamon perfumes, Theophrastus chooses the rose and the *kypros*, neither of which are notably common in literary depictions of perfumed men. However, Theophrastus is coming from an entirely different perspective than the majority of sources depicting male perfume use, in that he does not seem to consider perfumes to be inherently effeminising or otherwise damning, but rather healthful and beneficial improvements upon nature. In this light, the ever practical Theophrastus suggests that more heavy-duty perfumes are more better suited for women, indicating an assumption that women were expected to wear perfume for long periods of time, and perhaps also that women might want to create a more powerful aura of scent than men. Writing such a long time before and geographically so removed from Martial, Theophrastus is obviously not a guarantee that this division of scents into male and female was in fact practised. In fact, the lack of other references to male-appropriate perfumes rather suggests the opposite.[390]

Overall, it would seem that perfumes were not exclusively used by women – many urbane men may well have used perfume regularly, and it is possible that the male consumer base may have been even broader, as indicated by the depiction of scented military men. However, it should be remembered that many descriptions of heavily perfumed men are intended to effeminise their subjects – often their very use of perfume makes them less than men.[391] Perfume, then, might be used by men, but that does not necessarily prevent it from being, above all, a woman's business. Although the Roman world did associate perfume predominantly with women, the reality is somewhat more complicated, treading a precarious line somewhere between the effeminate excess ridiculed in satire and the strict gendered division of usage idealised in moralising texts. It could be suggested that the preoccupation some authors show with the issue of male scent – either idealising the stench of the rustic men of

[389] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 10.42, trans. Hort, 1916 (Loeb 79.365).
[390] Juvenal, for one, mocks a man for wearing balsam perfume: *Satires* 2.41.
[391] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.63; Juvenal, *Satires* 4.108-109; Stewart 2007, 19; Butler 2010, 94; Bradley 2015b, 139. See chapter 5, pp. 187-188.

the past, or satirising or bemoaning the effeminate, perfumed men of the day does suggest that the use of perfume by men was not that uncommon.[392] Like the well-groomed, smooth-skinned men of Ovid's *Cosmetics for the Female Face,* it seems likely that the more 'cultivated' upper-class men of the early Imperial period, living in an environment seemingly so drenched in spices and scent, might indeed have worn perhaps a little more fragrance than traditionalists like Pliny would have liked.[393]

2.6. Conclusion

The complexity of perfume's production and consumption illustrated in this chapter can perhaps shed some light on *why,* as we shall see in later chapters, perfume carried with it so many complex and at times contradictory associations in Roman literary thought. Scented products spanned many separate areas of Roman life. They could be used respectably to worship the gods, honour the dead, and cure the sick, but at the same time, virtually indistinguishable products were also used for the frivolous and morally questionable purpose of bodily adornment, or for luxurious displays of wealth.

As this chapter has demonstrated, nowhere is this truer than in the case of perfumed substances used upon the body. At every different section in this chapter, we find the depiction of perfume in the majority of literary sources to be, as far as can be said, not unrealistic, but nevertheless considerably more complex than ancient stereotypes about such substances would suggest. Perfumes and their constituent parts did largely originate from the east, but at the same time the existence of perfume workshops in and nearby Italy, as well as perfume recipes featuring such ingredients as the Campanian rose indicate that this was by no means always the case. Perfumes could indeed be technically difficult to make, combining many different expensive and foreign ingredients, but such substances existed alongside far simpler examples. The image of perfume as the preserve of the wealthy is in many ways accurate, but both the archaeological record and the literary sources themselves hint at a far broader socioeconomic spread of perfume use. And finally, the image of perfume as primarily

[392] Seneca, *Letters* 108.12.
[393] Ovid, *Cosmetics for the Female Face* 24-15; Johnson 2016, 53.

part of the *mundus muliebris* is not proven false, but rather shown to be somewhat more complex and less practically enforced than it might appear.

What emerges from this chapter is the difficulty of delineating the boundaries of a 'perfume' in Greco-Roman antiquity. Just as the vocabulary of odour and perfumes involved much overlap and indistinction, there is also much imprecision, inconsistency, and overlap to be found regarding functions and categories of scented substance. Just as perfume usage in the ancient world is not static nor homogeneous, neither is the manner in which perfumes and other aromatic substances are understood, perceived, or represented. One of the key factors shaping the perception of perfume is its relationship with the body. As the locale of scent moves further away from the body – to clothes, to the domestic environment, to public rituals and entertainments – there is a noticeable reduction in the gendering of the substances and practices involved. Saffron *sparsiones* might be extravagant displays, either lauded as a public service or denounced as frivolous wastefulness, but they are not characterised as particularly feminine. This body-environment distinction is complicated by the question of perspective – the scented bodies in themselves scent their environment. This particularly the case for women; the objectifying male gaze (or, rather, nose) that is apparent in many literary sources which depicts women both as bodies in their own right, but also as an objects for the sensory pleasure of men.[394] Scented female bodies themselves might be thought of as sources of perfume which lend their fragrance to the surrounding male environment, improving the olfactory experience in much the same manner as might floral wreaths or perfumed wine at a dinner party.

What also emerges as the most important means for determining the value and implications of perfume is, above all, context. As Plutarch stated towards the beginning of this chapter, it is the intention behind the creation of scented substances, along with the end for which they are employed, that are the most significant factors for ancient understandings and representations of perfume. The importance of context to representations of perfume will continue to be a touchstone throughout future chapters. It is for this reason that the following chapter will be a sustained analysis of one highly-educated, conservative elite Roman's account of perfume in the mid-first

[394] On the male gaze, see Bartsch 2006; Fredrick 2002; Salzman-Mitchell 2005; Lovatt 2013.

century CE, as one small component of the rich and complex natural history of the Roman Empire.

3. Pliny's Perfumes: Female Frivolousness and Eastern Effeminacy in the *Natural History*

Following the broader survey of perfume in Greco-Roman antiquity in the previous chapter, this chapter will make a case study of the most substantial and often-used source for this topic: Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (hereafter *NH*). The thirteenth book of this vast work opens with a discussion of the history, composition, provenance, and use of perfumed unguents in the Roman world (13.1-25). In this, Pliny describes over twenty named unguents, along with many others he does not name, chronicling their provenance, composition, methods of production and storage, along with a broader account of the history of perfume in Roman society. Elsewhere, perfumes, scented products and the aromatic ingredients which went into making them appear many times throughout the *NH*, in Pliny's survey of trees in book twelve and throughout his discussion of medical treatments and remedies. Literary sources for the use of perfume in antiquity by the likes of Pliny, Dioscorides, and Theophrastus can provide information that is difficult or impossible to discern from the archaeological and artistic record. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, it is vital not to treat such sources as neutral records of fact. Scholars researching ancient perfume often remark upon the potential for error or inconsistencies, but often overlooked are the ways in which they are shaped by the social context and individual priorities of those who wrote them. The *NH*, which is so commonly used as a source for early Imperial Rome, is the perfect case study through which to explore such issues

The *NH* is by a comfortable margin the longest extant Latin text, comprising thirty-seven volumes and covering an astounding range of subject matter.[395] Pliny himself makes clear that the scale and breadth of the work is intentional, announcing that he is the first among either the Romans or the Greeks to have 'tackled single-handed all departments of the subject [nature]'.[396] The *NH* attempted to catalogue all contemporary knowledge about the natural world, synthesised for the most part from a vast range of pre-existing literary authorities rather than from Pliny's own

[395] It is also unique in including a full bibliography of its sources. Conte 1994, 69; Doody 2013, 290.
[396] Pliny, *Natural History* preface 14; Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 82; Beagon 2013, 84.

observation, and seemingly intended as a reference work for all occasions.[397] Pliny was very closely associated with the Flavian regime, holding several important positions within the imperial administration, was a close ally of Vespasian, and dedicated the *NH* to the future emperor, Titus, in 77 CE.[398] The *NH* appears to be representative of the 'knowledge' generally available to the educated elite, and also of many of their shared values, concerns, and prejudices, however Pliny himself claims to have compiled the work for a much broader audience, including farmers and artisans.[399]

Pliny's reliance upon earlier literary authorities over empirical evidence or observation, often at the expense of accuracy or consistency, is a common source of criticism from modern scholarship, leading many earlier scholars to dismiss the *NH* as 'bad science'.[400] However, as Trevor Murphy has demonstrated, to complain that Pliny ought to have checked his sources through his own primary research misunderstands the nature of 'knowledge' popular at the time: he was writing in a tradition which granted literary testimony far greater authority than we would today.[401] Taking another approach, Gian Biagio Conte suggests that the apparent contradictions in the *NH* were in fact a deliberate choice by Pliny as part of his encyclopaedic mission; he includes the entirety of 'knowledge' on a subject, without always indicating which version is to be believed.[402] Although the questions concerning the reliability of Pliny's information must be born in mind, what is more important is what Pliny presents as reality. Thorsten Fögen's analysis of part of Pliny's discussion of animals reveals a pattern which also is a regular feature of his discussion of *aromata* and perfumes, in which he combines supposedly factual information with anecdotes that reaffirm what he considered to be socially beneficial Roman moral values.[403] A close reading of the text, therefore, is a useful means by which to examine Pliny's attitude towards perfume and its use, particularly by contemporary Roman women.

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[397] Conte 1994, 69.
[398] Naas 2002, 86; Doody 2013, 288; Blake 2016, 356; Hurlet 2016, 21.
[399] Pliny, *Natural History* preface 29; Conte 1994, 90; Griffin 2007, 91; Hurlet 2016, 21.
[400] Stannard 1965, 420-421; Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 80; Vons 2000, 297-298. James Innes Miller, however, has argued that Pliny's position within the imperial administration might have meant that he was well placed for access to information on the contemporary prices: Miller 1969, 23.
[401] Murphy 2003, 301.
[402] Conte 1994, 90.
[403] Fögen 2007, 193.

The *NH*'s account of perfume warrants detailed analysis, as it can provide a Roman perspective on perfume use that is at once both highly specific – from one moment in time, written by one man with a particular set of beliefs and attitudes – and on another level general – based on a synthesis of earlier literary authorities, and positioned as the entirety of the information known about the subject. This chapter will examine in detail the portrayal of perfume in the *NH*. It will begin by outlining Pliny's depiction of odour: the sense of smell, the nature of scent, and the vocabulary he uses to describe this nebulous phenomenon. It will then look at the geographical origin of perfume and of its constituent parts, and the ways in which this affects Pliny's evaluation of these products. It will examine what Pliny says about the production and composition of perfumes, and discuss the ways in which Pliny's emphasis on the principle of *utilitas* (usefulness) shapes the way in which he depicts perfume use. Finally, it will consider the degree to which perfume in Pliny is represented as a gendered, feminine commodity, and how this relates to the characterisation of women and the female body in Pliny more generally.

To a degree, this chapter will mimic some of the structure of the previous chapter, and will engage with some familiar ideas: perfume's status as a luxury good, the medicinal properties of perfumes and their ingredients, and the ways in which perfume use is gendered. Indeed, to a degree this similarity emphasises that beneath all of the literary sources used as evidence in the previous chapter can also be found an array of concerns and attitudes that shape the ways in which perfume and odour are depicted. The focus on the *NH* allows for a more detailed exploration of these key themes, themes that are specific to the broader thematic and moral preoccupations of the *NH* itself, of its author and its specific cultural and historical context, and yet which are also representative of many of the broader attitudes of the Roman educated elite.

3.1. Odour and olfaction

On the human sense of smell, Pliny has relatively little to say. While his table of contents for book seven, which discusses the human body in detail, includes sections such as 'extraordinary sight' and 'marvellous hearing', there is no such section on 'sensational smell'. His discussion of the parts of the face in book six similarly, despite an extensive discussion of the eye and of sight, makes little comment on the function of the nose, noting only that humans are the only species with

'protruding nostrils', whereas other animals only have 'apertures for smelling without nostrils' (6.158). Elsewhere, he remarks that animals in general possess a far keener, more discerning sense of smell than found in humans, who only surpass animals in touch and taste (10.191).[404] In keeping with this statement, there are far more discussions of the sense of smell in animals than in humans. Pliny considers the sense of smell of fish, of insects, and even of the vine, which he claims turn away from foul-smelling plants, but fails to evaluate the powers of olfaction in humans.[405] This omission seems not to be because Pliny felt it unnecessary to explain the sensory powers of his own species – he discusses function and qualities of the human eye at length – rather, his neglect of olfaction is linked to the broader tradition which tended to see olfaction as a lower sense, more suited to the distasteful and uncivilised lives of animals and more animalistic humans.[406]

The dehumanising connotations of an especially acute sense of smell are highlighted in the *NH* by the account of the Astomi, a far-off Indian race, who 'have no mouth', and who 'are sustained only by the air they breathe and the odour they inhale through their nostrils'. Such men eat and drink nothing, instead consuming the scent of fruits, flowers, and roots. This dependence upon odour is their downfall as well as their sustenance, as 'they are easily killed by an unusually strong odour' (7.25-26). These unsettling anomalies occupy a space somewhere between the human and the bestial. Their animalistic sensitivity to odour is mirrored in their physiology; they are covered in hair like an animal, and their lack of mouths not only prevents them from eating, but also from engaging in the ultimate human skill, speech. It is interesting that this seems to be a direct trade – their keen sense of smell is directly connected to their mouthlessness and, consequently, their muteness.[407] The ability of scent both to provide and extinguish life could be seen as an extreme intensification of Greco-Roman medical and philosophical ideas of odour as a physical substance,

[404] Vultures, unsurprisingly, are singled out as having a particularly keen sense of smell. It seems odd to the modern reader, given our understanding of the close intertwining of the two senses, that human taste is deemed superior whilst smell is relegated. Although Pliny does often link the taste and the smell of a substance (for instance claiming that sweet-tasting things do not smell, whereas strong-smelling things are often bitter), there is little indication that he is aware of the biological connection between the two senses.

[405] Pliny, *Natural History* 10.194; 11.10; 17.239.

[406] See introduction, p. 23; Plautus, *The Weevil* 1.110: *canem esse hanc quidem magis par fuit: sagax nasum habet*.

[407] See chapter 5, pp. 211-212 for other examples in which scent is associated with a loss of speech.

possessing the ability to penetrate and alter the body both to cure and to harm. That bodies particularly sensitive to odour are also vulnerable to it is similarly a feature of Greco-Roman medical concepts, explored in chapter one, and it is striking that those bodies which are deemed particularly vulnerable are also those marginalised or othered by Greco-Roman society – exotic barbarian tribes and women.

Despite the above, odour is not discarded by Pliny as solely irrelevant or dangerous. On the contrary, Pliny sets up olfaction as a useful diagnostic tool that, when used correctly and paired with the knowledge which he provides, could fulfil a variety of practical functions. Of these, the most relevant to this chapter is the nose's ability to identify and assess the various *aromata* and perfumes discussed in the *NH*. Pliny details the odour of the majority of the products he describes, with a very practical purpose in mind, that of arming this audience against commercial fraud: 'these adulterations can be detected – and it must be enough to say this once, to apply to all other perfumes as well – by smell, colour, weight, taste, and the action of fire' (12.36). It seems to be no accident that the first of these means of detection is the sense of smell – these are, after all, the substances from which perfumes are made.

Much of the scholarship on Pliny, notably that of Mary Beagon and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, has discussed Pliny's bent towards practicality and relative lack of interest in advancing or promoting easily defined philosophical theories. The *NH* is influenced by an eclectic range of philosophical traditions, of which its well-documented stoic influences will be most relevant to this chapter, but both the sprawling nature of the work itself and the author's often vague and contradictory forays into philosophical territories make it difficult to pin down.[408] Thus is it unsurprising to find in the *NH* no clear theory of odour and olfaction, as can be found in the likes of Theophrastus' *On Odours* or Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*.[409] Nevertheless, he does provide an extensive passage in book twenty-one outlining the factors which affect the fragrance of *aromata* (21.35-39).

[408] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 84; Beagon 1992, 27-38, 71, 120, 203; Paparazzo 2005, 364; 2008, 42; Griffin 2007, 91; Beagon 2013, 94-95.

[409] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 1; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.673-715; Beagon 1992, 31-32; Baltussen 2015, 42-43. See chapter 1, pp. 30-34 for further discussion of the mechanism of odour and olfaction in ancient philosophical thought.

> All spices and also the plants from which they come have different colours, perfumes and saps (*colore et odore et suco*). It is rare for a thing that lacks smell to have a bitter taste (*sapor amarus*); rather, sweet-tasting substances rarely have any odour… The smell of some plants is sweeter at a distance (*suavior*), and is weakened as the distance is lessened... All perfume is more pungent (*acrior*) in spring and in the morning; as noon approaches it grows weaker. Young plants also have less perfume than old, however the most pungent (*acerrima*) perfume of all plants is given out in mid-age. The rose and the saffron have a stronger perfume (*odoratiora*) when they are gathered in fine weather, as have all flowers in warm climates than those in cold… The scent of some plants is sweet but heavy (*suavitati gravitas*)… Of some plants only the flowers are pleasant (*iucundus*), the other parts being scentless… Of garden plants the most strongly scented are those that are dry… Some only smell when broken or after being crushed, others only when the bark has been stripped off, others only when burnt, for example, frankincense and myrrh. Crushed flowers are all bitterer than when intact (*amariores*)… Some give a scent to the place itself, as does the iris, which also affects the whole of any tree whose roots it happens to touch.

This passage is a useful example of one of the most frustrating elements of the *NH*'s description of *aromata* and the perfumes from which it is made: Pliny's limited vocabulary of smell. Just as here, he is often content to describe a scent as *odoratus* ('scented'), *iucundus* ('pleasant') or other similarly vague terms. Although he does make use of some more evocative terms like *amarus* ('bitter/pungent'), *acer* ('sharp'), *dulcis* or *suavis* ('sweet'), *gravis* ('heavy'), more specific terms or helpful comparisons are relatively few and far between. Often, when such comparisons do appear, they simply compare to other *aromata* he has described in the vague terms just mentioned. Although this paucity in olfactory language is by no means limited to Pliny, it is often an irksome barrier to specificity – with so few terms to choose from, how would an ancient reader have been able to put into practice Pliny's advice for

sniffing out counterfeit goods, and how is the modern scholar to differentiate between these almost identical descriptions?[410]

In this passage, it is also possible to identify some key elements of Pliny's understanding of odour. Odour was affected by environmental factors: the age of the plant, time of day, its composition (whether it was watery or dry), and the environment in which the plant grew. It could also be altered though processes such as crushing, which was of course of particular importance when considering the processing involved in perfumery. Additionally, odour had the ability to expand the physical reach of its source, as in the case of the iris which could alter the scent of entire trees through minimal contact. Pliny's assertion that there was a connection between the odour of a plant and its taste highlights the multisensory nature of scented substances that becomes a theme throughout his discussion of perfumes. The multiplicity of ways in which *aromata* could be experienced – through sight, taste, touch, and smell – was reflected in their wide variety of applications – as perfumed oils and scented powders, spices for food and drink, cosmetics, medicines and so on.[411]

3.2. Provenance

a. *Aromata*

Before turning to Pliny's discussion of compound perfumes, it is vital to examine his account of the substances from which they were made. Pliny's discussion of the bounty of nature spans many books, with most substances receiving attention on multiple occasions, but for our purposes the most relevant discussions lie in book twelve and in book twenty-one, in which are described scent trees and flowers respectively. Pliny provides details of these commodities' geographic origin, their physical characteristics (appearance, texture, smell, taste, although not usually all of these at once), different varieties and their prices, the uses to which the substances were put, and often details the ways in which they might be adulterated and how to detect such fraud. His stated aim is to collect and display the wealth of knowledge enabled by the Roman Empire, and to empower his readership to become more

[410] On this and the limited nature of both Latin and Greek olfactory vocabulary, see introduction, pp. 23-24. See also: Draycott 2015; Baltussen 2015.
[411] See chapter 2, pp. 65-69.

informed consumers of its material wealth.[412] The *NH*'s thorough cataloguing of such substances is one of the aspects that makes it so invaluable to scholarly work on ancient perfumes: it is a vast repository of important (although often flawed) information on the geographical origin, appearance, properties, uses, and prices of these commodities, or at least as understood by Romans of the first century CE.

As discussed in the previous chapter, perfumes were connected with the exotic East, and Pliny bolsters this reputation by emphasising the provenance of the plants which were used in their creation. The connection between these commodities and the lands from which they originate was such that it could be central to the reputation and identity of those lands. When discussing the reputation of Arabia as Arabia Felix, Pliny claims that it was so called because of its wealth of *aromata*, particularly due to its possession of frankincense and myrrh.[413] Pliny creates a vivid olfactory portrait of an Arabia where fragrance pervaded every facet of daily life; frankincense-wood, for example, was used routinely as firewood in a manner that would be unthinkable in Rome (12.81). The abundance of scented firewood was such that towns gave off scented smoke 'just like that which rises from altars' (12.81), and once a day at the height of the sun, the combined fragrance of the many different aromatic plants native to the peninsula caused the entire land to give off a 'harmoniously blended exhalation' (12.86). Indeed, this sweet smell was so characteristic of the region that it was the first sensory engagement Alexander the Great had with Arabia when approaching it by sea; the odour of the land stretched out beyond its visual reach (12.87).

In many cases, Pliny is content to provide the origin of the substances he describes without further detail or comment. However, in the case of several of the more highly prized or culturally significant *aromata*, their origin is clearly of great significance. Frankincense, deeply sacred in Arabia, could only be harvested by a few select families from the Minaei district (12.54). Once harvested, its displacement from its geographical and cultural origin was a crucial factor in defining its status. As it travelled in stages along trade routes to Rome, it was transformed from sacred and literally priceless into a mere commodity, albeit one which fetched high prices.[414] In

[412] Pliny, *Natural History* preface 13; Healy 1999, 106.
[413] Pliny, *Natural History* 12.51, 82.
[414] Trevor Murphy explores this transformation in detail: 2004, 99-105.

Alexandria, employees at the warehouses where it was kept needed to be strip-searched every day to ensure against theft – such theft would be unimaginable in its country of origin that held it so sacred (12.59-60). By the time it reached Rome it was entirely altered; although used in religious ritual, its true value to Romans was as a luxury good and status symbol. One detail of this account of symbolic transformation and transition from religious to commercial value of particular interest is Pliny's claim that the families responsible for harvesting frankincense were forbidden from interacting with women or funeral processions while harvesting was taking place. The implication is that such contact would be polluting, and in some way compromise the sacred nature of their work and the substance itself. Pliny's audience would be more than aware, however, that the commodity would eventually become intimately connected with both female bodies and corpses, a fact that serves to reinforce the transformation of social significance it had experienced, and perhaps also implies that these bodies really might corrupt and degrade otherwise morally neutral or even sacred *aromata.*

A similar contextual transformation can be seen in several other *aromata* as they travelled from far-off places to the marketplaces of Rome. Myrrh, a fundamental component of many perfumes that could even function as a perfume on its own (13.17), was grown and collected in a highly ritualised manner, with only one or two collections per year. Like frankincense, both the source and the process is presented as being somewhat of a mystery to Greek and Roman writers; Pliny gives several conflicting accounts of the appearance of the myrrh tree and the method of collection, mentioning that some writers believed that myrrh and frankincense came from the same tree (12.67). Cinnamon, too, is surrounded in ritual and mystery, being conveyed across the sea from Ethiopia in ships 'that are neither steered by rudders nor propelled by oars or drawn by sails', a journey which takes five years and results in many deaths (13.87-88). Even more fantastically, cassia is said to grow in marshes, protected by some 'terrible kind of bats' and 'winged serpents' (13.86).

The effort required and distance to be travelled in order to transport these substances, and many others he describes, to the markets of Rome is indicative of the enormous geographical reach and economic prosperity of the Empire in Pliny's day. The *NH* can be read as a triumphant, imperialistic display of the power and stability

of Rome under the Flavian dynasty.[415] One potent symbol of such prosperity was the increase in consumption of goods from far-flung regions, some of which had become part of the empire themselves since the beginning the Principate.[416] The knowledge that Pliny could provide his audience with concerning these substances is an intellectual reflection of this material prosperity. However, as noted by Sorcha Carey and others, such stability and wealth was also constructed as one of the Empire's greatest threats: it lead to intellectual stagnation, with the Roman people turning away from academic enquiry and instead indulging in luxuries, becoming passive, effeminate, and degenerate.[417] Thus Pliny makes a concerted effort to undermine and devalue expensive foreign imports. Frankincense, prized for its rarity and obscure origins in Rome, is familiar and plentiful in its country of origin. Its high status and price in Rome could be unfavourably contrasted with its status in its homeland, which was based in religious reverence rather than grasping luxury.[418] Myrrh and cinnamon gain their status, which Pliny indicates is shallow and misplaced, from the difficulty and mystery involved in their collection and transportation, which in the latter case came at the cost of human life. In the case of cassia, the justification for the high price and status of *aromata* is called further into question – fabulous tales of their origins and the difficulty in procuring them are sometimes 'invented by the natives to raise the price' (13.86). The claim that cinnamon is collected from the nests of birds, including those of the phoenix is also implied to be a falsehood (12.85).

In his discussion of these *aromata,* Pliny makes a case for the culturally constructed nature of luxury.[419] He notes with some surprise Arabia's desire to import foreign scents, despite being so rich in products considered luxuries in Rome, 'so tired do mortals get of things that are their own, and so covetous are they of what belongs to other people' (12.39). As with his account of Frankincense, Pliny notes here the

[415] Citroni Marchetti 1991; Isager 1991, 223-229; Beagon 1992, 75-79, 190-194; Boyle 2003, 39; Carey 2003, 76; Pollard 2009, 336; Lao 2011, 35, 40; Beagon, 2013, 84; Blake 2016, 356-357; Zissos 2016, 9.

[416] Jones-Lewis 2012, 51. Botanical imperialism, in the form of the transportation of exotic plants to Rome is discussed further by Elizabeth Ann Pollard and by Laurence Totelin. One particularly explicit example of this was the carrying of a balsam tree as part of a triumphal procession celebrating the subjugation of Judaea: Pliny, *Natural History* 12.111-113; Dalby 2000, 170; Pollard 2009, 328; Totelin 2012, 122.

[417] Carey 2003, 76.

[418] Murphy 2004, 104.

[419] Murphy 2004, 99.

connection between the distance a substance has travelled and the degree to which it is prized as a luxury. Arabia's distaste for its own natural wealth of aromatics exposes the relativity of such concepts – if the goods so prized by the Romans had an intrinsic value, then surely this value ought to be universally appreciated. Instead the Arabians imported *bratus* wood from western Iran, *stobrus* from Carmania, and *storax* from Syria, all to 'dispel their dislike for their own scents' (12.39-40).

Aromata therefore occupy an ambiguous space within the *NH*; as products of beneficent Nature to which he often ascribes various favourable properties, *aromata* were not inherently worthy of disdain. Even as prized and expensive commodities there was some good in them, as they spoke to the wealth, stability, and power of the imperial regime with which Pliny was so closely aligned. However, the excessive consumption of these substances was both a symptom and a cause of the stagnation associated with prolonged stability and also of the infiltration of Eastern luxury into Roman society.[420] It is also characterised as a waste, as money leaking into the East, wasted on overpriced and unnecessary substances that Nature had seen fit to place far away from Rome.

b. Perfumes

The ambiguity surrounding *aromata* in the *NH* relies upon their status as raw materials. The value which Pliny encourages his readers to ascribe to them depends to a large extent on to what use they were to be put. It is in the move from book twelve, with its discussion of the natural sources of *aromata*, to the beginning of book thirteen, concerned with the transformation of these substances into scented unguents, powders, and so on, that it is possible to see a shift in Pliny's attitude from ambivalent to emphatically hostile. At the outset of book thirteen, Pliny describes perfumes as a man-made alteration of nature achieved by the combination of multiple natural scents to create more pleasing fragrances: '[scents] were not wonderful enough in themselves, and luxury delighted in mixing them all together and to make a single scent out of the whole: in this way were perfumes invented' (13.1). This statement accomplishes several things at once; it defines broadly what he means by *unguenta* – scents made from a mixture of individual odours (*e cunctis unum odorem facere*) – it establishes

[420] Vons 2000, 297.

that they were made due to a perceived deficiency in nature, and names Luxury, the *NH*'s sworn enemy, as the force behind their creation (*iubitque luxuriam*). The idea that perfumes are the result of a mixture echoes Theophrastus, who claims that odour is produced by a combination of different scents.[421] However, while for Theophrastus the creation of compound fragrances is if anything an admirable and beneficial practice, for Pliny it is a grave misuse of Nature.

It quickly becomes clear that Pliny sees perfumes as equally, if not more foreign than he does the substances from which they are made. Although he admits some ignorance as to when exactly perfumes were invented, he is clear who is to blame: 'perfume should be attributed to the Persian people: they drench themselves in it (*madent*), and quench the offensive odour (*virus extingunt*) produced by dirt by its adventitious attraction' (13.3). The use of the term *madent* (they are drenched, drip with) indicates not just the liquid consistency of the oils used but also suggests copious use – the term can be used to indicate other forms of excessive consumption of liquid, in particular of alcohol.[422] Furthermore, the reason Pliny gives for the Persians' use of perfume is very unflattering both to unguent and the body onto which it is smeared: beneath dripping layers of scent lies filth and malodour. In just one sentence, Pliny has painted *unguenta* as eastern substances used in excess for deceptive and repellent purposes, a stereotype which pervades depictions of perfumed bodies across much of Greco-Roman literature.

It is through Persia that perfumes made their way into the Greco-Roman world. Alexander the Great, Pliny says, captured a chest of perfumes from the Persian King Darius, and it was at some unspecified point after this that perfume became part of elegant Roman life (13.3).[423] This inherent foreignness is again emphasised by Pliny towards the end of his account of perfumes. Here he points to the earliest evidence he can find that suggests the presence of these commodities in Roman society; in this case, a ban on 'foreign unguents' (*unguenta exotica*) in 189 BCE (13.24).[424] It seems no accident that Pliny uses as his earliest evidence for perfumes in Rome an example

[421] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 1.
[422] Plautus *The Haunted House* 1.4.7; *Truculentus* 4.4.2.
[423] See also: 7.108-109.
[424] Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 269. See introduction, pp. 2-3 for the uncertainty surrounding this date.

which paints their use as socially disruptive.[425] In contrast to his first comment concerning the introduction of perfumes to Rome, where he suffices to say his fellow Romans considered these products among the 'most elegant and most distinguished enjoyments of life' (13.3), here he offers his own opinions on the matter: 'By Hercules! Now some people even put them into their drinks, and the bitterness is worth it that they may enjoy the wasteful scent from every part of the body (*ut odore prodigo fruatur ex utraque parte corpus*).[426] Scenting the body, inside and out, is to Pliny an example of luxurious excess both inspired by decadent foreign practices and facilitated by strange, foreign products.

Pliny's discussion of specific perfumes begins with him noting common trends in naming perfumes, one of which is to name the perfume after its place of manufacture.[427] That he chooses to mention this first, before mentioning other naming methods, points to the importance Pliny places on the provenance of these unguents, for this is by no means the most common etymology. Of the over twenty perfumes he describes, the only examples he gives of perfume obviously named after a location are *Mendesium* (from the city of Mendes), and *panathenaicum* ('all-Athenian perfume').[428] Much more common was for perfumes to be named after one of their most prominent ingredients, for instance rose perfume being named *rhodinum*, and iris perfume *irinium* (13.5).

While Persia might be the land upon which the blame could be laid for the eventual invasion of perfume into Roman society, and while the distant lands of Arabia and India could boast of their wealth in *aromata,* the centres for perfume production emphasised by Pliny are overwhelmingly located in the Greek East. The most popular perfume 'in the old days' (*antiquitus*) was an unnamed unguent made not in the unguent-drenched land of Persia, but on the island of Delos (13.4). *Irinium* (iris perfume) hailed from Cyzicus, *crocinum* (saffron perfume) from Soli and later

[425] Vons 2000, 296. Such a ban is reminiscent of the more famous *Lex Oppia* instituted during the Second Punic War, which restricted other luxurious adornments. Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 34.1-8; Tacitus, *Annals* 3.33-34; Culham 1982, 786.

[426] 13.25. This seems to go against other sources which claim that scenting wine actually improved its flavour: Theophrastus, *On Odours* 3.10; Columella, *On Agriculture* 12.28; Harvey 2006, 32.

[427] 13.4 It seems that Pliny is thinking of the *patria* as the place where the perfumes were produced, rather than where the ingredients were grown, but it is worth bearing in mind that Pliny is often inaccurate on both these counts.

[428] 13.4, 6.

Rhodes, *oenanthinum* (vine-flower perfume) first from Cyprus then from Adramytteum, *cyprinum* (cyprus perfume) also from Cyprus, *rhodinum* (rose perfume) from Phaselis, *amaracinum* (marjoram perfume) and *melinum* (quince-blossom perfume) from Cos (13.4-6). On the Greek mainland, Corinth had in the past been famous for its *irinium*, and Athens makes *panathenaicum* ('all-Athenian perfume').

Egypt, which Pliny claims was the country best adapted to produce perfumes, was also a prolific manufacturer of perfumes, producing *Mendesium* (after the city of Mendes), *metopium* (bitter almond perfume), and overtaking Cyprus as the most prominent source of *cyprinum.*[429] The perfumes from furthest east were the *pardalium* (panther perfume) of Tarsus, and those of Phoenicia, which usurped Egypt in the production of *metopium* and, despite its name, *Mendesium*. The only perfume which could claim to be consistent with Pliny's association between Persia and perfume is the *regale unguentum*, made for the kings of Parthia, a perfume which appears to have been more fantastical invention than real perfume (13.18). The link drawn here between perfume and the Greek world also ties into a broader theme of the *NH*. Pliny is frequently hostile towards Greek cultural influence on Rome, and critical of the claims of Greek sources, an attitude which can be found throughout much of Roman literature.[430] Above all, Pliny detests Greek doctors, whom he presents as swindlers who wrung money out of their patients through the promotion of unnecessarily complex medicaments.[431] Just as their luxurious tastes and crafty technologies in other areas of consumption infiltrated elegant Roman society, Greeks are shown here to be the main means by which perfumes were created and imported to Rome.

Perfumes, therefore, were trebly foreign. Their constituent parts were overwhelmingly produced in the furthest reaches of the known world, in lands either barbarically uncivilised or unimaginably luxurious. They were manufactured in the Greek East, in keeping with that culture's reputation for reprehensible cleverness in complicating and perverting Nature. Their most dedicated consumers were the

[429] 13.4-6, 26.

[430] On this, see Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 93-94; Beagon 1992, 18-19, 194; Fagan 2006, 196-198. This attitude is somewhat undermined by Pliny's own reliance on Greek sources for much of his information, hypocrisy which he seems not to notice.

[431] Pliny, *Natural History* 25.24; 28.5-6; 29.14-17; Beagon 1992, 20.

effeminate, decadent Persians, although increasingly, to Pliny's consternation, their title was being threatened by his own people. The increase in perfume consumption in Rome which Pliny denounces was also accompanied by an increase in local perfume production; in recent years the most fashionable *rhodinum* had come not from Phaselis, but rather from perfume workshops in Naples, Capua, and Palestrina (13.45).

In Pliny's account of the changing fashions of perfume production it is difficult to tease out a clear shift either from perfumes produced locally to perfumes from more exotic locales, which might suggest an increase in the desire for especially exotic perfumes, or alternatively a move towards more perfume production closer to Rome, which might indicate the invasion of foreign fashions into the Roman heartland. Several of the perfumes which he lists do move further east; Cyprus loses *cyprinum* to Egypt and *oenanthinum* to Adramytteum, and Phoenicia overtakes Egypt as the most fashionable source for *metopium* and *Mendesium*. However, this could also go the other way, as in the case of Campania becoming the more fashionable producer of *rhodinum*. It seems fashion was fickle. What Pliny does seem to indicate is the increasing taste for more complex perfumes, comprised of more ingredients from further afield. Roman society moves from favouring the simple combination of bryon and ben-nut oil, or relatively simple unguents based on rose oil, towards more elaborate concoctions made of a greater number of more exotic ingredients, culminating in the infamous *regale unguentum* (13.17-18).

> Now we will speak of what is the very height of luxury and the most important example of this commodity (*cumulus ipse deliciarum et summa auctoritas rei*). This is what is called royal perfume (*regale unguentum*), because it is prepared for Parthian kings. It is made of ben-nut juice, costus, amomum, Syrian cinnamon, cardamom, spikenard, cat-thyme, myrrh, cinnamon-bark, styrax-tree gum, labdanum, balsam, Syrian flag and Syrian rush, wild grape, cinnamon-leaf, serichatum, cyprus, aspalathus, all-heal, saffron, gladiolus, marjoram, lotus, honey and wine. And none of these things are produced in Italy, the conqueror of the world, and indeed none in the whole of Europe apart from the iris of Illyria and nard of Gaul

This ‘royal perfume’ is positioned as the not only the climax of luxury, but also as the climax of Pliny’s increasingly extravagant perfume recipes. It is made in the East for foreign kings, and is comprised of an astounding twenty-five ingredients, none of which, Pliny mentions censoriously, were grown in Rome nor even in Europe. Those ingredients which contradict his overall point are swept aside. It is perhaps unsurprising that there seems to be no other evidence of the existence of this perfume, but this makes little difference to the function it is performing in Pliny’s account. Whether it was myth or reality, whether a Plinian inaccuracy or a deliberate invention, it serves to support Pliny’s overall case against perfume. It is a caricature of everything that is wrong with these substances; absurdly lavish and entirely un-Roman. The history of perfume in Roman society is one not just of increasing luxury over time, but also of a cultural invasion of foreign, effeminising perfumes, an unfortunate side effect of the increasing economic prosperity, power, and geographical reach of the Roman Empire. Pliny finds in perfume the perfect vehicle to convey his theme of foreign luxury encroaching upon Roman society and compromising traditional Roman values.

3.3. Composition and manufacture

After discussing the names and changing fashions of perfumes in the Roman world, the majority of Pliny’s account of perfumes is dedicated to practical information about the composition and production of such products. One thing which is Pliny’s fairly thorough account of their contents makes clear is the range of complexity possible within the term *unguenta*. At one end of the scale, there is the unnamed fragrance from Delos, popular in the early days of perfume use, comprised only of bryon and ben-nut oil (13.8). This was the easiest to make (although Pliny, typically, does not specify what makes it so easy) and was possibly the first invented. Rose perfume, however, is Pliny’s choice for the simplest perfume and also that with the longest and widest usage, although he admits that a number of other substances were added; *omphacium*, rose and saffron blossoms, cinnabar, reed, honey, rush, flower of salt or alkanet, and wine – which rather goes against the image of this as a ‘simple’ unguent (13.9). Later in the passage, Pliny mentions that myrrh oil (*stacte*) could be used as a perfume without needing any other ingredients (13.17).

Other relatively uncomplicated perfumes include *Mendesium*, which succeeded the Delian perfume as the most popular scent in the early years of

perfumery, comprised of ben-nut oil (*balaninum*), resin (*resina*), and myrrh. *Sampsuchinum* (marjoram perfume), was made from marjoram, *omphacium*, and reed (*calamus*). *Megalium* (so called because it was so famous) contained ben-nut oil, balsam (*balsamum*), reed, rush (*iuncum*), wood-balsam (*xylobalsamum*), cassia, and resin. *Crocinum* (saffron-perfume) was made from saffron, cinnabar, alkanet (*anchusa*), and wine.[432] After this the lists of ingredients begins to build up; *cyprinum* includes not just henna oil but also *omphacium*, ben-nut oil, reed, costus, amomum, myrrh, and balsam. *Telinum* (fenugreek unguent) includes along with fenugreek itself (*fenum Graecum*), oil, henna, reed, melilot (*melilotus*), honey, cat-thyme (*maron*), and sweet marjoram (*amaracus*). *Cotonei unguentum* (quince-blossom perfume) also included *omphacium*, cardamom, flag, aspalathus, southernwood, henna, myrrh, and all-heal. *Metopion* (bitter almond perfume) had in addition *omphacium*, cardamom, rush, reed, honey, wine, myrrh, seed of balsam, galbanum, and terebinth resin. *Foliatum* (nard-leaf perfume, also called *nardinum*) included *omphacium*, ben-nut oil, rush, costus, amomum, myrrh, and balsam, and the pricey *cinnamomum* (cinnamon perfume) also contained ben-nut oil, wood-balsam, reed, rush, seed of balsam, myrrh, and scented honey.[433]

Although he does list the ingredients of so many perfumes, there are yet more for which Pliny does not give recipes. *Irinium* (iris perfume), *oenanthinum* (vine-flower perfume), *amaracinum* (sweet marjoram perfume), *narcissinum* (narcissus perfume), *panathenaicum* ('all-Athenian' perfume), and the mysterious *pardalium* (panther perfume). This last example stands out as the only animal-based perfume – both in the *NH* and elsewhere, almost all perfumed unguents mentioned in ancient sources are plant-based, making this a rather striking deviation from the norm. The alluring scent that panthers were said to emit in order to lure their prey was noted in Aristotle's *History of Animals* and referenced in many other sources, for instance in the choice of the name 'Pardalisca' for a female character in Plautus' *The Haunted House*, which appears to be a reference to the seductively fragrant panther.[434]

[432] 13.8, 10, 13.

[433] 13.5, 8, 11, 13, 15.

[434] See also: 21.39: *animalium nullum odoratum, nisi si de pantheris quod dictum est credimus*; Aristotle's *History of Animals* 612a12-15; Plautus, *The Haunted House*; Connors 1997, 306; Lallemand 2008a, 43.

Pliny, following Theophrastus, outlines the two main parts of unguents as being the *sucus* ('juice'), usually consisting of oils which are called *stymmata* ('astringents'), and the *corpus* ('body' or 'solid part'), made of a mix of aromatic substances, called *hedysmata* ('sweetenings').[435] Salt should be added to preserve the oil (unless the perfume contains alkanet), and resin (*resina*) or gum (*cummis*) helped to fix the scent to prevent it from evaporating too quickly (13.7). Instead of the technical descriptions of Theophrastus, the *NH* is only sporadically informative. With a few exceptions, Pliny does not concern himself with the different methods of perfume production (pressing, cold steeping, and hot steeping), the equipment required, the time it took to make perfume, nor the quantities of each ingredient. If a reader hoped to come away with from the *NH* with a clear idea of how to actually *make* these perfumes, they would be sadly disappointed.

Instead, the reader must piece together scraps of information to get an idea of how perfumes are actually made. Pliny mentions the belief by some that perfume can be made by adding 'a sprinkle of the most expensive ingredients to the others after boiling them down', but disputes this, arguing that although this saves money, the perfume is not as strong unless all the ingredients are boiled down together (13.16-17). Later, he claims that the final scent to be added to a perfume is the strongest.[436] He also occasionally mentions a precise feature of the manufacturing process when it is unusual or specific to one perfume, for example noting that *megalium* must be stirred constantly while it is being boiled 'until it ceases to smell', only recovering its odour when it cools down (13.13). The addition of sesame oil to *cyprinum*, will make it last as long as four years, and that its scent is brought out more by the addition of cinnamon (13.12). All kinds of nard perfume can be made more pungent (*acutoria*) by the addition of costus and amomum, and thicker (*crassiora*) and sweeter (*suaviora*) through the addition of myrrh (13.16).

Pliny is slightly more forthcoming regarding the correct means of storing and preserving perfume, claiming that the best containers for perfumes were made from

[435] See also: Theophrastus, *On Odours* 14; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 1.61, 63; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.7. Pliny's account of perfumes seems to draw from both of these earlier sources: Ernout 1957, 69.

[436] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.19: *inter omnis potentissimus odor quisquis novissime additur*. This claim seems somewhat inconsistent with the idea that all ingredients should be boiled down together.

alabaster. He also seems to indicate a distinction between *unguenta* and *odores*. His comment that 'unguents keep best in alabaster boxes, scents when mixed with oil' suggests two separate categories of perfume (13.19). His next remark, that scents (*odores*) last longer when fatter (*pinguius*) oil is used, followed by 'and unguents themselves improve with age' seems to maintain this separation. However, this is complicated when he goes on to claim that, as sunshine is harmful to them, they are stored in lead vases in the shade. His use of the term *iis* makes it unclear if Pliny is referring here to the storage of *odores* or *unguenta*, or indeed to both. The exact nature of the difference between these two varieties of perfume is somewhat unclear. Whereas with *magma* Pliny explains exactly the difference between this and other perfumes (that it is a powder), it is unclear whether there is a similar difference in consistency between the two – for instance with *unguenta* being generally thicker in comparison to thinner *odores* ('scents') – or whether the difference is in the ingredients from which they are made.

A feature of perfumes which comes across quite strongly in the *NH* is their multi-sensory nature. Perfumed unguents were not disembodied scents; they had texture, taste, and colour as well. Pliny follows Theophrastus in noting that perfumes were sometimes given a colour, and recommends that cinnabar and alkanet should be used for this purpose.[437] In keeping with the rest of his account, he does not go into as much detail as Theophrastus, choosing not to mention specific perfumes which were tinted, or why colour should be important. This very vagueness, however, gives the impression that although it is frequently ignored, colour was an aspect of perfumes which ought to be considered of similar importance to the *stymmata* and *hedysmata*.[438] When it came to the texture or consistency of perfumes, *susinum* – made of lilies, ben-nut oil, calamus, honey, cinnamon, saffron and myrrh – was the thinnest or most liquid (*tenuissimum*), followed by *cyprinum* (13.11)**.** On the other end of the scale, *cinnamominum* is characterised as the thickest unguent (13.15). Pliny also acknowledges the existence of *diapasmata* and *magma*, perfumed powders, therefore indicating that, although most of his discussion of (and most explicit disapproval of) perfume refers mainly to unguents he was aware of and has a similar distaste for other methods of scenting the body (13.19). Interestingly, Pliny seems to have a particular

[437] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 31; Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 4.23; Piny, *Natural History* 13.7.
[438] 13.7 *tertius inter haec est colos multis neglectus*.

dislike of thick unguents, and to disapprove of those who prefer these to the more liquid kinds, grouping such smearing of the body with thick unguents together with other morally questionable excesses, such as perfuming of the soles of the feet. (13.22).

There are several possible reasons for Pliny's relative reticence on the methods of production for specific unguents. Firstly, it is possible that Pliny simply does not know such exact details. It is also possible that he does not consider the information worthy of inclusion. The *NH* covers such an enormous quantity of information that it is hardly surprising that some finer details might be omitted, particularly those which are not in keeping with his key interests. Finally, it is also possible that Pliny's moral disapproval renders him reluctant to provide the kind of information that would, for instance, enable a reader to set up their own *unguentaria*. I would argue that this last option is quite likely. Although it is true Pliny does not always give all the details – indeed the *NH* would be unimaginably enormous if he did – but he does seem in general to give the most detailed information on issues which he considers not only the most interesting or useful, but also which sit best with his moral sensibilities. He gives plenty of detailed information, for example, on how to identify fraudulent practices when purchasing *aromata*, which would appear consistent with his broader mission both to arm his readers with practical knowledge, and also to expose the seedy realities behind the substances to which the Roman world gave such value.[439]

3.4. *Utilitas*

A central theme of the *NH* is that of humanity's use, or often misuse, of the natural world. Mary Beagon, among others, has noted Pliny's emphasis on the concept of *utilitas vitae* ('usefulness to life'), an idea which appears frequently during his discussion of perfumes, the plants from which they are made, and throughout the *NH* in general.[440] His project to catalogue the entire known natural world is largely driven by the desire to render Nature known, controllable, and above all useful to his fellow Romans, a desire most clearly demonstrated by the fact that around a third of the entire

[439] Lao 2011, 36.
[440] Pliny, *Natural History* 22.1, 15; 23.1; 24.1, 4; 25.25; 26.10; 27.3; 28.2; Beagon 2013, 95, 98.

work is dedicated to the countless medical uses to which plants, animals, and minerals could be put.[441]

This attitude can be seen to reflect a Roman form of Stoicism also evident in works such as Seneca's *Natural Questions* and Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*.[442] Stoic thought saw Nature as a beneficent deity which provided all things for humanity's use, and the influence of this model 'anthropocentric Nature' and the consequent concerns about the ways in which nature could and should be used are evident in Pliny's work; in book two, Pliny talks at length of Nature's bounty, characterising the earth as 'kind and gentle and indulgent, ever a handmaid in the service of mortals', gifting humans with all that is pleasurable and beneficial (2.154-156).[443] Every raw product of nature, even those which might at first seem only harmful, possesses potential *utilitas*, as long as it used appropriately. Even poison is framed as a compassionate gift from Nature, as a merciful escape from a slow and painful death (2.156). Indeed, Nature seems even to make a concerted effort to dissuade humankind from their avaricious and luxurious tendencies; the stings of bees, for instance, are a warning to humankind of the perils of overindulgence in sweet treats like honey (21.78).[444]

The precise nature of Pliny's engagement with Stoicism has been thoroughly discussed and debated in the scholarship, with Andrew Wallace-Hadrill emphasising the importance of the philosophy, fashionable during the Flavian period during which Pliny was writing, in shaping the entirety of the *NH*, while others such as Aude Doody and Mary Beagon have noted Pliny's lack of a 'cohesive position on nature', and argue for a lesser degree of overt alignment with Stoic ideas.[445] Although the finer points of such a debate are not the business of this chapter, it does seem clear that Pliny's censorious attitude towards perfume, above all his criticism of it as a useless, artificially produced misuse of nature seems to reflect his broader philosophical approach towards the natural world. Above all, Pliny is concerned with man's use and more importantly abuse of the wealth Nature provides. His eulogy to Nature in book

[441] Stannard 1982, 4-5; Conte 1994, 79; French 1994, 206-207; Doody 2013, 291.
[442] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 81; Beagon 1992, 26-25; Beagon 2013, 95; Doody 2013, 288.
[443] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 83; Conte 1994, 79; Manolaraki 2018, 207.
[444] Beagon 1992, 36-42; Conte 1994, 78.
[445] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 81-84; Beagon 1992, 26; Griffin 2007, 91; Doody 2013, 291; Manolaraki 2018, 207.

two is followed immediately by a lamentation on her behalf for man's violation of her; 'what earth has produced as a remedy for our ills, we have made into a deadly poison'.[446] This violation is most graphic when humanity is exploiting the earth for the sake of luxury; digging for gold, silver, and gems is likened to pulling out her internal organs (2.158). That Nature had hidden these riches far away from human reach is, to Pliny, a clear indication that they were not intended for human use, and therefore to go to such great lengths as mining, diving to the depths of the sea (in the case of pearls), and, in the case of exotic *aromata*, transporting goods over enormous distances, directly went against the natural order.[447]

The exploitation of natural resources for what Pliny and many others both contemporary to and before him deem to be unnatural, immoral, and degenerate purposes represented a gross misuse of Nature's gifts. Perfume emerges in the *NH* as the epitome of man's misuse of nature. Book thirteen presents Luxury herself as the creator of perfume, when she decided that the natural scents produced by the earth were not sufficiently fragrant.[448] The superfluity of perfume is further emphasised when Pliny claims that 'the first thing to know about [perfumes] is that their worth changes, often with their fame passing away' (13.4). Different kinds of perfume were frequently substituted for one another, suggesting that the specific nature of each individual perfume was unimportant, their popularity merely based upon the whims of fashion.

It is later on in his discussion of perfumes, however, when Pliny's main cause for disapproval is made explicit, that 'they serve the purpose of the most superfluous of all forms of luxury'.[449] The use of *supervacuus* (useless, unnecessary, superfluous) makes clear that perfumes are by their very nature opposed to Pliny's ideals of *utilitas*. Pearls, jewels and fine clothing, which are elsewhere themselves denounced as useless luxuries, are contrasted favourably with perfume; as they at least lasted for some time, and could therefore be made use of many times and inherited by future family members, 'but unguents lose their scent at once, and die in the very hour when they are used' (13.20). This volatility is made worse by their extreme expense. It is

[446] 2.157.
[447] 9.104-123; 12.51-65; 33.1-3; Carey 2003, 77; Doody 2013, 293;
[448] 13.1.
[449] 13.20.

interesting that here Pliny chooses to ignore his earlier assertion that relatively inexpensive perfumes were available, and specifies the price of 'more than 400 denarii per pound', in order to better support the picture of wastefulness he is painting (13.20-21). If this were not enough, Pliny goes on to claim that perfumes cannot be smelled by the wearer, and so the only possible use of perfume is the momentary olfactory pleasure it provides to others.[450]

Despite this unsympathetic characterisation, Pliny does in fact mention a variety of different uses for perfumed unguents, and even more for the many ingredients from which they were made. Indeed, Pliny's description of the various *aromata* that went into making perfume refers to a variety of practical, beneficial uses of these substances. The Sabaeans used incense wood to cook their food, while others used wood of the myrrh tree (12.81). Parthians used *bratus* leaves to perfume their drinks, and imported styrax in order to cleanse their homes of smells they disliked. The same styrax, when burnt, also fulfilled the useful purpose of driving snakes away from forests of valuable perfume-producing trees.[451] It should be noted, however, that all of these examples were of non-Roman uses, and Pliny treats them more as ethnological curiosities than as practical information for the reader as to how to use scented products. When Pliny does talk about the various uses of perfume found in Roman society, he is intensely hostile. Contemporary Romans, like the Arabians, used scent to enhance their domestic environment, sprinkling it upon bathroom walls and in bathtubs, and, again like the Arabians, perfuming their wine.[452] Despite describing activities of a similar nature, the difference in Pliny's attitude is striking – his account of Roman perfume use is peppered with 'By Hercules!', and other interjections expressing his disapproval (13.25). The difference here lay both in context and magnitude. The Arabians were uncivilised, Eastern barbarians, who were only to be expected to engage in unusual or undesirable behaviours, and they only used the raw material – styrax, and incense and myrrh wood – whereas the Romans Pliny is

[450] 13.21. Interestingly, it could be argued that this very characteristic could have been used by Pliny to ameliorate perfume's image; as Trevor Murphy has argued, money spent on lavish entertainments for the good of others is elsewhere characterised in the *NH* as an acceptable, even a commendable use of wealth – at least in comparison with miserly hoarding: Murphy 2003, 311.
[451] 12.78, 81.
[452] 13.22, 25.

describing were not only his fellow citizens, but were also using artificial, expensive *unguenta*.[453]

In book twelve, Pliny examines another important use of scented products – in ritual, as incense offerings to the gods and in the form of the perfumes and aromatics used to honour the dead. The sacred nature of frankincense both in its home country and in its rather more commercial form in Rome, examined in greater detail above, demonstrates at once both the importance of fragrant substances to religious ritual, and the ways in which *luxuria* and the ancient spice trade complicated and to a degree devalued such substances. Nevertheless, the *utilitas* of perfume and aromatics in worshiping the gods and honouring the dead is a topic of some interest to Pliny. The *NH*'s examination of Arabia Felix gave Pliny an opportunity to discuss the funerary uses of aromatics and perfumes. He recounts how perfumes from Arabia were burned over the body of the deceased, taking as a case study the funeral of Nero's wife Poppaea. At this lavish event, he claims, more spices and perfumes were burnt in one day than are produced by Arabia in an entire year (12.83). It might be expected that a conservative member of the Roman establishment would consider the burning of aromatics on the funeral pyre an acceptable manifestation of traditional values of respect for the dead and for one's ancestors, but this appears not to be the case. This practice was 'caused by the luxury of mankind', and one that lead to the consumption of vast quantities of expensive substances that ought properly to be dedicated (sparingly) to the gods (12.83). In fact, the practice is even implied to be something almost infernal – Arabia's part in the production of aromatics for use in funerary rites renders its title *felix* 'a false and disagreeable name', as it owes more to the gods below (12.81).

Above all, Pliny emphasises the pointlessness of using perfume and aromatics for ritual purposes; immediately after denouncing funerary usage of aromatics which ought to be used to worship the gods, he exposes even this practice as futile: 'The gods used not to regard with less favour the worshippers who petitioned them with salted spelt, but rather, as the facts show, they were more benevolent in those days' (12.83-84). Far from pleasing the gods because of their high price and rarity, luxurious scents are shown to be either entirely useless in encouraging divine favour, or possibly even

[453] 13.22, 24.

detrimental to this effort.[454] Pliny seems to be advocating for a return to a simpler, nobler past like that depicted at the beginning of book thirteen, where the only olfactory offerings to the gods were sourced from humble, native species (13.2). It might well be that Pliny's own scepticism regarding traditional Roman religion and the anthropomorphic pantheon colours his attitude here; not only were the quantities of expensive *aromata* being used excessive, their use was all the more futile if the deities they are propitiating did not in fact exist.[455]

The *NH*, then, consistently undermines and complicates the potential *utilitas* of perfumes and luxurious, foreign scents. However, it is also clear that this disapproval is contextual, and more often than not the fault is not with Nature, whose philanthropy Pliny goes out of his way to demonstrate, but with the misplaced ingenuity and the grasping *luxus* of humankind. On the other hand, Pliny displays a much more favourable attitude towards the Empire's access to medicinal plants, which were often the same used for the perfumes he vilifies. In stark contrast to his account of the spice trade, Pliny presents the trade in medicinal plants made possible by 'the immense majesty of Roman peace' as not just highly positive, but even as evidence that the Roman Empire itself was a divine gift to humankind.[456] The medicinal benefits of plants, were perhaps the best evidence of nature's benevolence, and represented one of the highest forms of *utilitas* which the natural world had to offer. It is therefore interesting that almost all of the ingredients used in perfumes also had medicinal uses.[457] Nevertheless, the value placed by Pliny on *utilitas* does not exempt such 'useful' substances from all criticism. Pharmacological treatments too could be perverted by misuses of mankind's *ingenium* (22.117-118).

> The works of Nature are brought forth absolutely perfect; a few ingredients are chosen with a purpose, not by guesswork… But for a man to weigh out, scruple by scruple, the active ingredients that he gathers together and blends, is not human guess-work but human impudence. I myself will not touch upon drugs imported from India and Arabia or from the outer world. Things that spring forth so far away

[454] Vons 2000, 294.
[455] 2.14-27; Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 82-83; Beagon 1992, 34.
[456] 14.2; 27.3; Ando 2003, 326.
[457] See chapter 1, pp. 49-50, 57-58.

> are inadequate as remedies; they are not produced for us, nor indeed even for the natives, who would not sell them otherwise. If you like, let them be purchased for perfumes, unguents and luxuries, or even in the name of religious superstition, for we worship the gods with frankincense and costus**.** But I will show health to be independent of such drugs, if only to make luxury all the more ashamed of itself.

This passage underscores the nuances and tensions which arise out of the combination of Pliny's anti-luxury, pro-utility stance, and his distaste for foreign products and producers. The very luxuries which Pliny denounces so consistently – perfumes and scented unguents – are here recommended as being a better way to make use of exotic substances than in medicinal remedies. The use of such substances in religious ritual is also lauded as more appropriate, despite the ambivalent and even hostile attitude Pliny has shown towards such practices elsewhere. While healing was indisputably the highest end to which Nature's bounty could be put – Pliny places such great importance on this use of nature that over a third of the *NH* is dedicated to exactly this topic – Pliny maintains that there was a right way and a wrong way to achieve this end. The right way was through the use of simple, inexpensive, easy to procure and produce herbal remedies, for which 'a few ingredients are chosen with a purpose'. This kind of medicine, informed by native folk traditions, respects the wisdom and beneficence of Nature, and is all that is required to maintain or restore human health.[458] The wrong way was that of the Greek physician – complex concoctions of many ingredients blended together, often making use of expensive products from far off lands like India and Arabia. This was not only evidence of 'human impudence', but is also redundant, either because the medicines did not work, or because the same effect could be achieved through simple, local, herbal remedies.[459] The encroachment of compound drugs into medicinal treatment, often made using the *aromata* which also went into compound perfumes, was evidence of the increasing weakness for luxury among the Roman population, and also of the degeneracy and deceitfulness of those who concoct them.

[458] On Pliny's relationship with and preference for folk medicine, see Stannard 1982, 4-5, 11.

[459] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 83; Beagon 1992, 193, 202; Fagan 2006, 196-197; See Pliny, *Natural History* 29.24-26 on *theriace* and the Mithridatic antidote, two colossally complex compounds which mirror the excesses of *regale unguentum*: Totelin 2004; Mayor 2010, 237-247.

Drawing this comparison between perfumes and compound medicaments is revealing, demonstrating the ways in which the worldview of the *NH* precludes a positive moral assessment of such substances. While the *aromata* may well possess an array of beneficial uses, the compound perfumes derived from them are rendered reprehensible not only by their use, but also by the very nature of their manufacture. In drawing together a large number of ingredients from distant lands, and combining them in complex recipes, perfumes were, like compound medicaments, perversions of the natural order. That Pliny suggests in the passage above that the use of exotic *aromata* in perfume was actually *preferable* to use in medicine points to perfume's frivolousness: while medicines are meant to fulfil a useful function, perfumes are deemed, by their nature, entirely useless.

3.5. Gender

This chapter has so far demonstrated that the use of perfumed unguents to fragrance the body or its surroundings is represented by Pliny as almost exclusively undesirable. Perfumes were a gross misuse of the natural world, inspired by luxury and avarice, subject to the whims of fashion, and lacking in any practical use. They were a waste of money, both due to their inordinate expense and to the widespread counterfeiting and adulteration common in the industry. They also represented the decline in traditional Roman morality which had been the unfortunate side effect of the empire's increasing wealth and geographical reach, and a deeply threatening cultural invasion from the decadent East. The ingredients from which they were made did have a range of potentially useful properties, the most positive of which were their many medicinal applications, but these benefits seem to entirely disappear when used for the purpose of enhancing one's odour. This final section will connect these elements of Plinian perfumes with the ways in which perfume use is represented in the *NH* as a commodity primarily produced for and used by women, and the ways in which their increasing use by men in contemporary Roman society is constructed by Pliny as evidence of their increasing feminisation.

There are scattered though the book thirteen, and also earlier in book twelve, general comments which indicate that Pliny assumed the majority of perfume consumers to be female. When complaining about the superfluousness of perfumes, Pliny rather scathingly remarks that 'their highest recommendation is that when a

woman passes by her scent may attract the attention even of people busy doing something else—and they cost more than four hundred denarii per pound! All that money is paid for a pleasure enjoyed by somebody else, for a person carrying scent does not smell it themselves' (13.20-21). Here, perfume is explicitly a feminine tool – Pliny does not speak of a person, but of 'a woman' as the default wearer of unguents, and ties this into a stereotypically feminine attempt to adorn the body. Although Pliny himself clearly questions the value of this *summa commendatio,* the use of perfume to attract (presumably male) attention is presented as its main purpose. In this way, perfume can be seen to be connected to other similar forms of luxury, like the fine clothes, jewels and pearls which Pliny mentions directly before it.[460] These fineries are also mainly used to adorn the female body, both as a means to display wealth and also as a means to enhance their attractiveness to men. However, perfume somehow goes above and beyond other forms of adornment in that, Pliny claims, the wearer does not actually experience the pleasant scent they are emitting; it is therefore only useful for the purpose of eroticised display and the seduction of others.[461] His emphasis upon the distracting nature of perfumes, attracting the attention presumably of men occupied in more productive pursuits damns such substances still further. Perfumes and the women who wear them not only lack *utilitas,* but actively entice men away from useful work and civic responsibility; to paraphrase Jacqueline Vons, perfume 'becomes a factor of moral and political disorder'.[462]

In a brief comment in book twelve, in which Pliny voices his disapproval at the high prices of various *aromata,* he blames women specifically for this great and, to his mind, pointless cost to the empire: 'By the lowest reckoning India, China and the Arabian peninsula take from our empire 100 million sestertii every year – that is the sum which our luxuries and our women cost us' (12.84). It is significant that women are to blame not only for the finished product, but also for the raw ingredients which go into perfume, and therefore the spice trade in general. It implies that the bulk of the imports of the products Pliny describes, particularly the more expensive ones

[460] Pliny specifically calls pearls 'wasteful things meant only for women': 37.15. Pearls and perfume are further connected in Pliny's description of pearls 'in the shape of perfume bottles', which women were particularly fond of as earrings or ornaments for the fingers: 9.114.
[461] Vons 2000, 321. It might well be argued that the pleasant visual effect produced by the wearing of jewels and fine clothing might also predominantly be experienced by the external viewer than by the wearer, but Pliny does not seem to consider this.
[462] Vons 2000, 322.

like cinnamon and cassia, were destined not for medicine or other more useful applications, but for the perfume bottle. It also goes another step towards associating women and Eastern luxury, almost imagining the women of Rome as actively conspiring with these foreign lands in order to manoeuvre the Empire into financial ruin. This idea has some interesting parallels with the trope found in other genres of Latin literature of women manipulating their lovers, customers, or husbands into spending vast amounts on perfume, extravagant jewellery or similar luxuries.[463] A small and yet revealing feature of this particular passage is the pairing of *nobis deliciae et feminae*, which not only adds to the strong association between women and luxury, but seems to imply that the women themselves can be equated with luxuries; they too are expensive, exotic and alluring, but also ultimately the potential source of moral and literal bankruptcy.

Pliny's discussion of floral chaplets in chapter twenty-one demonstrates the degree to which perfumes were associated with, and indeed considered the fault of women and their luxurious tastes. Having related with disapproval the modern fashions for wreaths made of hand-stitched petals or of those imported from India, he notes that 'the chaplet deemed the smartest prize is made of nard leaves, or of multi-coloured silk steeped in perfumes (*unguentis madida*). Such is the latest form taken by the luxury of our women' (21.11). As in the case of the trade in exotic *aromata*, Pliny makes an offhand remark attributing the entirety of the demand for such luxuries to the women of Rome. However, in the case of perfumed chaplets, this seems even less justified, as his account of the contexts in which garlands would be worn – in honour of military, political, or sporting achievements – seems to suggest a primarily male consumer base. He mentions many notable Romans who wore chaplets, for instance Scipio Serapio, who was given a garland by the Roman people, as well as several who misused these marks of honour, notably one Lucius Fulvius who was punished for wearing a chaplet of roses in an inappropriate context.[464] Only one Roman woman is mentioned in conjunction with chaplets, Julia, who does not wear one but rather places one on the head of a statue of Marsyas (apparently a shocking faux pas) (21.9). It can be assumed that in some of the contexts Pliny mentions, such as religious festivals, he is assuming his audience were aware that women also wore

[463] See chapter 2, p. 93, 98; chapter 5, p. 186, 202.
[464] 21.7-8, 10.

chaplets, but the contrast between the examples he gives and his accusation against women is striking. Once *unguenta* appeared, once the odour given off by the chaplets was no longer the natural scent of Italian flowers (or, even better, grass), chaplets became, like all other perfumed adornments, women's business.[465]

In most cases, rather than give specific examples of female perfume use, Pliny chooses to talk of women in general. In this manner he creates the impression of a widespread feminine partiality to, if not obsession with expensive, luxurious fragrances. However, when it comes to specific examples, there are actually more references to male use of, or association with perfume in this section than there are to female use.[466] The earliest historical appearance of perfume Pliny cites was of perfume passing between two men; from King Darius to Alexander the Great (13.3). The infamous *regale unguentum* was specially created for use not by wealthy women, but by the kings of Parthia (13.18). In Rome, the emperors Caligula, Nero, and Otho all use perfume, as do their male slaves and even the soldiers who defend the empire (13.22-23). In fact, there are few individually named woman directly linked to perfume use, none of whom appear in Pliny's discussion of scented unguents in book thirteen.[467] In his account of *aromata* in chapter twelve, one notable female figure does appear: Poppaea. It is Poppaea's funeral that Pliny uses to illustrate the impious overuse of *aromata* in contemporary Rome, dwelling on the vast consumption of luxurious Arabian spices.[468] This functions largely as a means for Pliny to criticise Nero, whose excesses he mentions on frequent occasions throughout the *NH.*[469] However, Poppaea herself also had a reputation for luxurious excess, bathing her entire body in the milk of mules (whom she demanded wore golden horseshoes), and here Pliny seems to imply that she was, despite being dead, somehow complicit in this last act of extreme waste (28.183).[470]

[465] See Guillaume-Coirier 2008 for further discussion of naturally and artificially scented chaplets in Petronius' *Satyricon.*
[466] Vons 2000, 322.
[467] Vons 2000, 292.
[468] 12.83; Vons 2000, 295. See chapter 2, pp. 67-68.
[469] On Nero's luxuries, see 16.233; 33.53; 35.51; 36.111-112; 37.17-20; Seneca, *On Benefits* 7.9.2; 34.63; Beagon 1992, 3, 17, 191; Deszpa 2016, 169.
[470] Vons 2000, 295.

This proliferation of male use of perfume should not, however, be taken to suggest that perfume was a masculine or gender-neutral substance that could be used by respectable Roman men without condemnation. Rather, the association between these men and perfume use serves to undermine their masculinity. King Darius, the owner of the perfume casket, and the Parthian kings smothered with royal perfume, were both from the very region which Pliny singles out as being the origin of perfume use. As foreigners from the decadent East, their association with perfume is unsurprising both in its connotations of excessive luxury, and also in its links to effeminacy, both of which were well-established stereotypes in the ancient world. The Roman emperors whom Pliny has chosen to depict using perfume – Caligula, Nero, and Otho – are exactly those most associated with effeminacy and its accompanying vices, and so their use of perfume here works on multiple levels; their perfume use adds to their already existing image as failures of Roman masculinity and morality, and the use of perfume by them in turn serves to associate perfume itself with depraved effeminacy.[471] Alexander the Great seems to largely escape condemnation, but he is also the only figure associated with perfume who does not appear to use it himself: in an earlier mention of this perfume box, Alexander piously disposes of the unguents and replaces them with the works of Homer. In his younger days (*in pueritia*) he was guilty of lavish use of frankincense in religious ritual, for which he was chided by his tutor Leonides, but this excess does not seem to translate to personal use of perfume.[472]

The case of Lucius Plotius is perhaps the most extreme and explicit condemnation of male perfume use: 'Lucius Plotius, brother of Lucius Plancus who was consul and censor twice, having been proscribed by the triumvirs was betrayed at his hiding-place in Salerno by the scent of his perfume – an embarrassment that made the whole proscription guiltless; for who would not judge that such men deserved to die?' (13.25). Here Pliny is directly contrasting Plotius' status as a member of the Roman elite against his use of perfume. Whereas elsewhere perfume use was an indirect and insidious threat to Roman society, here it is the direct cause for a Roman

[471] Apart from Pliny's own unfavourable accounts of Nero, Otho and Nero's debauched companionship appears elsewhere in Latin literature: Tacitus, *Annals* 13.12; Suetonius, *Life of Otho* 2-3. Nevertheless, Pliny's claim that Otho taught Nero the art of perfuming one's feet appears in neither. The perfumed bathing of Caligula appears in Suetonius, *Life of Caligula* 37, alongside other examples of his extravagance, including drinking pearls dissolved in vinegar.
[472] 7.108-109; 12.62.

man's downfall and subsequent death. Pliny's rather extreme assertion that Plotius' olfactory excesses completely excused his killers, accompanied by the alarming general claim that 'such men (i.e. those who wore perfume) deserved to die' is his most extreme condemnation of perfume use, positioned rather meaningfully at the very end of the *NH*'s section devoted to the subject. It is a startlingly unambiguous ending, and leaves the reader in little doubt; in Pliny's opinion, Roman men have no business wearing perfume.

The image of perfume which emerges is that of a substance automatically associated with the feminine. Indeed, one could well argue that the two general comments about female perfume use discussed earlier in this section neatly combine many of Pliny's main concerns with and criticisms of scented unguents. They were indeed feminine, but they were not *just* feminine; they were also the epitome of frivolous, short-lived luxury, the desire for which allowed the East to swindle Rome out of millions of sestertii each year and in exchange spread their decadence and dubious morality into the very heart of fashionable, elite Roman society. Specific examples of Roman male use of perfume do not suggest that perfume itself was not gendered, rather they provide evidence of the decline of traditional Roman values and morality. The use of perfume by women was, while frivolous and wasteful, only to be expected, however much Pliny looks down upon it. The use of perfume by a man, even when part of a growing trend, was an aberration, a sign of the corrupting, femininity of the East, and might even constitute a social faux pas worthy of death.

3.6. Conclusion

In chapter thirty-seven of the *NH*, as part of his discussion of the mineral wealth of Nature, Pliny dedicates a substantial section to amber (37.30-51). Amber is a unique case: an aromatic resin that is treated, both in antiquity as today, as a gemstone, prized for its appearance and use in jewellery, as well as for the pleasant scent that it emits.[473] Pliny's discussion of amber follows that of myrrhine and rock crystal, both of which he has roundly denounced as unnecessary luxuries. From the outset, however, he makes it clear that amber is even more useless than these; although 'rock-crystal vessels are used for cold drinks and myrrhine-ware for drinks both hot

[473] Ahl 1982, 395; Bradley 2009, 104-105.

and cold, not even luxury has yet succeeded in inventing a justification for using amber' (37.30). Corinthian bronzes, pearls, and other gems he also contrasts favourably with amber, concluding that 'every other substance for which we have a weakness pleases us because it lends itself either to display or to practical use, whereas amber gives us only the private satisfaction of knowing that it is a luxury' (37.50).[474]

One striking similarity between *aromata* and amber lies in the many aetiological accounts of the geographical origin and creation of amber (37.31-46). One myth, upheld by a number of Greek poets, made amber the tears of the sisters of Phaethon, transformed in their grief into poplar trees. A similar myth which Pliny attributes to Sophocles made it the tears of the Meleagrids, the daughters of Meleager who had been transformed into birds. Demonstratus advanced the theory that it is solidified lynx urine, and Nicias that amber is moisture derived directly from the sun's rays. Pliny delights in exposing such fantastical theories and providing the 'real' origin (37.42). These are reminiscent of the tales, tall or otherwise, of the provenance of substances like cassia and cinnamon, but here there is a clearer indication of Pliny's motivation behind recounting and rejecting such tales; to demonstrate the superiority of Roman knowledge, gained through exploration and scientific enquiry, over Greek theories and superstition.[475]

Also present in Pliny's account of amber, and somewhat at odds with his characterisation of the substance as without use, are its medicinal properties (37.50-51). Worn as an amulet, it was beneficial to the health of babies, or for people of any age prone to 'attacks of wild distraction', for urinary tract infections, or for fevers and diseases in general. Amber could also be beneficial for ear infections 'when powdered and mixed with honey and rose oil', or for issues with sight when combined with attic honey. However, much like exotic *aromata*, amber might well have beneficial properties, but, crucially, it was not necessary – anything amber might contribute to human life could be provided at less effort and expense by those plants, animals and minerals Nature had made locally available. In a final blow to amber's potential utility, Pliny suggests that those who emphasise its pharmacological uses were at best missing the point, and at worst simply hypocrites, for 'it is not for this reason that women like

[474] Darab 2012, 151.
[475] Darab 2012, 154.

it' (37.50). Here we see yet another link between amber and unguents; it was a luxury desired by and associated with women. From the very first sentence on the subject, women are singled out not just as the most enthusiastic consumers of amber, but the *only* consumers (37.30).[476] As ever, Pliny does not consider pleasant odour alone a legitimate source of worth: 'the pale kind has the finest scent, but… it has no value' (37.47). Yet again, as with *aromata* and perfumes, his own account suggests that this was not the case. That the odour of amber was a significant feature of its appeal is indicated elsewhere in the passage, in the references to the practice of rubbing amber in order to access its scent, and in claims that it was derived from trees called *psitthacorae,* 'luscious sweetness' (37.39), and that in India it was considered 'more agreeable even than frankincense (37.36).

A further point of comparison might be drawn here between amber and myrrh. Much like in the myths of Phaeton's sisters and Meleager's daughters, drops of myrrh, too, are the tears of a transformed woman. Although Pliny does not recount the mythical origins of myrrh, this myth would have been familiar to his audience, thus perhaps reminding them that although amber is treated as a precious stone it is rather a scented resin which occupies an uneasy space between perfume and gem.[477] This also highlights a theme which appears throughout both Pliny's account of perfumes, but which also pertains to female adornment more broadly: the interplay of the senses. Perfumes, primarily valued for their scent, were also defined by their colour and texture, and often also their taste. The sensory element of amber that Pliny most emphasises is its appearance, but its odour and its frequent wearing as a pendant lent it olfactory and haptic qualities as well. The multisensory nature of amber placed it in a particularly ambiguous realm between gem and perfume: amber must be rubbed in order to be smelled (37.42, 47).[478] Much like perfume, amber could also be dyed,

[476] Women's desire for amber also manifests in a general appreciation for the colour itself. The hair of Poppaea, she of the spice-filled funeral, is called 'amber-coloured' (*sucini*) in a poem by her husband Nero, which Pliny says inspired a fashion for this hair colour among Roman women – a fashion he deems misguided, saying that 'no defect lacks a term that represents it as an asset': 37.50.

[477] See chapter 4, pp. 166-172. It might seem odd that Pliny does not mention the mythological origin of myrrh, but looking through his catalogue of *aromata* it seems that he did not make a habit of recounting such stories. This, however, makes his inclusion of the myth of amber all the more significant – it suggests the tale was deliberately included to emphasise the ridiculousness of Greek theories concerning its origin.

[478] The wearing of this scented pendant around the neck is reminiscent of the *rhodides* of Dioscorides, which he also claims is a purely female pursuit: See chapter 2, pp. 89-90.

sometimes with the pungent Tyrian purple, which might perhaps have imparted some of that dye's infamously fishy scent to the resin (37.47).[479] That a substance generally categorised as a gem rather than a perfume should bear so many points of comparison, and for which odour is such a significant feature, is a reminder of the broadness and mutability of the category of 'perfume' in antiquity.

Pliny's discussion of perfume draws together many of the themes and broader concerns which appear throughout the *Natural History*. In many respects, both perfume and the exotic materials from which they were made might reasonably be expected to draw some approval from the encyclopaedist, as representatives of the vast power and broad geographical reach of a thriving, successful empire. Indeed, it is possible to read some of Pliny's account in this way. When he catalogues thoroughly the far-flung origins of and complex collection and transportation of cinnamon, myrrh, frankincense, and so on, it is hard not to see the ways in which this reflects well upon the Flavian dynasty whom Pliny is so keen to please, and the global dominance of the empire which he has set out to catalogue. Even the popularity of the concocted perfumes themselves suggest an empire in the midst of an economic boom, which can afford the vast sums of money it loses to Arabia and the like for such luxuries. However, despite this image of wealth, power, and stability (which is certainly present in Pliny's account), luxurious unguents were anything but symbols of a victorious Roman empire. Rather, they epitomised the moral decline, intellectual stagnation, misuse of the earth, and effeminate Eastern decadence which formed, according to Pliny, the most serious and insidious threats to the Roman empire of his day.

Pliny's conception of benevolent, all-providing Nature fundamentally shapes the ways he presents and assesses the different technologies and products used by his fellow humans. The appropriation of herbs, spices, and other natural materials for the vain, temporary, and morally suspicious purpose of fragrancing the body ignores their true *utilitas* in valuable medical treatments, or else robs them of their proper religious significance. Pliny looks back to a nobler, simpler past, where such substances were used sparingly and for legitimate purposes, and exposes those who might claim that the trade in exotic scents was motivated by a pious desire to please the gods – Plinian deities have no interest in perfume, but rather (much like the man himself) would

[479] See 9.127; Bradley 2015b, 142.

prefer it if everyone dedicated just a little salt and some local wood-smoke. To Pliny, Poppaea's excessively-spiced funeral has nothing to do with the gods, and everything to do with human greed and extravagance.

It seems, at first, odd that Pliny should provide so much detailed information on substances with which he finds so much fault. However, in doing so, Pliny seems able to have his cake and eat it. His long catalogue of *aromata* and perfumes allow him to show off both the magnificence of the empire, and also his own extensive and worthy collection of knowledge. These very same details give him an opportunity to condemn those uses of these substances that he considers frivolous or actively harmful. His emphasis on the pervasiveness of fraudulent practices serves the extra purpose not only of undermining the luxurious, exotic image of *aromata* and *unguenta*, but also of arming his reader against such trickery, and thus serves the kind of practical purpose that Pliny claims is central to the *NH*'s mission.

Weaving through all of these other thematic concerns, the wearing of scent is consistently conceptualised as unavoidably feminine. Men may wear perfume, and indeed Pliny seems to paint a picture of a contemporary Rome inundated with such men, but this by no means rids perfume of its gendered character. In fragrancing themselves, men were participating in their own emasculation and othering; soldiers prioritised perfumed hair over military success, and emperors drenched themselves in perfumes better suited to effeminate Persians, and bathed in the same perfumed waters as their slaves. Luxuria itself might even be thought of as a feminine entity, much like Seneca's depiction of Voluptas, dripping with perfume and smothered in makeup.[480] Perfume, then, provides Pliny with a compelling case study for the subject of *luxuria* and the Flavian Empire. The fragranced female body becomes the location in which Pliny explores and interweaves many of the anxieties which pervade the entire *Natural History*. Perfume was a potent, Eastern, feminine threat to a male Roman empire which is at the heady height of its strength, but despite or because of this, particularly vulnerable.

[480] Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 7.3-4.

4. Ambrosial Aromas and Mephitic Monsters: Female Bodies in Myth

Pliny's assertion that the gods had little interest in fragrance flies in the face of a long and pervasive tradition of both religious practice and belief. Throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, odour played a crucial role in the cultural construction of divinity. From the sweet, heady scents of incense and perfume, to the pungent, animal smells of spilled blood and roasting meat, sacrifices and other rituals were often as strongly marked by odour as they were by visuals and sound. These scents played a part in ritual that went far beyond just pomp and circumstance. Far from being the accidental by-product of offerings to the gods, they were the offerings. The gods, having no need for and little interest in solid food, were believed to delight in and even take nourishment from the scent of roasted flesh and fragrant smoke.[481] Odour was able to cross the boundaries between earthly and divine, and thus served as a crucial means by which the one realm might communicate with the other.[482]

However, as this chapter will demonstrate, odour and olfaction were even more closely connected to the divine. Just as the gods could be supplicated and placated through pleasant odour, so too were they able to communicate with the mortal realm through scent, signalling their presence through the sweet fragrance that characterised spaces sacred to them, and that emanated from their own divine bodies. The ambrosia and nectar with which they nourished themselves, frequently characterised as fragrant, could be used by deities to heal and even transform mortals whom they favoured, as well as functioning as an immortal perfume.[483] Although their status as divine seems to have often rendered most gods fragrant, it seems no accident that the most sweet-smelling of all was also the most associated with the eroticism, beauty, and dangerous seductive power of the female body: Venus. The smell-scape of myth was not, however, all exotic perfume and fresh flowers. Just as pleasant odour evoked and

[481] Kirk 1990, 10, 13; Seaford 2004, 73; Clements 2015, 48.
[482] This is explicitly stated in *Scholia in Aeschines* 1; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 23; Detienne 1994, 156. For discussions of the connection between the gods and odour: Prost 2008; Bodiou and Mehl 2008, 142-150; Clements 2015, 47-59.
[483] Homer, *Iliad* 14.170-177; *Odyssey* 4.446; 5.93-94; Lilja 1972, 215; Clements 2015, 51.

characterised the divine, so too did foul, acrid stench suggest infernal, monstrous, and chthonic bodies.[484] The antithesis to the fragrant form of Venus can be found in the leaking, stinking bodies of the Harpies, who used their foul excreta as divine punishment. This cosmic olfactory hierarchy also served to situate the mortals of myth between the poles of heaven and the underworld. Amongst the heroes and heroines of myth, to be fragrant was often suggestive of supernatural status, or at least of contact with the divine. Simultaneously, just as the fragrant bodies of the gods' favourites marked them out, unpleasant odour could indicate in mortals something of the infernal or aberrant, such as in the hideous stench of the Lemnian women.

This chapter will explore the olfactory characterisation of the mythological figures introduced above. It will begin by discussing the role of perfume in communicating with the gods, and the degree to which the Romans conceived of their deities as possessing their own specific odour, or as adorning themselves with perfume. It will then focus on the fragrant body of Venus. In what ways did her scent relate to her depiction as the embodiment of female beauty and eroticism? Was Venus characterised by her own specific odour, or was she herself a consumer of perfume? More broadly, to what degree was the extent and nature of heavenly fragrance gendered? The chapter will then go on to examine the characteristic stench of the Harpies and the Lemnian woman. It will discuss the ways in which their representation in Latin literature as foul smelling relates to their gendered physiology, and to their socially disruptive behaviour. Just as Venus, the female deity most defined by her body, gender, and sexuality, was the most olfactorily attractive, so too were these two groups of mythological women, so defined by their bodies and bodily functions, the most repellent. How does this shape our understanding of Roman olfactory codes, both within mythology and beyond?

In addition to the examination of the female bodies of myth from which perfume and malodour waft, the role of perfume in myth can be approached from another direction; by examining mythological narratives surrounding the sources of significant aromatic substances in Roman society. Several of the key components of the perfumes and other scented products of the Roman Empire possess fascinating mythological aetiologies, which often revolve around the metamorphosis of female

[484] Detienne 1994, 47.

bodies. The second half of this chapter will discuss some of these, taking as its main case study the myth surrounding one of the most prominent of such substances, myrrh. Myrrha, the unfortunate casualty of an unnatural passion, was credited not only as the figure for whom myrrh is named, but also as being physically undifferentiated from the substance itself; her body was transformed into and equated with the tree that bore her name, and the drops of resin extracted for use in perfumed unguents were her tears. This case study will examine the degree to which this identification between myrrh the substance and Myrrha the woman can shape our understanding of the associations and significances of myrrh in antiquity. How does the taboo nature of Myrrha's transgressions relate to Greco-Roman ideas about the perfumed female body?

Many of the most highly scented mythic episodes and characters in antiquity, the associations which they carry, and the various connections that can be drawn between them, have been explored at length in Detienne's *The Gardens of Adonis*.[485] In this structuralist analysis, Detienne situates the myths surrounding spices within a complex network of overlapping codes – botanical, cosmological, olfactory, sociological, and so on. The olfactory codes which are discussed both in this chapter and throughout this thesis, to a substantial degree, are influenced by those which are explored by Detienne. Many of the myths discussed in this chapter also, as is to be expected, appear in Detienne, and much of my argument is necessarily informed by his work. While his approach enables the identification of many fascinating patterns and connections, the rigidity of the structuralist binary into which he must fit the myths he discusses often creates problems and weaknesses; the need to construct a neat system overwhelms and suppresses considerations of historical context, and even of evidence. However, I aim to counterbalance Detienne's theoretical methodology by grounding my arguments in the perspectives and approaches of the sources themselves, and by acknowledging not only the oppositions or polarities that can be identified in odour-filled myth, but also its inconsistencies, contradictions, and uncertain or simultaneous implications.

[485] Originally published in 1972 and translated into English in 1977. I have been using the 1994 English edition in this thesis.

4.1. The scents of myth

a. Divine fragrance

The olfactory signs of divinity were present in Greco-Roman antiquity since at least as far back as Homer, and appear across a wide range of literary genres and time periods.[486] A fragrant cloud envelops Zeus in the *Iliad,* and a whole host of other divine beings in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are also surrounded by, or are the bringers of sweet-scented ambrosia and nectar.[487] Hippolytus senses Artemis entirely by her 'breath of divine fragrance', and knows immediately that he is in the presence of a god.[488] When Leto gives birth to Apollo, the ambrosial scent of the god stretches out to fill the entire island of Delos.[489] Ovid suggests the divine fragrance of the goddess Flora by remarking that the scent that lingers after her departure is such that you would have known a goddess had been present, and that Bacchus' invisible presence is perceptible through the odour of myrrh and saffron.[490]

In keeping with beliefs about the power of olfaction as a diagnostic tool, odour was often a key sensory means by which the true identity of gods who were in disguise could be (appropriately) divined. In the guise of a bull, Zeus' sweet scent reveals him to be not what he seems – to the reader if not to his intended victim, Europa.[491] Europa's attraction to the bull is, according to the Syracusan poet Moschus (c150 BCE), largely driven by the delicious and erotic appeal of its scent. Given the supposed lack of odour or unpleasant smell given off by most animals, saving of course the panther, the enticing odour of the bull/Zeus is particularly indicative of its divine nature.[492] In the *Aeneid,* Venus' true identity becomes apparent to her son, who

[486] Lallemand 2008a, 37-38.
[487] Homer, *Iliad* 15.153; 19.38-39, 347; 23.186; *Odyssey* 4.444-446; 18.188-196; Shelmerdine 1995, 99; Clements 2015, 51-52. Although these substances are not always clearly differentiated, Ashley Clements argues that nectar, with possible linguistic roots in 'a Semitic term used for incense' and thus is perhaps to be thought of as even more closely aligned with odour than ambrosia, a term that comes from *ambrotos* ('not-mortal').
[488] Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1391-1393: *theīon osmēs pneūma*; Lilja 1972, 19-30. See chapter 5, pp. 207-215 for further discussion of the connection between the breath and scent.
[489] Theognis, *Elegiac Poems* 1.8-9.
[490] Ovid, *Fasti.* 5.376; *Metamorphoses* 4.393.
[491] Moschus, *Europa* 91.
[492] [Aristotle], *Problems* 13.907b; Pliny, *Natural History* 21.39. See chapter 3, pp. 121 on the panther's scent.

initially believed himself to be talking to a young maiden huntress, by the wafts of scent which roll from her hair when she turns to leave.[493]

It is often difficult to tease apart whether or not this divine odour could be said to be a specific, intrinsic scent emitted from within the bodies of the gods themselves, or whether it was a superficial addition, in the form of scented oils, ambrosia or nectar. Certainly, ambrosia and nectar explicitly fulfil the function of perfume as well as cosmetic on many occasions, as in Hera's adornment scene in the *Odyssey*, but other examples are less clear.[494] It is ambiguous, for instance, whether the *odor* left by Ovid's Flora is of the flowers with which she is surrounded, or of a distinct fragrance of her own. However, it seems that such a distinction is to some degree unnecessary. Whether the gods emit fragrance themselves, or whether they bathe in perfumed oils, there can still be said to be a distinctive odour of divinity. One might also raise the question as to how it is possible to speak of the odour of divine *bodies* – although anthropomorphised, the corporeality of the gods was often fluid, both in the forms which deities take on (think of Venus and Zeus in the examples above), and in the degree to which they could be confined to a physical body. As previous chapters have demonstrated, odour was in the Roman world was considered to be indicative of the physical state of the body from which it emanated, and so one might reasonably expect the forms taken on by the gods to affect their odour. This does sometimes appear to be the case; Venus' divine *odor* is not perceptible to Aeneas until the very moment in which her true nature is revealed. Often, however, the scent of divinity existed independently from the body in which a deity might currently be manifested, or even independently from any corporeal presence at all.

Particularly in Greek literature, but also present in Virgil, Propertius, and other Latin sources, altars, precincts, and geographical areas dedicated to deities are often characterised as fragrant. Saara Lilja has argued that 'Roman poets do not often characterize sacred places as fragrant', and although this is indeed more typical of Greek sources, fragrance still makes many appearances in divine precincts and other spaces associated with the divine: Cyprus, Venus' sacred island, is filled with flowers and sweet-scented *amaracus* in the *Aeneid*, Propertius characterises Naxos, the

[493] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.403.
[494] Homer, *Iliad* 14.171-172.

childhood home of Zeus and haunt of Bacchus, as the site of fragrant rivers, the temples of both Apollo and the Bona Dea as fragrant with incense, and the Elysian Fields, abode of heroic souls in the afterlife are fragrant in both Tibullus and Virgil.[495] Lilja also notes the difficulty of discerning whether references to odour in divine haunts, such as the 'fragrant caves' of Hermes and Dionysus in their Homeric Hymns, suggest the burning of incense associated with religious worship, or whether this suggests that locations associated with deities were thought to be intrinsically sweet-smelling.[496] To an extent, this distinction is significant – in the first case the odour of divinity was dependent upon human intervention, in the second it was not – but for the most part the resulting association is unchanged: divine spaces were fragrant. The stability of divine odour points to a feature of olfaction not obviously indicated by Greco-Roman medicine: in addition to signifying the physical condition of the body, either inborn or influenced by its activities and behaviour, odour could also indicate the innate nature of the *animus*.

Although the concept of divine bodily odour appears across Greco-Roman antiquity, scholars have noted that the prevalence and nature of this idea varied somewhat. Where fragrance seems to have been a pervasive and integral part of Greek constructions of divine bodies, it seems that the Roman writers were less ready to characterise their gods, or the spaces occupied by them, as fragrant.[497] Nevertheless, or indeed because of this, the instances where certain figures or groups appear to have retained – or even increased – their scent became especially significant, their odour serving to define their specific nature, role, and perception in Roman society. If the divine realm as a whole was not as ubiquitously pungent as in earlier sources, then it is all the more worthwhile to examine those heavenly (or, conversely, hellish) bodies which are still swathed in odour.

Venus (and her counterpart Aphrodite) is repeatedly depicted as surrounded by, exhaling, and drenched in fragrance.[498] In the *Odyssey*, she is bathed and perfumed with her 'immortal oil' by the Graces, and her island of Cyprus is marked by the

[495] Homer, *Iliad* 23.148; *Odyssey* 8.362-364; *Homeric Hymn to Demete*r 331, 490; Callimachus, *Hymn to Athena* 63; Propertius, *Elegies* 3.17.27; 4.6.5; 9.28; Tibullus, *Elegies* 1.3.61; Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.692-694; 6.658; Lilja 1972, 29.
[496] *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 65; *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* 2.6; Lilja 1972, 26.
[497] See Lilja 1972, 29.
[498] Lallemand 2008a, 38.

fragrance surrounding her altar at Paphos.[499] The motif of the Graces bathing and scenting the goddess is repeated in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite,* also taking place in Paphos and mirroring the *Odyssey's* depiction of divine oil 'as blooms upon the eternal gods'.[500] Euripides depicts an Aphrodite breathing sweet breezes across the land, and the *Greek Anthology* is full of epigrams referencing the fragrant eroticism of Aphrodite.[501] It is worth briefly acknowledging that, while Venus is often equated to and treated as synonymous with the Greek Aphrodite, this is not so. Venus' identification with Aphrodite came after a long history as a separate entity in Roman religion, in which she was associated more with agricultural fertility than human erotic desire. The laughing, seductive, often cruel Aphrodite took on new identities under the Romans as the respectable Venus Genetrix, mother of the founding father Aeneas, and patron of Julius Caesar and Augustus, and the two maintained an uneasy coexistence throughout Latin literature.[502] Given perfume's reputation in the Roman world as an inherently feminine substance, linked to female adornment and the erotic appeal of the female body, it might be suggested that where the fragrance of Venus is implied or emphasised, sources are evoking the side of the goddess that was more in keeping with her Greek sister.

That Venus' divine image still incorporated odour as an important element in the Late Republic is suggested by Cleopatra's magnificent display upon meeting Mark Antony, as told by Plutarch: 'she herself reclined beneath a canopy spangled with gold, adorned like Aphrodite in a painting, while boys like Erotes in paintings stood on either side and fanned her… Wondrous odours from much incense diffused themselves along the river-banks'.[503] Cleopatra's mimicry of Venus is multisensory. It was not enough to *look* like the goddess, she must *smell* like her as well. Some elements of Plutarch's account – the gold-covered excess, the 'wondrous' (*thaumastos*) and plentiful incense, not to mention the infamous character actually posing as Venus – seem to play up the foreign excess of such a display; this Venus is

[499] Homer, *Odyssey* 8.363-365: *elaiōi ambrotōi.*

[500] *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 5.61-65; Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.614-615. See Gladhill 2012, who argues for a metatextal reference by Virgil to the *Homeric Hymn*.

[501] Euripides, *Medea* 838-840; *Palatine Anthology* 5.199.3-5; 6.275; 9.626.3-5; 12.83, 95. These examples span a broad time period, from as early as c.300 BCE to as late as 500 CE, attesting to the endurance of this cultural association.

[502] Reckford 1995, 3, 8-10.

[503] Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 26, adapted from Perrin 1920 (Loeb 101.193-195).

by no means the respectable, Roman ancestor. At the same time, however, this exotic incarnation was still instantly recognisable to the Romans within the narrative, to Plutarch, and to his audience.

While Cleopatra's poor facsimile of the goddess attempted to replicate her divine odour through incense, literary depictions of Venus are often ambiguous as to exactly to what she owes her seductive scent. Silius Italicus talks of a 'fragrance' (*odorem*) breathed out from her head, which far surpassed the already broad reach of mortal perfumes, spreading throughout the entire surrounding landscape.[504] The scent is not attributed to any added perfume, suggesting a goddess by her very nature fragrant, just as she was by her very nature beautiful. Other sources present a slightly more ambiguous account, referencing a specific scent but leaving it unclear whether this functions as an olfactory point of reference, or indicates the literal addition of the scent in question. In the *Aeneid*, the first encounter between Aeneas and his mother (in the guise of a huntress) provides one example of this ambiguity: 'turning away, her rosy neck shone bright. From her head her ambrosial hair breathed divine fragrance (*ambrosiaeque comae divinum vertice odorem spiravere*); down to her feet fell her dress, and by her movement she was revealed truly to be a goddess'.[505]

These few lines conjure an intoxicating multisensory image of the moment Venus' true nature reveals itself. Her rosy neck displays the goddess's beauty, her garments transform into those fit for a goddess, and her hair gives off a scent which can only belong to a deity. The location of the fragrance in the hair is certainly suggestive of added scent, with ambrosia taking the place of myrrh-oil or some other mortal concoction. The female poet Nossis, in the third century BCE, draws just such a comparison between the perfumed band wound into a woman's hair and the sweet smell of nectar (*hadu… nektaros osdei*) used by Aphrodite.[506] However, I would argue that it is far from certain that we ought to imagine that Venus has actually applied ambrosia to her hair. Like the transformation of her clothing, this odour comes in to being at the moment of and as a result of the removal of her disguise; it is her true

[504] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 7.467-469 'All the surrounding groves and all the hollows of the leaf-clad heights drank in deeply the fragrance that breathed from that divine head'. The image of a sentient landscape which actively senses and takes pleasure in the odour emphasises its extra-ordinariness. See also: Euripides, *Medea* 838-840.
[505] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.401-405.
[506] *Palatine Anthology* 6.275. See chapter 5, pp. 182-190.

godly fragrance bursting forth. Like in the case of Artemis' visit to Hippolytus in Euripides, Venus' ambrosial hair is intrinsic to and a crucial sign of her divine status.[507]

However, unlike the divine fragrance of the perpetual virgin Artemis, or the newborn Apollo, the sweet scent wafting from Venus' hair carries with it an unmistakable whiff of sexual allure. Kenneth Reckford makes a strong case for the uncomfortably suggestive elements of this scene, noting the potential for double-readings that render Venus simultaneously the respectable Roman deity and yet also the sexual and sexualised goddess of erotic love.[508] Her hair (hanging loose when in disguise) is implicitly pulled into an elegant up-do, her knee-length huntress attire lengthens into a stately *palla*, and her divinity and power can be sensed through her ambrosial fragrance, while at the same time her 'rosy' neck is voyeuristically exposed, her dress falls down to her feet (and possibly, suggests Reckford, off her entire body), and her hair becomes drenched in perfume.[509] The use of 'rosy' for beautiful is particularly apt here given that its referent, the rose, was both a common presence in perfumes and associated with the goddess in question.[510] Virgil's ambiguous wording, as well as the supernatural nature of the transformation, allow him to have it both ways, preserving the respectability of a mother of a Roman founding father and protecting Aeneas from the embarrassment of his mother's inescapably sexual nature, while at the same time allowing his audience a moment of imagined sensual pleasure.[511] The revealing odour of Venus' divinity, therefore, is more akin to the enticing musk of Zeus-the-bull, functioning both to signal that body's place in the cosmos and also to add to the (somewhat taboo in both circumstances) supernatural sensuality of the body from which it comes.[512]

In addition to the sweet scents she exuded herself, Venus was also constructed as a provider of perfume. Statius' *Silvae* offers an explicit example of the goddess acting as *ornatrix*, recounting to Eros her adornment of a beautiful young bride,

[507] Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1391-1393.
[508] Reckford 1995, 8, 13, 20-22.
[509] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.402-405; Reckford 1995, 1-3.
[510] Homer, *Iliad* 24.184-187; Lallemand 2008a, 37-38; Draycott 2015, 70.
[511] Reckford 1995, 6.
[512] Reckford 1995, 15-16. The scene gives off 'the strong perfume of an all-too-human sexuality'. See also: Gladhill 2012, 163.

combing balsam-oil into her hair.[513] Statius gives another example of the goddess, referred to as *Cytherea*, anointing the head of one Flavius Earinus, to whose hair Statius devotes an entire poem. In this, the ambiguity of the exact nature of the substance used appears again, with Statius describing not balsam but instead the goddess' 'secret essences'.[514] In another instance, Statius gives a striking description of Venus perfuming not a mortal body, but an entire house.[515] More broadly, the idea that Venus was responsible for imparting scent to mortals appears repeatedly throughout Greek and Latin literature, and some of these will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.[516] The many potential interpretations, some sexually explicit, of the perfumes given to the young lady of Catullus 13 by 'Venus and the Amores' is perhaps the most fascinating example of the tangled nexus of associations between the goddess, the eroticism of the female body, and the sensuality of perfume.[517] Shane Butler explores Venus as a purveyor of perfume in his discussion of the specific scent (or scents) of *amaracus*. It is *amaracus* which envelops and soothes the sleeping Ascanius when he is kidnapped by Venus and temporarily stowed on Cyprus in order that Eros might impersonate the child and further the plot of the *Aeneid*, *amaracina* thereafter being a term used for particularly fine perfumes – whether or not they actually included *amaracus* amongst their ingredients.[518] Indeed, the frequency with which perfumes, or just pleasant fragrances in general, were associated with the goddess of love is such that it might be fair to describe all perfume as Venus' business.

Venus' role as the bequeather of fragrance upon the mortal world also manifests in more oblique ways. She was the initial mover, the inciting incident for

[513] Statius, *Silvae* 1.2.111. The wedding of Lucius Arruntius Stella and Violentilla, is also commemorated in Martial, *Epigrams* 6.21, although perfume does not make an appearance; Donnis 1939, 463.

[514] Statius, *Silvae* 3.4.91. Martial also wrote several epigrams on the subject of this young man's hair, along with two others lauding Earinus' beauty more generally: Martial, *Epigrams* 9.11, 13, 16, 17, 36; Donnis 1939, 468.

[515] Statius, *Silvae* 1.3.10.

[516] For instance in Horace, *Odes* 1.3.15. See chapter 5, pp. 180-182.

[517] Catullus, *Elegies* 13.13. It is tempting here to think of the 'secret essences' offered by Venus in Statius. For further discussion of Catullus 13 see chapter 5, pp. 198-199.

[518] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.691-692. Much like myrrh, *amaracus* is said to have its roots in a mythological figure, Amaracus, who unwittingly created an exceptionally pleasing perfume by accidentally dropping several others: Servius, *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil*, 1.693. Some mythical traditions even held this Amaracus to be the son of Cinyras – father to Myrrha. Butler 2015, 74-76.

many of the myths most central to the rest of this chapter, although her interventions were much less gentle than the combing of a bride's hair. In Ovid's version of the myth of Leucothoe, it is Venus who ensures that the Sun will fall in love with the unsuspecting young woman, as retaliation for his bringing her affair with Ares to light, thus precipitating the events which lead to Leucothoe's transformation into frankincense. She curses Myrrha with her incestuous passion for her father, and so eventually brings myrrh into the world.[519] Her love for Myrrha's beautiful son Adonis, doomed to tragedy, is implied to be the direct result of the alluring fragrance of his mother's myrrh with which he is anointed after birth – a fitting retribution for the suffering she has caused. Venus also bestows a scent of a different kind upon the Lemnian women, causing their husbands to abandon them in disgust. It is perhaps unsurprising that the most fragrant, and sometimes most malicious, goddess of the Greco-Roman world should have a hand in so many olfactory tragedies.

While odour's disembodiment is often emphasised as a reason behind its importance in communication between the mortal realm and the divine, the particular scent of Venus functioned to emphasise the erotic appeal of her divine body, sometimes causing tension between Venus' conflicting identities. The olfactory blending of the bodily and the divine, the sacred and the erotic, which Venus embodies is perhaps best encapsulated by the hetaera Gymnasium in Plautus' *The Casket*, who remarks of a house prepared for lovemaking: *venerem meram haec aedes olent*.[520] Typically of the comic playwright, this phrase is imbued with layers of innuendo – *venerem*, from *venus* might be translated as 'love', or even, more bluntly, as 'sex', but is of course simultaneously a reference to the goddess herself, particularly as the name of the goddess is invoked in the preceding line.[521] *Merum*, 'unmixed', 'undiluted', 'pure', or 'naked' is especially associated with wine (*vinum merum*) – an appropriately intoxicating connotation. The term also appears in the a similar phrase, *meros amores*, 'the essence of love', in Catullus, in reference to the *unguentum* given by Venus to

[519] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.524. See below, pp. 166-171 for more on this myth.

[520] Plautus, *The Casket* 314.

[521] Plautus, *The Casket* 313: 'how pleasant it is when Venus (*Venus*) comes! Making love is always joyful'. Further adding to this heavenly innuendo is the use of the word *aedes*, which can mean simply 'house', but also 'temple', 'sanctuary', or 'dwelling of the gods'. Appropriately enough, given the profession of the speaker, *venus* can also mean 'sale' or 'purchase', although this is a much less common noun in the fourth declension, and hence not the explicit meaning in this case. All definitions are taken from Lewis and Short 1879.

Catullus' girl, and in Martial, describing a fragrant breast band 'warm from Venus' breast' (*ceston de sinu Veneris calentem*).[522] Thus, this line might be translated as 'the house (or sanctuary) smells of the essence of love', or alternatively 'of undiluted sex', or even, perhaps, 'of naked Venus'.[523]

Venus was a goddess with her own, intrinsic fragrance, and yet at the same time the ultimate perfumed female body. Sweet-smelling since the sixth century BCE, the olfactory element of her characterisation became an even more defining feature in the few centuries either side of the millennium, when the divine odour of other gods and goddesses seems to have become less prominent. The oils with which she scents herself acted almost as a greatly intensified version of the perfume available to mortal women – their erotic appeal was all the more intoxicating, and their medicinal powers extended beyond the olfactory remedies of mortals, having the power to nourish, heal, and even deify. The ambiguity as to whether one should imagine Venus as intrinsically fragrant, covered in ambrosia or nectar, or in recognisable perfumes (or indeed more than one at once), reflects the anxiety and ambiguity surrounding the role of natural odour and artificial perfume in characterisations of other female bodies. Did Venus truly smell better than mortal women, just as she was more beautiful? Or was this an illusion, smeared over her body and combed through her hair in the same manner by which mortal women were thought to trick unwitting men into bed? While her status within the cosmic order granted her unusual agency over her body, and her particular godly role exempted her from the moral censure which a mortal woman would attract, the criticisms levied against those women who use the perfumes with which she was so closely associated certainly did not reflect well upon the goddess herself.

[522] Catullus, *Poems* 13.9; Martial, *Epigrams* 14.206; Vessey 1971, 46-47; Littmann 1977; Bernstein 1985, 129; Gowers 1993, 234.

[523] Emily Gowers ascribes a particularly suggestive meaning to the entire sentence *veneram meram haec aedes olent, quia amator expolivit,* translating the latter part as 'since a lover has given it a lick and a promise': Gowers 1993, 241.

b. Infernal stench

At the other end of the olfactory spectrum from the ambrosial fragrance of the gods lay the repugnant, sulphurous stench which characterised many of Greco-Roman mythology's monsters and infernal powers.[524] Stench was a striking feature of monstrous femininity, and the ways in which such odour manifests and the reasons behind it often reflect Greco-Roman ideas about the female body and acceptable or taboo female characteristics or behaviour. This section will examine two odiferous case studies: the Harpies and the Lemnian Women. It is worth acknowledging the obvious differences between these two groups of female bodies. The Harpies were infernal monsters, half-bird and half-woman, whose foul odour often appeared to be an intrinsic part of their existence and the punishment they inflict upon their victims. The Lemnian women, on the other hand, were not (it would appear) monsters, but rather the unfortunate victims of the wrath of Venus. Their foul odour was a temporary state which could be resolved. Despite these not insignificant differences, there are some key points of similarity which justify examining them together. Firstly, their iconic appearances in myth are as episodes closely grouped together in the larger saga of the Argonautic quest for the Golden Fleece. Secondly, the odours with which they were afflicted were closely tied to their identities as female beings with female bodies, and as such reflect vividly the deep-rooted anxieties within Greco-Roman society regarding the relationship between female bodily odour, female bodily function, and the transgression of social norms and boundaries.

Harpies, literally 'snatchers', were monstrous bird-women, renowned for their ravenous, unceasing appetites, their speed in flight, and their foul and polluting bodies. The repulsive stench of the Harpies is not present in the earliest Greek sources, with Homer characterising them as storm winds personified, and with Hesiod describing them as 'lovely-haired' (*ēukomous*), a term applied elsewhere to goddesses and exceptional beauties.[525] The first extensive account of the Harpies appears in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, who emphasises their malodour and polluting

[524] Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 53; Euripides, *Cyclops* 410; Statius, *Thebaid* 1.106-109; Lilja 1972, 215-217; Allen 2015, 64-104.
[525] Homer, *Odyssey* 1.241; 20.77; Hesiod, *Theogony* 265-270; LSJ *eukomos*; Fasce 1984, 334-337; Kahil 1988, 445-450; Casali 2007, 203; Murgatroyd 2009, 63; Allen 2015, 66.

effect.[526] Early on in the Argonauts' travels, they come upon the unfortunate Phineus, who had been granted prophetic powers by Apollo, and (as was invariably the case) had 'suffered terrible miseries' because of it.[527] Angering Zeus by using his gifts to warn men of the god's intentions, he was struck blind and forced to endure the repeated attacks of the Harpies, who, whenever he attempted to eat, would snatch the food out of his hands or even from his mouth.[528] As if the torment of constant hunger were not enough, Apollonius emphasises the sensory torture which the Harpies inflict by their repulsive presence: 'And they poured upon it stinking drops (*mudaleēn odmēn*, literally 'a dripping/mouldy odour'): none could bear to stand even at a distance, let alone bring the food up to his mouth; so greatly did the remnants of the banquet smell.[529] Apollonius repeats and thus re-emphasises the suffering that Phineus is undergoing at the Harpies' hands (talons?), through an extensive and emotive speech the seer delivers to the Argonauts, pleading for their help. Again, the putrid stench with which the Harpies infect his food is reiterated, with the addition of a particularly repulsive detail: the hunger to which Phineus has been driven by the Harpies compels him to consume polluted, mephitic food which 'no mortal could bear'.[530] There is here an interesting parallel between the Harpies and their victim: themselves ravenous and stinking, their presence renders Phineus equally so. This seems to reflect, in an especially heightened and horrifying form, a common anxiety about the penetrating and pollutive potential of other odiferous bodies, above all female.[531]

In Virgil's *Aeneid,* the earliest substantial Latin account of these avian monstrosities, the Harpies are encountered by Aeneas and his men, long after they have been repelled from Phineus' table. Despite this altered context, Virgil's characterisation of the Harpies, particularly their scent, echoes Apollonius.[532] Virgil's Harpies are, however, both more odiferously repulsive, and also more visually

[526] Felton 2013, 405; Allen 2015, 68.
[527] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 2.178-179.
[528] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 2.180-190.
[529] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 2.191-193. Whether Apollonius is the earliest source to ascribe odour to the Harpies depends upon the interpretation of the beginning of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 53, where the Erinyes are described as 'snoring with unapproachable breath' (*rhegkousi d' ou platoisi fusiamasin*), shortly after being compared to the Harpies: Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 53. Lilja 1972, 124; Hughes Fowler 1991, 98.
[530] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 229-233.
[531] See introduction, pp. 3-4, 18-19; chapter 1, pp. 37-41; chapter 5, pp. 206-208.
[532] Casali 2007, 203; Murgatroyd 2009, 67-69.

defined: they have 'the faces of virgins' (*virginei vultus),* a phrase somewhat reminiscent of Hesiod's 'lovely-haired' incarnation, and yet are gaunt and pale with hunger, winged and clawed.[533] Most striking, however, of both their visual and olfactory characteristics, is the repulsive substance that flows from their abdomens (*foedissima ventris proluvies*). Already evocative of odour, the following passage, in which the Harpies descend upon the Aeneades to gobble up the cattle they had poached, is replete with nauseating smells:

> Suddenly, with a dreadful dive from the mountains the Harpies are here, and shake their wings with a great noise shake their wings, and ravage the banquet, and with their foul touch they defile everything (*contactuque omnia foedant immundo*); then an awful cry sounds amongst the repulsive stench (*taetrum odorem*)... again out of another part of the sky and from an unseen lair, the mob flies around its spoils crying, with taloned feet, and pollutes the banquet with their mouths (*polluit ore dapes*).
>
> Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.225-234

In the wake of the Aeneades' retaliation, the Harpies scatter to the winds, but the effects of their polluting odour remain as evidence of their presence: 'soaring skyward with rapid flight, they leave the half-eaten prey and their foul traces (*vestigia foeda relinquunt*)'.[534]

Debbie Felton argues for an alternative or parallel reading of the substance seeping from the Harpies that goes even further in emphasising the monstrous femininity of their bodies.[535] Although the foul liquid which leaks from the bird-women is often interpreted as some kind of pus emitted from the surface of the abdomen, or else as faecal matter (human or avian), Felton notes that the term *ventris*, translated most often as 'belly' or 'bowels' might also reasonably be rendered as 'womb'.[536] The *foedissima* liquid, the 'flowing forth' or 'overflow' (*proluvies*) which

[533] Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.216-218.
[534] Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.243-244.
[535] Felton 2013, 405-418; Richlin 2014, 174.
[536] Felton 2013, 406-407. This use of the word *venter* is attested in the Republican period and later; Varro, *On Agriculture* 2.1.19; Livy, *Books from the Foundation of the City* 1.34.2; Horace, *Epodes*

leaks from this *ventris*, therefore, can be read as referring to menstrual blood rather than (or in addition to) excrement. The polluting touch of the Harpies and their effluent, as well as the foul odour which they produce, is indeed reminiscent of the monstrous powers and unpleasant odour ascribed by some sources to menstrual blood and to the menstruating female body.[537] We might think in particular of Pliny's dramatic account of the fluid, which is not only malodorous but also 'monstrous' (*monstrificum*) and evil (*malum*), and of the menstruating woman's destructive, even deadly touch. [538] The Harpies are disgusting because of the leakage from their lower orifice (or orifices), and their mouths and clawed hands are also pollutive. The Harpies resemble menstruating women also in the specific nature of their pollution, both of which lead to decay and rot.[539]

Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, written during the Flavian period, largely follows the plot of the Apollonian episode, and adopts the Harpies' unbearable stench with some enthusiasm.[540] His Phineus laments his fate: 'they destroy and sweep away my feast, and defile (*foedata*) and break the goblets; their stench rages (*saevit odor*)… What all [of them] have rejected and polluted with their touch (*poluerunt*), and everything that has dropped from their dark claws (*unguibus… atris*), helps me to carry on lingering in the light'.[541] Whereas in Apollonius the reader is witness only to the Harpies' feasting through expositional accounts first by the narrator and subsequently by Phineus, Valerius Flaccus' Argonauts witness the repulsive scene for themselves: 'a harsh odour reeks, and the breath of their father Avernus is exhaled (*fragrat acerbus odor patriique expirat Avernis halitus*)… Then upon the ground and upon the fouled coverlets of the mocked banquet they pour a filthy stream (*sola conluvie atque illusis stramina mensis foeda rigant*)'.[542] Here too it is possible to read the 'foul stream' of

17.50; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.311; *Fasti* 3.42; *Heroides* 16.44-46; Columella, *On Agriculture* 6.24.2; 10.390; Juvenal, *Satires* 6.596; Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 12.9; Adams 1982, 100-101; For other interpretations and translations, see Rabel 1985, 13; Horsfall 2006, 13; Ruden 2008; Murgatroyd 2009, 68.

[537] Columella *On Agriculture* 11.3.38, 50; Pliny, *Natural History* 7.64; Beagon 2005, 229; Felton 2013, 410. See chapter 1, pp. 37-46. For further discussion of menstruation in antiquity see also: Parker 1983, 100-102; Dean-Jones 1994b, 243-250; King 1998, 88-89; Lennon 2010, 75-76; 2014, 81-88; Lowe 2015, 131-136; Ripat 2016, 108-111.

[538] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.64; Ripat 2016, 109.

[539] Ripat 2016, 110.

[540] Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 4.450-461, 487-500; Murgatroyd 2009, 65.

[541] Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 4.454-457.

[542] Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 4.493-498.

the Harpies as menstrual; Felton suggests that Valerius Flaccus' use of the word *mensas*, with its similarity to the *menses*, might well be an instance of wordplay hinting at the true nature of the fluid.[543] The Avernian breath which accompanies the Harpies is another olfactory indication of their nature; Lake Avernus was 'sometimes considered to be the gateway to the underworld, and had a reputation for its sulphorous fumes.[544] The stench of bodily fluids shared in common between mortal women and the Harpies intermingles with the odour of the underworld that signals their infernal and monstrous nature.[545]

Returning to Virgil, the leaking, stinking bodies of the Harpies might be said to exhibit his characteristic 'monsterisation' of femininity, but it simultaneously serves to feminise monstrosity.[546] H. Akbar Khan notes that the physical features Virgil attributes to the harpies are the stomach, hands, and face, all of which are features of Greco-Roman female beauty, and all of which are made monstrous, their faces are gaunt and pale, their hands are clawed and grasping, and their leaking bellies 'suggest a grotesque and lustful female sexuality'.[547] The menstrual reading invited, if not confirmed by Virgil (and by Valerius Flaccus) renders the femininity of the Harpies of intrinsic importance to the horror they evoke, and the stench of their emissions links them firstly, by its inhuman potency, to the animal, infernal, and inhuman, and secondly, by its distinctly feminine nature, to that section of humanity that is both familiar and yet other, woman.[548] The Harpies are 'liminal beings who cross the boundaries of female, animal, and monster'.[549]

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[543] Felton 2013, 414.

[544] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 806-807, who rejects the hellish reputation but not the odour; Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.201; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.146-159; Lilja 1972, 201. On the stench of the underworld and its portals, see Allen 2015, 75-82.

[545] Allen draws a distinction between the function of odour for Harpies and for the underworld, arguing that the former evokes 'disgust at decay and carnage', the latter 'foreboding at the suggestion of death': Allen 2015, 75. It might be suggested that both the corporeality of the Harpies and their femininity lend themselves to disgust rather than to existential dread – they might be thought of as 'body horror' whereas the stench of the underworld is more akin to 'psychological horror'.

[546] For the connection between the Harpies and other monstrous or dangerous female figures in the *Aeneid* and elsewhere see: Rabel 1985, 318; Felton 2013, 414-416; Allen 2015, 68-74.

[547] Akbar Khan 1996, 137-138.

[548] On the mythological trope of women with 'bestial and rapacious lower regions' (Ripat 2016, 109), see Doniger 1995, 27-28; Richlin 2014, 252; Lowe 2015, 70-163.

[549] Felton 2013, 414.

The prominence of stench in these influential texts suggest that this aspect of Harpies' bodies was likely well-established in Roman culture.[550] Ovid, although he omits odour in his account of the Phineus episode in the *Metamorphoses,* was certainly aware of the potential of the Harpies to evoke visceral olfactory repulsion, comparing the cosmetics and perfumes of a woman at her toilet to the nausea-inducing contents of Phineus' table.[551] The rank odour of the Harpies is viscerally linked to the wetness and leakiness of their bodies – Apollonius Rhodius makes repeated use of the term *mudaleos* ('dripping') in conjunction with words denoting odour, and Virgil's Harpies' pollutive excretions are 'an overflow' (*proluvies*), and those in Valerius Flaccus 'pour' or 'moisten' the tables with their discharge (*rigant*). In this context, Ovid's choice of allusion is suggestive of more than just sickening stench. The many and varying ointments and unguents implemented by women in order to render themselves more attractive are framed as just as offensive as the bodily fluids which both naturally excrete – the Harpies openly and constantly, and mortal women periodically and in secret.

Elsewhere on their travels, the Argonauts encounter the infamously fetid women of Lemnos.[552] The Lemnian episode appears to have been a widely-known myth, with a tradition stretching as far back as Hesiod.[553] The *Iliad* makes mention of Jason's son by the Lemnian Queen Hypsipyle, Euneos, and although there is no mention of the pungent story behind this progeny, it is very possible that some version of the myth existed very early in Greece's history.[554] It was, at least, a popular enough source of material to appear in genres and time periods as diverse as Attic tragedy and comedy, Hellenistic epic, and lyric poetry.[555] Indeed, Herodotus suggests that the tale was so well known that the term 'Lemnian crime' had become a byword for any especially appalling act of cruelty.[556] The myth maintained its relevance during the

[550] Horace, *Satires* 2.2.39-44; Petronius, *Satyricon* 136; [Apollodorus], *The Library* 1.21.
[551] Ovid, *Remedies for Love* 355-336: *Illa tuas redolent, Phineu, medicamina mensas: Non semel hinc stomacho nausea facta meo est.* For Ovid's account of the Phineas episode: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.709-710; Casali 2007, 203.
[552] Clare 2002, 179; Fowler 2013, 217.
[553] Hesiod, *Theogony* 992; Burkert 1970, 2; Gantz 1996, 345.
[554] Homer, *Iliad* 8.468; Martin 1987, 81-82.
[555] Aeschylus, *Hypsipyle*; *Women of Lemnos*; Pindar, *Pythian* 4.450; Aristophanes, *Women of Lemnos*; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*.
[556] Herodotus, *Histories* 6.138.4.

Roman Empire forming the context for Ovid's letter from Hypsipyle to Jason, and being recounted in mythographic works of the first few centuries CE.[557]

That the mythical women of Lemnos were considered to be malodorous in antiquity, is somewhat taken for granted by some scholars, above all by Detienne, for whom the myth forms a substantial part of the fourth chapter of *The Gardens of Adonis.* They are presented, alongside Myrrha, as the alternative possibility for a woman, or group of women, who insults Aphrodite: on the one hand, the slight results in 'an excessive union provoked by a sweet smell', on the other hand, 'separation due to a bad smell'.[558] Although an enticing comparison, odour is surprisingly elusive in the extant sources. Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the most extensive retelling of the myth, describes the Lemnian deed in this way:

> There, all at once, the whole male population had been ruthlessly slain by the heinous actions of the women in the previous year. For the men had come to detest their legitimate wives and rejected them, whereas they maintained a violent passion for the captive women whom they themselves brought back when pillaging Thrace on the opposite shore. For the horrible bile of Cypris was afflicting them (*cholos ainos opazen Kupridos*), because they had for a long time deprived her of honours.
>
> Apollonius, *Argonautica* 1.610-616[559]

In the wake of this crime, the women abandoned societal norms, reconfiguring themselves as warriors, and farmers, and concerning themselves with public life. Indeed, Apollonius states that these roles were to them 'easier than the works of Athena', suggesting that the women not only filled these roles but even preferred them.[560] Apollonius' description of the Lemnian crime makes no explicit mention of the foul scent of the women. It does, however, put the revulsion felt towards them by their husbands down to the *cholos* of Aphrodite. This term, literally 'bile', is used metaphorically to mean 'wrath', but in this context its association with the bodily fluid is suggestive. The fluid itself was humour central to health, and an excess (or

[557] Ovid, *Heroides* 6; Hyginus, *Fables* 15; [Apollodorus], *The Library* 1.9.17.
[558] Detienne 1992, 90-98.
[559] Adapted from Race 2009 (Loeb 1.53).
[560] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.627-630; George 1972, 53.

imbalance) brought disease, and, consequently malodour.[561] There is no question that the primary use of *cholos* here is to signify Aphrodite's anger towards the women, but the physiological, humoral overtones were well-established as early as Homer, in which Hera's anger manifests in breasts overflowing with bitter *cholos* in place of milk.[562] Apollonius' description of the Lemnian women as being plagued by this horrible, implicitly bitter bile might well imply that the olfactory element of their curse was already a feature of the episode.

The first unambiguous appearance of the Lemnian stink is in a scholia to the *Argonautica* by a Hellenistic *paradoxographos*, Myrsilus of Methymna, from c.250 BCE.[563] Possibly influenced by Myrsilus' account, several later scholiasts also mention foul odour, in notes on the *Iliad,* Pindar's fourth *Pythian,* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*.[564] Myrsilus diverges somewhat from this position, placing the blame on a jealous Medea, tossing noisome drugs towards the island as she sailed past with Jason on the return journey from Colchis. Witches were frequently the conveyors of potent and pungent magical herbs, and so it is unsurprising that some versions of this myth connected Medea with the odour inflicted upon the women, who might well be constructed as rivals for Jason's affection.

According to Myrsilus, the smell of the Lemnian women is linked to an annual ritual in which the female inhabitants of Lemnos 'keep away their husbands through a bad smell'.[565] As Myrsilus apparently visited Lemnos and talked to its inhabitants, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that this ritual actually happened: the Thesmophoria was said to involve a similar practice.[566] Geoffrey Kirk and Walter Burkert have linked this smell ritual with the better known annual Lemnian fire ritual, during which all fires were extinguished for nine days until a ship arrived with new fire.[567] This fire ritual was, according to Burkert, linked to the myth of the Lemnian women, with the structure of the myth – a 'period of abnormal, barren, uncanny life'

[561] See chapter 1, pp. 28. Bile could cause fever, mania, and erotic overexcitement: [Aristotle], *Problems* 30.954a32-34.
[562] Homer, *Iliad* 8.460-461; O'Brien 108-109.
[563] *Scholia to Apollonius Rhodius Argonautica* 609e (54 Wendel); Jackson 1990, 77.
[564] *Scholia to Apollonius Rhodius Argonautica* 1.609 (53 Wendel); *Scholia to Homer's Iliad* 7.468; *Scholia to Pindar's Pythian* 4.88 (109 Drach); Jackson 1990, 79.
[565] Burkert 1970, 12; Martin 1987, 89; Zeitlin 1996, 165; Detienne 1994.
[566] Kirk 1974, 246.
[567] Kirk 1974, 245.

replaced by 'return to normal life' – reflecting the structure of the ritual.[568] Kirk has even suggested a connection between this fire and the foul smell, positing the existence of 'some kind of marsh gas', which would, in theory, both stink and provide fuel for fire.[569] A connection between the island of Lemnos and foul odour can, indeed, be found in other areas of myth. When Philoctetes, on his way to fight in the Trojan War, is bitten by a snake on Lemnos, the wound he sustains renders his foot so repulsively malodorous that his fellow Achaeans abandon him on the island.[570] Lemnos was also a cultic centre for Aphrodite's husband Hephaistos, whose connection to fire, volcanoes, and the blacksmith's arts might provide an additional explanation for Lemnos' mythical pungency.[571]

The *dusosmia* that the scholiasts reference is also found in Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, which is attributed a wide range of dates, from as early as the first century CE to as late as the third.[572] As with Apollonius, Pseudo-Apollodorus points to Aphrodite as the divine power which had cursed the islanders: 'the Lemnian women did not honour Aphrodite, and so she afflicted them with an awful smell (*ai Lēmniai tēn Aphroditēn ouk etimōn: hē de autais emballei dusosmian*). Therefore their husbands took captive women from nearby Thrace and slept with them'.[573] It might be suggested that, since the foul odour was imparted by Aphrodite, and since it drove the Lemnian men to seek out alternative sexual partners, we might understand the source of this scent to be connected to, or even emanating from, the women's genitalia. One scholiast on Euripides' *Hecuba* suggests as much, although other sources suggest also mouths and armpits as the focal points of odour.[574]

One potential, although uncertain, explanation for the odour of the Lemnian women might be, as in the case of the Harpies, a supernaturally odiferous instance of menstruation. If the vaginal source of the odour suggested by the Euripides scholiast

[568] Burkert 1970, 7.
[569] Kirk 1974, 245.
[570] Homer, *Iliad* 2.718; Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 7-11, 890-991; Stephens 1995, 154-155, 165-166; Halls and Photos-Jones 2008, 1034-1036; Felton 2013, 415.
[571] See Lilja 1972, 199 for the connection between fire and sulphurous odours.
[572] Hard 1997, xii; Scott Smith and Trzaskoma 2007, xxix; Fletcher 2008, 63.
[573] [Apollodorus], *Bibliotheca* 1.9.17; adapted from Smith and Trzaskoma 2007.
[574] *Scholia to Euripides Hecuba* 887; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 33.50; Detienne 1994, 93; Felton 2013, 415.

is to be credited, then menstruation would be the most likely connotation.[575] Steven Jackson in particular argues that the odour of the mythical Lemnian women, and the annual ritual recorded by Myrsilus on contemporary Lemnos, can both best be explained with reference to menstruation, and though an appealing theory, there seems to be little other than the sources mentioned so far to support this.[576] In comparison to the compelling arguments for reading Virgil's Harpies as shedding menstrual blood over the feast, the evidence for such an interpretation of the myth seems markedly shaky – albeit not impossible. An oblique suggestion of this explanation of the odour might be found, somewhat unexpectedly, in Pliny's *Natural History*, where, in outlining the uses of 'Lemnian ochre', he indorses its use in the treatment of excessive menstruation, and also of snakebites – the latter might well make one think of Philoctetes' stinking, snakebitten foot, and perhaps, therefore, the former might be suggestive of the odour of the menstruating Lemnian women.[577]

Unlike the loathsome Harpies, there is little suggestion that the Lemnian women were, prior to their crime, 'bad' women. Instead, their error was the religious neglect of Aphrodite. Indeed, it is the abandonment by their husbands *as a result of* their odour which led to their act of mass-murder, as opposed to the smell being present as an indicator of their essentially violent nature, even developing as a result of the crime. By afflicting the women with an evil smell, Aphrodite drove the Lemnian men to their Thracian captives and, perhaps, made the Lemnian crime inevitable.[578] It is perhaps significant that the most fragrant of the Olympians might punish women who fail to pay her proper dues with an infernal stench which renders the bodies of the cursed erotically repellent. Although this punishment-by-smell is almost a complete inversion of the pattern which we have come to expect, it seems to re-emphasise the lethal potency of odour. Odour could repel, kill, and even grant female bodies the unnatural power to disrupt the accepted power dynamics of an entire society. The

[575] Felton 2013, 415.

[576] Jackson 1990, 81-82. I approach Jackson's argument with a degree of scepticism, partly due to some ambiguous wording which seems to imply rather a buying-in to the idea of menstruation as intrinsically and powerfully foul-smelling: 'one can easily imagine the difficulty people had in having to explain the origin of such a malodorous stink'.

[577] Pliny, *Natural History* 35.33-34; Felton 2013, 415.

[578] Pavlock 1990, 45.

restoration of the natural order is therefore necessarily accompanied by the neutralisation of female bodily odour and the dangerous power it possessed.

One epigram by the first-century CE poet Lucillius reinforces the idea that the Lemnian stench was, at least by the early Roman Empire, proverbial: 'not Homer's Chimaera breathed such foul breath, not the fire-breathing herd of bulls of which they tell, not all Lemnos nor the excrements of the Harpies, nor Philoctetes' putrefying foot. So that in universal estimation, Telesilla, you surpass Chimerae, rotting sores, bulls, birds, and the women of Lemnos'.[579] In this searing insult to an unfortunate woman named Telesilla, Lucillius compares her to many of the most notoriously noisome mythological bodies. It might not be an accident that three of these stinking bodies – including the Chimaera – are female. In associating Telesilla with these monstrous, malodorous female forms, Lucillius invites the reader to understand her own stench to be indicative of the repulsive, bestial and grotesquely sexualised condition of her body. As will be explored further in the following chapter, just as fragrant mythological precedents could be employed to grant mortal women in Roman literature an air of supernatural allure, so too could their inverse be weaponised to demean and other.

c. Conclusion

Just as the divine, perfumed body of Venus emitted fragrance indicated to anyone within smelling-distance both her position within cosmic olfactory order, and also her supernatural erotic sensuality, so too was the nature of the monstrous Harpies and the murderous women of Lemnos signalled by their rank odour. The Harpies' leaking bowels and menstruating wombs befoulled everything they touched, epitomising Greco-Roman fears about the pollutive potential of a female body incapable and unwilling to exercise control over its orifices, boundaries, and bodily functions. The odour of the Lemnian women also functioned as an olfactory marker of their transgressions, initially their lack of religious observance, then more horrifically in their violent overthrow of the social order. The connections drawn between the various odorous females in myth highlights this cosmic olfactory code; Virgil, as Margaret Brucia argues, draws a link between Venus and the Harpy Celaeno, through the goddess' resemblance to similar-sounding Harpalyce. This auditory

[579] Lucillius, *Greek Anthology* 11.239, trans. Paton 2014. On the dating and identity of Lucillius, see Paton 2014, 67; Hewitt 1921, 72.

parallel also invites an olfactory contrast – the divine odour wafting from her hair as she reveals herself to Aeneas is mirrored in the foul odour of Virgil's Harpies.[580]

4.2. Myths of scent

Deborah Lyons, Anne Carson, and others have noted the prevalence of metamorphosis in Greco-Roman myths concerning female subjects.[581] Although women dominate all categories of metamorphosis apart from insects, reptiles, and sea creatures, the gender weighting is most clear in the category of transformation into plants.[582] It is therefore unsurprising to find, behind some of the most famous aromatic plants in Greco-Roman society, myths in which female bodies are transformed, becoming the very substances with which more fortunate female bodies are fragranced.[583] The myth of Leucothoe, source of the frankincense displayed by Pliny as an example of the degenerate luxury of the Principate, is an unmitigated tragedy.[584] The Sun, enchanted by a vengeful Venus, developed a passion for the Persian princess which he fulfilled through rape. Clytie, lover of the Sun, revealed to Leucothoe that his daughter was no longer a virgin, and as punishment for what he saw as her crime, he buried the princess alive. Unable to save her, the Sun sprinkled her with nectar, with metamorphic results:

[580] Brucia 2001, 307; Gladhill 2012, 164.

[581] Zeitlin 1986, 123; Lyons 1997, 27; Carson 1999, 79-80. Lyons ascribes this to the association of the feminine with the natural or animal world, present in the antiquity and in some form persisting to this day, see also: Ortner 1974.

[582] Lyons 1997, 68.

[583] Annick Lallemand has noted the floral fragrance that often surrounds tales of rape and subsequent metamorphosis, often located in a natural landscape full of flowers: *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 12-14; Lallemand 2008a, 38-40. It is worth mentioning that

[584] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.190-270. See chapter 3, pp. 112-113.

> He sprinkled her body and the ground with sweet-smelling nectar (*nectare odorato sparsit corpusque locumque*), and complaining greatly beforehand, he then said: 'even yet you shall touch the air (*tanges tamen aethera*).' Instantly the corpse, moistened with heavenly nectar, melted away and saturated the ground with its fragrance. Then through the earth, little by little, rose a frankincense plant with deep-driven roots, and burst through the top of the mound.
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.250-255

Ovid emphasises the olfactory dimension that went along with the transformative powers of nectar, implied to be responsible for the ensuing fragrance of the plant that it helps to create from Leucothoe's body. The substance, in keeping with its potent odour and magical qualities, not only easily transverses Leucothoe's bodily boundaries, it entirely destroys them, liquefying the body and transforming it into something entirely new. Detienne argues that the chief function of this myth is to set up frankincense above all, and other spices by association, as a symbolic connection between 'the Below and the Above', and thus explain their importance as tools for communicating with the gods.[585] This dichotomy certainly appears in Ovid's account, which emphasises both the deep roots that anchor the transformed Leucothoe to the ground, and her intangible scent that is able to reach up into the sky and thus to be with the Sun. This moment of transformation is presented by Ovid as a bittersweet ending to the story, in which, despite the destructive jealousy of Clytie, the Sun in the heavens might once again be united with the object of his affections.[586] However, one cannot help but notice some cognitive dissonance here – these are no Romeo and Juliet. Leucothoe is rather unambiguously portrayed as an unwilling yet helpless victim throughout Ovid's version, and so the Sun's adamancy that even in death and transformation Leucothoe should be accessible to him is more than a little macabre.[587] If Leucothoe is indeed the victim she seems, then this is not a love story, but a nightmare, in which a woman is the passive victim of sexual violation, endures a

[585] Detienne 1994, 38.
[586] This is certainly the way that Detienne presents this ending: 1994, 38. This might be an example of the scholar's 'masculinist vision' which has been criticised by, among others, Winkler: 1990, 199.
[587] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.228-233: Ovid's description of the paralysing fear of the young woman and his use of the term *vim passa* seems to leave little doubt about the nature of the encounter.

horrific death, once again has her bodily autonomy ignored and her bodily boundaries transgressed in the most intimate way possible, is literally objectified, and eternally trapped both below the earth and in the sky with her rapist.

If the mythological background given to Frankincense by Ovid has some disturbing implications, these are more than matched in his much longer account of the origins of myrrh. As previous chapters have discussed, myrrh was an important substance in many of the main aromatic arenas of Greco-Roman antiquity.[588] Like frankincense, it lent its odour to religious ritual, having a particular association with funerary contexts. In medicine, it possessed a multiplicity of therapeutic functions, related directly to a greater or lesser degree to its specific odour. It occupied a privileged space in elite life as a luxury product demonstrating wealth and cultural sophistication. Unlike its frequent partner frankincense, however, myrrh was an almost ubiquitous presence in the realm of perfumed unguent, and seems to have often been almost a shorthand for exotic, alluring artificial scent.

Myrrh has made frequent appearances throughout this thesis, but this section will now somewhat sidestep the substance itself, and look instead at the aetiological myth explaining its coming into being, to see how features of this myth can be seen to relate to myrrh's many uses in the ancient world. Obvious, but worth noting nevertheless, is the fact that, just as elsewhere, there is no singular, authoritative version of this myth. Despite this, the main plot points of the myth can be summarised thus: Myrrha (in some versions named Smyrna or Zmyrna), either having fallen foul of Aphrodite, a Fury, or simply out of sheer bad luck, developed an incestuous passion for her father (sometimes King Cinyras of Cyprus). Often aided by a devoted nurse, she eventually managed to trick him into bed, conceiving her own half-brother Adonis. Inevitably, this crime was discovered, and Myrrha fled her sword-brandishing father eastwards. Eventually, heavily pregnant and caught between weariness of life and fear of death, she appealed to the gods and was transformed into the myrrh tree. Some time later, Myrrha the tree gave birth from its trunk to the baby Adonis. It is the fragrant tears of this tree which the ancient Greeks and Romans dedicated to their dead and smeared upon their bodies.

[588] See chapters 1, 2, and 3.

The myth of Myrrha appears to have been widely known in Greco-Roman antiquity. It may well have existed since at least the fifth century BCE, when it was related by the epic poet Panyassis of Halicarnassus.[589] Today we are aware of at least nine versions of the myth, including accounts appearing in Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Library* (first or second century CE), Hyginus' *Fables* (probably second century CE), and in Plutarch's *Morals* (late first century to early second century CE), to name a few.[590] The popularity and wide dissemination of the myth, at least in the late Republic seems to be suggested by the fact that it was the subject of a now-lost neoteric work by Caius Helvius Cinna. According to Catullus, this work, which took over nine years to write, was very highly regarded in its day.[591] Ovid presents the reader with a complex and multifaceted picture of myrrh and its source, the ill-fated mother of Adonis, Myrrha. Myrrha's story, combined with a variety of other literary sources either concerned with Myrrha herself or myrrh in other contexts, provides a fascinating case study for the associations between scented substances, morality, divinity, and gender, associations which are often as ephemeral and hard to grasp as scent itself.

Ovid's account of the Myrrha myth is narrated by Orpheus, who explicitly states earlier in book 10 the theme he wishes to illustrate through the story: that of 'maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust' (10.153-154). Despite a typically nuanced portrayal by Ovid, Myrrha is here and in all other versions of the myth the initiator of incest, the most extreme form of sexual excess.[592] She is a woman ruled by her urges who uses deceitful means to lead a man to destruction – Cinyras is often said to have committed suicide upon learning the truth. Throughout, Myrrha is characterised as in sway to her 'evil desire' (11.342 *malus ardor*), tossing and turning through the night with an 'ungoverned passion' (11.369-370. *igni… indomito)*. In addition to this stereotypically feminine lack of control and sexual obsession, assisted by (or, more accurately directed by) her nurse, she covers her true identity with the dark of night as a means of seduction.[593] It should be noted

[589] Panyassis, *Heraclea* fr.28; Forbes Irving 1990, 274.
[590] Propertius, *Elegies,* 3.19.15; Plutarch, *Morals: Greek and Roman Parallel Stories* 310f-311a; [Apollodorus], *The Library* 3.14.4; Hyginus, *Fables* 58; Fulgentius 3.8; Forbes Irving 1990, 274-275.
[591] Catullus, *Poems* 95; Anderson 1972, 502; Wiseman 1974, 49-50.
[592] Lowrie 1993, 51; Detienne 1994, 77; Zeitlin 1996, 165; Tissol 1997, 40; Putnam 2007, 173-175; Resinski 2014, 276.
[593] Dyson 1999, esp. 165. Julia Dyson argues that Ovid's description of Myrrha's visit to her father, under the cover of darkness, deliberately echoes Virgil's account of Aeneas' descent into the

that this trickery is not confined to women – think of Cupid's nocturnal affair with Psyche, for example. However, the female tendency towards dishonesty, particularly when it comes to clandestine love affairs, appears in a wide range of literature – in the realm of elegiac poetry, Catullus often complains that his mistress, with whom he is conducting a night time affair, is unfaithful not only to her husband but also to him! Indeed, some sources specifically cite Myrrha as an example of the weakness of women. Ovid's *Art of Love* names Myrrha alongside Byblis, another mythological woman with an unhealthy interest in keeping it in the family, first in a catalogue of 'crimes prompted by women's lust'.[594] Propertius, similarly, describes Myrrha as 'a reproach to women'; an example of the kind of punishment that could be expected as a result of uncontrolled female lust.[595]

As discussed elsewhere, particularly in Pliny's account of perfumes, the anti-cosmetic tradition and its association of female bodily adornment, of which perfume was a particularly denigrated subsection, with deception, *luxuria*, and seductive intent, had serious cultural influence both within and far beyond the texts of Roman moralists and traditionalists.[596] What makes myrrh such a significant substance is that it often appears as a stand-in for all perfume: when Plutarch denounces perfume as 'an effeminate, emasculating luxury which has absolutely no real use', and goes on to bemoan the fact that the influx of such luxuries had 'depraved' all women (and heaven forbid even some men), he singles myrrh out by name.[597] This singling-out of myrrh as the height of or as a catch-all for perfume, especially negative references, seems fairly common. When Boudicca denounces the excesses of her contemporary Romans in Cassius Dio, she, like Plutarch, chooses myrrh as the ideal perfume for calling into question the manliness of her enemies.[598] It might be pushing it too far to suggest these sources were thinking of the sexual deviance which brought it into existence, but it

underworld to visit his own father, Ascanius. This is just one among several instances in which either Virgil or Ovid (and at times other sources as well) appear to construct links between the myth of Aeneas, Anchises and Venus, and that of Venus, Myrrha, and Adonis. See Hutchinson 2006, 77; Detienne 1994.

[594] Ovid, *The Art of Love* 1.281-288; *Metamorphoses* 9.450-665. Betty Rose Nagle explores Ovid's representation of the two women at length, highlighting in particular the ways in which Byblis' innocence of her own desires renders her more sympathetic to the narrator, while Myrrha attracts more criticism, despite (or because of) her introspection: Nagle 1983, 301-315, esp. 301 and 304-306.

[595] Propertius, *Elegies* 3.9.15.

[596] See chapter 3, pp. 131-133.

[597] Plutarch, *Morals: Beasts are Rational* 990b-c.

[598] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 62.4-5.

seems highly plausible that myrrh was singled out as a well-known substance which perfectly combined ideas of excessive luxury, effeminate eastern-ness, and eroticism

The morally questionable, effeminising potential of myrrh and other perfumes is encapsulated in Martial's epigram addressed to Postumus, in which he finds the myrrh-scented kisses of Postumus 'suspicious', claiming aphoristically that 'a man does not smell good who smells good all the time'.[599] This sentiment is reminiscent of the maid Scapha's advice that 'a woman smells right when she smells of nothing' in Plautus' *Haunted House* – a comment meant to encourage her mistress Philematium to abandon perfume in favour of natural scent.[600] Propertius, although by no means a stranger to perfume himself, echoes this attitude in a poem praising the virtue of *nudus Amor* (naked Love) over cosmetic artifice and adornment of all kinds: 'why do you drench your hair with Syrian myrrh?'[601] Echoing a theme found elsewhere in elegy, Propertius suggests that this adornment destroys his lover's natural charms.[602]

To what degree, therefore, was myrrh associated with its mythical originator, and vice versa? Although Ovid's account is by no means overflowing with olfactory language, Ovid ensures that the reader is reminded of the fragrant result of Myrrha's impiety right at the beginning of the tale:

> I congratulate this land, which is far away from those regions which gave birth to such sin. Let the land of Panchaia be rich in balsam, cinnamon and costum, its trees sweating frankincense, its flowers of many sorts, as long as it bears the myrrh-tree, too: a new tree was not worth so much (*tanti nova non fuit arbor).*
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.306-10

Orpheus lists a catalogue of stereotypically Eastern spices; balsam, cinnamon, costus, frankincense, and unnamed other plants, and says that the East can keep all its luxurious fragrances, as long as they keep the myrrh tree as well. Indeed, he suggests that his homeland of Thrace is in some way protected from crimes against nature like

[599] Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12. See chapter 5, pp. 213.
[600] Plautus, *The Haunted House* 270-275.
[601] Propertius, *Elegies* 1.2.1-6.
[602] See chapter 5, pp. 183-184.

that committed by Myrrha simply by being far from where the myrrh is grown. Orpheus makes it clear that myrrh, along with many other key perfume ingredients, is inherently Eastern and luxurious. Myrrha's transformation in Sabaea (other versions specify different locations, but all in stereotypically 'eastern' locales) solidifies this association. In Augustan literature and cultural thought, Sabaea was both an exotic source of *aromata* and 'an Arabian enemy outside of Roman *imperium'* (10.478-87).[603] Charles Gladhill argues that Virgil's use of the phrase *Sabaeum tus* is a reference to the myth of Myrrha, and hence might be translated 'incestuous incense', adding to the sense of latent sexual tension in the interactions between Venus and her son.[604] As has been seen throughout the chapter, Venus seems unable to escape association with other odorous women.

Again, after Myrrha's transformation, the only living remnants of the unhappy woman are the tears of myrrh which trickle down from the tree even to this day: 'although she has lost along with her body her old senses, she still weeps, and the warm drops drip out of the tree. Even her tears have honour, and the myrrh which distils from the bark holds its mistress's name and for all ages will never be silent' (10.499-514). Myrrha's involvement in the *Metamorphoses* ends with her son and half-brother Adonis being born from a tree weeping myrrh from the pain of childbirth, and with the new-born being anointed with these fragrant 'mother's tears' (11.514, *lacrimis parentis*). The motif of the fragrant tears of transformed female bodies appears elsewhere in myth in the tale of the Heliades, sisters of Phaeton, who are transformed into poplars: they too are characterised by a grief which leads to their literal objectification, and which makes available to the world a precious, scented substance.[605] Ovid's repeated references to her tears, the resin of the myrrh tree used to produce perfume, intensifies the association between the mythological figure and the scent which derives from her. Myrrha's story is therefore bookended with perfume.

Beyond the *Metamorphoses*, there are plenty of indications that when one thought of myrrh, one might think of Myrrha, and vice versa. Most obviously, the

[603] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 3.46-47; Detienne 1994, 5-6; Lallemand 2008a, 43; Gladhill 2012, 161; See chapter 2, pp. 72-76 and chapter 3, pp. 111-115 for more on Roman ideas (and confusion) about the Eastern origins of *aromata.*

[604] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.614-615; Gladhill 2012, 164-165.

[605] Ovid, *Amores* 12.36-37; *Metamorphoses* 2.340-366; Pliny, *Natural History* 37.38-39; Statius, *Silvae* 5.86-87; See chapter 3, p. 138.

accounts of the myth of Myrrha all include her metamorphosis, as do the accounts of Adonis' birth when Myrrha is his mother (there are alternative candidates for Adonis' mother, but it would seem Myrrha was by far the most well-known). Other references to Myrrha frequently identify her with the plant she becomes. Ovid's description in *The Art of Love* of Myrrha's excessive desire takes care to mention her fragrant tears, and makes specific reference to the wearing of myrrh-scented perfume with which his contemporaries were anointed (*unguimur*), echoing Orpheus' assertion that the tears ensure the preservation of Myrrha's name – and, presumably, her story.[606] It would seem that this link also occurred the other way around, with sources primarily discussing myrrh acknowledging its mythological source. Columella's *On Agriculture* mentions Myrrha as the 'Cinyrian maid' (*Cinyreia virgo)* when lauding cicely as a worthy imitation of myrrh.[607] Columella also makes specific reference to her tears, once again emphasising that the actual substance used in perfumery was indeed derived from the ongoing grief and suffering of an incestuous, Eastern woman. It would therefore seem that, for some Romans, when they thought of myrrh they might well have thought of Myrrha and her crime.

Myrrha, then, was a woman overcome by immoral, excessive, and destructive lust, but nevertheless the source of a valuable and religiously significant fragrance, and despite (or because of) everything, remembered throughout the ages. How can these facets be reconciled? Can they? Do they need to be? Several scholars have noted that, while Orpheus' attitude towards Myrrha, and the myrrh tree by extension, at the beginning of the tale is unambiguously negative, as the plot progresses he appears to be swayed by the heroine's plight and becomes increasingly more sympathetic, until finally her transformation becomes not simply a just punishment for her *nefas*, but rather a more complicated mixture of punishment, relief from suffering, and, somewhat oddly, source of honour.[608] Orpheus speaks of the *honor* in her resinous tears, presenting myrrh the substance as a means of preserving her *nomen* (name, or fame) for all time.[609]

[606] Ovid, *The Art of Love* 1.85-88.
[607] Columella, *On Agriculture* 10.169-173.
[608] Nagle 1983, 314; Segal 1998, 29-31; Dyson 1999, 165; Hutchinson 2006, 77; Putnam 2007, 175; Resinski 2014, 280.
[609] Putnam 2007, 193.

Her final prayer, in which she asks not for an end to punishment but rather to be removed from both the realm of the living and the dead in order for her not to 'offend' either, also marks Myrrha out as unusual; metamorphoses for women often occurs at a crisis moment when the victim's sexual or physical safety was threatened (think of Daphne), and when requested by the victim, it is often out of a desire to escape danger.[610] Myrrha, however, is not seeking escape, and nor does she get it – the tears she weeps even after metamorphosis suggest she is still in there, constantly atoning for her crime. Perhaps this grim tale, ending in a passage out of life into another state, is exactly appropriate for the scent 'redolent of funerals' (*olentem funera murram*), as it was termed by Martial.[611] We might note, that Myrrha's redemption (if indeed that is what it is) is achieved through transformation away from her female form into an arboreal one: the only way she can escape her role as what he terms 'a paradigm of female lust' is by abandoning her female body.[612]

Detienne, as mentioned above, makes much of this connection between Myrrha and her namesake, but he also chooses to frame as the centre of the web of oppositions and codes which he explores not Myrrha but rather her son, Adonis. Myrrha's is 'a myth about seduction', in which Myrrha is flung from one pole to the other of two oppositions on a sociological and olfactory code, rejection of desire and lack of perfume (virginity) and extreme desire and exotic scent (incest), with marriage as the ideal intermediate, never-achieved position between her two states.[613] Detienne convincingly argues for the erotic significance of myrrh (alongside the seductive message he sees in the Myrrha myth), and fits this into his previously established models which contrast hot, dry spices with cold, wet vegetation. The element of the framework he lays out that seems most fragile, however, is also that which he chooses to situate at the very centre – the fragrance of Adonis. Detienne characterises Adonis as 'both lover and perfume', since he is the product of the myrrh tree/Myrrha, and, like perfumes, he unites the Below and the Above through the infatuation he incites in

[610] Lyons 1997, 67-68.
[611] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.54. On Myrrha's suspension between life and death in the form of a tree, see Barkan 1986, 64-65; Putnam 2007, 117.
[612] Segal 1998, 29-32. Segal notes that the only physical remnants of Myrrha's human body is her womb. Woman is therefore stripped entirely of agency (which the preceding narrative has shown to be dangerous), and reduced to her primary function – to facilitate the birth of (male) children.
[613] Detienne 1994, 64.

Persephone and Aphrodite.[614] For cold, wet, vegetation he draws on a version of the myth in which Adonis is hidden by Aphrodite in a bed of lettuce, according to Detienne 'no doubt to save him from the attack of the boar'.[615] This lettuce, deemed by Eubulus as 'food for corpses' and a bringer of sexual impotence according to Dioscorides and Athenaeus, is positioned by Detienne as myrrh's opposite: 'myrrh confers extraordinary sexual and vital powers while lettuce brings impotence, which is equivalent to death'.[616]

The association between lettuce and impotence is illuminating, and certainly fits to his schema, but it is striking that clear connections between Adonis and odour are difficult to come by. This is demonstrated by the fact that Detienne must rely upon uncertain and debated interpretations of the Greek festival bearing his name, and is unable to point to any extant version of the Adonis myth which actually contain both plants which are essential to his structure, lettuce and myrrh.[617] He may well be correct in arguing for the existence of a version which did include both – indeed, given the nature of myth it would almost be more surprising if this were not the case – but even so, positioning Adonis as the scented centre of the entire book seems to be stretching the extant evidence further than justified. Furthermore, Detienne, despite seeming to take the position that 'all variants of a myth constitute a part of it and contribute to the 'message'', seems to ignore versions of the myth which do not fit his structure, such as those in which Myrrha is *not* Adonis' mother.[618]

If Adonis is to be thought of as fragrant, this is largely incidental, and almost entirely imparted by the fragrant women with which he interacts: he is anointed with his mother's perfume, and pursued by a goddess who embodies divine fragrance. If we are to include the lettuce element, than he still lacks agency in the extinguishing of the hot, heady perfume with which he might be associated – he is placed into the lettuce by Aphrodite. To position him as the central focus does carry with it a whiff of

[614] Detienne 1994, 63.
[615] Callimachus, fragment 278; Eubulus, fragment 14; Detienne 1994, 67-68.
[616] Dioscorides, *On Medical Materials* 2.136; Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 2.69C; Detienne 1994, 68.
[617] On the uncertain connections between perfume and the Adonia, see Eichholz 1978, 234-235; Winkler 1990, 198-201.
[618] Eichholz 1978, 234.

the 'phallocentric analysis' of which Detienne has been accused.[619] Such is his emphasis upon male agency that he characterises Aphrodite and Persephone's infatuation with the baby Adonis as a seduction by the newborn, rather than the fairly common trope in which goddesses become enamoured with mortal men, a trope which predominantly positions the goddesses as the seducers possessing all of the agency and power.[620] I would argue that refocusing upon the fragrant female body enables a richer and more convincing discussion of the olfactory codes that lie at the heart of Detienne's thesis

4.3. Conclusion

The discussion of odour in Greco-Roman mythology in this chapter has been wide ranging, considering both natural and supernatural bodily odours, bodies from which famous scents have originated, and scents added to mythical bodies, primarily in the form of ambrosia and nectar adorning or imparted by the gods. It is this final aspect which bears the most similarity to the perfumes discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In several ways, ambrosia and nectar seem the supernatural analogue to mortal unguents, and certainly their functions reflect the many different and overlapping mortal uses of scent. In addition to their function as food and drink, which in itself was reminiscent of the perfumed wine so popular in Greco-Roman high society, the heavenly substances could heal, preserve, transform, and even stave off death – they were in essence the pharmacological treatments of the gods, granted only to each other or to a few favoured mortals.[621] That they, like the perfumes of the mortal realm, might sometimes be used to improve one's beauty as well as one's odour is suggested in the ambrosial oil of Hera's adornment scene in the *Iliad,* and the divine cleanser with which Athena strips the years of worry from Penelope's face in anticipation of her husband's return in the *Odyssey,* rendering her both younger and more beautiful.[622] That Venus emerges as the most highly scented and scent-giving being in the cosmos comes as no surprise: she, like the perfume (ambrosial or otherwise) she interacts with, is intrinsically sensuous, in the most literal sense of the word.

[619] Winkler 1990, 1999.
[620] On Adonis 'seducing' Persephone and Aphrodite, see Detienne 1994, 64.
[621] Clay 1982, 114-116.
[622] Homer, *Iliad* 14.171-172; *Odyssey* 18.192-194.

As Ashley Clements has put it, 'odour emerges as an experience of divinity, and divinity, in turn, an experience of odour'.[623] The ability of scent to permeate boundaries – of the body, of space, of Below and Above – and its ambiguous position between the corporeal and the incorporeal is central to its ability to create lines of communication between the mortal and immortal realms, and hence to its importance in Greco-Roman religious ritual. The life-giving, body-changing powers of ambrosia and nectar too are closely tied to this ambiguous, boundary-crossing quality, often being applied to the nostrils. Simultaneously, we see the ways in which these same qualities of odour can be exceptionally, supernaturally repulsive, dangerous, and polluting. The Harpies' polluting touch, and the stench of their unnameable bodily fluids reflect a 'monsterised' vision of the disgusting and fluid nature of the female body. That the entire female population of Lemnos might have malodour inflicted upon them, either by the powers of the most fragrant goddess or even by the *pharmaka* of a jealous witch, indicates the vulnerability of the human (and particularly female) body to external odour. The repulsive power of this odour, and its dreadful consequences, are a hyperbolic rendition of the socially disruptive nature of the malodorous female. Christopher Faraone has connected the gynaecological use of sweet scents to entice and acrid odours to drive away the unruly womb to ritual uses of odours such as incense and sulphur to evoke, banish, and purify a connection, which points again to the interconnectedness of the many olfactory codes and uses of scent in antiquity.[624]

Odour was a powerful means of conceptualising the scale between the profane and the divine, with the foul as a characteristic of visceral, rotting mortality and the sulphurous fumes of the underworld, and the fragrant characteristic of immortality, divinity, and the ambrosial heights of Olympus. This had serious ramifications for mortal perfume and perfume use. What happened when the very scents associated with the gods were also emanating from mortals? If fragrance was associated with the gods, then the act of perfuming oneself was not simply morally dubious excess, but an artificial means by which to climb a rung further up that ladder; sensing a fragrant woman became like sensing divinity. Myrrh, straddling the world of sacred incense and luxurious, seductive perfume, was the ideal substance for examining the

[623] Clements 2015, 59.

[624] Faraone 2011, 15-16. See also: Parker 1983, 229-234; von Staden 1992, 16-20.

incongruities and tensions which lurk in the areas where the different realms of scent overlap, embodied in Ovid's contradictory, tragic, and infinitely ambiguous Myrrha.

5. Scent and the City: Female Bodies in Rome

> Wherever you go, we think that Cosmus is moving shop and that cinnamon-oil is pouring out of a shaken glass bottle. But don't let exotic trifles please you, Gellia. You know, I think that my dog could smell good in the same way.
>
> Martial, *Epigrams* 3.55

The over-scented Gellia is one of a multitude of women in Martial who are denounced for their olfactory failings. Drenched in cinnamon-oil redolent of the famous perfumer Cosmus, her scent announces her presence to everyone in the vicinity, much like the perfumed women in Pliny's *Natural History*, who hope to attract the attention of those they pass in the street.[625] Like these women, Gellia hopes that her perfumes will enhance her desirability and advertise her wealth, detectable even if she is dressed conservatively or veiled.[626] Martial, however, undermines her efforts. Her perfume is so excessive that she smells like the entire contents of a perfumery, but even so she reeks not of priceless luxury but of *peregrinis nugis* ('exotic trifles' or 'foreign nonsense'). Martial compares Gellia to a scented dog – hidden beneath her powerful olfactory veneer is a body that is at best unimpressive, at worst pungently bestial. His keen, penetrating masculine nose is easily able to disarm her feminine tricks.[627]

Contained within this short epigram are many of the anxieties surrounding perfume and the female body which appear throughout much of Greco-Roman literature. Perfume was a means of improving one's sensory appeal, but its presence also left the wearer vulnerable to accusations of deception and covert malodour – why else would artificial scent be required, but to cover up the body's olfactory failings? This chapter will examine in depth ways in which the relationship between odour,

[625] Pliny, *Natural History* 13.20-21, see chapter 3, pp. 131-132.
[626] Although it is unlikely that she is so modestly clothed – 'Gellia' appears several times in Martial as an elderly, over-adorned woman: Martial, *Epigrams* 4.20; 5.29; 8.81; Moreno Soldevilla 2006, 213.
[627] While Gellia here is the dog, Martial's own olfactory powers are also dog-like – Horace elsewhere compares himself to a sharp-scented hound when he, too, sniffs out a woman's true nature: Horace, *Epodes* 12.2-6; See below, pp. 190-191.

perfume, and the female body was constructed in Roman literature, principally in the genres of elegy, satire, epigram, and comedy, which all delight in conjuring up highly sensual (for better or worse) women. It will consider the ways in which these constructions interact with those encountered in the previous chapters: medical and philosophical theories about the female body; the role of perfumes and aromatic substances in Roman society; the connections drawn between perfume use and the state of the empire in texts like Pliny's *Natural History*; and the construction of the mythological female body. It argues that all of these are fundamental to understanding the construction of the female body in much of Roman literature, and that all contributed to the existence of a complex network of olfactory codes which served as a diagnostic tool for categorising and evaluating the female body.

To an extent, this chapter forms an extension of the previous. Many of the sources that depicted the fragrant or repulsive female body in myth also depicted female bodies in other contexts, and sometimes these 'mythical' women and 'real' women appear in the same work, in the same passage or poem, and are even directly juxtaposed. There are many potential ways one might delineate these categories, all of which would have their merits and help in their own way to explore this thesis' stated topic. The term 'real' in this context might be misleading, and obscures the fact that even female bodies with an apparent real-world referent emerge from these sources as literary constructs shaped by their [male] authors.[628] Nevertheless, I use the term occasionally as a useful shorthand. The distinction I make is primarily a relational, temporal, and spatial one. Where the female bodies of the previous chapter (which I have chosen to refer to as 'mythological', 'divine', 'monstrous', and so on), existed apart, both in space and time, from contemporary or near-contemporary Roman society, and did not have real-world analogues with which the readership or audience of a source might interact, the female bodies in this chapter were spatially, temporally, and relationally closer to home. These women – young women, wives, mistresses, slave girls, prostitutes, and old women – are constructed, fictionalised manifestations of the kinds of women who populated the urban environment of Rome, and thus might actually come into contact with the reader.

[628] On the difficulty of accessing 'real' Roman women: Wyke 1994, 134; Dixon 2000, 14-16; Milnor 2005, 40-41, Richlin 2014, 7-8.

Whilst the separation of literary female bodies into mythical and non-mythical is deliberate, so too is the decision to juxtapose these two chapters. Saara Lilja's survey of odour in ancient poetry chose not to consider the odour of divinity and the odours of humans together, but rather begins in Olympus with the gods, and works its way down the cosmic ladder, considering three of the most pungent groups of substances – incense, perfumes, and foods – before considering the human body, then progressing onwards through the odours of death, the animal and plant kingdoms and finally descending into the sulphorous underworld.[629] This structure serves particularly well to demonstrate the ways in which odour and olfaction demarcate the cosmos, with human bodies at a middle point between the gods and the underworld. However, for the purposes of this thesis, with its emphasis on the interrelation of gender, smell, perfume, and the body, it is useful to consider supernatural bodies – alien but still recognisably female – in closer conjunction with mortal ones. As was demonstrated in chapter four, mythological referents were common in literary depictions of fragrant, malodorous, and perfumed female bodies. Perfumes were frequently metaphorically or literally bestowed upon mortals by the divine, and the myths behind substances such as myrrh had the potential to colour the ways in which the use of these substances in non-mythical contexts could be read. Many of the examples in this chapter will further explore the underlying system of thought and literary tradition which linked fragrance with the gods, above all with the goddess of erotic love, and foul odour with monstrosity, the infernal, and death.

The previous chapter considered the structuralist approach of Detienne, which despite its limitations provides a useful framework for understanding the olfactory characterisation of divine and infernal female bodies. This chapter will in turn draw from feminist and gender-focused reassessments of classical mythology and its relationship with ancient society.[630] Questions surrounding the interrelation between gender in myth and the values and attitudes of the society which produced and circulated these myths are always fraught; as Froma Zeitlin puts it, there is always between myth and society 'a tension between proximity and distance, resemblance

[629] Lilja 1972.
[630] Cixous 1976; Lefkowitz, 1986; Dowden 1995; Zeitlin 1996; Doherty 2001; Zajko and Leonard 2006; Zajko 2009.

and difference, model and antimodel'.[631] The women of the previous chapter might be thought of as archetypes and exaggerations of 'real' women, and as such this chapter will often discuss moments of connection between these broader archetypes and the 'real' women of Roman literature. This chapter also devotes substantial discussion to the odour, natural or perfumed, of the male body. It argues that the use of perfume, and more broadly the emission of odour of any kind, could be framed as a failure of masculinity, and a descent (for that is indisputably what it was) into the female.

The sources which make up the bulk of this chapter's discussion might be grouped broadly under the headings of erotic poetry and invective.[632] Falling within these broad categories are works from a range of genres: comedy, epigram, satire, elegy, and lyric. Central are the poets Catullus, Horace, and Martial, who, as Lilja noted, are particularly interested in the phenomenon of odour in relation to the female body**.** Martial is by far the richest (and often most grotesque) source for this subject in Roman literature, and his epigrams will feature throughout as a heuristic device through which to delineate key points and arguments.[633] Martial was rivalled in his sensory game-play perhaps only by Plautus, whose comedies, written and performed some three hundred years earlier, are also rife with pungent bodies.[634] The interpretation of 'Roman' literature in this chapter is also somewhat broad. Although many of the most central sources are written in Latin by authors who spent at least a portion of their lives in Rome itself, I also consider Greek-language sources and sources authored by Greeks and other provincials, which there is reason to believe would have been circulated in Rome between the middle Republic and the Antonine period. Generic concerns and conventions, the specific style and perspective of individual writers, and also the historical context of the sources, naturally impact the bodies, scents, and scenarios depicted, as well as the ways in which these elements can be read. It will therefore be important to continue to draw attention to these nuances of genre.

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[631] Zeitlin 1996, 9.

[632] See Richlin for this way of dividing up poetry: Richlin 1992, 32-33.

[633] Martial's women are often grotesque both in the general sense of the term and in that outlined by Mary Douglas and Mikhail Bakhtin: Bakhtin 1968, 26-27; Douglas 2003, xxxvii-xxxviii; Bradley 2015b, 136.

[634] Lilja 1972, 225-227. Despite their early date relative to many of the other sources discussed in this chapter, the influence of Plautus on later Latin literature is considerable.

Although literature from different genres and by different authors will naturally have differing perspectives, contexts, and so forth, the overarching image of the fragrant and foul female body and its meaning is strikingly consistent across much of Roman literature, and there is much to be gained from a discussion which considers these sources in close proximity, where points of difference can be explored within the broader, often genre-transcending, themes. This chapter will therefore take the form of an exploration of the female body. Much like the scopophilic, dismembering approach towards the female body typical of Roman elegy and inverted in invective, this chapter will map the different sites on the body to which odour and perfume are most often and most pungently attached: hair, skin, armpits, genitals and anus, and mouth.[635] To approach the female body in this piecemeal manner, which reduces it to its parts, serves the dual purpose of enabling a detailed and thematic discussion of the nuances of odour and the body – that odour's meaning is not only derived from its nature but also from its context – and at the same time emphasising the ways in which the male writers who construct this meaning frequently use it to expose, other, and dehumanise their subjects, thereby reasserting woman's inferior position in Roman society. It will then examine the ways in which the female body, simultaneously malodorous and perfumed, could be constructed as a symptom and stimulus of social disorder and decline, by looking at passages from Juvenal's sixth *Satire*. Finally, it will conclude by examining Martial's infamous epigrams concerning Thais and Bassa, two women who epitomise and bring together the themes of the chapter into one stinking whole.

[635] Fredrick 1997; 1999, 71, after Laura Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze in Hollywood cinema: Mulvey 1989, 14-26. For this phenomenon applied to the sense of smell, I might suggest the term aisthanophilia, from *aisthanesthai* (to sense/to smell).

5.1. Scratching the surface

a. Perfumed-soaked locks

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the scent of divinity was often located or concentrated in the hair, hair that was dripping with sweet-scented ambrosia or nectar.[636] This manifestation of divine odour has clear parallels with the depiction of hair in Roman poetry, which was often fragrant and drenched in perfume. Beautiful hair is one of the most common stock features of descriptions of attractive female bodies in Roman literature, and it seems clear from the many references to the phenomenon that the fragrance exuded from a beautiful woman's hair formed a substantial part of its attraction.[637] It was also an indicator of identity – its natural colour could reveal age, ethnicity, wealth, and social status, and its artificial colouration or coiffure attracted much of the same criticism as cosmetics and perfumes.[638]

The fragrant, often explicitly perfumed hair of a mistress or the object of the narrator's erotic attention appears regularly in elegy, lyric, and epigram.[639] Perfumed or sweet-smelling tresses were such an established elelgiac trope that Ovid depicted the very personification of elegy, Elegia, with 'a braid of fragrant locks' – a sensuous image that reflects the erotic, indulgent, and symposiastic nature of the genre, and calls back to the fragrant hair of Virgil's Venus, the wafting odour of which revealed her identity as the goddess of love.[640] Pleasure, too, manifested as a perfumed female body in both Seneca and Silius Italicus, in both cases positioned as Virtue's opposite, with hair and body dripping perfume.[641] While fragrant, perfumed hair might be appropriate for the personification of elegy, a conspicuous lack of perfume could also be used to

[636] See chapter 4, pp. 148-149.
[637] Sensi 1981; Sebesta 1994; James 2003, 167-173, 304-305.
[638] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.18.23-30; Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.135-168; Bartman 2001, 1, 22; Gibson 2007, 32-35; Bradley 2009, 174-178.
[639] *Palatine Anthology* 5.147.5; 6.250.7, 276.1; 7.218.10. See also Antipater of Sidon's Hipparchia, who rejected the perfumed hair-net alongside other articles of the *mundus muliebris* in favour of the masculine life of a philosopher: *Palatine Anthology* 7.413.4.
[640] See chapter 4, pp. 144-145, 149: Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.401-405; Ovid, *Amores* 3.1.7. The fragrant locks of Elegia also allude to the intricately constructed nature of elegy – like a perfumed woman, elegy takes work to look/smell/sound this good. See Wyke 1989, 113 and Keith 1994, 27-28 for discussion of Elegia as a personification of the style and subject matter of elegy.
[641] Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 7.3; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 15.22-26.

characterise personifications of a different kind, as in Martial's depiction of 'rustic Truth (*Veritas*) with dry hair (*siccis capillis*)'.[642]

During an eventful night of drinking, the narrator of Propertius' second elegy is forcibly taken to the house of his mistress Cynthia, with the promise of a titillating and fragrant scene upon his arrival: 'When she loosens the ties of her Sidonian nightcap and moves her sleep-heavy eyes, no perfumes from Arabian herbs will waft upon you but those that Love made with his own hands (*afflabunt tibi non Arabum de gramine odores, sed quos ipse suis fecit Amor minibus*)'.[643] The assertion that Cynthia's fragrant hair is not a result of artificial scent, but is a product of her naturally fragrant body is significant, as is Propertius' need to make this distinction explicit. It is also fairly rare in Roman literature, particularly in Latin poetry, in which sweet-scented hair is much more often explicitly dripping in perfume or else implied to be so. Cynthia, as is typical of the women of elegy, is depicted as consistently and uniquely attractive, and her physical beauty is here mirrored by her uniquely fragrant hair. That the 'perfume' she emits was crafted and bestowed upon her by Love also positions her among the heroines of myth, who are also often recipients of divine unguents and ambrosia, substances which render them both more beautiful and more fragrant.[644] The literal anointing with ambrosia or nectar in epic acted as a means of fending off old age and the other ill-effects life could have upon the body, or, as in Athena's anointing of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, it could supernaturally transform the body, lending it inhuman beauty and fragrance.[645] Naturally, or rather supernaturally, sweet-smelling hair aligns Cynthia more with the fragrant female bodies of myth than with her contemporary Roman women – she is (just like all other elegiac love-interests) 'not like the other girls'.[646]

The trope of fragrant hair as a metric for female beauty extended even further across the Greco-Roman world, appearing in both Greek and Roman literature and stretching as far back as Archilochus in the seventh century BCE, and continuing long

[642] Martial, *Epigrams* 10.72.11. Silius Italicus' Virtue, similarly, has unadorned (and hence implicitly unperfumed) hair: Silius Italicus, *Punica* 15.27-29.
[643] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.29.15-18; Gowers 1993, 236.
[644] Statius, *Silvae* 1.2.111; 3.4.84-94. See chapter 4 149-150 for further discussion of this.
[645] Homer, *Iliad* 14.176; 19.126; *Odyssey* 18.172-179.
[646] Greene 1995, esp. 306. See chapter 4, p. 141, 144-145 for further discussion of the ambrosial scent of divinity.

after the temporal parameters of this chapter.[647] One poem from the *Anacreontea*, possibly written in the first or second century CE, provides a particularly evocative example of perfumed hair as part of the construct of the female body as erotic object, as the speaker instructs an artist to paint his mistress's hair, 'and if the wax can do it, make it smell of myrrh'.[648] This construction of the poet-speaker's ideal (and idealised) woman in paint has an obvious mythical analogue in Pygmalion's mythical sculpting of female beauty.[649]

Propertius stands out as the elegiac poet who most valued the natural and, according to him, pleasant odour of the female body.[650] This was in keeping with his emphasis on the virtue and erotic appeal of *nudus amor*, naked or unadorned love, to which he dedicated an entire poem, urging his beloved to avoid all adornments and the paraphernalia of *cultus*:[651]

> What help is it, my love, to go out with an ornately coiffed hairstyle and to shake the delicate folds of a Coan dress? What help is it to drench your hair with perfume from the Orontes (*aut quid Orontea crines perfundere murra*) and to advertise yourself in foreign wealth, to ruin the grace of nature with purchased decoration (*cultus*), and not to allow your limbs' own qualities shine? Believe me, no medicament can improve your appearance: Naked Love does not love artificial beauty (*nudus Amor formam non amat artificem*).
>
> Propertius, *Elegies* 1.2.1-8

Propertius' disdain for *cultus* and the *mundus muliebris* is consistent with the attitudes towards feminine bodily adornment seen in the anti-cosmetic tradition. This tradition asserted that cosmetic enhancement was unnatural and deceptive, allowing the user to appear to be something they were not.[652] It associated cosmetic use with adulteresses and meretrices, and denounced the practice as example of *luxuria* at its

[647] Archilochus, fragment 30.
[648] *Anacreontea* 16.8-9: Campbell 1988, 16-18; Kantzios 2016, 374-379.
[649] On Ovid's Pygmalion as a lens through which to understand the *puella* in Latin love elegy, see Sharrock 1991.
[650] Lilja 1972, 218.
[651] Propertius, *Elegies* 1.2
[652] Wyke 1994; Gibson 2003, 21-25; 2006, 123-124; Olson 2006, 293; Dolansky 2012, 270-271.

worst.[653] The texts from which these anti-cosmetic ideas come are largely satirical or moralistic, although the above demonstrates the ways in which they permeated elegy and other more sensuous genres, suggesting that the attitudes were not without traction in the Greco-Roman cultural consciousness.[654] Within this anti-cosmetic tradition, perfumes were particularly denigrated, as encapsulated in Pliny's description of them as 'the most superfluous of all forms of luxury'.[655]

Where Propertius' poem deviated from a large body of these sources, however, is in the suggestion that the unadorned female body was intrinsically attractive – his criticism of adornments was not due to their expense or their seductive potential, it was that they spoiled the natural charms of his beloved. Both Propertius and the anti-cosmetic tradition demonstrate the double standard regarding the construction of an ideal female body – when in the hands of Pygmalion or indeed a male writer, it was an opportunity for sensual, voyeuristic enjoyment. However, female attempts to participate in this system by constructing a version of themselves which conformed to societal ideals attracted harsh criticism. Odour was powerful, and the ability to control odour (whether real, imagined, or even metaphorical) granted its controller power.

Returning to Cynthia's bedroom, the naturally fragrant welcome promised to the narrator is revealed to be a fantasy. He is allowed several lines of voyeuristic enjoyment of Cynthia's sleeping beauty.[656] Soon, however, the spell is broken, as a newly-awoken Cynthia flies into a rage at her lover's behaviour, admonishing him for spying on her and repelling his advances for the foreseeable future. Instead of the alluring scent of her hair, the bedroom is characterised by an absence of fragrance, proof, claims Cynthia, that she has not had another man in her bed.[657] John Patrick Sullivan suggested that this odour of adultery might refer to the scent of one or more of the bodily fluids which might be involved in sexual intercourse, an interpretation which has been rejected by some scholars due to the general squeamishness

[653] Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian.* 214; Seneca, *Letters* 114.9; See Gibson 2003, 175-176 for a detailed survey of anti-cosmetic texts.
[654] Wyke 1994, 134; Olson 2008, 59.
[655] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 3.222; Pliny, *Natural History* 13.20; Olson 2008, 78. See chapter 3, pp. 126-127 for further discussion of this topic.
[656] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.29.23-30. Cynthia is here compared to Isomache and Brimo, both beautiful figures from myth, but with a twist: former is the victim of gang-rape at the hands of the centaurs, and the latter's name (appropriately, as the poem goes on to demonstrate) means 'the angry one'.
[657] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.29.37-8.

demonstrated by elegiac poets when it came to sexual secretions.[658] Alternatively, it may suggest an absence of perfume, which, as explored further below, frequently accompanied sexual activity. Where Cynthia's fragrant hair earlier in the poem hinted at the possibility of sex, the total absence of odour from her body here seems to render intimacy impossible.

This connection between perfumed hair and sexual activity, specifically with infidelity or unfaithful intention appeared in a wide range of literary contexts, from epigram to Athenian Old Comedy. In the *Palatine Anthology*, the first century BCE Greek poet Meleager claims that his lover Zenophilia's hair 'freshly moistened with fragrant perfume' betrays her affair with another man.[659] The association had a long pedigree: Praxagora, in Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, similarly proves her fidelity to her husband by inviting him to sniff her hair, to which he replies 'what? Can't a woman get fucked even without perfume?'[660] The answer, it would seem, was no: perfumed hair was framed not simply as an erotic enticement, but as a necessity. One passage from Plautus' *The Haunted House* indicates, however, that a truly attractive woman could eradicate the need for perfume as an aid to sexual activity. The courtesan Philematium, asking her lover Philolaches whether she ought to bring *unguenta,* is met with his flattering answer 'what for? I'm already lying next to oil of myrrh'.[661] Her presence, he implies, is as fragrant and arousing as any artificial stimulant. Philematium's fragrant presence must be natural, since in a previous scene her slave had enjoined her not to put on any perfume.

The connection between perfumed hair, erotic contexts, and deceit was a pervasive theme of the comic plays of Plautus, overflowing as they were with courtesans and sexual intrigue. Plautus' apparent fascination with odour and olfaction was a feature of his comedy which indicated his indebtedness to Old Comedy. In one passage of the *Truculentus,* the eponymous slave shouts at Astaphium, slave of the prostitute Phronesium, threatening to tear her perfumed hair from her head, because she has turned up at his door made-up. He emphasises the girls' made-up face and

[658] Sullivan 1961, 1-2; Witke 1982, 328; Richlin 1992, 249; Gowers 1993, 236. See below for further discussion of the fraught topic of female sexual fluids in Roman poetry, pp. 196-203.
[659] *Palatine Anthology* 5.175.2.
[660] Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen* 523-525, trans. Henderson 2002 (Loeb 180).
[661] Plautus, *The Haunted House* 301-309; see also 272-278.

liberally scented hair as the source of his disgust: 'you have dared come to our door smeared with perfumes (*unguentis uncta*) and with your cheeks so prettily painted with purple'.[662] These artifices he finds repulsive, evidence of the girls' lack of *pudor* and of both her and her mistress's deceitful intentions. The girl and her mistress are, he claims, bringing his master Strabax to financial ruin while they drink up and perfume themselves with his wealth.[663] While prostitutes might use the wealth of their customers to procure scent, Phronesium also lists it as a central part of the service she offers, claiming to owe to a customer 'perfumes, the night, and sweet kisses'.[664] Truculentus' moral high-ground is somewhat undermined by his status as a slave, his liberal use of rural imagery, and his obscene, almost Freudian mishearing of Astaphium's words: Wolfgang de Melo argues that Plautus is mocking the moral conservatism and rustic *simplicitas* that other genres and writers venerated.[665] Despite his hyperbolic display of revulsion towards the girl, by the end of the play he too has been seduced by scent, becoming one of her customers.

The erotic powers of perfume could lead to humiliation as well as financial ruin. In the play *Casina*, the *senex amator* Lysidamus purchases exotic perfumes in an effort to seduce the eponymous slave-girl, and it is the scent of these unguents wafting from his hair that gives his intentions away to his wife Cleostrata.[666] Cleostrata's perceptive nose exposes her husband's infidelity, while Lysidamus' foolish infatuation leads to his humiliation at the hands of his wife: she arranges a mockery of marriage between his slave Olympio and her slave Calinus, dressed in women's clothing and posing as Casina.[667] In this scene, Lysidamus olfactory perception are their downfall – although he catches a whiff of 'Casinus', he is unable to recognise what his/her adornments are concealing in time to avoid a severe beating.[668] The centrality of

[662] Plautus, *Truculentus* 289-290.

[663] Plautus, *Truculentus* 311. For perfumes as financially draining gifts for prostitutes and lovers: Propertius, *Elegies* 3.13.8; *Palatine Anthology* 6.250.7; Martial, *Epigrams* 11.27.9; 12.55.7. While Truculentus might see through the façade, another character in the play, the libidinous Diniarchus, is utterly taken in, praising the fragrant beauty of Phronesium: Plautus, *Truculentus* 353.

[664] Plautus, *Truculentus* 938: *unguenta, noctem, suavium.*

[665] de Melo 2013, 255.

[666] Plautus, *Casina* 235-241; Cody 1976, 457-458; Ryder 1984, 184-185; Connors 1997, 82; Franko 1999, 7; Allen 2015, 44-49; Christenson 2015, 167.

[667] Cleostrata metaphorically and literally sniffs out Lysidamus' misdeeds on multiple occasions: Plautus, *Casina* 266, 277, 554; Allen 2015, 22.

[668] Plautus, *Casina* 814: *oboluit Casinus procul.*

perfume and eroticism to this play is evident in the fact that the love-object Casina's name is derived from the spice cassia. The girl herself never appears on stage, and is throughout as invisible and pervasive as the scent of her namesake. In this sense Casina seems to speak to the anxiety perceptible in many Greco-Roman accounts of odour, which spread out to exert its influence upon bodies and objects outside of the physical reach of its source. Scenes in which olfactory perception enables characters to expose and humiliate the wearers of perfume are also common in satire, epigram, and invective, in which they are most often used to solidify the male poet-speaker's power over their target – as in the passage with which this chapter began.[669] Comedy contained a range of different characters, all of which (or none) could at different times be positioned as the point of audience identification at different times throughout the play. This allowed Plautus to play with this trope, granting the domineering wife the typically male penetrating olfactory powers required to expose and humiliate her husband's risible adornment.[670]

As Lysidamus' anointed locks have already demonstrated, comedy, elegy, lyric, and epigram also contained perfumed men. The poems of Propertius, Catullus, Horace, and Martial all feature perfumed male bodies, often the narrator's own, apparently with little of the anxiety that might be expected given the strong association in the Greco-Roman world between perfume and the female.[671] This is largely shaped by the generic conventions of such poetry: elegiac and lyric poetry, as well as amatory epigrams, commonly involve a symposiastic or otherwise festive setting, in which perfume often played a significant role.[672] Why then do so many of these sources choose to present themselves in this manner? Some scholars have argued convincingly for the existence in Roman society of a subculture which co-opted traditionally feminine styles of dress and adornment in order to indicate urbanity, wealth, and even to make themselves more attractive to women.[673] Perfume formed a key part of this package, and perhaps goes some way to explaining the prevalence of scented self-representation in Roman erotic and symposiastic poetry. Propertius and Horace both

[669] This is one of the features of what Amy Richlin terms the Priapic narrator: Richlin 1992a, 58-59.
[670] On Cleostrata as the stereotypical Plautine wife: Williams 1993, 49; McCarthy 2000, 104.
[671] Wyke 1994, 135.
[672] Propertius, *Elegies* 3.10.19-22; Horace, *Odes* 1.4.9; 2.7.6-8; 3.29.4; 14.21-2.
[673] Horace, *Satires* 2.7.55; Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.443-444; Seneca, *Controversiae* 1.pr.8-101; Gleason 1990, 405; Gibson 2003, 14, 280-281; Olson 2017, 145-149.

talk of scenting their hair with sweet-scented oils, and Ovid's *Cosmetics for the Female Face*, when addressing the fashion concerns of contemporary women, mentions the *comptos viros* ('well-groomed men') who now rival them in beauty.[674] The existence of such a subculture does not, of course, erase or even substantially challenge the broader olfactory coding of perfume as both feminine and feminising, and the many examples throughout this chapter which connect artificial fragrance and pathic male sexual behaviour demonstrate the degree to which perfume could compromise hegemonic Roman masculinity.[675] Perfume was a woman's business, and therefore the use of perfume rendered a man less than fully male.

Perfumed hair was a prominent and almost ubiquitous attribute of the *cinaedus* or pathic male, attracting fierce attacks from many different corners of Greco-Roman literature.[676] Martial, no stranger to scented unguents himself presented stereotypical portraits of such men: Rufus' perfumed hair spreads its odour across the entire theatre of Marcellus; Cotilus, who always smells of balsam and cinnamon, is a *bellus homo* ('pretty man'); Phoebus uses coloured *unguenta* to hide his bald spot.[677] One particularly noteworthy example can be found in Juvenal's second satire, a damning portrait of the state of contemporary Roman society. This satire uses effeminacy, male passivity, and moral hypocrisy as elements through which to present an image of Rome in a state of social upheaval and degeneracy.[678] Among its many attacks on pathic or effeminate males is a passage in which a woman, Laronia, denounces those who profess to uphold traditional Roman morals as hypocrites: 'where did you buy this balsam perfume which exhales from your shaggy neck? Don't be ashamed to point out the shop-owner… there isn't any example so revolting in our sex. Tedia doesn't

[674] Propertius, *Elegies* 2.4.5; Horace, *Odes* 2.11.13-17; 3.20.14; Tibullus, *Elegies* 2.2.7; Ovid, *Cosmetics for the Female Face* 24; Martial, *Epigrams* 5.64.3; Johnson 2015, 53.
[675] Butler 2010, 94.
[676] Cicero *Philippics* 3.12; *Against Piso* 3.12; *In Defence of Sestius* 18; *Against Cataline* 2.5, 22; Ovid, *The Art of Love* 2.734; *Palatine Anthology* 6.254.4; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.29.5; 3.63; 6.57.1; Juvenal, *Satires* 9.48-53; Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 6.12.5; Richlin 1992a; Olson 2014, 185; 2017, 139-140. For the *cinaedus* in Roman art, literature and society; Edwards 1993, 81-84; Richlin 1993; Gleason 1995; Taylor 1997, 338; Butrica 2002; Williams 2010, 193. In ancient Greece: Winkler 1990, 45-70; Davidson 2007, 167-182.
[677] Martial, *Epigrams* 2.29; 3.63; 6.57.
[678] Nappa 1997, 107-108; Wiseman 1985, 1-14.

lick Cluvia, nor Flora Catulla, but Hispo submits to young men and turns pale from both diseases'.[679]

The balsam dripping from this hypocrite's hairy neck reveals him as effeminate, and aligns him with Hispo, who 'submits to young men' (*subit iuvenes*).[680] The contrast between his hairy nape and the scented perfume highlights his hypocrisy, and is also reminiscent of other descriptions of pathic males as men with hairy faces but smooth buttocks.[681] Her requests to know where he got his perfume from is laden with sarcasm, as is her reassurance that he need not be embarrassed – her express purpose was to embarrass him by exposing his effeminacy and therefore hypocrisy. Laronia's assertion that Hispo's behaviour was not practiced among the women of Rome stretches the implication further: by perfuming themselves and engaging in all the behaviours that perfume implies, such hypocrites make themselves not simply like women, but by some measures even beneath them.

[679] Juvenal, *Satires* 2.36-53. Laronia herself appears to have been either a prostitute or an adulteress: Ferguson 1979, 134; Coffey 1989 125.
[680] The pallor of Hispo alludes to the perceived weakening effect of passive anal intercourse: Richlin 1993, 552; Taylor 1997, 354-355; Nappa 1998, 99.
[681] Richlin 1992a, 41, 189.

b. Goatish sweat

While hair was a locale of sweet scent and perfume, the odour of sweat, commonly connected with the underarms but sometimes generalised to the whole body, was exclusively disgusting.[682] Such bodily odours were frequently evoked through reference to goats, since this animal was associated with a rank, bestial odour.[683] The targets of this insult were the aged and the unattractive, and also the licentious, since goats were also thought to possess excessive sexual appetites.[684] This goat-smell, although a common element of olfactory attacks upon men, was also characteristic of women deemed by the poet-speaker as repulsive.[685] As this chapter will continue to explore, more or less any female body that deviated from the ideal in any way (that is to say, practically all of them) could be characterised as malodorous, but that which received the most consistent and vitriolic accusations of stench was the *vetula*, the old woman. Roman literature's apparent horror and hatred of the aged female body has been explored at length in the work of Amy Richlin and others, and the sheer quantity of invective against old women is staggering.[686] *Vetulae* in invective and comedy were depicted as grotesque and ridiculous, frequently drunk and shamelessly desperate for sex.[687] A particularly pungent description of one such woman can be found in Horace's twelfth *Epode*:

> I'm no firm youth, nor of unrefined nostril (*naris obesae*); for I can sniff out whether an octopus or a rank goat lurks in your hairy armpits more keenly than a sharp-scented dog can sniff out where a sow is hiding (*namque sagacius unus odoror, polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis, quam canis acer ubi lateat sus*). What a sweat and what a bad smell rises up from her withered limbs (*qui sudor vietis et quam*

[682] Horace, *Satires* 1.2.27; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.87; 3.93.
[683] Plautus, *The Merchant* 575; *Pseudolus* 738; Ovid, *The Art of Love* 1.522; 3.193; Horace, *Odes* 1.17.7; *Palatine Anthology* 11.240.2; Moreno Soldevila 2006, 114.
[684] Horace, *Epodes* 10.23. The *senex amator* Lysidamus in *Casina* is likened to a toothless goat, among other animals: Plautus, *Casina* 550; Franko 1999, 8. It was also sometimes connected with the onset of puberty that transformed *pueri* from idealised pederastic objects into adult men: Martial, *Epigrams* 11.22; Eyben 1972, 680; Kay 1985, 118, 120.
[685] *Palatine Anthology* 11.240; Martial, *Epigrams* 3.93; 4.4; 6.93.
[686] Richlin 1984; 1992; 2014. Pauline Ripat locates much of this horror in the cultural association between old women and witchcraft: Ripat 2016.
[687] Horace, *Epodes* 8, 12; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.19; 3.32, 93; 4.20; 7.75; 8.64, 79; 9.29, 37; 10.39, 67, 90; 11.29; Richlin 1992a, 109-116, 244.

> *malus undique membris crescit odor*) when, finding my penis limp, she hurries to quench her wild lust; nor does her moist chalk make-up stay in place, and, with the rouge made from crocodiles' dung, begins to run (*umida creta colorque stercore fucatus crocodili*), and now in her animal heat (*subando*) she breaks the taut bed and its canopy!
>
> Horace, *Epodes* 12.2-12

The image of withered arms and slipping makeup is unpleasant, but the main characteristic of the narrator's bedfellow is undoubtedly her disgusting bodily odour, manifested above all as goatish sweat. It is so repulsive that the narrator is rendered impotent, such a failure of virility that would normally be a source of embarrassment, but here it is reframed as proof of the repulsive nature of this old woman.[688] While the crone stinks, the narrator smells, boasting of the sensitivity of his olfactory faculties. He compares himself to a hound on the hunt, and details extensively for his audience the exact nature of the woman's foulness**.** The power of the male poet-speaker to see through the façade of feminine adornment, or simply to identify and categorise was a common feature of invective, serving to re-establish the 'natural order' of male over female, and to establish the kinds of female body acceptable to Roman society.[689]

In contrast to the narrator's dog-like olfactory perception, the malodorous woman resembles an astonishing array of strange and pungent animals. In addition to the goat beneath her armpits, she also reeks of octopus, and implicitly also like a pig. She is also literally coated in crocodile dung (*fucatus crocodili*), clearly used here to evoke disgust in the reader at the close contact between excrement and face.[690] This bestialisation climaxes in the use of the term *subando,* which implies the lust of an animal in heat as much as, if not more than human sexual excitement: throughout this

[688] Impotence in the face of the sexual advances of old women appears again in *Epode* 8, which places similar emphasis on female malodour: Horace, *Epodes* 8.1-2.

[689] In one epigram of Martial, the penis is characterised as the locus of this subjugating male perception: Martial, *Epigrams* 9.37.9-10.

[690] *Polypus*, which can connote either an octopus or a cuttlefish, could also refer to a kind of nasal polyp – appropriate for this pungent context. On crocodile dung as a cosmetic, see Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.269-270; Pliny, *Natural History* 28.184-185; Olson 2009, 296-297; Johnson 2016, 80-81. In stark contrast to the disgust Horace seems to be encouraging in this scene, Pliny at least characterised the dung as fragrant, since it was supposedly taken from a kind of crocodile which ate only sweet-scented flowers: Pliny, *Natural History* 28.108.

encounter, the woman's increasingly bestial desire is accompanied by an inhuman, animalistic stench. If Cynthia's ambrosial hair, given to her by Love, positions her as more than human, this anonymous old woman's association with animal odours renders her subhuman. As chapters one and four demonstrated, women were often linked with animals and with the wildness of nature, an association which appears in Greco-Roman medicine, myth, and beyond, and part of this connection can be seen in the conviction that the female body was both more sensitive to odour and a more pungent source of it than the male. Both goatish stench and comparisons to bizarre or unpleasant animals are particularly common in descriptions of *vetulae,* for instance in the case of Martial's decrepit and apparently repulsive Vetustilla.[691] Such bestialisation, exacerbated by evocations of odour, marked undesirable female bodies as socially marginalised.

It is notable that accusations of harbouring a goat under the armpit was also a common attribute of the ugly and aged male body.[692] Catullus, for example, wrote of the repulsive odour of Rufus, who metaphorically harbours 'a rank goat under [his] armpits', which 'outrages our noses' and drives away all *bellae puellae*.[693] This is a reminder, of course, that olfactory coding does not correspond only to gender, but rather functions as a complicated web of associations and implications, including indications of class, lifestyle, age, and so on.[694] Goatish stench in men often appeared as an uncomplimentary indicator of rusticity and lack of an appropriate degree of *cultus,* and also often served to characterise a male body as ugly, old, and licentious – these latter associations were much the same as those we have seen attached to the sweating female body. The development of bodily odour could also be a feature of puberty, appearing in one of Martial's epigrams as an indicator that a *puer* was becoming too old to be the object of attraction.[695] Once again, there is a similarity here between men and women, for whom stench indicates the sexual repulsiveness of age. However, the social implications of this stench of ageing were strikingly different for

[691] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.93; Richlin 1992a, 244. Hendry 1995, 584. The association between women and animals in antiquity can be traced back at least to Semonides in the seventh century BCE: Semonides, *fragment* 7.
[692] Plautus, *The Merchant* 574-577; Catullus, *Poems* 97.1, 71.1; Ovid, *The Art of Love* 1.519-520; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.22.7; 10.98.10.
[693] Catullus, *Poems* 69.6-9, 71. For detailed analysis of these poems: Nicholson 1997; Nappa 1999.
[694] On the odours indicative of social class: Stevens 2008, 159.
[695] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.22.

the maturing boy and the woman past her prime. For the *puer* the stench of encroaching manhood, while it rendered him unattractive to older men, signalled a bodily change from sex object to adult man, and was therefore not intrinsically a disaster for the *puer*.[696] For the female body, it was a disaster – aging beyond sexual attractiveness or marital desirability marked a transition into a state which was even more culturally othered than that of the young female body.

While the fetid woman in Horace's *Epode* attempted to make herself more attractive through the use of cosmetics, Horace makes no reference to the use of perfumes. Given that her pungent aroma seems to be her main characteristic, one might wonder why she made no effort to alter or disguise her scent in the same manner as her face.[697] However, even if the woman from *Epode* 12 had attempted to mask her body odour with artificial scent, there is no guarantee that it would have been more effective than her foolhardy attempts at makeup: the failure of perfume to successfully disguise foul odour, indeed its ability to worsen the overall bouquet is well-attested in literary invective and in Roman comedy.[698] The stench created when malodorous female bodies slathered on artificial scent is used to great effect in the scene in Plautus' *The Haunted House*:[699]

> A woman smells right when she smells of nothing (*mulier recte olet ubi nihil olet*). As for those old women who smear themselves with perfumes, dressing themselves up, toothless crones who hide their bodily imperfections with makeup. When their sweat mingles with the unguents, directly they smell just as when a cook mixes many sauces into one. What they smell of you don't know, except for this: you know that they smell bad (*quid olant nescias, nisi id unum ut male olere intellegas*).
>
> Plautus, *The Haunted House* 274-278

[696] It should, however, be noted that in Roman pederastic poetry the objects of this sexual interest were usually slave boys, and so were not automatically to transition into adult citizens: Richlin 1992a, 34.
[697] The products she uses to enhance her appearance may well have themselves been scented, as for instance the *fucatus crocodili.* However, it is clearly their function as cosmetics which is emphasised here.
[698] See below, pp. 214-215 for the embarrassing failures of Martial's Fescennia and Myrtale.
[699] As discussed in the introduction, p.1.

In this adornment scene, the beautiful courtesan Philematium is preparing herself to meet with her lover Philolaches, assisted by her slave Scapha, an older woman. Scapha repeatedly encourages her mistress not to adorn herself, finishing by flatly stating that Philematium should not make use of *unguenta.* Her description of the sweating, perfumed *vetulae,* while potent, is somewhat puzzling for the context: Philematium is neither old nor ugly, and indeed is elsewhere in the *Haunted House* associated with the scent of myrrh.[700] Scapha's reasoning up until this point for discouraging the use of adornments is more in line with Propertius' argument that such devices hide a beautiful woman's natural charms.[701] The abrupt turn to an extended description of stinking old women seems something of a *non sequitur*, but it might be suggested that it serves to delineate the contrast between these undesirable female bodies and Philematium's youth and beauty.

As in Horace, sweat is central to the failure of the women's cosmetic endeavours.[702] Scapha makes use of typically Plautine gastronomic imagery, likening the odour to an over-complicated stew. Scapha seems to subscribe to Theophrastus' view that mixture increases pungency, but here the combinations of a good smell (perfume) with a foul one (the sweat of old women) creates a powerfully unpleasant aroma which it is difficult to describe, but which everyone can agree is repulsive.[703] The imagery of scent produced through the mixing of different elements is a comedic inversion of the mixing which was thought to be central not only to cooking, but also to the production of the luxurious perfumes the women are wearing. Bradley has discussed the connections between *sudor* and disease, associations which lend to this image additional implications: the old women attempt to cure the *vitiae* ('blemishes/defects/faults') with unguents, but the sweat which is the evidence of their aged, humourally-unbalanced bodies also undermines the remedy's efficacy.[704]

[700] See above, pp. 185.
[701] See above, pp. 183-184**.**
[702] Mark Bradley has remarked upon the connections between *sudor* and disease, illness, and misfortune: Bradley 2015b, 137-138; Bradley 'Sweating like a Roman: perspiration, essence and goatiness from Republic to Empire (Forthcoming).
[703] Theophrastus, *On Odours* 1.
[704] 'In medical circles sweat was linked to the body's effort to purge itself of toxins, or to a corrupt balance of humours': Bradley 2015b, 137-138.

One might wonder what to make of Scapha's aphoristic assertion that 'a woman smells right when she smells of nothing'.[705] Elsewhere in the Plautine corpus, the courtesan Anterastilis expresses almost the opposite opinion: plain women (among whom she places herself) are comparable to pickled salt fish, stinking and unpleasant to touch. It is only through thorough cleanliness and the addition of elegant and expensive adornments that they can become attractive and lose their natural fishiness.[706] Nevertheless, Scapha's words (possibly spoken from experience as an old woman herself) were clearly meant to resonate with the audience. Philolocles, who had been voyeuristically spying on his beloved's toilette takes this moment to turn to the audience to elicit a laugh of recognition: 'It's true, and most of you know it!'[707] In this one scene we have a fairly clear indication of Roman prejudices about the aged or unattractive female body: it was foul-smelling in its raw state, but was resistant to the effects of perfumes.

As this section has illustrated, the surface of the female body provided the author of amatory, comic, and invective literature with plenty of olfactory stimuli, all of which could be used to categorise that body, above all as attractive or unattractive. The sweet-scented beauties of elegy were inhumanly attractive, and were often linked with Venus in particular. In addition to Venus' eroticism and scent, they were often comparable to the goddess in their propensity for cruelty, infidelity, and domination over their lovers. Their alluring scent, an olfactory analogue to their visual beauty, could contribute substantially to their power over the poet-speakers, who often depicted themselves as subordinated and even feminised – if not under the thumb entirely, then at least in a far weaker positon than the Priapic poet-speaker of literary invective. It should also be said that while these women were indeed attractive, they hardly represented the ideal Roman woman – these were mistresses or courtesans, not *matronae.* Furthermore, as Propertius' account of the nocturnal visit to Cynthia indicates, the degree to which this natural fragrance can be understood (even within the confines of the text) as 'real' is debatable. When the 'real' Cynthia appears, her

[705] This seems to have been something of an aphorism – it appears in one of Cicero's letters to Atticus, where he uses it to complement the plain style of Atticus' writing, and Martial uses a similar sentiment on two occasions to chastise male wearers of perfume: Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 21.1; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12; 6.55.

[706] Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian* 240-245; Richlin 2005, 256: 'women's genitals are said to smell like fish in later Roman satire'.

[707] Plautus, *The Haunted House* 80-81.

absence of scent exposes the truth: she is Venus only in Propertius' desire-clouded mind.

The inverse of the potent fragrance of the elegiac mistress's hair can be found in the stinking, sweating bodies depicted in Horace, Plautus and others. Such bodily odour rendered the female body sexually repulsive and worthy of ridicule. The detection of this odour, and the subsequent rejection and ridicule of its source by the male poet-speaker gave both him and, by proxy, the audience, power over the female body in question.[708] The sweaty old woman in Horace is unable to arouse him, and the decrepit Vetustilla is mercilessly mocked for her desire for a new husband – it is implied that her previous strategy of bribing men to marry her, already pathetic, is no longer effective.[709] The examples from Plautus' comedies provide an interesting complication – in both *The Little Carthaginian* and *The Haunted House* the speaker is female. By putting the words into the mouths of female characters, Plautus presented them as complicit in these othering stereotypes.[710] The effect, however, was the same: exposing the olfactory failings of the female body served to reinforce its social subordination.

Perfume was significant for both sides of this olfactory divide. Perfume might be a pleasant addition to the attractive female body, enhancing its erotic appeal by adding an olfactory dimension, and providing a limited sensory apotheosis. On unattractive women it could be a woefully inadequate means of disguise, not only failing to cover up an unpleasant bodily odour but adding to it. However, as Martial's attack on Gellia suggests, artificial scent could not be guaranteed to fail quite as spectacularly as in Plautus. Perfumes therefore posed a threat to male perception and evaluation of female bodies, and might allow unattractive women to dupe men into sex (or worse, marriage). The poet-speaker of Horace *Epode* 12 might be disgusted by the stinking sweat and cosmetic slippage brought on by his partner's energetic attempts at coitus, but he has, after all, agreed to go to bed with her. The odour of the

[708] Richlin 1984, 69.

[709] The need to buy sexual or marital partners was a common insult levied against old women, and indicates another potential reason that unmarried elderly women were the target of such vitriol. If they had been widowed, they might well be among the most economically and socially independent of all Roman women: *Priapaea* 57; Horace, *Epodes* 8.11-16; Martial, *Epigrams* 9.37; 11.29; Juvenal, *Satires* 1.37-44; Richlin 1992, 114; 2014, 80.

[710] Of course, these 'women' were themselves male actors. Richlin 2014, 175.

female body was tied to its sexual desirability, but, reflecting the misogynistic nature of Greco-Roman culture, even the Pygmalion-like poets of elegy sometimes cast doubt upon the idea that women could ever be truly fragrant.

5.2. Odiferous orifices

a. Sniffing the lower part: genital and scatological smells

While the first half of this chapter mapped the key sites of odour on the surface of the female body, this latter part will now turn to odours associated with the orifices of the female body, in particular the genitalia, the anus, and the mouth. The Greco-Roman construct of the female body as a collection of orifices – penetrable, permeable, and leaking – has been a running theme throughout several of the previous chapters, and this view of female physiology and psychology looms large in Roman poetry and comedy.[711] The three main orifices of the female body – mouth, anus, and vagina – over which women were often deemed to have little control, were therefore central to the body's relationship with odour. Chapter one demonstrated the ways in which this idea manifested in medical and philosophical constructs of the female body, but we will see that this held true in much of Roman literature as well.

The scent of the female body, fragrant or foul, natural or artificial, was frequently inextricable from its sexual connotations. Unsurprisingly therefore, this was also a characteristic of odours attached to its orifices. However, as Amy Richlin has demonstrated, female genitalia are almost completely absent from Roman erotic poetry.[712] Erotic poetry for the most part completely erased the vagina from the female body, and despite revelling in the many of the odours associated with sex, barely a whiff appears that might be suggestive of any intimate emissions.[713] One very rare example of a positive assessment – indeed, a remarkably intimate and eroticised depiction – appears in one of the epigrams of Rufinus, a Neronian epigrammatist: 'Rhodope, Melite, and Rhodoclea competed to see which of the three had the best pussy (*mērionēn*), and chose me as judge. Like the much-admired goddesses they

[711] See introduction, pp. 18-19; chapter 1, pp. 35-36; chapter 4, p. 155-157.
[712] Richlin 1992a, 46-47; 2014, 177; 1984, 72**:** 'nowhere in Latin is there a favourable direct portrayal of female genitalia'.
[713] Richlin 1992a, 46; 2014, 177.

stood, naked, dripping with nectar (*nektari leibomenai*)'.[714] The poet-speaker casts himself here as Paris, inspecting in explicit detail the genitalia of these 'goddesses'.[715]

This is a striking departure from the bulk of the Greco-Roman erotic literature, so much so that Richlin suggested that it might be indicative of a particular sexual fixation of his; in the previous epigram, Rufinus describes a similar scenario in which he judges three beautiful buttocks, and in another voyeuristically describes the dripping body of a nude woman, who attempts (unsuccessfully) to cover her genitals with one hand.[716] That an eroticised depiction of female genitalia might be so abnormal as to lead scholars to theorise that it must represent something akin to a fetish really highlights the depth of Greco-Roman literature's vulvaphobia. More striking even than the epigram itself is the reference to nectar. The poem explicitly equates the three women with goddesses – a trope in erotic literature with which we are already familiar – and so the nectar can be read fairly innocently as an indication of their divine beauty and its associated fragrance. However, the poem's emphasis on their genitalia specifically strongly suggests another interpretation – that the nectar is analogous to vaginal fluids.[717] Such a reading would make this already remarkable example even more of an outlier, but nevertheless it seems in context possible, even likely. At the very least, the passage conjures up for the reader literally heavenly tastes and odours in conjunction with explicit description of female genitalia.

There are no other examples in Roman literature, and certainly not in Latin, which goes as far as Rufinus in describing the genitals as attractive and sweet-smelling. One other rare example which might invite such a reading is Catullus 13, the interpretation of which has inspired much debate. The poem takes the form of an *invitatio*, in which the poet-speaker invites one Fabullus to dinner – or, more accurately, invites Fabullus to *bring* dinner. While Fabullus must provide the food, the

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[714] *Palatine Anthology* 5.36, translation Paton 2014 (Loeb 67). Rufinus was, along with the other Neronian epigrammatists Lucillius and Nicharchus, a significant influence upon Martial (who, nevertheless, displays no such positive erotic interest in female genitalia): Cameron 1982, 162; Sullivan 1991, 85.

[715] The detail of Rufinus description is such that W. R. Paton's 1857 translation hilariously prefaces this with the warning 'offensive and extremely vile', an assessment which might have come straight from the mouth of a Roman moralist: Paton 2014, 225.

[716] *Palatine Anthology* 5.36; 5.60; Richlin 1992, 49; Höschele and Konstan 2005, 623-627.

[717] This is also implied in 5.60, in which the bather's pudendum is euphemistically referred to as 'swollen Eurontes' (*holon Eurōtan*): Höschele and Konstan 2005, 625-626.

wine, and bring along a *candida puella,* the narrator's contribution is more enigmatic: 'you will receive the essence of love, or something sweeter and more elegant; for I will give you perfume which the Venuses and Cupids gave to my lady, and when you smell it, you will ask the gods to make you, Fabullus, all nose'.[718] The narrator's *puella* is the recipient of an *unguentum* bestowed upon her by the gods of love, in much the same manner as that which is rolled from the unbound hair of Cynthia.[719]

The exact nature of the *unguentum* which is being offered has been interpreted variously as a literal perfume, an anal lubricant, or Catullus' own poetry.[720] Robert Littman has argued for reading this substance as vaginal fluid, which, although appealing particularly when compared to Rufinus' later epigram, has been criticised as too great a stretch given the lack of other similar references either in Catullus or in Roman literature more broadly.[721] While it might indeed be too far to suggest such a specific interpretation, the erotic connotations of this passage are fairly clear – as discussed above, the association between perfume or sweet scent and the female body carried with it inescapable sexual overtones.[722] Shane Butler argues, among others, that there are clear grounds for linking this desire to experience the sweet odour of a perfumed female body with the desire to sexually enjoy that body, whatever the literal nature of Lesbia's *unguentum.*[723] The poem is redolent of erotic suggestion: the perfumed body of Lesbia (whatever the nature of the perfume) is so alluring that it will make Fabullus wish to be 'all nose', the better to sense her.[724]

If we are to follow Littman's interpretation, or even the more metaphorical reading of Butler, the erotically fragrant *unguentum* oozing from Lesbia's body paired with Fabullus' desire to find the source of that smell with his nose come dangerously close to implying one of the most taboo of Roman sexual practices, cunnilingus. The nectar dripping from Rufinus' beauties is similarly suggestive – their genitalia are,

[718] Catullus, *Poems* 13.9-14.
[719] See also Horace's description of Lydia's ambrosial kisses: Horace, *Odes* 1.13.9-16. See below, 2017-208.
[720] Littman 1977, 123; Hallett 1978, 748; Witke 1980; Marcovich 1982; Bernstein 1984, 130; Gowers 1993, 244; Case 1995, 874; Nappa 1998, 390; Butler 2015, 82.
[721] Littman 1977, 123; Witke 1980, 327-328; Richlin 1992a, 249; Gowers 1993, 235.
[722] The phrase *meros amores* 'pure/unmixed love' is an appropriation of terminology (*meros*) often applied to wine – another frequent accompaniment to sexual activity.
[723] Butler 2015, 82.
[724] Dettmer 1989 furthers this case in the argument that *nasus* is an innuendo suggesting the phallus.

after all, the explicit focus of his attention. The dinner-party setting of Catullus 13 certainly brings to the foreground ideas of taste and consumption, which, as explored at length by Emily Gowers, were often loaded with sexual innuendo.[725] The nectar in Rufinus also invites connections to both eroticism and eating, being as it was the food of the gods. Many interpretations reject this suggestion, on the basis that Roman literature, Catullus included, usually refers to this practice exclusively in terms of the deepest disgust.[726] It might, of course be argued that this is a somewhat self-feeding argument – 'this cannot be an eroticised reference to cunnilingus because there are no eroticised references to cunnilingus in Roman poetry': such prescriptions leave no room for the rare. Furthermore, the general characterisation of cunnilingus as a disgusting, feminising sexual perversion does not in itself preclude such an interpretation of Fabullus' desire. The ambiguity of the latter part of Catullus 13, which has allowed for so many different interpretations, might well indicate that whatever the narrator is suggesting is particularly risqué or even taboo.

Martial, whose literary debt to Catullus is well-documented, attaches the name Fabullus to a character accused of being a *cunnilinctor* in one of his epigrams, one which is characterised by both foul odour and language: 'You say that sodomites smell at the mouth. If what you say is true, Fabullus, where do you think cunt-lickers smell?'[727] Fabullus apparently shares the culturally predominant view that saw the mouths of *fellatores* as polluted and therefore malodorous, but appears blind to the parallel prejudice against *cunnilingus*, a practice to which Martial implies Fabullus is partial. Patricia Watson and Lindsay Watson suggest that this might well be a parodic reference to Catullus 13, which, if true, would strongly suggest that Lesbia's *unguentum* could have carried obscene implications.[728]

Martial does more obviously appear to allude to Catullus 13 in another epigram, in which Fabullus is criticised for providing his dinner guests with nothing but perfume, taking the place of the poet-speaker in Catullus 13.[729] Fabullus appears

[725] MacCary and Willcock 1976, 32; Gowers 1993, 238.
[726] See below, pp. 210; Witke 1980; Richlin 1992a, 249; Butler 2015, 87.
[727] Sullivan 1991, 95-96 (on Martial's Catullan influence); Moreno Soldevila 2006, 534-535; Martial, *Epigrams* 12.85: *Pediconibus os olere dicis. hoc si, sicut ais, Fabulle, verum est, quid tu credis olere cunnilingis?*.
[728] Watson and Watson 2003, 315-316; Moreno Soldevila 2006, 535.
[729] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.12; Watson and Watson 2003, 15, 195-196.

elsewhere in Martial once again as a man apparently insensitive to the olfactory repulsiveness of the female body. In this, his paramour Bassa keeps a baby at her side at all times, in order that she might blame her excessive wind on the baby.[730] This bodily failing, which surely entails not only the noise but also the smell of flatulence, seems to be no deterrent to Fabullus, much as he is apparently unworried (or even aroused) by the odour of female genitalia.[731] Reading epigrams and 12.85 and 3.12 as Martial's answer to Catullus 13 suggests that Fabullus' desire to become 'all nose' (*totum nasum*) could have been interpreted by a Roman reader on a number of levels, incorporating both an excessive fondness for the olfactory pleasure provided by perfumes, and also an unnatural, sensual enjoyment of both perverted sexual practices and for the scent of female bodily emissions.[732]

Invective, far more than erotic poetry, echoes philosophical and medical ideas in that it constructed the vagina as central to female bodily odour, and to the construction of the female body more generally and its position in Roman society. Roman poetic invective characterised the female genitalia singularly repulsive, as 'smelly, dirty, wet, loose, noisy, hairy'.[733] As discussed in chapter one, the vagina in Greco-Roman medicine was a key locus of female odour, both as the orifice from which flowed lochia and menstrual fluid, and as the receptacle into which were smeared, piped or inserted the various olfactory therapies which would restore the body to health.[734] As ever in this genre, the kinds of women most fiercely abused are the elderly and unattractive, whose repulsive *cunni* viscerally attested to the inappropriateness of their continued sexuality. Use of unambiguous olfactory terminology directly referring to the odour of the vagina was fairly rare, but rather more common were comparisons evocative of odour and, above all, language referencing dirt, staining, and foulness.

[730] Martial, *Epigrams* 4.87; Moreno Soldevila 2006, 534-535. Bassa elsewhere appears as one of the most foul-smelling women in Martial's oeuvre: Martial, *Epigrams* 4.4.
[731] Watson and Watson 2003, 317.
[732] As explored in Donald Lateiner and Dimos Spatharas' work on disgust in the ancient world, the *cunnilinctor's* lack of disgust in the presence of vaginal excretions could be emphasised in order to highlight their perversion: Lateiner and Spatharas 2016, 26.
[733] Henderson 1975, 30-45, 130-147; Adams 1982, 80-81; Richlin 1992a, 68, 113-119, 122-123.
[734] See chapter 1, pp. 42-43.

One among many of Martial's epigrams which make an elaborate show of loathing female genitalia is an extensive description of the vagina of a woman named Lydia. The poet-speaker's main criticism of Lydia is her looseness, attributed to the effects of decades of sexual intercourse.[735] However, her genitals are also akin to 'an old boot soaked in muddy water', a simile evoking an unpleasant squishy texture, dirt and filth, and the stench of feet.[736] Reaching the punchline of the epigram, Martial remarks: 'I am said to have fucked her in a marine fishpond. I don't know; I think I fucked the fishpond', once again creating a multisensory image of copious, rank wetness, and a pungent fishy or salty aroma.[737] The marine allusions are reminiscent of the fishy women of Plautus, but here it is clear exactly where the odour comes from – not the body in general, but the genitals specifically.

While invective contained by far the most references to the foulness of the *cunnus*, rare examples can also be found in other literary genres. One passage of Plautus' *Menaechmi* is strongly suggestive of vaginal odour: Menaechmus invites his friend Peniculus to sniff a cloak he intends to give to a courtesan, stolen from his wife.[738] The female genitalia here are characterised as both malodorous and corrupting – contact with them, or even proximity, causes both objects and other bodies not just to become foul, but causes a lasting odour which will attest to this contact indefinitely: 'It is proper to smell the uppermost part of a woman's clothing, because from *that place* the nose is defiled with a smell that can't be washed off (*ex istoc loco spurcatur nasum odore illutili*)'.[739] While the lower half of the *palla* is unmentionable and staining, the upper half smells, so Peniculus claims, like 'theft, a prostitute, and lunch'.[740] The odour of prostitution hints at scented unguents – such substances might also be considered redolent of 'theft', as the many references to courtesans draining the wealth of their clients through their desire for luxurious perfume. The smell of

[735] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.21; Kay 1985, 114.
[736] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.21.4; Kay 1985, 116. The simile of the old boot is used elsewhere in Martial to represent foul odour: Martial, *Epigrams* 4.4.
[737] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.21.11-12.
[738] Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses* 166-168; Lilja 1972, 143 interprets this passage as a reference to incontinence, but the gender-specific nature of the odour pushes against such an interpretation. Bradley 2015b, 138
[739] Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses* 166-168.
[740] Plautus, *The Two Menaechmuses* 171.

dinner in conjunction with perfumed prostitutes might also be loaded with sexual connotations, hinting at a specific kind of 'consumption'.[741]

The fourth-century poet Ausonius, who was substantially influenced by earlier invective and epigram, clearly saw the opportunity afforded by the pungent interconnections between the female genitalia, fish, cunnilingus, and perfume, and put them to use in the following epigram attacking one Eunus through the competing odours which surrounded the body of his mistress, a perfume-seller:

> Eunus, why do you seek Phyllis, the perfume-seller? The rumour is that you are licking her middle, not pounding it (*mediam lamberen, non molere*). Watch out that the names of her wares do not deceive you, and take care that you are not misled by the odour of Seplasia, by thinking that cunts and costus have the same smell (κύσθον κύστον*que putas communis odoris*), and nard and sardines the same savour.
>
> Ausonius, *Epigrams on Various Matters* 82[742]

Phyllis' body is defined by scent. Her profession surrounds her in exotic, alluring perfume, but beneath this lies the fishy stench of female genitalia, positioned as the extreme olfactory opposite of nard or costus, and linked to the odour and flavour of fish.[743] The term *kusthon*, a term for female genitalia which Ausonius, feigning coyness, chooses not to translate into Latin, also has fishy connotations, being related to the term for a dye derived from a marine substance, probably the famously stinking Sidonian purple.[744] Several of the epigrams immediately following continue this theme of Eunus the *cunnilinctor* with a malfunctioning sense of smell. He is a 'licker of groins' (*inguinum ligurritor*), and is not disgusted by the 'putrid groin' (*putria inguina*) of his pregnant wife.[745] The olfactory ineptitude of Eunus is made more apparent (and, presumably, more amusing), due to the profession of his lover; it

[741] Allen 2015, 662. Perfumes and spices often accompanied meals, were mixed into wine, and seasoned food. See chapter 2, p. 68.
[742] Adapted from Kay 2001 (Loeb 115). See chapter 2, pp. 81-82.
[743] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.81, 77; Ausonius, *A Nuptial Cento.* 111-114; *CIL* 4.1830; Adams 1982, 138; Kay 2001 236-237.
[744] *The Stockholm Papyrus* 22.42; Henderson 1975, 130-131; Kay 2001, 236; O'Bryhim 2017, 327.
[745] Ausonius, *Epigrams on Various Matters* 86, 87. This description is made all the more taboo and grotesque by Ausonius imagining that Eunus' tongue penetrates all the way into his wife's womb, to lick the buttocks of his unborn son: Kay 2001, 240.

provides Ausonius with the opportunity to humorously contrast stereotypically sweet and foul odours. There is also a sense that Eunus' impairment puts him at the mercy of Phyllis, who, as a perfumer, might be expected to have a particularly discerning sense of smell.[746] Thus both the *cunnilinctor* and the female body involved are denigrated, the latter for being olfactorily repulsive, and the former for failing to notice.

Just as Roman literature was filled with scented courtesans, so too was it populated by stinking whores.[747] Adelphasium, sister of the self-deprecating Anterastilis in Plautus' *The Little Carthaginian*, identifies cheap prostitutes because 'they stink of the brothel (*olant stabulum*)'.[748] The filthy stinking brothel was a favourite of Roman satire, and, in addition to characterising such places as cheap, socially inferior, and generally dirty, heavily implies the foul odour of intimate bodily parts and fluids.[749] The idea of the stench of the brothel adds another sensory element to Seneca's depiction of Pleasure, who, like a prostitute, reeks of perfume (and wine) and also can be found in the brothel.[750] That the malodorous brothel imparts its stench to the women who sell their bodies there is most explicitly stated by Juvenal, whose searing account of the indefatigable sexual appetites of Messalina ends with her returning to the emperor's bed, carrying this foul odour with her.[751] This suggests that Pleasure herself is simultaneously perfumed and foul-smelling, adding a touch of sensory revulsion to the moral repugnance Seneca encourages in the reader.[752]

The attitude towards female genitalia stands in stark contrast to that displayed towards the anuses of *pueri*, the beautiful boys who were as often the erotic object of elegy and epigram as were *puellae*.[753] Where female genitals were ignored, the boy's anus was regularly a sexual focus of such poetry – this was particularly true of Greek

[746] See chapter 2, pp. 81-82 on the olfactory prowess of perfumers.
[747] Perfumed prostitutes were also a common love interest in Greek epigram: *Palatine Anthology*, 5.16; 13.5. The latter concerns the fragrant anomaly Charito, whose 'unwrinkled skin distils ambrosia' (much like a goddess) even at sixty years old.
[748] Plautus, *The Little Carthaginian* 265-270.
[749] Horace, *Satires* 1.2.30; Juvenal, *Satires* 6.130-132; 11.172; Lilja 1972, 134; Flemming 1999, 45.
[750] Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 7.3.
[751] Juvenal, *Satires* 6.130-132.
[752] On the connection between physical and moral disgust, see Miller 1997, 179-205 and introduction, pp. 19, 23-24.
[753] Richlin 1992a, 34.

epigram, but is also found in Latin literature.[754] The most striking image used in Greek pederastic epigrams, was that of the anus as a flower, most often a rose – evoking simultaneously sight and smell.[755] The attractiveness of the *puer'*s anus seems to have surpassed that of the unmentionable vagina, and was also sensorially preferable to the *puella's* anus. In an epigram of Martial, a *puer*'s anus is a sweet-smelling, delicious, desirable Chian fig, whereas that of a woman is a *marisca*, simultaneously a cheap and tasteless fig, and a slang term for anal warts or piles.[756] Female genitalia had far more in common with the anuses of pathic males. Unlike the eroticised orifices of *pueri*, the anus of the pathic male was the focus of moral and sensory disgust. Like the vagina, it was loose, loud, and ugly, and like the vagina it expelled foul-smelling and polluting substances. In this way the anus, characterised largely by its foul odour, attested to the pathic's feminisation.[757] Indeed, in one striking image by the first-century CE satirist Persius, a pathic prostitute is described as having, instead of an anus, a 'withered vagina' (*marcentis vulvas*).[758] Men who were penetrated were deemed to exhibit a lack of control over their orifices much like that ascribed to women, and were similarly prone to foul odour.

Richlin has argued that the penis was largely immune to the polluting effects of female genitalia and anuses of men and women. Largely, this seems to be true – foul odour, one of the hallmarks of this pollution was very rarely if ever attached to the phallus, whereas orifices all seemed to be either naturally foul-smelling or prone to contracting odour due to their penetration. One fragment from the early Roman satirist Lucilius, however, seems to contradict this: 'She stains you with blood (*inbubinat*), but on the other hand he soils you (*inbulbitat*)'.[759] Paulus, an ancient commentator, explained that *bubinare,* a word which occurs only in this fragment, means 'to pollute with menstrual blood'. In this, the malodorous effluvia of both

[754] *Palatine Anthology* 12.7, 22, 30, 33, 36, 40, 204; Martial 11.58; 12.75, 96.
[755] *Palatine Anthology* 12.40; Richlin 1992a, 38. This epigram by Nicharchus evokes the image of the rosebud among the thorns, with the thorns standing in for the hairs which signalled the onset of manhood and therefore the end of the *puer*'s attractiveness.
[756] Martial, *Epigrams* 2.96; Juvenal, *Satires* 2.13; Richlin 1992a, 42, 233; Adams, 1982, 247.
[757] See *Palatine Anthology* 11.241; Catullus, *Poems* 97.1-4; Martial, *Epigrams* 6.37; Richlin 1992a, 68.
[758] Persius, *Satires* 4.35; Richlin 1992a, 189.
[759] Lucilius, *Unassigned Fragments* 1182: *Haec inbubinat at contra te inbulbitat <ille>*; Paulus ex Festo 23; Richlin 1992a, 197, 204; 2002; 169; Lowe 2013, 343; Bradley 2015b, 135

women and men seems a threat to the phallus, with the ability to defile it in much the same way that contact with genitalia pollutes the mouth.

This passage from Lucilius also indicated the equivalence which was often drawn between the anus and the vagina, and consequently between the effluvia of both orifices. The consequences of penetrating either female or male bodies are presented unfavourably by Lucilius, with the befouling nature of menstrual blood equated with that of faeces. Moreover, it suggests that there was sometimes little distinction drawn between menstrual blood and other female vaginal secretions.[760] This is a fairly unique example, but does conform to the broader cultural concept of foul female bodily emissions as a serious threat to the male body. Pliny the Elder, as discussed at length in chapter one, would write around two hundred years later of the noisome and potentially deadly effect of coitus with a menstruating woman, a claim which appears to have been rooted in longstanding folk medicine and superstition.[761] Even within medical texts such as the Galenic corpus, in which menstrual blood was deemed to be a natural product of a healthy female body, sensory revulsion directed towards this substance occasionally surfaced, and it was frequently equated with the other excretions of the body.[762] The female body was thus more olfactorily repulsive than the male, since it excreted more kinds of polluting and foul liquid, which were, particularly in the case of menstrual blood, uniquely dangerous.

Medical and philosophical ideas about the female body had many points of crossover with the preoccupations of literary invective. Odour, pleasant and repulsive, was connected to the physiology of the female body, lending a carnal significance to both sweet and fetid scent. One passage from Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, illustrates the ways in which philosophical and literary constructions of the orifices and inner workings of the female body overlap. Lucretius waxes lyrical on the ability of erotic desire to blind a man to the reality of his beloved. He encourages a typically Epicurean epistomelogical approach, urging men to seek out proof that will correct their misconceptions.[763] In one passage, a woman 'fumigates herself with foul odours'

[760] Lateiner and Spatharas 2016, 26.
[761] See chapter 1, pp. 37-38.
[762] Galen, *On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs* 10.1 (12.248-250 Kühn); Prioreschi 1998, 302; von Staden 2007, 48-49; Kazantzidis 2017, 59; Petit 2017, 60.
[763] Brown 2017, 28.

in an inner chamber of the house while outside, the stock figure of the *exclusus amator* ('shut-out lover'), perfumes the front door with amaracine and adorns it with garlands of flowers.[764]

The female body is thus mapped onto the house, and the worship and perfumes bestowed by the lover upon the entrance – either its external façade in general or the mouth in particular (the only entrance into the body which can be acceptably revealed to the outside world) – conceals its repulsive inner parts.[765] Lucretius asserts that '[the beautiful woman] does all the same things as the ugly woman does' and that if any man were to get a whiff of what is beneath the external layer of perfume and makeup, he would 'find some reasonable excuse to get out', casting all women as intrinsically (and equally) malodorous.[766] The use of the term *suffit*, literally 'fumigate' invites the reader to think of the common use of fumigation in gynaecological therapeutics, which further supports the identification between the inner room and the female genitalia, and also lends a kind of biological finality to Lucretius' assertion that such odours are an inescapable feature of the female body.[767]

The olfactory repugnance of the female body was tied to its leaking orifices and to its sexual activity. That this foul smell was so closely tied to feminine (or feminised) orifices and their effluence adds to female perfume use an explicit and explicitly damning implication: it could indicate that the veneer of perfume hid beneath it not just a generally fetid body, but specifically foul and befouling orifices. This fetid 'lower part' is reminiscent of the leaking bowels or genitals of the Harpies.[768] These monstrous women can be seen as a mythological reflection of Greco-Roman anxieties about female bodies deemed sexually unattractive, typified in *vetulae.* Like the Harpies, these women possess a ravenous appetite – for food, wine, and sex – and were polluting and rancid. While they might well be ugly, the true indication of their repulsiveness lay in the in the foul, unspeakable fluids which poured

[764] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.1170-1180; Butler 2015, 85-87. See the conclusion, pp. 224-226 for more on this and its similarities to Ovid's depiction of feminine adornment processes: Ovid, *Remedies for Love* 427-432, 437-440; Johnson 2016, 35.

[765] Richlin 2014, 175-176.

[766] Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.1170, 1180-1181.

[767] Robert Brown argues that this passage suggests flatulence rather than literal fumigation – either interpretation speaks to the unpleasant odours of female physicality: Brown 2017 29, 32, 39. See chapter 1, pp. 49-56 for odour therapies in ancient gynaecological treatment.

[768] See chapter 4, pp. 155-158.

out of their orifices, contact with which imparted a stain of pollution and permanent stench.

Naturally pleasant odours, too, carried sexual significance, and sparse examples seemed to hint at an explicit connection between these scents and female genitalia. Those sources which even hint at a fragrant female secretion only do this either through suggestive references to perfume or *unguenta*, or through partial apotheosis of the female body to something approaching the divine – hence the references to nectar and the perfumes of Venus. For fragrant genitalia to be possible, a 'real' woman must be aligned with the 'mythical'. More common than characterisations of female genitalia as fragrant were depictions of men who seem to find them so. The failure of a man to exhibit the culturally predominant sensory revulsion towards female genitalia was characterised as perverted in the extreme. Accurate olfactory perception was therefore an indispensable tool by which Roman men could maintain their manhood. The ability to detect the stench of undesirable female sexual partners, and the use of artificial scent intended to disguise this, was necessary not only to avoid the kind of unpalatable sexual encounter described by Horace, but also to defend against deception, staining and emasculation.

b. Ambrosial breath and the *os impurum*

While there are few explicit references to fragrance emanating from her other orifices, the breath or mouth of a literary beloved or sex object was frequently characterised as sweet-smelling. In one Horatian ode, the poet-speaker describes his lover Lydia's lips as 'lips which Venus imbued with the quintessence of her own nectar'.[769] This depiction of naturally sweet female bodily odour has much in common with Propertius' fantasy of Cynthia rising from her bed to greet him, and also with the enigmatic 'perfume' at Catullus' dinner party. We see once again the motif of the divine scent of the elegiac woman: Lydia has not added some cosmetic or perfume to her lips, instead they are themselves supernaturally fragrant and delicious, making her as pleasing to the nose and tongue as she is to the eye.

Fragrant breath as an olfactory manifestation of desirability appeared in Greek epigram, for instance in one anonymous epigram from the twelfth book of the *Palatine*

[769] Horace, *Odes* 1.13.15-16.

Anthology: 'the kiss was nectar, for her mouth smelled of nectar, and I am drunk with the kiss, since I drank so much love.[770] The girl's lips are both divinely fragrant and delicious, smelling of nectar (*stoma nektaros epnei*). They also invite comparison with perfumed wine, rendering the speaker drunk with love. This trope of erotic literature is used for comic effect in one scene of Plautus' *Comedy of the Asses*. The *senex* Demenetus praises the courtesan Philaenium, whose breath, he says, is far sweeter than that of his wife, Artemona.[771] The sweet scent of courtesans was, as we have seen, a common element of Plautine comedy, and here this is explicitly tied to the scent of the mouth. Artemona's kisses, on the other hand, are repulsive to her husband, who claims that he would 'rather drink vomit, if necessary, than kiss her'.[772] Unbeknownst to him, Artemona is eavesdropping on the scene, and in a typically Plautine marital confrontation, the grovelling husband is forced to claim that her breath smells of myrrh.[773] Sweet scent in Plautus once again occupies uneasy ground between reality and metaphor – as a prostitute and a young, beautiful woman, she might well be fragrant (most likely through perfume), but simultaneously her olfactory allure is a product of Demenetus' desire for her.

Martial often incorporates the motif of fragrant breath, mouths, or kisses into epigrams expressing desire for or idolisation of *pueri.* These pederastic epigrams are the only references he makes to fragrant mouths which do not also carry some other less favourable implication, once again suggesting that the young male body was, at least to Martial, preferable to the female.[774] The only exception to this is his remarkable epitaph for Erotion, a recently deceased young slave girl of whom Martial seems to have been very fond. Among an extensive list of Erotion's charms is mentioned her sweet breath, which was 'fragrant as a Paestan rose-garden, as the first honey of Attic combs, as a lump of amber snatched from the hand'.[775] The sensuality of this epigram has led some scholars to suggest that Erotion may have been a *puella*

[770] *Palatine Anthology* 5.302, trans. Paton 2014 (Loeb 67). See also: *Palatine Anthology* 12.95; Martial, *Epigrams* 5.37.
[771] Plautus, *The Comedy of Asses* 891-893.
[772] Plautus, *The Comedy of Asses* 894-895.
[773] Plautus, *The Comedy of Asses* 926-927.
[774] *Palatine Anthology* 5.118.1; 12.123.4; *Anacreontea* 43; Catullus, *Poems* 99.2; Martial, *Epigram* 11.8; 3.65.
[775] Watson 1992, 257; Martial, *Epigrams* 5.37.9-11.

delicata: that Martial's interest in and relationship with her may have been sexual.[776] The significance of odour as this chapter has explored so far would seem to lend support to this interpretation, particularly given the link Martial himself makes between fragrant breath and kisses in his pederastic epigrams.

The ambrosial breath of the sexually desirable was matched (or perhaps out-matched) in the stinking breath of the repulsive. The principal occurrence of stinking breath was in invective against *fellatores* and *fellatrices*, whose mouths were polluted by oral-genital contact. This foul breath functioned much in the same manner as accusations of malodorous genitalia or anus, that is as evidence of sexual passivity and therefore lack of social power and self-control. Martial is rife with either implications or explicit accusations of this behaviour by both men and women, and foulness of the mouth was a central characteristic of the *fellator* or *fellatrix.*[777] The connection was often implicit, with reference to halitosis sufficient by itself as proof. On some occasions the connection was explicitly spelled out, as in one epigram, in which Martial counters the claim of Zoilus that the mouths of poets and lawyers stank by noting, pointedly, that 'a sucker's mouth smells worse' (*fellatori… peius olet*).[778] Accusations of performance of *fellatio* (willing or unwilling), as well as threats of oral rape, were common in invective, both political and literary.[779] These carried implications of subjugation and submission, silencing, and, when levied against male bodies, feminisation. When such references emphasised the foul breath resulting from this behaviour, the emphasis was on the sexual perversion, emasculation, and pollution of the body. As with stinking genitalia, foul bodily odour was presented as a symptom of passive sexual activity and once again the focus was on a penetrated orifice.

The practice of *cunnilingus* was less frequently mentioned in Greco-Roman sources, but was treated as an even more loathsome, polluting aberration.[780] If, as

[776] Watson 1992, 258-266.

[777] For *fellatores* see Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12, 89; 3.28, 77, 88; 7.10; 10.22; 11.20, 30, 59, 66; 12.59. For *fellatrices* see Martial, *Epigrams* 1.94; 2.50, 73; 3.87; 4.84; 6.93; Kay 1985 137; See also: *Palatine Anthology* 11.219.2; Catullus, *Poems* 39; 97; Richlin 1992a, 144-156; Fitzgerald 1995, 63-72; Dupont 1999, 141; Moreno Soldevila 2006, 164-5; Rimell 2008, 174; Bradley 2015b, 136-137.

[778] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.30. The implication here is of course that Zoilus is one such 'sucker'.

[779] Catullus, *Poems* 28, 37, 74; Martial, *Epigrams* 4.50; Richlin 1992a, 40-46; Adams 1982, 313-314; Moreno Soldevilla 2006, 364-365; Rimell 2008, 175; Lateiner and Spatharas 2016, 26.

[780] Krenkel 2006, 282-287; Lowe 2013, 346; Lateiner and Spatharus 2016, 25-26. A particularly explicit description of the befouling nature of *cunnilingus* appears in Aristophanes' *Knights*, in which the

demonstrated above, the female genitalia that was the object of this practice was malodorous, the perpetrators of this taboo were perhaps more so. Martial is once again a rich source for such references, as in his epigram concerning the Fabullus' predilection for this practice discussed above, which suggests that the mouths of *cunnilinctores* exceeded even *fellatores* in malodour.[781] The younger Seneca twice makes reference to *cunnilingus*, in both cases emphasising the impurity of the practice.[782] In the first of these, in reference to a man named Mamercus Scaurus, *cunnilingus* was depicted as the swallowing up of menstrual blood.[783] Some discussions of this passage interpret it as a reference to a specific sexual practice or inclination, 'menophilia'.[784] Dunstan Lowe, however, argues that the inclusion of menstrual blood served to 'heighten the sense of disgust' – compounding taboos to render the practice even more despicable.[785] As discussed above, the lines demarcating the boundaries between menstrual blood and other vaginal fluids, and indeed all vaginal fluids and excrement, were often unclear and flexible, easily allowing for sensory confusion and conflation. It is little wonder, then, that Martial implies that the breath of a *cunnilinctor* was even fouler than that of a *fellator*. Since the female body was more olfactorily repulsive than the male, contact between female genitalia and the mouth – both stereotypically vulnerable orifices – was necessarily extremely polluting and staining.

While the *os impurum* of a female body exposed its sexual deviance and reasserted ideas about female lack of control, the significance for men was perhaps more damning. In allowing his mouth to be penetrated, a man was taking on the female role. In addition to becoming the object of ridicule and criticism, such behaviour seemed to physically alter the male body to make it more like the female – the *os impurum*, crucially evinced through odour, was a symptom of this physical change. One passage of Catullus provides a particularly vivid account of the emasculating physical effects of passive sexual behaviour:

character Ariphrades is credited with the invention of and insatiable desire for this practice: Aristophanes, *Knights* 1284-1289.

[781] Martial, *Epigrams* 12.85, 59.

[782] Seneca, *On Benefits* 4.31.3; *Letters* 87.16

[783] *ancillarum illum suarum menstruum ore hiante exceptare*.

[784] Krenkel 2006, 286-287; Younger 2011, 76; Lowe 2013, 343-344.

[785] Lowe 2013, 347.

> I didn't (gods love me!) think it made any difference whether I was sniffing Aemilius's mouth or his arsehole. This one's cleaner than nothing, that one's filthier than nothing; in fact his arsehole is cleaner and better, for it has no teeth… it is wide open like the split cunt of a pissing mule in heat (*qualem diffissus in aestumeientis mulae cunnus*)... Shouldn't we think any woman that touches him capable of licking the arsehole of a diseased executioner (*non illam posse putemus aegroti culum lingere carnificis*)?
>
> Catullus, *Poems* 97

This passage is a particularly vivid piece of invective describing the effects of passivity on the male body: displaced or undifferentiated orifices, loose orifices, filth, and repulsive stench.[786] Aemilius' foul, gaping, and worn-out mouth is reminiscent of the slack, stinking vaginas of repulsive women, such as that of Martial's Lydia. It is explicitly compared to female genitalia, making the reason for this description clear: he uses his mouth like a vagina, and so it has become one. Catullus takes the insult further – Aemilius' mouth/*cunnus* is that of a mare that is both in heat and urinating. Several lines later, Catullus equates touching Aemilius with intimate contact between a tongue and a diseased anus. Aemilius' mouth is now, for all intents and purposes, the worst possible version of a *cunnus:* bestial, dirty, scatological, lustful, and polluting.[787] Similar depictions of confusion between genitalia/anus and mouth in the bodies of *fellatores* can be found in three poems by Nicharchus. Central to all three of these is the intermingling of flatulence and breath, which is accompanied by a loss of intelligible speech – this can be seen as an allusion to the silencing power of *irrumatio* in legal and political invective, and thus indicates another feature of the emasculation of *fellators.* Like women, their [public] voice is taken away.[788]

With the hyperbole characteristic of the genre, two of Martial's epigrams depict the foul breath of the *fellatores* Sabidius and Papylus physically transforming luxurious and sweet smelling objects into filth: the former blows on a delicious dessert, turning it into excrement (*merda*), the latter transforms the contents of a perfume jar

[786] Compare the description of Aemilius' anus with the slack vagina in Martial, *Epigrams* 11.21.
[787] O'Bryhim 2012, 152.
[788] *Palatine Anthology* 11.241, 242, 415; Uden 2007, 18-19.

into garum by smelling it.[789] Elsewhere, Papylus is described as having a nose long enough to reach his penis, which again evokes simultaneously *fellatio* (indeed, *autofellatio*), and the primacy of odour in this sexual practice.[790] Hanna Szelest and Walter Burnikel have both suggested that these examples of the transformative nature of odour might well be directly indebted to an epigram of Lucillius, in which the foul breath of Demostratis infects anyone near her with a similar stench.[791] These explicit examples of the transformative, infectious nature of odour lend to Martial's other depictions of the foul-smelling a greater degree of unease: even if not stated outright, foul bodies in Martial posed a threat above all to the poet-speakers and the male-identified audience.

The *os impurum* appears to have posed a greater pollutive olfactory risk than the foul-smelling anus/vagina. Martial in particular seems to have been preoccupied by this threat. The anus and vagina, while perhaps disgusting, could easily be avoided. Roman social practice, however, made avoidance of contact with the *os impurum* much more difficult. Victoria Rimell, among others, has noted Martial's distaste for and anxiety around the practice of social kissing.[792] She argues that many of Martial's unfavourable representations of kisses can be read as 'sardonic allusions' to the sensuous, ambrosial kisses in Catullus.[793] Mouth-to-mouth or at least mouth-to-face contact seems to have been routine, and so the threat of the polluted/ing orifice was keenly felt. Such anxieties were only exacerbated by the centrality of odour. Martial's epigrams, among others (backed up by contemporary and long-standing medical and philosophical ideas about the functioning of odour) made clear the power of odour to corrupt and physically transform. The foul breath of the *fellator/fellatrix* lent further reach to their polluting influence, and thus made it more difficult to avoid.[794]

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[789] Martial, *Epigrams* 3.17; 7.94.

[790] Martial, *Epigrams* 6.36.

[791] Szelest 1960, 530; Burnikel 1980, 33-35; Galan Vioque 2002, 494; *Palatine Anthology* 11.240. Lucillius was a Greek writing during the reign of Nero and important influence on Martial.

[792] Sullivan 1991, 189; Rimell 2008, 19; Lateiner and Spatharas 2016, 21.One epigram lists a whole host of unappealing and malodorous kissers, crowding around an attractive youth, including a hairy farmer with a goatish kiss, and recent performers of *fellatio* and *cunnilingus*: Martial, *Epigrams* 12.59. See also: 1.94; 2.10, 12, 2.21-23, 33; 7.95; 10.22; 11.98.

[793] Fitzgerald 2007, 167-186; Rimell 2008, 131, 163, 174.

[794] Lateiner and Spatharas 2016, 21.

Given the intense anxiety in Roman erotic poetry and invective surrounding the 'staining' effect of anal or genital contact with the mouth, the odour of the breath becomes central to establishing not only the status of the body as a whole, but also the risk it posed to others – above all, to the virility and power of the poet-speaker.[795] While halitosis was therefore suspicious, equally or even more so was conspicuously perfumed breath, or, indeed, conspicuous perfume use in general. The perfumed breath of a man could be doubly incriminating: the overuse (or simply use) of perfumes, as we have seen, was in itself feminine and thus feminising, and the scenting of the breath suggested an attempt to mask the unpleasant aftereffects of passive sexual behaviour. Postumus, in book two of Martial's *Epigrams*, is thus doubly unmanned by the poet-speaker's claim that 'your kisses smell of myrrh, and you always wear a foreign scent'.[796]

Oral penetration was not the only potential cause of foul breath – other culprits could be the ingestion of particularly pungent foodstuffs such as garlic or leeks, or more commonly overindulgence in wine. Given the connection between wine and perfume in the Greco-Roman world discussed in chapter two, it is unsurprising that the two often appeared together in poetry. It seems to have been generally believed that alcohol exerted a particularly potent influence over the female body*:* the stereotype of a female mania for wine has a long and broad tradition in the Greco-Roman world across literature, theatre, and art, and appears to have had real-world consequences, for instance apparently providing the motive for a husband's murder of his wife in the early Republic.[797] Aulus Gellius similarly reports that in the days of Cato the Elder, it was the custom for women to kiss their relations in order that if they had been drinking, the odour of their breath would betray them, and that the punishment for transgression was 'no less [severe] if they had drunk wine than if they had disgraced themselves by adultery'.[798] Excessive wine consumption by women is a common criticism in satire and invective, and frequently accompanied by other

[795] See Richlin for further discussion of the poet-narrator of Roman humorous literature as a Priapic figure, as an extreme, aggressive version of masculinity: Richlin 1992a, 58-59.
[796] Martial, *Epigrams* 2.12.1; Rimell 2008, 131-132. Martial's disdain for Postumus' kisses appears in several other epigrams in book two: Martial, *Epigrams* 2.10; 2.21-23.
[797] Aristotle, *Women at the Thesmophoria* 688-764; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 6.3.9.
[798] Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 10.23.2-5.

excesses, above all sexual – in this way it can function much like perfume as an indicator of the excessive desires of women.[799]

Leaena in Plautus' *Curculio* is the epitome of the drunken old woman, appearing upon stage following 'the flowery scent of old wine', which is to her myrrh, cinnamon, rose, saffron, cassia, and ointment of fenugreek, and in comparison with which, all perfumes smell like vomit.[800] Her lustful desire for the wine, expressed in terms reminiscent of amatory or erotic poetry, has clear parallels with the reputation of such old crones as aggressively sexual.[801] She tracks the odour in search of its source, demonstrating the behaviour and sensitive olfactory powers associated with animals, kneeling down on the floor and sniffing.[802] When she finally discovers the wine and gulps it down with speed, an observer, Palinurus jokes 'I think it will rain today for sure', hinting at the woman's incontinence as a result of her bibomania.[803]

Martial's epigrams attacking Acerra, Fescennia, and Myrtale ascribe their foul odour to their copious consumption of wine.[804] While Acerra attracts Martial's scorn primarily for her overindulgence and its malodorous results, his mockery of both Fescennia and Myrtale rests above all on their woefully ineffective attempts to mask the evidence of their debauchery. Myrtale resorts to chewing laurel leaves, while Fescennia, gobbles up 'pastilles of Cosmus', tablets of perfume that could be chewed with the aim of freshening the breath.[805] Like Scapha's sweating old women, perfume only makes the situation worse when the woman lets out a belch: 'the stench smells more noxious when mixed with scented powder and the doubled odor of the breath

[799] A facet of this trope is that of the drunken woman, overcome by wine, falling asleep in a public space and subsequently being sexually assaulted, see for instance Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.766-768; *Fasti* 1.415-450; Gibson 2003, 386-387. An epigram by Hedylus of Samos from the third century BCE concerns the rape of a girl who had passed out from drinking, and whose clothes (those that she had been wearing at the time) are 'still dripping with perfume': *Palatine Anthology* 5.199.3-5.

[800] Plautus, *Curculio* 96-109.

[801] See above, pp. 193; Sharrock 2008, 15-18.

[802] See also: Plautus, *The Braggart Soldier* 1254-1260.

[803] Plautus, *Curculio* 160-1; Ambrose 1980, 451. See also Martials' Philaenis – might her implied incontinence be the result of drink? : Martial, *Epigrams* 9.66; Bradley 2015b, 142.

[804] Martial, *Epigrams* 1.28; 1.87; 5.4.

[805] This method of combatting halitosis is also attested to in Horace *Satires* 1.2.27 and 1.4.92, in which they are consumed by a man, Rufillus. Here there is no direct reference to a foul odour which Rufillus seeks to disguise: rather his excessive perfuming is contrasted with the goatish stink of Gargonius – both are risible.

reaches out further (*quid quod olet gravius mixtum diapasmate virus atque duplex animae longius exit odor*)'.[806]

Unlike the women of Cato's day, who supposedly managed to avoid detection by consuming only spiced or sweet wine, in Martial the use of perfume only served to highlight and indeed to exacerbate the rankness of the breath emanating from female bodies corrupted by wine, exposing their degenerate behaviour. Whenever Myrtale smells of laurel, you can be certain that she has been drinking, and the heavy perfumes of Fescennia's tablets simply combine with the reek of alcohol to make the odour doubly disgusting. Once again there is the motif of mixtures of pleasant scents with foul – Martial's description of the odour emphasises not only its foulness but also its increased reach beyond the body. In the context of the many other examples in Roman literature which express anxiety about the possibility of pollution or staining as a result of contact with an *os impurum*, the invasive nature of this woman's foul breath, exacerbated by perfume, is rendered even more repulsive due to the threat of infection.[807]

5.3. Degraded orifices, disordered society

Thus far this chapter has primarily been concerned with the ways in which literary constructions of foul and fragrant women interacted with Roman (or broader Greco-Roman) prejudices about the female character and body. However, the odour of the female body was also often used as a focus for commentary concerning the state of Roman society as a whole. As this thesis has demonstrated in many different ways, Roman cultural values and anxieties were often mapped onto the female body: Pliny's criticisms of female perfume use served to reinforce his claims about the deleterious effects upon Roman society and character of excessive imperial bounty, and the younger Seneca's vision of perfume-soaked Pleasure embodied the seductive appeal of the plentiful base pleasures of Roman society which could prevent his reader from leading a truly happy, Stoic life.[808] Maria Wyke's discussion of the rhetoric of adornment and the anti-cosmetic tradition has demonstrated that the female body and

[806] Martial, *Epigrams* 1.87

[807] That the odour of the female body and breath could transmit that odour to others forms the basis of Lucillius' epigram deriding the goatish stink of Demostratis, which imparts foul breath to any who smell her: *Palatine Anthology* 11.240.

[808] Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 7.3-4; see chapter 3, pp. 140.

its interaction with the paraphernalia of *cultus* was intimately connected with ideas about the 'natural' order of the sexes and the threat of its upheaval.[809]

One particularly rich source for the ways in which the stink of female depravity could rub off upon the male citizen body, or indeed Roman society as a whole, can be found in Juvenal's sixth satire. Ostensibly an attempt to dissuade his friend Postumus from getting married, Juvenal paints a grotesque picture of the many depravities of Roman women, whose actions lead to the humiliation and even, eventually, death of their husbands.[810] While the entire satire is rich in olfactory and other sensory imagery and language, one passage in particular runs the gamut of foul behaviours which characterised the foul-scented female body:

> What does your Venus care about when she's drunk? She doesn't know the difference between head and groin, she who devours giant oysters when it's already the middle of the night, when perfumes foam forth after being drenched with unmixed Falernian, when the shell-shaped perfume jar is being drunk from (*cum perfusa mero spumant unguenta Falerno, cum bibitur concha*), when now the ceiling's spinning and the table's walking around with doubled oil-lamps. Go on, ask yourself why Tullia grimaces as she sniffs the air, and what notorious Maura's foster-sister says when Maura passes by the ancient altar of Chastity. At night they set down their litters here, and here they piss and drench the goddess's effigy with long-lasting streams, and take it in turns **to** ride one another and thrust without testicles. Then they go home. When daylight has returned, you tread in your wife's urine on your way to visit important friends.
>
> Juvenal, *Satires* 6.292-313

In this passage. Juvenal concocts an olfactorily overwhelming fantasy of the activities of women attending the festival of Bona Dea. Abandoning their husbands, they gorge themselves on pungent food, gulp down unmixed wine, indulge in luxurious perfumes, lose control of their bowels, and engage in all manner of sexual

[809] Wyke 1994, 138-141.
[810] Braund 2004, 230.

perversions, including adultery, *fellatio* (or *cunnilingus*), and lesbian intercourse. Throughout, the passage is rich with olfactory imagery – the pressing of noses into groins, the consumption of fishy bivalves, the scent of neat wine mixed with foaming perfume, and the ammonia rising from urine excreted directly onto Chastity. Whether the misogynist persona adopted by Juvenal in this satire is reflective of the poet's own prejudices need bother us little here: the accusations he makes against women are consistent with the broader stereotypes about female bodies that have been a recurring feature of this chapter.[811] Although the activities and the odours themselves are by now familiar, Juvenal's debauched women are particularly notable for their social status. While the majority of the women (both foul and fragrant) discussed in this chapter have been prostitutes, mistresses, or aged erotomaniacs, the women in Juvenal's passage are wives of Roman citizens. He uses these malodorous female bodies as a means to demonstrate the social disorder of contemporary society: the bodies of these supposedly respectable Roman women are indistinguishable from the bodies of whores.

This highlights another facet of meaning tangled up in olfactory descriptions of women. Roman citizen men were expected to function as the masters of their households, and possessed considerable legal and socially-accepted control over the others within it. This was particularly true of the women in the household, whose behaviours needed to be controlled due to their naturally weaker bodies and natures.[812] The inability of husbands to control their wives' behaviour and bodies is levied against them by Juvenal as a source of humiliation and emasculation: they fail to restrain the women from overconsumption of rich foods, wine and perfumes, nor can they prevent them from engaging in taboo sexual behaviours. Powerless, they are further humiliated and polluted by the evidence of the women's debauchery – the stale urine they have left in the street – and so are literally as well as metaphorically stained by their wives' misbehaviour.

[811] Patricia Watson argues that 'the speaker is not so much a misogynist as a parody of a misogynist', and Susanna Braund interprets the satire as an attack on marriage rather than women per se, branding Juvenal a 'misogamist': Braund 1992, 86; Skinner 2005, 249; Watson 2012, 78.

[812] In reality, of course, Roman women often enjoyed considerably greater social freedom during the early Roman Empire than they had in previous generations, and indeed it seems likely that this was one of the factors which contributed to the cultural anxieties about female misbehaviour upon which Juvenal so deftly plays.

This motif is repeated some one hundred lines later, when another woman, who abandons the house to attend the gym and to be pleasured by her masseuse, keeps her dinner guests waiting and then returns late only to overindulge in alcohol and vomit profusely into a golden basin and all over the floor.[813] The upheaval of social roles which is so commonly mocked by Juvenal is clearly present here: the woman usurps the masculine role through her athletic endeavours, extramarital affairs without consequence, and absence from the house, while the husband is trapped within the house, forced, like the other guests, to await his husband-wife's return. Once again, the account is punctuated by extreme malodour and by leaking female orifices, as the wine only recently drunk makes a foul reappearance. The odour is so unpleasant that the husband has to fight against the urge to vomit as well – the odour of female debauchery threatens to unsettle male bodily control and render the husband similarly malodorous. Juvenal's image of whole groups of uncontrolled, malodorous women therefore not only calls into question the stability and control of the male body, but of the male citizen body *en masse*.[814]

Juvenal's sixth satire both encapsulates and adds to the central themes addressed in this chapter's discussion of the odours associated with the orifices of the female body. Contact with the female body, mediated through the gateways that were its orifices, seemingly transformed fragrant substances (wine and perfumes) into foul excrement (urine and vomit). Although Juvenal makes no direct reference to female genitalia, he emphasises the sexual debauchery which accompanied and added to this malodour. Like the *fellatrices* and *fellatores* of Martial, Catullus, and others, they are either immune to or actively enticed by the taboo of mouth-genital contact, and the noxious results of their misdemeanours simultaneously expose the corrupted state of their bodies and threaten to compromise the bodies of others.

[813] Juvenal, *Satires* 6.418-433.

[814] Wyke 1994, 140: 'The frivolity of today's adorned wife is opposed to the dignity of her citizen husband, and her concern for luxury is opposed to the work ethic of the state'.

5.4. Conclusion

Throughout this exploration of the scented female body, the epigrams of Martial have at every point provided rich source material, and it seems fitting to end with two of his most noisome women, Thais and Bassa.[815] These epigrams might be considered 'scent-portraits' due to their emphasis upon a detailed description of their individual [mal-]odour, consists of a *cumulatio* of things that each woman exceeds in stench:

> Thais smells much worse than an old pot of a miserly fuller recently broken in the middle of the street, or than a billy-goat newly come from rutting, or than a lion's belch, or than the hide torn from a dog from across the Tiber, or than a chick rotting in an aborted egg, or than an amphora tainted by putrid garum.
>
> Martial, *Epigrams* 6.93.1-6

> Of the smell of the bog of a dried-up pool, of the fumes of raw Albulae, of the stale air of a marine fishpond, of a sluggish billy-goat mounting a she-goat, of the boot of a weary veteran, of a fleece twice stained with sea-purple, of the fasting of female Sabbath-worshippers, of the sighing of melancholy defendants, of the dying oil-lamp of dirty Leda, of ointments made from Sabine muck, of a fox's den or a snake's nest – I would rather smell of any of these than of the way you smell, Bassa.
>
> Martial, *Epigrams* 4.4

These two epigrams are remarkable both in their overwhelming sensory imagery and for the ways in which Martial interweaves much of the olfactory coding that this chapter has identified as markers of a specific kind of female body. Scatological odour is emphasised first through reference to the fuller's broken vessel, and both this and the reference to the goat suggest that Thais is a woman past her sexual prime, whose body leaks both sweat and urine. Implicit too in this image is Thais' total lack of sexual desirability – she is no more erotically appealing than the

[815] Bassa has already made an appearance in this chapter due to her attempts to disguise her excessive flatulence: Martial, *Epigrams* 4.87; see above, pp. 203.

hairy, stinking goat to which she is compared. Bassa, too, is redolent of the rutting billy-goat, and this repetition of not only goatish stench but also the specific sexual context within which this stench is situated strongly indicates that Thais and Bassa can be counted among the ranks of sexually-active or lustful *vetulae* whom Martial regularly treats with extreme scorn.[816]

Martial's description of Bassa goes further to establish this image of the woman as both aged and repulsively sexual: she is compared both to 'the stale air of a marine fishpond' and to 'the boot of a weary veteran'. These two similes, separated only by the highly sexual reference to the billy-goat, naturally invite comparison to Martial's derogatory description of Lydia's vagina, and it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that this was a connection Martial would have expected his readers to make.[817] Thais, too, brooks comparison with fishiness, specifically with 'putrid garum' (*vitiata garo*). Garum itself was an infamously pungent, fermented fish-paste, but Martial's inclusion of the term *vitiata* suggests perhaps that this particular garum was too far gone to be palatable even to the Romans who loved it so much.[818] The reference to 'dirty Leda's dying oil-lamp' further serves to characterise Bassa as sexually disreputable: the name Leda appears frequently in Martial as the name of a prostitute, the lamp was strongly associated with clandestine affairs, and the use of the word *spurcus* ('dirty') carries with it sexual or scatological implications.[819] The dying or extinguished lamp was thought to carry a particularly potent and even dangerous odour, as discussed in chapter one, and so it is possible that this image would have evoked a sense of foreboding – perhaps Bassa is not just repulsive but an active danger to those around her.

> So that she might exchange this stench for another odour, as often as, having taken off her clothing, she seeks the bath, the deceitful woman is green with depilatory unguents or lies hidden under chalk steeped in vinegar, or is covered with three or four layers of fat bean-unguent.

[816] Chief among these points of comparison is Vetustilla, who also stinks of goat: Martial, *Epigrams* 3.93.
[817] Martial, *Epigrams* 11.21; Kay 1985, 114.
[818] Moreno Soldevila 2006, 119-121.
[819] Moreno Soldevila 2006, 119-120.

> When by a thousand deceptions she thinks she has made herself safe,
> after everything, Thais smells of Thais (*Thaida Thais olet*).
>
> Martial, *Epigrams* 6.93.7-12.

Martial's description of Thais' woeful attempts to counteract her own stench also encapsulate many of the main features of ancient perfumes and cosmetics which have been examined throughout this chapter and the thesis as a whole. The facemasks, creams, and cleansers which she piles onto her body while bathing are repulsive on a number of sensory levels – mouldy or poisonous in colour, stinking of vinegar, thick, sloppy, and lumpy in texture. Their function is similarly multisensory, aiming to improve primarily her odour, but also to make her skin smooth and hairless and grant her a pleasing complexion. They are deceptive tricks, with the aim of making her physical body reach the standards of attractiveness which might make her acceptable to Roman society, and which the nature of her body odour suggests she must be failing to achieve. Finally, these cosmetic remedies, which themselves sound very much like those proposed by Pliny and Galen and so *ought* to be effective, can do nothing to alter the thing which reveals her true nature most implacably: her odour.

The odour of the female body, when it was mentioned or implied, formed a crucial aspect of its characterisation, and could imply a range of things about that body. Above all, it served to categories women into one of three key categories: 'young woman (attractive), young woman (repulsive), and old woman (repulsive)'.[820] In addition to age and beauty, social status could factor into the odour of the female body, as could stereotypical feminine behaviour, such as erotomania, love of wine, and love of luxury, particularly in the form of perfumes. Odour was also used as a potent literary device to evoke lust or disgust, and this was often achieved through the appropriation and application of mythological precedents, and allusions to broader cultural understandings about female physiology and the diagnostic, infectious nature of scent. Perfume complicated the schema of foul/fragrant, as it held the potential to disguise one's true odour. This posed an existential threat, as odour was linked both to moral and physical filth, and had the ability to infect and pollute the bodies with which it came into contact. It is in this anxiety over the potential for staining and pollution that

[820] Richlin 2014, 70.

can be seen most clearly the connections between the literary construction of smell and medical and philosophical theories about the nature of odour and its ability to touch, invade, and physically alter the body. Simultaneously, of course, anxieties about staining and pollution were also rooted in religious belief, and the connection between foul odour, dirt, and religious pollution has been well-established since the ground-breaking work of Robert Parker on *miasma* in Greek religion.[821]

Perfume's invisibility and intangibility, so often the reason for the anxiety it causes, also made it an imperfect disguise. While it might be able to cover up signs of *os impurum* (although it frequently failed even in this), it was particularly ineffective when used by *vetulae* in an attempt to make themselves more attractive. As in the case of the eternally malodorous Thais, no amount of perfume or cosmetic remedy could (if the male poet-speakers of invective were to be believed) provide an entirely undetectable and successful disguise for the natural foulness of the undesirable female body. Olfaction and, in the same vein, the 'outing' of female bodies as malodorous by the poet-speaker, could therefore be used to categorise and control the 'real' women who populated the verses of Roman poetry. This was particularly the case in invective, in which the identification and ridicule of foul-smelling women served to reinforce acceptable gender roles, delineate the lines of acceptable femininity, and set apart those who did not conform. The ability of the male poet-speaker to sniff out the imperfect deception of perfume reinforced this power dynamic. Lucretius explicitly encourages this use of olfaction as diagnosis in his recommendation that men seek out the malodorous evidence of their beloved's flaws. In Martial's pronouncement that 'after all, Thais smells of Thais', his sensitive nose takes on a role equivalent to that of his one-eyed, all-seeing phallus in his epigram rejecting Galla, who much like Thais seeks to take control of her sensory image through cosmetic means.[822] Literary constructions of this kind, in which the perceptive poet-speaker presented himself as undeceived by the olfactory contrivances of women, exposed anxieties concerning the possible consequences of flawed senses, and simultaneously allowed for the fantasy of complete control over the female body and over odour, both of which were in much of Greco-Roman thought, inherently unstable, intangible, and uncontrollable.

[821] Parker 1983.
[822] Martial, *Epigrams* 9.37.

Conclusion

This thesis has repeatedly drawn attention to the multisensory and multifaceted nature of the female body, of perfumes, and even of odour itself. The female body, like all bodies, was and inherently multisensory artefact, experienced through the senses and itself sensing the world around it. Sensory diagnosis of these female bodies could thus rarely be conducted solely through olfaction: to perceive the body was to interact not only with its odour but also on a number of different sensory levels simultaneously. This is reflected in the many constructions of the 'attractive' or 'unattractive' female body that we have encountered, above all within Roman comedy and poetry; the beauty of the elegiac mistress rests neither just upon her visual appearance, nor the perfumes of Venus wafting from her hair, nor the softness of her limbs, but from all of these things in conjunction with one another. So too are the lascivious old women of Martial not simply foul-smelling, but also ugly, loose, and wet. The utilisation of multiple senses in the construction of the female body enabled authors to conjure up their fantasy (or nightmare) women in the minds of their audience and, like Pygmalion, bring them to life.

This synaesthetic experience of the imagined female body is amplified and made more complex by the additional elements of *cultus* – clothing, jewellery, cosmetics, and perfume – all of which manipulated the ways in which these women were perceived on multiple sensory levels. Of these, perfumes and their close relatives cosmetics, applied directly to the body that they enhanced, were perhaps best positioned to provide this sensory blending. As demonstrated on a number of occasions throughout this thesis, the two categories overlapped and intermingled, with products simultaneously able to provide colour, texture, and odour. Perfumed substances by their very nature were not only perfumes: they altered the visual appearance, texture, and even the taste of the body. In addition to this, *unguenta* and other scented products carried with them a variety of properties and associations distinct from their function as cosmetic enhancement – medicinal, poisonous, and even supernatural.

The literary potential of this for the creation of multisensory, vivid depictions of made-up women is demonstrated very clearly in Ovid's *The Art of Love*, *Remedies for Love,* and *Cosmetics for the Female Face*.[823] As Marguerite Johnson's recent monograph, *Ovid on Cosmetics*, has demonstrated, Ovid's erotodidactic focus leads him into sensual descriptions of women and cosmetic substances.[824] The poems are rife with sensory language, and women are constantly subjected to the judging, perceptive eyes, noses, mouths, ears, and hands of men both within the text and in the form of the narrator and his audience. In the midst of a description of the many supposedly acceptable ways in which women might improve their appearance, Ovid employs a range of multisensory imagery and language to trigger a visceral sense of disgust: 'who would not be offended by muck smeared all over the face, when having slipped because of its weight, it drips into a warm bosom? How the wool-grease stinks (*oesypa quid redolent*), though the oil extracted from the sheep's unwashed fleece is sent from Athens!'[825] The *faex* used as makeup ('muck', 'residue', 'sediment') suggests both dirt and unpleasant smell, and in addition to the colour of this rouge, the reader is encouraged to imagine its greasy texture as it glides over the woman's body (*fluit*), made all the more disgusting by its tepid temperature (*tepidus*).[826] The olfactory element is given particular emphasis in his description of the infamous stink of *oesypum*, which much like the *faex is* characterised as dirty (*immundus*).[827] The scene is repeated almost word for word in *Remedies for Love*, albeit supposedly for a different audience and to serve a different purpose:

> Then too, when she is smearing her face with composite potions (*compositis cum collinet ora venenis*), you should go to see your mistress's face, not letting shame hinder you. You will find *pyxides* and things in a thousand colours, and wool-grease that has melted and dripped into her warm bosom (*et fluere in tepidos oesypa lapsa sinus*). Such drugs (*medicamina*) smell of your table, Phineus; not only once

[823] On these see: Watson 2002; Gibson 2003; 2006; Rosati 2006; Toohey 2014; Johnson 2016.
[824] Johnson 2016.
[825] Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.210-214.
[826] See Pliny, *Natural History* 22.2. Here, Ovid makes use of the anti-cosmetic trope seen in Horace of the woman whose makeup has been ruined by sweat: Horace, *Epode* 12.10-12; Gibson 2003, 184. It is interesting to note that, even here, the image has an element of eroticism to it, which might be seen as a nod to the voyeuristic interest of the eavesdropping male audience.
[827] Pliny, *Natural History* 29.36; Gibson 2003, 184.

has this caused my stomach nausea (*non semel hinc stomacho nausea facta meo est*).

Ovid, *Remedies for Love* 341-356

Ovid advises the lover who wishes to fall out of love to spy on his mistress while she is engaged in making herself up, claiming that the sight and smell of the scene will seriously turn him off. Here again we have a face smeared with disgusting substances – *venenum* connoted either 'drug', 'potion', or even 'poison' – and a return of the dripping, malodorous *oesypum*.[828] The ability of these substances to transform the appearance is made more explicit in Ovid's description of containers full of many colours, reminiscent of Martial's Galla, whose face is assembled each day from materials stored at night in a hundred *pyxides*.[829] Ovid goes on to compare the odour of this scene to the stomach-churning stench of the befouled food at the table of Phineus, whose food was ruined by the reeking excrement (and menses?) of the Harpies every time he attempted to eat.[830] Ovid's use of *sucus* (juice) at line 214 highlights the synaesthesia inherent to taste and smell – what smells foul very likely tastes just as bad. Ovid's use of the term *medicamina*, which does not strictly translate to 'cosmetics', but rather to 'drugs', 'medicaments', 'remedies' implies that, in keeping with the attitude Richlin has identified in Roman literature, the raw state of the female body was considered repulsive or deficient, and in need of 'remedy'.[831]

A common reading of *The Art of Love* and *Cosmetics for the Female Face* sees Ovid posing as a champion of female *cultus*. Ovid seems to reject the reverence for the noble simplicity of the past and horror of luxury exhibited by the anti-cosmetic tradition and instead favours a middle way, in which contemporary Roman women can make full use of the techniques of bodily adornment at their disposal, just so long as they choose what is becoming (*decet*) to their individual looks.[832] However, the passages above suggest otherwise. Rather, Ovid's apparent condoning of *cultus* and its paraphernalia is above all a rhetorical exercise, mimicking what might in female

[828] Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.212; *Remedies for Love* 354.
[829] Martial, *Epigrams* 9.37.
[830] Ovid, *Remedies for Love* 355. See chapter 4, pp. 155-160.
[831] Richlin 2014, 173-174, 189. See Juvenal, *Satires* 6.471-472, who equates a female face smeared with skin creams with a wound – both are covered in *medicamina.*
[832] Gibson 2006, 125.

hands have been an empowerment discourse, while primarily catering to an assumed male audience.[833] By giving the lovesick male audience of the *Remedies for Love* and the eavesdropping men of *The Art of Love* 3 a glimpse of the nauseating processes that go into female bodily adornment, Ovid is exposing adornment as a female deception that is, despite appearances, foul in the making. Ovid uses the senses in tandem to animate the figures in his verse, and to amplify the efficacy of male diagnosis and evaluation, all underpinned by a deep-seated prejudice about what the female body should smell (look, taste, sound, and feel) like.

As this brief discussion of Ovid suggests, and as this thesis has demonstrated, odour was a flexible and potent concept that could be used as a means to say or imply a range of things about the female body. It could be used to demarcate gender, as well as to indicate the degree to which and in what manner individuals or groups conformed to or transgressed the parameters of socially accepted gender roles. As part of this, odour could be used to subdivide women into more refined social groupings – *puella, meretrix, vetula,* and so on. The implications of scent were complex and malleable. The broad strokes remained consistent across time, genre, and even between Greek and Roman sources: good odour or a lack of odour was positively valued, and bad odour negatively so. However, different sources could utilise odour in complex and sometimes inconsistent or contradictory manners. Hence the sweet floral odours of young women could in different instances (or simultaneously) suggest untouched virginity, readiness for marriage, erotic objectification, or divinity. Equally, foul odour could indicate lack of beauty, excessive consumption, abundant sexual activity (sometimes with the narrator as a sexual partner), decay, age, and monstrosity. These aspects of identity could overlap and intermingle just as nebulously as the scents themselves.

[833] Gibson 2003, 20-21. Gibson notes that such posturing had a long tradition, appearing Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.11. The motif of men eavesdropping on female erotodidactic scenes occurs literally in Plautus' *The Haunted House* 157-312, as discussed in the introduction, p. 1 and chapter 5, pp. 193-194. Ovid even feigns to encourage women to keep the processes he exposes secret, since 'there is much that it befits men not to know; most of your doings would offend, did you not hide them within': Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.229-230. This is reminiscent of Lucretius' assertion that the secret and foul practices of women would appal any lover who became privy to them: Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.1170-1184.

What odour revealed about the female body was always to a degree vague and open to interpretation – like odour itself, difficult to fully demarcate and classify. However, it was no less powerful for this. The corporeality of odour – emanating from within the body, reflecting its inner workings, obscene fluids, and the humours which determined both good health and disease – positioned it as a potent truth-teller. This is reflected in the routine failure of artificial measures by which it might be covered up. Its close connections with bodily functions and effluvia connected odour closely with both disgust and eroticism.[834] Whether real or imagined, it was able to conjure up vivid images and evoke visceral reactions.

Before moving on to my closing remarks, it seems appropriate to consider some of the key findings and themes which have emerged throughout this thesis' discussion of odour, perfume, and the female body. Chapter one established that odours could enact real, physical harm upon bodies. Odour was in ancient thought an intoxicating, erotic, revealing, penetrating, and dangerous phenomenon. The body, made up as it was of exactly those elements in which odour is generated, was potentially vulnerable to alteration, pollution, or injury by scent, in addition to the raw sensory discomfort it could evoke. The odour of others and of environment, therefore, really mattered.

Greco-Roman medicine constructed the female body as particularly sensitive to odour, and this sensitivity was caused by the very physiological characteristics which made it biologically and socially inferior; it swelled, leaked, and overflowed with liquid, and this profusion of bodily fluids, above all in the form of menstrual blood, rendered it particularly smelly. At the same time, therapies predicated upon the power of odour to alter the body and even to reorient the womb, were a widespread feature of Greco-Roman gynaecology. Such theories not only tied female odour sensitivity closely to biological sex, but also granted to odour and to the substances which produced odour potent remedial and injurious properties, properties which might alternately be thought to grant to perfumes therapeutic benefits, but also served as a reason for physicians to denounce their creation and use by those who lacked the necessary expertise. While medical theory did not, of course, equate exactly to popular

[834] See Bradley, Leonard, and Totelin, *Bodily Fluids in Antiquity* (Forthcoming).

belief, such constructions of the female body and of scent reflect broader cultural understandings, and serve to reinforce and add weight to non-medicinal constructions.

Chapter two demonstrated that, despite such concerns about misuse, and both because of and despite the power afforded to them by medical and philosophical theory, perfumes and scented products were ubiquitous throughout Roman life. Bodies, private and public spaces, religious ritual, food, magic, medicine, and death (and more) were all steeped in fragrance. The characterisation in much of Roman literature of perfumes as feminine, Eastern luxuries appears to have a foundation in social and economic reality, in that perfumes and their constituent parts were often produced in the far reaches of or even outside of the empire, were often expensive, and worn by women, but in each case their stereotypical depiction is (unsurprisingly) not the whole story – cheaper perfumes and spices that largely originated from the heart of the empire were available, and seem to have been accessible to some degree to a much broader swathe of the public, both men and women. Just as the division between perfume and medicament was an uncertain one, so to was the distinction between the many other uses of *aromata* and compound perfumes, and later chapters demonstrated the ways in which these different uses and associations of scented products could be co-opted by different authors. Above all, this chapter explored the ways in which context shaped attitudes towards perfumes: perfume applied to the body for the purpose of improving its scent was more heavily gendered and critiqued than other, more dis-embodied uses.

Chapter three moved away from the synthetic approach of the previous chapter, exploring the ways in which more in-depth investigation into the sources from which we get much of our information concerning perfume use can both complicate and enrich our understanding of the subject. Pliny's *Natural History* demonstrates the importance of authorial perspective in shaping the depiction of perfume. Pliny uses perfumes to develop his broader philosophical agenda: they were wasteful and luxurious, symptoms of a cultural invasion and of the softening of male Roman bodies and minds that accompanied and threatened imperial prosperity and stability.[835] Elements of this attitude can be seen reflected elsewhere, both in Galen's attitudes towards perfumes and cosmetics in chapter one, and in many of the depictions of

[835] Dubois-Pelerin 2008, 270.

perfume discussed in chapter five. However, Pliny's emphasis on intellectual stagnation and in particular on compound perfumes as a perversion of and insult to benevolent Nature herself, are symptomatic of his own concerns and attitudes, as is his inclusion of detailed information concerning a subject which he disdains. Pliny's repeated jabs at the frivolous excesses of women, and his depiction of male perfume use as the nadir of contemporary culture, demonstrate the ways in which perfume's associations with femininity existed independently of actual perfume use: femininity, luxury, and foreignness were inextricably intertwined both in Pliny and in many other areas of Roman literature.

Chapter four followed the incense (that Pliny had dismissed as unnecessary) wafting from Roman funerals and sacrifices up to the realm of the divine and mythological in a rich set of Greco-Roman literary traditions. In addition to the olfactory codes demarcating the spectrum of gender, wealth, culture, and so on, it explored the existence of a cosmic olfactory code that aligned the divine with supernatural fragrance and the infernal or monstrous with mephitic stench. Prominent at both ends of this spectrum were female bodies, and in both cases the odours they produced were tied closely to their femininity. Venus, the epitome of divine female fragrance, was rendered more beautiful and desirable through her scent, and made use of perfume as a gift through which others could be beautified. Conversely, the Harpies and the Lemnian women were characterised by the foul scents emanating from their bodies and arguably their genitalia. Such myths could be used to provide a cultural matrix for Greco-Roman social and cultural identity; these mythological female bodies can be seen as referents and archetypes for the mortal women discussed in chapter five, and indeed were sometimes explicitly invoked as such. Scent was a potent means of characterising the female body taken to extremes, used to either deify or demonise. Conspicuous also in this chapter is the boundary-crossing, altering, and polluting power of scent. Just as in Greco-Roman medical thought odour could, for example in the case of menstrual blood, taint the bodies with which it interacted, and just as association with perfume could enact a softening, feminising of male bodies in Pliny, scent here transgresses bodily boundaries, transforming the body for better or worse, and causes corruption and pollution. Myths concerning the creation of perfumes emphasise this transformative power, with female bodies such as Myrrha transforming

into the very substances used by women, supposedly to enable versions of the very crimes that precipitated her metamorphosis.

Chapter five moved from straightforwardly mythical women to women who were, despite nominally having real-world referents, no less fantastical. It demonstrated the ways in which depictions of the odiferous and scented female body often interwove many different associations and implications of odour, using scent to imply or compound attractiveness, age, social status, and moral character. Women were associated with fragrance or putridity in ways that conformed to stereotypes about ideal or deficient appearance and behaviour, and these odours served in turn as evidence of their nature. It explored the ambiguity as to how far the Roman female body could ever be truly 'fragrant', and the ways in which perfume served to complicate and undermine the entire system – if women could hide their defects through perfume, or else use such substances to facilitate reprehensible behaviour, then the fragrant female body was hardly less suspect than the foul. Emerging once again was the inherent femininity of perfume, and indeed of certain kinds of excessive bodily odour – when associated with male bodies, such olfactory characterisations served to characterise these bodies as failures of masculinity, as closer to female and animal than to Roman male. Perhaps most alarmingly, as indicated by Juvenal's sixth *Satire*, the perfumed female body was implicated in the destruction of traditional Roman values, of natural gender hierarchies, and of Roman society itself.

This thesis has demonstrated that any consignment of olfaction to the role of a 'lower' sense did not preclude odour from being a powerful force in the ancient imagination. Although afforded less importance in hierarchies of the senses than was given to sight and sound, odour is viscerally connected to ideas of dirt, disease, bodily functions, and eroticism. References to and depictions of odour in ancient literature are constrained by the limits of olfactory vocabulary, and are sometimes implied or evoked rather than explicitly stated, but the wealth of material in this thesis demonstrates the degree to which odour pervaded much of ancient literature, particularly in depictions of the body.

In addition to the question of odour's role as a metric of identity, and as a phenomenon which crossed boundaries, the most significant themes this thesis has encountered concern three further elements pertinent to odour's relationship with the

female body: odour's inherent ambiguity; odour as a focus and source of anxiety; and olfaction as a diagnostic tool employed in order to address these two issues. Odour by its very nature was elusive, ambiguous, and ephemeral. It occupied an uneasy position between physical contact and separation, extending far beyond the physical reach of the objects and bodies from which it emanated and penetrating invisibly and intangibly both space and bodily boundaries. It was conceived of as a force which could, in multifarious ways, exert power over the physical world, in particular the bodies and minds of others. This was most obviously disturbing in the case of unpleasant, mephitic odours, of those scents associated with disease and bodily disorder, or of those powerful scents which were thought to directly cause physical harm. However, as the perfumed or divinely fragrant female body indicates, even pleasant odours might pose other kinds of risk, and the passivity inherent to many experiences of odour might be seen as reflective of the power of scents to harm, seduce, or otherwise overpower. Odour could heal, harm, kill, pollute, seduce, repulse, dehumanise, and feminise.

The anxieties provoked by odour were redoubled when in conjunction with the female body, which was much like perfume ambiguous, fluid, and transient. As demonstrated repeatedly throughout this thesis, depictions of female odour often served as fodder for Roman misogyny, and reflected prejudices and concerns about the female body as an unstable force in need of control. Foul female odours were indicative of physical or moral failings, and pleasant odours, while preferable, were seductive and intoxicating, and sources seem deeply anxious about the power that female odour might exert: the menstruating female body in Pliny, for example, could be deadly. Artificial scent only exacerbated such anxieties. It could be used by women in order to manipulate their own odours and therefore to control a significant aspect of their perception by others. It could disguise the scents that might signal to others undesirable characteristics or even potential dangers posed by the wearer. By virtue of the other powers attributed to odours and odiferous substances, perfume could be a particularly potent form of body-modification, imparting health and potentially magical or supernatural powers of seduction, protection, or harm. Since perfume was a crucial part of the *mundus muliebris*, all of the above had the potential to distort or even invert Roman gender hierarchies, granting women inordinate and yet inscrutable control over male bodies, minds, and desires. As Juvenal's depictions of unrestrained olfactory debauchery among contemporary Roman wives demonstrates, the scented

female body could be constructed as both a symptom and cause of cultural decline and social disorder.

Many of the texts that this thesis has discussed responded to the ambivalent and anxiety-inducing nature of female odour by emphasising the ways in which olfaction could be used in the diagnosis of female bodies. Keen olfaction could provide one with the power to identify, avoid, or overcome the powers of odour, by sniffing out tell-tale signs of disease, filth, and immorality. Being able to distinguish between the 'real' odour of women and the artificial measures by which this was hidden provided the opportunity to expose and humiliate the dissembler, whilst also protecting oneself from seduction, pollution, or other forms of sensory subterfuge. However, just as artificial odour was an imperfect disguise, so too was olfaction an imperfect diagnostic tool. In Greco-Roman medical and philosophical thought, the human power and language of olfaction was deemed deficient; it could not reliably provide the kind of accuracy and precision afforded by, vision and sound.[836] The multi-layered complexity of odour made possible by compound perfumes, or by the mixing of artificial scents with unpleasant bodily odours also proved a challenge for olfactory diagnosis – hence, the perfumed old hags in Plautus' *Haunted House* reek of something which cannot be pinned down and described.[837] Indeed, while male authors take great pains to indicate that, like Martial's one-eyed phallus, they are able to see through the use of perfumes and other elements of the *mundus muliebris*, this in itself highlights the potential presence of diagnostic and perceptive failure. Ovid's account of feminine *cultus* certainly suggests this – while the making-up process is malodorous, disgusting, and artificial, the finished product is, he claims, potent and effective.[838]

This thesis has explored the ways in which the scented women that remain to us in the sources are 'made-up' by men, indeed by a fairly restricted subsection of elite, educated men. However, the Roman world was full of very real women who engaged both with the cultural discourses surrounding adornment and with the everyday reality of perfume use. Many of these women will have regularly made use

[836] Baltussen 2015, 30.
[837] Plautus, *The Haunted House* 278.
[838] Ovid, *The Art of Love* 3.217-234; *Remedies for Love* 342-344; Martial, *Epigrams* 9.37.

of perfumes and other scented cosmetics, participating in and curating their own sensory construction. The difficulty of accessing 'real' women in ancient literary sources is a well-trodden and endlessly frustrating discussion amongst feminist scholarship. Amy Richlin, Maria Wyke, and Alison Sharrock's concepts of 'reflections' of women, 'made-up' women, and 'womanufacture' respectively have demonstrated the ways in which this problem rears its head in discussions of female adornment.[839] Nevertheless, the anxiety evident throughout male depictions of perfume use allows to read into these texts some echoes of female resistance and agency: women constructed themselves in everyday life in ways which might well have interacted with male anti-cosmetic narratives. The very prevalence of perfume regalia in the material culture of ancient Rome is itself evidence that women either ignored or actively resisted such narratives, and female protests against the Lex Oppia demonstrate that Roman women could rebel against attempts to restrict or control their use of adornments.

If the controversial identification of the elegiac poet 'Sulpicia' as a female author is correct, her poem 'Sulpicia's Garland' offers an enticing possibility of female olfactory self-representation, in which the female poet-speaker depicts herself as uniquely worthy of all the feminine adornments of the *mundus muliebris*, not least of which are the finest perfumes of Arabia.[840] The poet-speaker depicts herself a beautiful, scented, lavishly adorned object, offered up for the sensual pleasure of Mars. Her self-representation is in keeping with that of an elegiac beloved or a heroine of myth, but 'Sulpicia's' depiction of herself revels sensuously in the elements of the *mundus muliebris* – elegant hairstyles, luxurious clothing, exotic pearls, and fragrant perfume – and asserts that whatever way she chooses to adorn herself is necessarily appropriate (*decet*).[841] Unlike Propertius, she seems uninterested in natural beauty, and unconcerned that adornment might tarnish her beauty, rather, it enhances her erotic appeal and grants to her a semi-divine status; she seduces the god of war, and exhorts the Muses and Apollo to sing of her in much the manner of an Achilles or Aeneas.[842]

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[839] Sharrock 1991, 49; Wyke 1994, 134; Richlin 1995; Dixon 2000, 15; Milnor 2005, 40-41; Richlin 2014, 5-6.

[840] [Tibullus], *Elegies* 3.8.1-20. On the controversy surrounding Sulpicia's identity, see: Keith 1997; Holzberg 1999; Doherty 2001, 150; Hallett 2002; 2012, 272; Keith 2006; Fulkerson 2017, 36.

[841] [Tibullus], *Elegies* 3.8.7-10.

[842] [Tibullus], *Elegies* 3.21-24; Propertius, *Elegies* 1.2.1-8. See chapter 5, pp. 183-184.

If this is indeed a female poet, this might provide a glimpse of the ways in which Roman women might interact with and resist predominantly male narratives surrounding perfumes and other adornments.

As my thesis has demonstrated, examining the ancient body and gender through an olfactory lens enables us to ask different questions and draw from the extant evidence new elements, information, and interpretations. It also invites us to explore the ways the inhabitants of ancient Rome are simultaneously familiar and yet alien. To emit odour and to make use of olfaction are fundamental to human bodily experience, and therein lies much of the fascination and value in studying the ways in which ancient writers responded to and constructed the odours infusing their lives and their imaginations. We can see within these sources the commonality of human sensory experience, which invites us to see ourselves in those writing and being written about thousands of years in the past. At the same time, this thesis reinforces what other historical and anthropological research makes clear; that the experience of and ways of understanding odour are culturally and individually specific. As such, the current sensory turn in Classics still has much yet to offer, and further exploration of the relationship between the female body and the senses will continue to enrich this field.

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