DOCTA NIMIS VISA ET FACUNDA:
WISHFUL THINKING OR SOCIAL REALITY?

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ABSTRACT

In the Apologia, a speech in which Apuleius defends himself against the charges of
magic and legacy hunting, the orator depicts his wife, Aemilia Pudentilla, as a highly-
educated woman. There are many reasons why such a portrait of his wife would reflect
favourably on the author and on his innocence of the crime of which he stands
accused. Since this speech contains the only detail we know about Pudentilla, using this
information about her as evidence for educated womanhood of her time could be
suspect, and certainly needs to be examined carefully if it is to be utilized. The essential
question which this article therefore attempts to answer is: would it have been possible,
given the period and location, for Aemilia Pudentilla to have been the well-educated
matron that Apuleius depicts for us in the speech?

A few modern works have accepted at face value the high level of education
attributed to Aemilia Pudentilla, a wealthy widow from Oea who married the
famous orator and writer, Apuleius of Madauros.1 Such authors have drawn
t heir conclusion from the portrait of Pudentilla presented in the Apologia, a
speech in which Apuleius defends himself against the accusation that he used
magic to influence this wealthy widow to marry him. Scholars from the
perspective of women’s studies, for example, are not unnaturally keen to seize
on this example as part of a larger tapestry of evidence for women’s education.
Emily Hemelrijk, in her work on educated women in the Roman world, refers
to the example of Pudentilla a number of times, specifically remarking that ‘a
surprisingly outstanding education (considering her domicile) is evident in the

1 Readers will recognize behind my Latin title Juvenal 6.445. Education has here
been taken to mean having been taught in literacy and numeracy. Scholarly
references to Pudentilla’s high level of education: Pavis d’Escurac 1974:97; Fick
case of Aurelia Pudentilla ... who was fluent in Latin and Greek both in reading and in writing.5

But is this mere wishful thinking? Other authors have expressed their doubts about using aspects of such a tendentious speech as historical evidence, particularly since it is the only source which gives any details about Pudentilla’s existence.6 In addition to any doubts we may have about the speech itself, the locality in which the events took place was a provincial backwater rather than a large city centre like Carthage or even Lepcis Magna, where learning was much more accessible.7 Whether or not the information which Apuleius gives us about the level of erudition possessed by Pudentilla can be trusted is the focus of this article. The problem has been addressed in two parts, dealing firstly with the text of the Apologia itself, and secondly with the historical and cultural setting in which Apuleius and Pudentilla lived, and against which the plausibility of the information in the Apologia on this particular issue can be tested.3

The general context and dramatis personae

It was around the middle of the 2nd century AD in the Tripolitanian town of Sahratha that Apuleius defended himself in court against the charge that he had used magic to inveigle Pudentilla, a widow for thirteen years (<Apol. 27.7>), to marry him.8 But Apuleius’ accusers were less concerned with this, although in itself a serious charge, than with his access to the widow’s substantial financial means.9 His accusers were Sicinius Aemilianus, the brother of Pudentilla’s

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5 Hemelrijk 1999:27. Although it may be inferred from the context, there are no specific indications in the speech that Pudentilla could speak Greek fluently or that she had any proficiency in Latin. This will be discussed further below. See also other references to Pudentilla in Hemelrijk’s work pp. 200, 204, 205. On the motivations of scholars keen to use Pudentilla as an example, see Hunink 1998:275.
8 The speech may not be a literal version of what was said during the actual trial; see Hunink 1997:4, 25-27; Harrison 2000:42-43.
9 The number of years of widowhood vary slightly according to what is convenient to the speaker: thirteen years at 27.7; about fourteen at 68.2 and fourteen at 85.5.
10 The accusations against Apuleius are listed by himself at 67.3-4. While Hunink 1998:284-85 advises caution regarding the exact facts and figures provided by Apuleius on Pudentilla’s estates and general wealth, there can be no doubt that Pudentilla was a very wealthy woman in her own right, since this seems to be the underlying reason for the court case in the first place. Since the real basis of the
deceased husband, as well as her surviving son by her first marriage, Sicinias Pudens. Allied with them was Herennius Rufinus, who (according to Apuleius) hoped to remarry his daughter, recently widowed by the death of Pudentilla’s eldest son, Pontianus, to Pudentilla’s second son. At the time of the trial all the parties concerned resided in the nearby town of Oea. The case was heard before Claudius Maximus, proconsul of Africa Proconsularis in 158/9. Our single source of evidence for this entire event is Apuleius’ own defence against these charges, a speech known as the *Apologia or Pro se de magia.*

The references to Pudentilla’s erudition

It is in this context that Apuleius weaves an expansive and complex portrait of his wife, never actually making a direct statement that his wife was highly educated, but building up the image by a variety of references.

The most important testimony to Pudentilla’s level of education is a letter written by herself to her son, Pontianus (*Apol. 82.83*), in Greek. The letter has already been used by the prosecution for their own case, and Apuleius first refers to it at 30.11, and later quotes from the letter. The quality of the Greek is praised by Apuleius, and from the short passage which Apuleius quotes, Pudentilla is made to reveal a sense of irony which is disclosed by the full context, instead of the single line raised by the prosecution:

\[\text{νέν δὲ ὃς κατ' ἐγώμας ἥμισυ κακοθέης σκ ἀναπληθοῦσαν, αἰσθήθην ἐγώ καὶ Ἀπολείπον μάγος, καὶ ἐγὼ μεμάγκομαι ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔρχομαι ἐκ ἐκείνης πρὸς ἐμαύρων, ἐχθρῶν ἑαυτῶν.}\]

charge is Apuleius’ access to the widow’s money, Apuleius would in fact have every reason for downplaying Pudentilla’s wealth, which is attested on several occasions. On the relative wealth of the Sicinii and Pudentilla, cf. Pavis d’Escarce 1974; Fick 1992:30-31; Gustfeld 1992, although the information in the *Apologia* is taken rather literally by all three.

8 Not a town of particular distinction, the three main Tripolitanian towns of Lepcis Magna, Sabratha and Oea were of Punic origin and relatively less Romanized than the main towns of Africa Proconsularis: Bénabou 1976:540-41; Martingly 1994:58-61.

9 Claudius Maximus is mentioned by name in the speech, and it has been established that he did his tour of the province in this year (Guey 1951; Syme 1959).

10 For the purposes of this study I have used Hanink’s text (1977) and the translation by Butler (1970). A team led by Stephen Harrison is preparing a new translation of the *Apologia, Floridus* and *De dos Soratius.*

But now that certain ill-natured persons have brought accusations against us and attempt to dissuade you, Apuleius has suddenly become a magician, and has bewitched me to love him. Come to me then, while I am still in my senses. 

(Apol. 83.1)

In praising the quality of Padentilla’s Greek, Apuleius remarks that it is too elevated for the comprehension of her in-laws, the Sicini (Apol. 87.2-3). Apuleius claims that another letter, allegedly written by Apuleius to Padentilla, has been forged by the Sicini because it is in such poor Greek that it could not have been written by himself. Naturally Padentilla’s Greek would pass over the heads of those whose Greek was so very definitely below par! The letter from Aemilianus to Pontianus, which is also read out in court, had been written in Latin (Apol. 70.1), and earlier on Apuleius was also careful to mention that he had noticed that Tarromanus Pudens, acting for the prose-cution, had been unable to read Padentilla’s letter because it was written in Greek (Apol. 30.11). The Greek correspondence is an indication that mother and son, husband and wife, corresponded in Greek, since even if the latter missive were forged, the family must have had some basis for thinking that they wrote to each other in that language. Since it was the custom for the Roman élite to write letters in Greek or to sprinkle their correspondence with Greek words and phrases, the obvious inference which Apuleius wants his audience to draw is that Padentilla was a woman of superior education and high social standing.12 It is also emphasized that Apuleius and Padentilla were singular among their peers in Africa to be this familiar with Greek, since knowledge of this language is scanty or non-existent among their accusers.13

There are a few other references to Padentilla’s learning. Apuleius mentions that he assisted Padentilla and her younger son Pudens in their studies: Non nihil a me in communibus studiis advenitur ... (I gave them some help in our common studies ..., Apol. 73.1). Hunink suggests that in communibus studiis here refers to either the studia litterarum mentioned at Apologia 5.1 or the studia liberalia mentioned at Apologia 28.9 – literature, philosophy, but probably not rhetoric.14 The latter would have been of less use to a woman, and in any

13 On Greek taught as part of the education of the élite in the African provinces, see Visser 1997:469-76.
case we have evidence only of Pudentilla's interest in Greek letters. If it had been Apuleius' intention to play down his influence over Pudentilla, to emphasize his role in her education would not, it seems, serve his purpose. Perhaps Apuleius wanted to invoke the image of the husband-as-mentor, as exemplified in Pliny's relationship with Calpurnia (Ep. 8.10 and 8.11), suggesting the type of marriage, so common in antiquity, where the husband's seniority in years reinforced a paternalistic attitude towards a young wife.\(^{15}\) In this way he could also play down the age difference between himself and his older wife.

There is also a reference to the fact that Pudentilla's younger son, Pudens, spoke only Punic, knew no Latin and only the Greek he had 'picked up from his mother' (\textit{et quid ultra a matre gravisius, \textit{Apol.} 98.8). This implies that Pudentilla had some influence in teaching her sons Greek before or beyond Apuleius' influence. Although it is possible that Pudentilla spoke Greek on a daily basis, it seems more likely that she was taking an active part in the education of her son.\(^{16}\) A Greek education preceded the teaching of Latin to young children, and it was considered quite normal for a young child to speak only Greek for a time (Quint. 1.1.12-14).\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) It is apparent from the ancient sources that Roman men did not appreciate too much learning in a woman. Although Junuvenal's scathing condemnation of female pretensions to learning (Sat. 6.451-56) may be attributed to the satire genre, other sources also reveal a prejudice against a manifestation of learning in women (Hermelink 1999:17 has a number of examples). Traditionally a Roman woman was expected to complement her husband, not surpass him, and in this spirit Pliny was satisfied to have a wife with enough education to appreciate his own talents (Ep. 4.19.2-4), and Ovid felt that a little learning gave a woman altutate (\textit{Ars amant.} 3). It is therefore unsurprising that the husband-as-mentor predominates in women's later education. From the African continent, Augustine in the 4th century saw the ideal wife as one who was either educated, or malleable to some further learning at the hands of her husband (\textit{Lettera iuventutis, vol quae etsi to facile possit erudiri}, 5thbd. 1.10.17). Harris 1989:314 infers from Augustine's remark that as Augustine's social level a woman of marriageable age would be illiterate, but this seems to me to be an over-interpretation.

\(^{16}\) Pudentilla's interest in the education of both her sons is indicated elsewhere in the text (87.8) and it is likely that she paid the expenses of Ponticianus' education in Athens and Rome (72.3; 69.5); cf. Halinik 1998:278 n. 4. For a knowledge of Greek in Tripolitania, see Millar 1968:130-31; Pavis d'Escurac 1974:97-98; Fick 1987:285-96.

\(^{17}\) On Greek studies for Romans, cf. Barclay 1959:178-82; Clarke 1971:14; Opeku 1993: 33. Griffiths 1975:61-62 argues plausibly that Punic was the tongue of Pudentilla and her sons, who then learned Greek before Latin. See also the reference to Mariana's educational role in the life of Fulgentius, below n. 47.
Pudentilla does not only display the fruits of a literary education. We are also told that she had actually augmented her son’s inheritance left them by their paternal grandfather (Apol. 70.6). More detail about her business and financial abilities is given later, when Apuleius mentions her control of her estates, in which she herself, we are told, supervised the accounts of the bailiffs, and was so proficient in this that she actually made additions to the family fortune (som rationaliter villanum et aquilonum et equinum sollicitius sub-rectrix, Apol. 87.7). This implies at least some education in arithmetic, presumably beyond that of being able to do a few ‘household accounts’, advocated some centuries earlier by Xenophon for the ideal spouse.19

Plausibility and reliability

This is then the essential information which must be evaluated. A cautious approach to these remarks for the purposes of historical evidence seems advisable. Scholars are divided on the issue, some, like Pavis d’Escurac, Fick and Guttsfeld using the text as an historical document, while others, such as Fairham and Hunink for the most part taking a more sceptical approach. Hunink concludes his article on ‘the enigmatic lady Pudentilla’ with the caution that her portrait is ‘stylized according to rhetorical and literary patterns’ and that ‘modern scholars should be very wary in using the Apology as evidence for their theories about Pudentilla’.20 In his 2000 article Bradley is critical of Hunink’s cautious approach to the use of the speech as historical evidence, but Bradley’s earlier paper is itself a clear indication that Apuleius cannot be trusted on every point, no matter how well argued.21

While some elements may seem to be beyond dispute – for example the letter that Pudentilla wrote to Pontianus, which is produced in court –

21 Bradley 1997:208-12; 2000:218 n. 5. In the speech Apuleius at some length denies the magical uses of fish (Apol. 29-43). Bradley 1997:212 points out that Apuleius’ contention is ‘certainly suspicious’, given the amount of evidence from antiquity that fish were used in the context of magic, something which Apuleius, who displays a great deal of knowledge on the subject, would surely have known.
nothing can really be certain. We do not know, for example, that Apuleius himself did not assist Pudentilla in its composition, or even, as Fantham suggests, that he tampered with its contents afterwards.22 Many scholars feel that the speech has a measure of plausibility, and hence reliability, since it seems likely that Apuleius was acquainted – he subsequently went to live in Carthage and continued with a political career.23 But plausibility must be seen in the context of what was credible firstly to Claudius Maximus, Apuleius’ judge and the learned guide of Marcus Aurelius (Med. 1.15), and secondly to those who were present in court.24 Presumably outside of Apuleius’ accusers (who would be expected to contradict anything Apuleius had to say) there was no one present who was intimately acquainted with Pudentilla. It also seems doubtful that Pudentilla herself was present in court, not so much because of the medical details which Apuleius reveals, but rather, I would think, because of the unflattering picture he paints of his wife’s lack of physical attractions (Apol. 73.4-7; 92.8). Apuleius may have advised against her presence, or perhaps conservative provincial attitudes played a role here, since Apuleius’ witness, Capitolina, was also not present in court but represented by her son (Apol. 62.1), and Apuleius also acted for Pudentilla in her case against the Granii at Lepeis (Apol. 1).25 Whatever the reason, Pudentilla’s

22 Fantham 1995:227: ‘Were these her own words? It is not beyond our clever advocate to have concocted this version of Pudentilla’s letter, with or without her cooperation, to invalidate the document displayed by his enemies.’ Fantham does, however, proceed on the assumption that the letter is genuine. In one of his letters, Quintus expresses scepticism that the wife of Pompeius Saraninus, who was said to write exceptional letters, was really their true author (and even if she were, the credit should go to her husband for his cultivation of her) (Ep. 1.16).
23 For example, Bradley 1997:203, who assumes Apuleius’ acquittal because of the ‘rhetorical and stylistic brilliance of his speech’. Cf. Fantham 1995:229: ‘Although Apuleius’ portrait of Pudentilla’s circumstances cannot be entirely trusted, it must have been plausible enough to convince the local community.’ Again, Bradley 2000: 217 n. 3: ‘the essential facts about Pudentilla ... have to be at least plausible ... otherwise how could Apuleius expect to convince his judge when on trial?’ Pudicitia of the speech seems to be the clearest indication of Apuleius’ acquittal; cf. Harrison 2000:43.
24 See Bradley 1997:213 on this point.
25 Pudentilla also had a tutor, Cassius Longinus, for legal purposes (Apol. 101). As legal minors, women were traditionally not able to represent themselves in court (Marshall 1989; Gardner 1986:165). During the late-first and early-second century AD, however, Pliny (Ep. 4.17, 7.6; 3.9; 3.11 and 9.13) tells of women in Rome bringing cases and, in the last two letters, of appearing in court as witnesses. Legal sources mention a number of similar cases which indicate that women were increasingly becoming active participants in, rather than passive subjects to, the law
absence from the proceedings must weaken the case for plausibility when Apuleius presents details about her life.

**Apuleius’ ulterior motives**

Apuleius clearly could have ulterior motives in showing Padentilla to be a well-educated woman. It is in Apuleius’ interests to show his wife as rational (as opposed to bewitched) and independent (as opposed to under his influence). Such a serious (gratia, 70.2), studious matron as he defines for us is unlikely to be equated with the woman who married under the influence of passion, whether induced by magic or by any other means of seduction, and by depicting Padentilla as a woman of sound judgement in business and financial matters, he further emphasizes her rationality. The more Apuleius reveals his wife as a member of an educated elite, the further he draws her from the world of the masses and their ignorant magical practices, and reinforces the fact that for women, as for men, education was one of the routes to autonomy and independence.26

Apuleius is intent on showing that Padentilla is a cut above the rest of her family, and in fact intellectually more closely aligned with himself. Bradley has already convincingly argued that Apuleius uses oration to create an alliance between himself and his judge, Claudius Maximus.27 Conversely, the ‘dumbing down’ of his accusers as country bumpkins is also not mere rhetorical invective used to discredit his opponents.28 The large number of references to Greek language and literature in the *Apologia* is not an indication of Apuleius’ preference for the Greek over the Roman Latin, but a means to distinguish between the ‘country cousins’ who knew no Greek, and the sophisticated urbanites, who did.29 While the Apuleius-Claudius Maximus link is undoubtedly

(see Paull, *Dig* 22.5.3.5; 22.5.4; 22.5.18). Legal prohibitions were therefore not necessarily the cause of Padentilla’s absence. Hunink 1997: II, 216 suggests that it is because ‘Padentilla’s place is in the countryside, not in the forum’, as Apuleius implies at 88.4, but this seems to be too literary an interpretation.


27 Cf. Bradley 1997:212-13. *Apuleius based his defence not on the truth, but on the establishment of a common intellectual identity with his judge, the only figure after all he needed to persuade.* Also Brown 1992:35-70; Fick 1987:292, especially for the defer-erant’s use of Greek to create a bond between himself and Claudius Maximus.

28 There are a number of purple passages of rhetorical invective, for example on Stilbius Aemilianus as a boorish rustic: *Apol. 10.6; 16.7; 22.3; 23.6; 36.7; 66.3-8; 91.1.*

29 Note here Opekšu’s conclusion that Apuleius was instrumental in ‘replacing Greek
the most important one, I would argue that at another level it is also Apuleius’ aim to align Pudentilla with himself in this little cocoon of elevated superiority, and to distance her from the family of her deceased husband, and even from her own son. To Claudius Maximus the concept of a well-educated woman would not have been unfamiliar, since as a friend of Marcus Aurelius he would surely have known, or known of, the emperor’s mother, Domitia Lucilla (whose proficiency in both Greek and Latin are known to us through Fronto’s letters), or women like her in his own circle.30 Claudius Maximus was meant to see Apuleius and Pudentilla as a unit under persecution by ignorant locals who wanted precisely what they accused Apuleius of – Pudentilla’s fortune. Base motives, it is implied, sit more naturally on base persons.

There is yet another reason why Apuleius would emphasize an intellectual link between himself and his wife, which would be to minimize or deflect attention from the disparity in their socio-economic status, a point which had already been addressed by the prosecution, and to which Apuleius returns a long defence of his lack of fortune and his origins (Apol. 17–24).31 Bradley points to the language in which Apuleius addresses Claudius Maximus as an intellectual as well as a social marker, ‘since learning on this scale could only be the preserve of the socially and economically advantaged’.32

with Latin as the language of higher education in the Roman world’ (1993:32), and Bradley’s argument that he ‘draws a firm distinction between Greek achievements and those of the Romans, and it is with the latter that he firmly positions himself’ (2000:231–32).

30 Fronto, Epišt. Gen. 1 and 2. From Juvenal’s cynical comments (6.448–56) such well-educated women were known at Rome. Cf. Henkelijn 1999 for individual highly-educated women of the 2nd century AD, e.g. Julia Balbillilla, Julia Domna and Matidia the Younger.

31 For a socio-economic review, cf. Paris d’Escurac 1974:95, for Apuleius’ social status: Gutfeld 1996:260–61 and Fantham 1995:222–25. Pudentilla’s family did have at least one later political figure: L. Aemilius Frontinus (JRT 230), who was probably a kinsman of Pudentilla, became consul in the 160s. Of the Scaev, L. Scaevus Pontius and Q. Scaevus Clatus Pontianus attained senatorial status, the latter becoming governor of Thrace at the beginning of the third century (Guerry 1954; Corbier 1982: 727–28 proposes the late-second century for the first senatorial Scaevus). Pudentilla was undoubtedly a member of the local elite. She donated 50,000 sesterces to the town on the occasion of her elder son’s marriage; typical liberatix of that class. Dedicatory or honorary inscriptions show that there are many instances of liberatix by women of Roman North Africa; from Tripolis-eia six women are known CIL 8. 23 (JRT 746); 22695 (I.L.T. 21); JRT 91; 370.71; 587 and 632; 707.

32 Cf. Bradley 1997:216. Apuleius is able to say in the Vindola (8) that, while only a few men could be senators, even fewer were noble, fewer still consular, fewer virtuous and fewer studiit or learned, a rather subjective statement in which he qualifies
Finally, Apuleius also uses Pudentilla’s education to enhance the image of the ideal Roman mother and nurturer. A Roman woman’s education traditionally had the vicarious worth of passing on something of the Roman values in the early formative years of her sons. Since Apuleius is in essence being accused of fortune hunting, it is important for his defence that there should be no doubt about the role of Pudentilla as a devoted mother, and hence no doubt about the inheritance of Pudentilla’s son. A heavy emphasis on the ex-cellence of Pudentilla’s motherhood, also as an educator (Apul. 98), would make it seem less likely that she would disadvantage her remaining son in favour of her new husband.\textsuperscript{13} So much, then, for Apuleius and his ulterior motives.

**Learning in Tripolitania**

Not a great deal is known about the town of Oea, but it was certainly inferior to the nearby town of Lepcis Magna in status, size and sophistication.\textsuperscript{14} The image which Apuleius presents of Pudentilla’s unsophisticated relatives seems better suited to a small Romano-Punic community of little renown than the image of the well-educated widow. Hemelrijk’s expression of surprise that such a high level of education should be evident in a woman living in a small African town indicates that this was unexpected, though not unwelcome. Lepcis Magna, the largest and most Romanized city in the area, where one may have expected to find evidence of educated women among the elite, was the birthplace of Septimia Ocatilla, the sister of Septimius Severus, who lived about half a century after Apuleius’ trial. We are told in the *Historia Augusta* that she embarrassed the emperor when she visited him at Rome ‘since she could scarcely speak Latin’ (*sic Latina loquens*, SHA Srv. 15.7). This source is in itself a controversial one. It is possible that the author wanted to get in a dig at the emperor’s provincial origins through a reference to his sister, since he gives other African aspects of Severus.\textsuperscript{15} But Spartanus also tells us that the emperor himself among the few at the top by virtue and education rather than birth and wealth. On education and social rank, see also Hopkins 1991:142-44.

\textsuperscript{13} Hunink 1996:289 points out that at 68.3-6 Apuleius invites a comparison between Pudentilla and Penelope by painting the former as a mother who, to save her sons’ inheritance, procrastinates in fulfilling the contract of marriage to Scinius Clarius: ‘It is significant that in the age of Apuleius the mythological character Penelope had become a symbol of philosophy and wisdom’ (my emphasis).

\textsuperscript{14} On Oea see Martingy 1994:122-25.

\textsuperscript{15} He also mentions, for example, that Severus spoke with a native or Punic accent till late in life (*... canone sua, sed Afrum quidam scopo ad equitantem rovam*, SHA Srv.)
was in prima puertilis, praequem Latinis Graecisque imbuendus, quibus eruditiorem fuit (‘while still a child and before he had been drilled in the Latin and Greek literatures, with which he was very well acquainted ... ’, SHA. Ser. 1.6). It seems odd that the sister of one who was so well educated in Greek and Latin would be ignorant of these languages, and since Spartianus does credit Septimia Octavilla with some Latin, an indication that she shared in the education provided for her brother, we are possibly dealing with some bias or exaggeration on the part of the author here.37

**Education in the Roman African context**

The Roman African context provides a number of other indicators for the education of women, both as far as the general cultural milieu is concerned as well as in giving us specific examples of female education.

Africa produced a number of men of letters, of whom Apuleius himself was one. Writers such as Pronto, Arnobius of Sicca, Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Florentinus and Augustine often praised their native province for this characteristic.38 But these patriotic accolades cannot be taken as an indication of the excellence of Roman education in North Africa, certainly not for the period in which Apuleius and Padertilla lived. We know that Apuleius, like Padertilla’s elder son Pontianus, and so many others, left Africa to study elsewhere, since the quality of African education was not considered to be comparable with that of Athens and Rome.39 What these eulogia do indicate, however, is how

19.9-10) and sneers at his African superstition about dreams (SHA. Ser. 19.10; Cato 2.6).

36 Also Aurelius Victor: *oror multe humuli, praeem litteras, debite imbutae fore* (‘born into a fairly humble station, Severus was schooled first in letters, then in law’, Upid. de Cass. 20.28).

37 Cf. Fantin 1995:223; Bradley 2000:219. Birley 1988:132 believes that it is possible that Octavilla’s husband was a Greek speaker, and that it is quite possible that Octavilla knew Greek, even if her Latin had become rusty through lack of use – a possibility, certainly, but unsupported by any actual evidence.

38 For example, Augustine, *De al. ord. 7.16-17.* For African attitudes to education generally, see Marrou 1956:294; Opeda 1993:34.

39 Apuleius describes his home town of Madauros as being a provincial backwater (*Apul. 24.1; Flor. 20*) which he left to acquire an education (*Flor. 9; 18.15-16*). In *De al. ord.* (22) he is rather scathing about the Carthaginians’ level of education, although his flattery of the city when he addresses an African audience is naturally falsoine (*Flor. 20*). Fronto addressed a letter written in Greek to the emperor’s mother, Domitila Lucilla, which he requested Marcus Aurelius to read first to check

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important such an education was held to be in the eyes of local elites.

It is the status-conferring element of education that has given us most of the
evidence we have of women’s education in Roman Africa. The display of
learning was something usually advertised by the upwardly mobile, since
traditionally it was something to which only the elite had access.49 This would
have applied to a lesser extent to women, and would explain why we
occasionally see women displaying the insignia of education despite the fact that,
in thus attending to their own fulfilment and achievements, they were running
counter to the Roman ideal of the matrona devoted to husband and family.46 It
is, of course, true that recording the education and intellectual accomplishments
of women was of less interest to ancient writers and commenatorators than the
same achievements of men. It is also not surprising that nothing of the letters
written by women such as Pudentilla remains – since women’s virtues were
defined by society as modest and retiring, to have a private letter of a woman
published would have brought shame on her family.47 In view of these
limitations, the evidence collected on the following pages is quite significant.48

his Greek (Ad Fl. Caes. 1:8:7). While it is possible that Fronto was being politely
differential in writing that his provincial Greek education was inferior to both that of
Domitila Lucilla and Marcus Aurelius, by the 4th century Augustine, growing up in
his native Thagaste, was to be taught in the Latin authors, but his instruction in
Greek was very limited indeed (Conf. 1:12:20), cf. Cornìés 1927:4-6, Marsou 1958:28-37.

41 In the Roman world in general, even though we cannot establish how common
education for upper-class women was, the number of funerary reliefs, frescoes and other
illustrations of female literacy do seem to indicate, as pointed out by Harris (1994:252),
that ‘some literary education was thought to be desirable for a woman of good family.’
For the view that education was more important where there was a desire to distinguish
between the barbarian and the Romanized elite, see Harris 1989:136.

42 Two famous Pompeian wall paintings of women with the insignia of learning are
well known and can be viewed in Hemelrijk 1999: plates 2 and 3.

43 In court Apuleius rebukes his accusers for quoting from Pudentilla’s private letter
to her son in public as against ‘common humanity’ (saltem humanita) and against
‘decency’ (philone, Apol. 84:15). Only incidentally do we hear of women writing
letters and only by the merest chance do unpublished letters ever survive.

44 Generally cautious about women’s education, Harris 1989:252, 330 estimates
women’s literacy in the provinces as low as 5%. The general point of Horsfall’s
argument (1991) is that the scarcity of the evidence in the case of the poor is no
argument for their illiteracy. The argumentum ex silentio is used by Pomeroy 1977:54
for women’s education generally. Bowman 1991:120 maintains that we should be
‘wary of the assumption that what we have is all there can be.’ This is also the basis
for the assumption of Vössing 1997:479, that since there is chance evidence for the

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The education of girls

The education of sons was of primary importance for provincial élites, since this was a condition for membership of their class and upward mobility, but there were also some motivating factors for the education of girls. Firstly, in Roman Africa there may have been a Punic precedent for the education of daughters of local élites, since we are told of Sophonisba, the daughter of Hanno the Great, who had received an excellent literary and musical education (πολλή ἡ γυναῖκα καὶ γραμματεύτης και μουσικής ἰδεατή). If this was the case, it may well have given extra emphasis to the Roman tradition as it developed in Africa, and we know that Paduntilla herself lived in an originally Punic community with Roman overtones. From the side of the Roman tradition the Roman mother was expected to play some role in the education of her children. For Paduntilla’s educational role in her sons’ early lives, there are no contemporary Roman African references, barring two rather unspecific mentions in epitaphs, one referring to a woman as adiacatrix of her sons’ daughters and grandchildren (CIL 8.20913) (where adiacatrix is usually interpreted as a general ‘bringer-up’ rather than an educa-tor per se), while another, found near Cirta, praises a mother who filius renovat bene, ‘advised her sons well’ (AE 1966, 639). A secondary, but equally likely-ized, consideration

education of some girls, most girls of the élite class in a city like Carthage commonly enjoyed an education.

38 Only Dio Cassius mentions (17.54) that she was well educated in the arts and music – the earlier sources for this episode of African history (Polybius, Livy and Appian) do not mention this aspect at all, which makes the evidence less reliable.

39 See Bradley 2000 on the Punic characteristics revealed by the Apologia.

40 The ideal of childhood learning from their mother is spelled out in Tacitus’ Dialogus de infinito (2.84) and exemplified in Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, singled out by Quintilian (I.O. 1.16.6) and by Cicero (Inst. 27; 58). On the role of Roman mothers in the education of children, see Barlow 1959.150-57; Hemelt 1999.64-71.

41 From the 4th century there are two literary portraits of mothers involved in their sons’ education, particularly in the later stage, in the manner in which Paduntilla may have financed Pontius’ education abroad: Augustina’s mother Monica gained the financial support of a local benefactor, Romananus, to continue Augustina’s education after the death of his father (Conf. 3.4 and Contra auq. 2.3). The Christian bishop and writer Fulgentius, who was born in the city of Thubet, was as a child made to learn Greek literature (before Latin) by his mother, Mariana (U/r 1996, 1). There was another purpose to female education, which was to enable a woman to earn a living: an inscription dating from the middle of the 2nd century (AE 1994, 1903) records the first grammatica in Roman epigraphy (see Agneta-Bodart & Bourbon 1996, Roller
for the education of daughters was the view, expressed by Plutarch, that a wife occupied with study would be diverted from ‘unsuitable conduct’ (τὰ ἄμεια) and frivolity (Consp. praece. 145c-d). These are certainly connotations which Apuleius would hope to associate with the learned Pudentilla.

Such ideals would theoretically have enhanced the possibility of education for daughters of local elites, who as young children would have shared in the facilities created for their brothers. In this way they were probably taught much of the same material, that is to say the traditional curriculum for boys mentioned above, literature and perhaps philosophy. Most fair-sized cities in Roman Africa had facilities for elementary education to which children of both sexes could be admitted if their parents had the means, or if they were otherwise sponsored. A chance reference indicates that girls in schools were no novelty to Apuleius: in the Medeaformae (9.17) he mentions the wife of a baker who as a girl had gone to school with another girl, who was now the wife of a decurion. A tombstone from Ammaedara tells us that Julia Paula, who died at the age of sixteen, had ‘exceeded all other girls in her conspicuous learning’ (sane seculi spee doctrina praece, IL.-A. 158), which also seems to imply public schooling and the presence of other girls. The word doctrina used here specifically refers to a level of acquired learning rather than the more natural state of intelligence ( Sapientia is more commonly attributed to girls whose fond parents found them wise or intelligent).

There is also another medium confirming such pride in the

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2003:257), although she was not a member of the local elite.

80 This is expanded upon in Hemelrijk 1999:60-64.


82 We know from Augustine, for example, that Thagaste had an elementary school, as did Madaraus (Conf. 1.13.20, 2.3.3). On the presence of girls in schools during the Roman period generally, see Harris 1989:240), who is sceptical about there being very many. Girls were sometimes included in sponsorships by wealthy citizens, for example in Lycia, where a wealthy patron provided funding for the education of boys and girls in the mid-second century AD (SEG 30.1980, 1333). The closest African equivalent is a patron of Sica Vereina, the proconsul P. Lúciánius, who left money of which the interest was to be used for the upbringing of 300 boys from three to fifteen years of age and 300 girls between the ages of three and thirteen (CIL 8.1641), but education is not specifically mentioned.

83 See discussion in Vissing 1997:204-05, who dismisses the significance of doctrina on the basis of a reference to her abilities in spinning and singing. These traditional female occupations do not necessarily preclude a literary education, even though this

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education of young girls. In a sarcophagus relief from Theveste the literary aspect is the single most significant personal aspect of a portrait of a young girl, who holds a scroll in the left hand, while more scrolls are shown tied together on the floor.\[^{10}\]

While such evidence supports the idea that girls were sometimes included in the initial phases of education in the more advanced stages of education women are mentioned very rarely, since by the time boys continued their education by attaching themselves to an established orator, possibly in Carthage or outside Africa, most girls were respectively married. It is possible that women who married later had a better opportunity to avail themselves of formal schooling than those who married at fourteen,\[^{11}\] and, in fact, in Roman Africa women on average married at a later age than in Rome itself.\[^{12}\] Vibia Perpetua, for example, who married at the age of 18 or 19, was appa-rently very well educated, and it is to such examples of educated womanhood that we now turn.

**Educated women**

The *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicitas provides some detailed evidence of a well-educated woman, Perpetua herself, who was martyred at Carthage in AD 203, about fifty years after the time of Apuleius' trial. The surviving accounts of the martyrdom, both a Latin and a Greek text, consist of three parts, that of an anonymous editor, of one of the other prisoners named Saturnus, and the diary of Perpetua. At the beginning the text relates (2.3) that the account of Perpetua's

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\[^{10}\] See Marrou 1964:103, no. 103. The sarcophagus relief can be viewed in Fournet-Pilpenko 1961: fig. 22 and in Yaacoub 1993: fig. 55. The skeletal remains are those of a child of twelve of undetermined sex. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the relief figure is male or female, although scholarly opinion in the main favours the latter. For a summary of the discussion, see Fournet-Pilpenko 1961:294, who is in favour of a female figure. Subsequent debate, however, indicates that the issue is not resolved (see Bundinelli 1971:222, who also assumes that the figure is female, as opposed to Vissing 1997:290-91, who favours a male figure).\[^{11}\]

\[^{12}\] Of course, education for women did not necessarily end when they married, as Apuleius has indicated in referring to the studies he shared with Pudentilla and her son.\[^{13}\]

\[^{14}\] On age at marriage, see the evidence and arguments by Hopkins 1965 and in particular Lassière 1977:489 and Shaw 1987, who deal with the evidence from the African provinces.
martyrdom was written by her own hand (conscripserunt manu sua), and this statement is supported, firstly, by the fact that Perpetua’s section is written in rhetorical prose (where the rest of the text is written in non-rhetorical prose) and, secondly, by the fact that the author refers repeatedly to certain female preoccupations, such as her baby, breastfeeding and details of her relationship with her father. In the same paragraph Perpetua is referred to as bonae nata as well as liberator instituta (2.1), which points to her elite status (she was a member of a high-ranking decurial family in Thuburbo Minus), as well as implying an education beyond the range of the traditional Roman elementary level, and tuition by a grammaticus. A number of studies have pointed to aspects in Perpetua’s text which reveal a high level of education, for example her rhetorical prose, a style taught as part of rhetorical composition and after the basic education in poetry, the Platonic undertones to the dialogue between Perpetua and her father (3.1-2), or even the application of the argumentum ad hominem in 16.2-4. Perpetua demonstrates a great deal of personal authority in getting the tribune to give them better accommodation in prison, and when she persuades the authorities to desist from dressing them in the costumes of the priests of Saturn, her argument reveals the influence of the Second Sophistic period. Another aspect of Perpetua’s education is intimated when in her own account she relates how in one of her dreams she conversed in Greek with the bishop and a priest (13.4). Since Saturus and the editor do not comment on her ability to speak Greek, it seems unlikely that her knowledge of this language was suddenly acquired in the dream context. It would appear then that Perpetua had enough education to be able to converse in that language.

That literary pursuits played a role in the lives of some women is also attested

33 Detailed discussions of Perpetua’s education can be found in Shrewing 1929; Frith 1968; Dronke 1984:1-17; McKechnie 1994; some insightful comments by Hemelrijk 1999:185, 208, 250 n. 136, 285-86 n. 155, although Perpetua falls outside the scope of her study; also Vössing 1997:476-78, who feels that there may be some exaggeration in liberator instituta in an attempt to convert members of the elite class to Christianity, but that point is not convincingly argued.

34 Here Perpetua argues that she and her fellow captives are the noblest of the condemned prisoners, since they belong to Caesar. See McKechnie 1994:283.

35 McKechnie 1994:283.

36 It is true that Perpetua’s brother, Dinocrates, bears a Greek name, and there is a possibility that she may not necessarily have acquired her knowledge of Greek through education only, but the name Dinocrates is also one that was often used by Africans (Ferguson 1969:182). On Perpetua’s Greek, cf. Dronke 1984:283 n. 7.
in a more secular context dating from the 2nd century AD. A Roman funerary relief from Carthage with four panels (of which three are still visible) shows the deceased woman spinning in one panel, at her toilette having her hair done in another, and sitting on a chair reading from a scroll in the third, clearly depicting scenes from daily life. The juxtaposition of the panels indicates that intellectual interests are not meant to be seen as attaining the levels of an Apuleius or a Fronto, but are undertaken for personal pleasure rather than for ambition. An inscription from Circa praising a woman for her studia (CIL 5:509) may also be presumed to fit into this category of adult learning.

There are no real parallels for Padernilla’s business skills. Since such activities did not serve to advertise elite education and status, an interest in anything other than literacy is seldom mentioned or portrayed for the women of Roman Africa. Praise for their management skills is usually related to the domestic context (CIL 8.134, 5834, 9520, 11294, 24986; ILT 489), although there is one explicit reference to a woman who featured as a partner in her husband’s business (CIL 8.152) – she may have had the same management skills which Apuleius praises in Pudentilla.

There is some further testimony for educated Roman African women from Late Antiquity. In the house of Gaius Barbarus Pompeianus, the governor of Africa in 400-401, the inscription above the door leading to one of the rooms reads: Invicta Venus Benefica. Presumably this formed a part of the women’s private quarters, a typical feature of Late Antiquity where women were allocated special rooms within opulent villas. Inside this chamber was a two-part mosaic with inscriptions asserting the magnificence and grandeur of the life of the nobleman on his estate. The upper level represents three pavilions in a landscape setting, and in the foreground the mistress of the estate is seated in a high-backed chair under a palm tree, fanning herself, with her dog at her feet. Overhead is written Fili de iure. The most obvious explanation is that the wording is a compliment to the preoccupation of the lady of the manor, who does not appear to be busy with anything other than her thoughts.

60 See Brown 1987:38 on this arrangement.
61 The original mosaics no longer exist and are known only from drawings which can be viewed in Tissot 1884: plates I-V.
62 See also Boissier 1912:152-64, photo no. 4.

67
Evidence for women’s interest in philosophy is rare in Roman antiquity. In Africa the only other source is Augustine: in the dialogue De haec vita, his mother takes an active part in the discussion about a life of philosophical studia, which he explains elsewhere with the comment that his mother wore a woman’s habit but a manly faith (Conf. 9.4). At the beginning of another work, Augustine states (De ord. 1.31) that women in earlier generations discussed philosophy (presumably he had Cornelia in mind), and he then records his mother’s presence at a discussion with the comment that her natural ability and understanding of things divine was suited to ‘true philosophy’ (spra philosofia, De ord. 2.1). All in all it may be said that Augustine felt that his mother’s philosophical contributions needed some explanation.64 Again, in neither of these testimonia to women’s interest in philosophy is there any specific indication of the quality of their education.

Another overt display of education in a pagan context is to be seen in the fourth-century tomb paintings discovered at Gargaresh (a few kilometres from Oea).65 The inscription above the main portrait identifies the woman buried there as Aelia Arsitha (CIL 8.22687; AE 1904, 19), who was approximately sixty years of age when she died.66 Her portrait clearly depicts a woman of local elite status, firstly in the care which has been lavished on the paintwork itself (particularly compared to the lack of care taken with the fresco work of a

63 Very occasionally women in Roman antiquity are known to have shown an interest in philosophy, and a philosophical education for women remained the subject for debate it had been in Plato’s day (Plut. Pomp. 55; Cic. Ep. ad Att. 13.21; Mus. Rufus, Fr. 3 and 4; Sen. De cons. sap. 14; De nat. 3.24; J. Lactan. Dei seculi: 3.25).
64 Christianity certainly made women’s education more visible; see, for example, Hickey 1987:98; Sebesta 2002:104. That some form of education for Christian women was encouraged in Roman Africa is evidenced by the fact that by the early 5th century Augustine took it for granted that a women’s monastery would have a library when, in his letter describing his Rule, he specifically mentions that one of the women should be in charge of it (Ep. 211:13). Tomb mosaics from the Chapel of the Martyrs at Thuburbo in Africa Proconsularis show two figures, one a woman, and both holding a rollam or scroll (Alexander 1987:9; the figures are listed as 1049q and 942 in Guadéld 1910). They are probably Christians, like the figures in the other mosaics from the Chapel, even though they are the only figures not in the pose of the orant.
65 Romanelli 1922 speculates on possible Christian elements in the tomb paintings but recognizes the predominant pagan element.
66 Di(i) Aelia Arsitha (sacerdotess | Aelia Arsitha | sancta annu | rexqista | plus minis. The nomens ‘Aelia’ indicates that an ancestor was enfranchised under one of the Antonines, while the cognomen ‘Arsitha’ is of Punic origin and is attested in various forms in inscriptions from this area (IRP 12, 29, 239, 754, 850, 855).
second niche in the tomb occupied by her husband), secondly in the stateliness of her dress and her jewels, and lastly by the fact that Aelia carries a *vulsum* in her left hand.67 The accompanying niche is dedicated to her husband, Aelius Mal[nus] or [-ximus], son of Iranthus, who is depicted in the fresco reclining under a tree in a typical posture of *atium*.68 This would seem to be a complete reversal of the traditional male-female portraiture of Late Antiquity, where it is the woman who is represented at leisure as an attestation of her husband’s success and wealth, as in the mosaic in the house of Barbarus Pompeianus mentioned earlier. Aelia is clearly the more prominent partner here, occupying the role of learning and exhibition of wealth usually associated with men, where Aelius is indolently enjoying the fruits of this wealth, a role often attributed to women.

Assessing the Roman African evidence – some conclusions

The volume of evidence discussed above may not be large, but it must be remembered that recording female activities did not normally enjoy much priority in the Roman world. That there is some evidence is already encouraging. Not only do we have examples of educated girls and women from earlier periods in Roman North Africa, but also from later periods, up to two centuries after the time in which Apuleius and Pudentilla lived, indicating the continuation of an established tradition during the Roman period. The evidence is also geographically diverse, sometimes originating from small towns like Thuburbo Minus, sometimes from large cities like Carthage. More evidence has, in fact, come to light from small towns or outlying districts than from the major centre of Carthage. This is surprising but, since the body of evidence at our disposal is quite small, this aspect should not be given too much emphasis. It only serves to indicate that Pudentilla’s domicile need not count against the likelihood of her education. Rather than the locality in which they lived, it appears that it was the level of wealth which supported female education, or at least its display. The evidence stems from people who were at least affluent enough to be able to afford a sarcophagus for burial, a lengthy inscription on a tombstone, or, as in the case of Vibia Perpetua, were known

67 Photographs available in Romanelli 1922; Autigemma 1960, in colour.
68 The name Iranthus is Libyan, and also occurs in an inscription from neighbouring Sabratha in connection with the building of a *latrine* in the late-first or early-second century. No offices are listed for the benefactor – probably he was acting as a private citizen.
to be part of a wealthy local elite. This gives some credence to the Pudentilla of Apuleius’ text, since she was a wealthy woman of good social standing, part of the aspiring, upwardly mobile Roman African elite.

The commemorators or authors were proud of the education of the girls and women with whom they were associated. It is this pride which makes the quality of women’s education in Roman North Africa difficult to assess. Are the proud fathers, husbands and associates exaggerating the accomplishments described or illustrated? In the majority of cases there is no certain way of determining this, particularly since we do not possess any women’s writings. We are fortunate to possess one woman-authored text which does bear the hallmarks of a good education, and in Perpetua we do have a woman educated in both Latin and Greek.

The external evidence does give some support to the picture of an educated woman which Apuleius draws for us, since we have seen that educated women turn up in the most unexpected places in Roman Africa. It may therefore not have been necessary for Apuleius to exaggerate or even invent this characteristic. This brings us, finally, to an assessment of the level of Pudentilla’s education, to answer the question: could Pudentilla speak and write Greek and Latin fluently? From the speech itself it seems reasonable to suppose that Pudentilla, Apuleius and Pontianus corresponded in Greek, since this is taken as fact by the prosecution. That Pudentilla’s Greek was superior to that of the allegedly forged letter is more likely to be a rhetorical disparagement of the Scirii than a reliable attestation of the excellence of Pudentilla’s Greek. Apuleius’ reference to his involvement in his wife’s further education also, to my mind, indicates that Pudentilla’s Greek was of a lower standard than his own. She may have known enough Greek to write letters, and to teach her sons, but whether she was able to actually converse fluently in this language is not supported by the evidence from the speech.

How fluent Pudentilla was in Latin, there is no way of determining from the text, since it is never specifically mentioned. This is probably because, by taking a fluency in Greek as an affectation of the educated elite, a command of Latin was taken for granted. We can infer from this that Pudentilla’s Latin was at least the equal of her near contemporary, Perpetua.

Thus, in conclusion, Apuleius may have slightly exaggerated or enhanced Pudentilla’s learning, but the educated widow of Oea is no literary invention – many women of Roman North Africa bear her out.

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