



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

## Inscribed meaning: the vilica and the villa economy

### Citation for published version:

Roth, U 2004, 'Inscribed meaning: the *vilica* and the villa economy', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol. 72, pp. 101-124. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246200002683>

### Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1017/S0068246200002683](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246200002683)

### Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

### Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

### Published In:

Papers of the British School at Rome

### Publisher Rights Statement:

This article has been published in a revised form in Papers of the British School at Rome (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068246200002683>). This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © Cambridge University Press, 2004.

### General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

## INSCRIBED MEANING: THE *VILICA* AND THE *VILLA* ECONOMY\*

Historical story-telling [...] means turning or steering the description of an object, event or person away from one meaning, so as to wring out further different, and possibly even multiple meanings.

Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (New York, 1997), 11

The slave-staffed estates described by the Roman agricultural writers Cato, Varro and Columella possessed a clear management structure that imposed an indisputable hierarchy. At the head of each individual estate or *fundus* stood a farm manager, the *vilicus rusticus*, who took the place of the absentee landowner and carried out business on his behalf. His duties were largely of an administrative and supervisory nature, including the recording of all tasks performed on the estate, the arranging of sales and purchases of both products and equipment, and the supervision at the highest level of virtually all transactions and production processes on the farmstead.<sup>1</sup> The *vilicus* was not the only person on the farmstead who carried out managerial duties. The *vilica*, a housekeeper, or in more modern terms a farm manageress, was also regarded by the agronomists as a permanent member of staff. Her duties lay largely within the economic activities that were carried out at the villa, and she was under regular supervision through the *vilicus*. Cato lists her in his inventories for both an olive grove and a vineyard and subsequently devotes a whole chapter to her professional and social duties.<sup>2</sup> Varro only mentions her in passing but also clearly takes her presence for granted.<sup>3</sup> Columella's description of the *vilica*'s duties is by far the most extensive we have and has considerably influenced the modern picture.<sup>4</sup> According to their precepts, the *vilica*'s duties were extensive, stretching from the overall maintenance of the villa, the organization of provisions and cooked meals for the slave *familia*, the general care and guardianship of the labourers, to the supervision of a whole range of domestic and industrial activities carried out at the farmstead. On the kind of estates envisaged by the agronomists, both the *vilica* and the *vilicus* had firmly separated spheres of activity, and each a substantial workload of their own.

Despite the description of work areas and duties of both *vilica* and *vilicus* in

---

\* I wish to thank Michael Crawford, Henrik Mouritsen, Dominic Rathbone, Joyce Reynolds, James Roy, and Benet Salway for discussing the evidence and the argument of this article with me. Thanks also to the anonymous readers of the *Papers* for their very helpful comments. Last, but by all means not least, thanks to Marco Buonocore, for discussion of the epigraphic material at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy in Barcelona in 2002, where I first presented it – and for encouraging publication, as well as for suggesting the *Papers*. Any errors are mine, of course.

Texts and translations are taken from the Loeb Classical Library unless otherwise stated. Texts and translations of the Digest are taken from *The Digest of Justinian*. Latin text edited by Th. Mommsen with the aid of Paul Krüger. English translation edited by A. Watson, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1985), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>1</sup> See for a modern synopsis of the *vilicus*' work duties J.-J. Aubert, *Business Managers in Ancient Rome. A Social and Economic Study of Institores, 200BC-AD250* (Leiden, 1994), 169-175, and J. Carlsen, *Vilici and Roman Estate Managers until AD284* (Rome, 1995), 70-80.

<sup>2</sup> Cato, *De agricultura* 10; 11; 143.

<sup>3</sup> Varro, *De re rustica* 1.18.

<sup>4</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

the agricultural treatises, the attention they have received by modern scholars has been highly imbalanced: whilst the *vilicus* has attracted detailed treatment in a number of studies, the *vilica* has been viewed in the shadow of her male counterpart, with only a single article in print that is exclusively devoted to her role.<sup>5</sup> The imbalance, however, is not only quantitative. The *vilica*'s work is regularly described as of an auxiliary nature and discussion of her economic significance consequently rather perfunctory.<sup>6</sup> This underestimation of the *vilica*'s economic role is directly connected to the assumption of an institutionalised personal relationship between *vilicus* and *vilica*, which defines her professional role ultimately through her personal relationship to a particular male slave. Traditionally, *vilicus* and *vilica* have been viewed as 'husband' and 'wife' by students of Roman slavery,<sup>7</sup> an image which seems strongly supported by the literary sources, and which has become solidly embedded in the modern picture of the management structure at the *villa rustica*: "[...] *vilicae* were chosen by their masters and married without their consent to the *vilici*, who were also slaves."<sup>8</sup> As 'wives' of *vilici*, *vilicae* have in our historical imagination virtually lost any professional justification in their own right, and the title they carry has generally become understood as of an associative nature. There are, however, some problems with this view: first, an institutionalized 'husband'-and-'wife' relationship between *vilicus* and *vilica* does not find unanimous support in the ancient evidence; second, any such interpretation cannot easily be brought into line with modern knowledge of Roman farm management and the villa economy. In what follows, then, I will argue for a limited occurrence of personal relationships between *vilicae* and *vilici* in republican and imperial times. In other words, I will propose that the *vilica* was only rarely the 'wife' of the *vilicus*, but that both usually had partners from amongst their fellow slaves. Furthermore, I will suggest that the title '*vilica*' possessed primarily a professional dimension (and not predominantly a personal one), giving the woman who carried it achieved (rather than associative) status. Ultimately, I will argue that it is by recognizing the *vilica*'s managerial role in her own right, that not only her economic significance can be discerned, but also the full economic potential of the villa economy. Thus the argument is focused on, and restricted to, discussion of the *vilica*'s status, and does not aim at offering a full assessment of the professional duties carried out by *vilicae*.

### **CREATING POSSIBILITIES OR THE VILICA AND THE VILLA ECONOMY**

What if the *vilica* was not the *vilicus*' 'wife' but, like the *vilicus*, gained her title

<sup>5</sup> For studies on the *vilicus*' role see n.1 above, for a study on the *vilica* see J. Carlsen, 'The *vilica* and Roman Estate Management', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg *et al.* (eds.), *De agricultura: in memoriam Pieter Willem de Neeve* (Amsterdam, 1993), 197-205, at 198-201.

<sup>6</sup> This point also made by Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 197, n.2 (with earlier bibliography).

<sup>7</sup> A legally accepted marriage could obviously not have existed amongst slaves, but this issue is irrelevant for the point to be made here. Equally, I do not want to enter here the debate about freed or free-born *vilici*, for which see H.C. Teitler, 'Free-Born Estate Managers', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg *et al.* (eds.), *De agricultura: in memoriam Pieter Willem de Neeve* (Amsterdam, 1993), 206-213.

<sup>8</sup> A. Fraschetti (ed.), *Roman Women* (Chicago and London, 2001), 1 (originally published under the title *Roma al femminile* (Rome and Bari, 1994). This is also categorically stated in the most recent studies on Roman estate management without giving specific source references: Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 177, n.204: "The concubine of the *vilicus* is called *vilica* in agricultural treatises [...]"; and Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 197: "It is clear from the use of the term *vilica* in the legal and literary sources that the title normally indicated the bailiff's wife."

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

through her professional role? Keith Bradley, in his list of slave jobs in Columella, lists the *vilica* (as the only woman) with the (professional) rendering “wife of *vilicus*” (whilst the *vilicus* is rendered “bailiff”).<sup>9</sup> But if the *vilica*’s ‘job’ was not, as I argue, to be somebody’s ‘wife’, but the managerial head of a productive unit, how come her professional significance was so easily overlooked by previous generations of scholars? Moreover, how come previous studies of Roman estate management and the villa economy created quite happily what could be described as a historical picture that was full of persuasion – despite ignoring the significance that I wish to assign to the *vilica*? The answer to both questions is essentially one and the same: a limited (and limiting) focus.

Rural estates in Roman Italy are predominantly seen from the point of view of agricultural production, i.e. those activities that are directly related to the cultivation of the ground. This was already the case with our Roman agricultural writers, although Varro, and even more so Columella after him, included in their treatises *some* discussion of non-agricultural activities that were carried out at or near the farmstead, yet without due attention for industrial activities.<sup>10</sup> The latter have also largely dropped out of any modern conceptualisation of the villa economy in Roman Italy (whilst finding repeated significance in discussion of villa economies outside Italy where the literary sources are rather slim): the result of acceptance of the pattern produced by the literary sources.<sup>11</sup> The focus on these have thus limited the potential not only of the *vilica*, but also of the villa economy as a whole. Focus on agricultural production, on the other hand, became synonymous with a focus on the *vilicus* and the male field labour force, and has indeed assumed virtual exclusivity.<sup>12</sup> Attempts to break with the focus on the male have been equally doomed to produce a restricted view because of a continued acceptance of the primary role played by the literary sources (and their monochrome interpretation)<sup>13</sup> – even when the evidential basis has a different emphasis.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> K.R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge, 1994), 60.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. Varro, *De re rustica* 1.2.21ff.; Columella, *De re rustica* 12.1.5; 12.3.

<sup>11</sup> Discussion of non-agricultural production at villa estates has been particularly fruitful in cases where the literary evidence is virtually missing and study consequently relies on archaeological material, as for instance in Roman Britain: K. Branigan and D. Miles (eds.), *The Economies of Romano-British Villas* (Sheffield, 1989), esp. the contributions by K. Branigan, ‘Specialisation in Villa Economies’, 42-50, and M. Todd, ‘Villa and Fundus’, 14-20.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. H. Gummerus, *Der römische Gutsbetrieb nach den Schriften des Cato, Varro und Columella* (Leipzig, 1906); W.E. Heitland, *Agricola: A Study of Agriculture and Rustic Life in the Greco-Roman World from the point of View of Labour* (Cambridge, 1921); E. Maróti, ‘The *Vilicus* and the Villa System in Ancient Italy’, *Oikumene* 1 (1976), 109-124; W. Kaltenstadler, *Arbeitsorganisation und Führungssystem bei den römischen Agrarschriftstellern* (Stuttgart, 1978); D.W. Rathbone, ‘The Development of Agriculture in the ‘Ager Cosanus’ in the Republican Period: Problems of Evidence and Interpretation’, *JRS* 71 (1981), 10-23, and ‘The Slave Mode of Production in Italy’, *JRS* 73 (1983), 160-168, reviewing A. Giardina and A. Schiavone (eds.), *Società romana e produzione schiavistica*, 3 vols. (Rome and Bari, 1981); K.D. White, ‘The Productivity of Labour in Roman Agriculture’, *Antiquity* 39 (1983), 102-107; M.S. Spurr, *Arable Cultivation in Roman Italy 200BC-AD100* (London, 1986); Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1); Carlsen, *Vilici* (above, n.1); C. Schäfer, *Sklaven und Freigelassene in wirtschaftlichen Führungspositionen* (Mainz, forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5); R. Günther, ‘Matrona, *vilica* und *ornatrix*. Frauenarbeit in Rom zwischen Topos und Alltagswirklichkeit’, in Th. Späth and B. Wagner-Hasel (eds.), *Frauenwelten in der Antike. Geschlechterordnung und weibliche Lebenspraxis* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2000), 350-376, at 362-365.

<sup>14</sup> Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 177 concludes his **epigraphic** discussion of female farm managers and their description as ‘wives’ of *vilici* by referring readers to R. Martin, ‘*Familia rustica*:

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

Study of individual aspects of industrial production in the countryside of Roman Italy, especially but not only the manufacture of bricks and tiles, has long questioned traditional ideas of subordinate roles of women on the managerial level: there, women have been fully recognised in their roles as *officinatrices*.<sup>15</sup> Given the potential for industrial production at rural villa estates, it is not at all far fetched to see the *vilica* in charge of such a productive unit. Textile production, the manufacture of tiles and pottery, production of special and dried foods, are obvious candidates for the industrial activities that contributed significantly to the overall economic performance of villa estates. It is also not too far-fetched to see rural estates standardly equipped and set up to engage in both agricultural and industrial production.<sup>16</sup> This would explain why all agricultural writers felt obliged to mention the *vilica*; it would also explain why they did so in a rather perfunctory way: her professional location away from those activities associated with the cultivation of the ground forbid anything but a brief sketch of either her managerial role or the unit(s) of production under her supervision in a treatise which was designed to debate matters agricultural. Furthermore, such industrial activities need not have been carried out throughout the whole year. Seasonal occupation is well attested in both legal and literary sources, especially with regard to rural estates, and so are allocations of managerial duties in more than one area, at least outside the rural sphere.<sup>17</sup> And Columella was quite clear about the non-sedentary nature of the *vilica*'s professional role, just as he knew of the importance not only of those activities carried out *in agris* (under the supervision of the *vilicus*), but also of those carried out *intra villam* (under the supervision of the *vilica*).<sup>18</sup>

If, then, we are prepared to view the *vilica* as a farm manageress with changing spheres of supervision, and if, furthermore, we are prepared to view rural villa estates as centres of diversified productive activity extending beyond the narrow constraints of agriculture proper, study of the productive landscape of Roman Italy can create new possibilities for the study of the economy and society of the peninsula as a whole – using as their focus of analysis compatibility of agricultural and industrial production, as well as compatibility of male and female (slave) labour at rural villa estates. The *vilica* can provide a key for this. Yet, this will not be the case if she is continuously seen as a lesser adjunct to her male counterpart and dependent in her professional status on any personal relationship she may have had. Given the current state of the evidence, it is unlikely that either literary or epigraphic source material will succeed in capturing the full complexity of rural (slave) life. The

---

les esclaves chez les **agronomes latins**', in *Actes du colloque 1972 sur l'esclavage* (Paris, 1974), 267-297 (my emphasis), despite having available to him 201 (male) *vilici*, four sub-*vilici*, and five *vilicae* attested epigraphically.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. T. Helen, *Organization of Roman Brick Production in the First and Second Centuries A.D. An Interpretation of Roman Brick Stamps* (Helsinki, 1975), 112f. and more recently P. Setälä, 'Women and Brick Production – Some New Aspects', in P. Setälä *et al.* (eds.), *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Empire* (Rome, 2002), 181-201.

<sup>16</sup> A continuum between agricultural and industrial production is evident elsewhere in the Roman world: P. Garnsey, 'Non-Slave Labour in the Roman World', in P. Garnsey (ed.), *Non-Slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 1980), 34-47. See also Columella, *De re rustica* 12.1.5 and 12.3.7 for use of agricultural surplus labour in productive activities carried out under the supervision of the *vilica*.

<sup>17</sup> For seasonal compatibility see Digest 33.7.25.1 and Vitruvius, *De architectura* 2.3.2. For managerial double allocations see Digest 14.3.13.pr.

<sup>18</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.3.8f. (see also *De re rustica* 12.46.1 and 12.50.1 for seasonally caused changes in the *vilica*'s work load), and *De re rustica* 11.2.72.



archaeology of Italian villa estates, on the other hand, is still underused, with small finds, faunal remains and the like, only just gaining any significant attention over the last few decades. Usage of the discipline outside the Italian heartland has in contrast produced highly stimulating results for the study of villa economies beyond agriculture.<sup>19</sup> If the single associative meaning usually given to the *vilica* could be broken down, and her title, at the very least, *also* be seen as carrying achieved status, her sphere of work, and with it the villa economy as a whole, could be subject to quite new readings.

### **INSCRIBED MEANING OR EPIGRAPHY AND VILICI RUSTICI**

The epigraphic evidence for Roman *vilici* consists of 194 inscriptions that mention a *vilicus* in Roman Italy and Sicily, but only six that mention a *vilica*.<sup>20</sup> Only a fraction of these, however, actually refer to their partners, generally in the form of a commemoration. The total number of inscriptions that provide positive clues towards determining the personal relationships of *vilici* and *vilicae* is hence reduced to 45 (or only 33 if one discounts those that clearly were not *vilici rustici*), including three of the six *vilicae* inscriptions. Tables 1 and 2 (below) lay out the various terms used for the partners of the three *vilicae* (Table 1) and the 44 (male) *vilici* (Table 2) in these inscriptions and the percentages they form of the total number. The majority, as can easily be seen from these tables, refer to the *vilicus*' partner simply as *coniunx*, *conserva* or *contubernalis*, while two of the three *vilicae* who mention their partners refer to them by the title of *vilicus*.

The quantitative view is impressive, for only a single inscription identifies the partner of a *vilica* beyond doubt as a *vilicus*. This inscription, currently in the museum yard of the Museo Archeologico di Corfinio, was only published in 1997, and hence could not be taken into account by those who have recently argued for an institutionalised *vilicus-vilica*-‘marriage’. It is a huge (1.96m high) funerary *stela* that was set up by the *vilicus* Felix (and his sons Phaedimus and Felix) to his partner Veneria, herself the *vilica* of an Attia Galla, and to her son Firmus.<sup>21</sup> The provenance is uncertain, but since the title ‘*vilica*’ is only known in an agricultural context,<sup>22</sup> it seems likely that it is evidence for slave managers in a rural context. Whilst this epitaph represents an inscriptional identification of a *vilica* as the ‘wife’ of a *vilicus*, it is nevertheless notable that the *vilicus* Felix found it desirable to inscribe both his partner’s professional title (‘*vilica*’), as well as the frequently employed ‘*coniunx*’ in order to clarify their personal relationship: it seems as if neither the professional, nor

<sup>19</sup> cf. n.11 above.

<sup>20</sup> An almost complete list of these inscriptions from Roman Italy and Sicily can be found in Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 442-462, who counts a total of 201 *vilici* and five *vilicae* identified clearly in the inscriptions known to him. The only addition that needs to be made is an inscription from Corfinio which mentions both a *vilica* and a *vilicus*: M. Buonocore, ‘Nuovi testi dall’Abruzzo e dal Molise (Regiones II et IV)’, *Epigraphica* 58 (1997), 231-265, at 241-244.

<sup>21</sup> Buonocore, ‘Nuovi testi’ (above, n.20), 241-244: *Dis Man(ibus) / Veneriae / Attiaes Gallae / vilicae et Firmo / filio eius Felix vilic(us) / coniugi cum Phaedimo / et Felice filis posit.*

<sup>22</sup> Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 461, believes the only republican *vilica* inscription we have to be possible evidence for the activity of a *vilica* outside the proper agricultural sphere, but even so, this would not exclude her occupation at a villa estate. The inscription is a graffito on a terracotta lamp that came from the Esquiline cemetery: *CIL* P 504 (Rome): *Statia vilic(a) nostra*. His point is made more explicit in ‘Workshop Managers’, in W.V. Harris (ed.), *The Inscribed Economy. Production and Distribution in the Roman Empire in the Light of ‘instrumentum domesticum’* (Ann Arbor, 1993), 171-181, at 178, n.50.

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

the personal ‘title’ by itself, would have been a clear indication for the other meaning.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it is not at all clear from the inscription whether Felix and Veneria worked (and lived) on one and the same estate or whether they belonged to the same master: Felix clearly emphasises Veneria’s mistress (as if Attia Galla was not *his* mistress); besides, it seems Veneria had had a personal relationship with someone other than Felix previously, from which she had had one child – *her* son Firmus (made clear through use of the pronoun *eius*, which is not used for the two sons Phaedimus and Felix, whom they had in common). Thus, whilst we have with this epitaph a clear inscriptional identification of a *vilica* as the ‘wife’ of a *vilicus*, it would be rash to conclude that it is evidence for a slave ‘husband’-and-‘wife’ management team, although this is admittedly not impossible.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to this funerary commemoration, there may indeed exist another inscription that implies the ‘marriage’ of the *vilica* and the *vilicus* mentioned therein. The inscription, formerly in the possession of Clemente Visocchi, now at the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, originates probably from Atina. It had been set up by a freedman and a freedwoman both announcing their freed status through the inscription, but also providing information about their professional positions.<sup>25</sup> Neither Gaius Obinius C.l. Epicadus, nor Trebia Gaiiae l. Aprodisia is titled *vilicus* or *vilica*, but the use of the verb *vilicare* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural leaves little doubt that both had held the respective positions.<sup>26</sup> Since they have set up the inscription together after having worked the estate for a substantial amount of time, it might seem overly critical to doubt their personal relationship, but such scepticism has been expressed.<sup>27</sup> And indeed, it is not uncommon for unrelated *colliberti* to set up epitaphs together, especially if they had close working ties, which clearly was the case between Obinius Epicadus and Trebia Aprodisia.<sup>28</sup> How far working relationships (and a subsequent desire to put up a common commemoration) were reinforced by personal relations is in most cases impossible to know. As is clear from the inscription, Obinius Epicadus and Trebia Aprodisia were freedman and freedwoman of two different people, but this need not speak against their being personally related.<sup>29</sup> Hence, whilst there is no positive evidence for a personal relationship, it is not impossible to think that here we may have a piece of evidence for a ‘husband-and-wife’-team as the farm

<sup>23</sup> cf. also *CIL* III 5611 (Noricum: Mattighofen).

<sup>24</sup> I would remain doubtful towards an interpretation of the epitaph as evidence for a family tradition in estate management and the implication of ascriptive status inherent in the profession of *vilici* as suggested by Buonocore, ‘Nuovi testi’ (above, n.20), 243f. On the notion that slave personal relationships were not restricted to estate boundaries *per se* see also n. 83 below.

<sup>25</sup> *CIL* X 5081 (Atina): *C(aius) Obinius C(aii) l(ibertus) / Epicadus / Trebia C(aiae) l(iberta) Aprodisia / hic vilicarunt / annos XIII*. Cf. Carlsen, *Vilici* (above, n.1), 97f., n.320.

<sup>26</sup> cf. the same use of the verb in this context in *AE* 1906, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 150 is hesitant in accepting the personal relationship between the two, but leaves the possibility open.

<sup>28</sup> On the practice of freedmen and *colliberti* commemorating their working relationships on stone see M.B. Flory, ‘Family in *Familia*: Kinship and Community in Slavery’, *AJAH* 3 (1978), 78-95, at 80-87, and S. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome. A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman and London, 1992), 134ff.

<sup>29</sup> We may wish to speculate that their masters were a couple themselves, but I do not understand why Carlsen, *Vilici* (above, n.1), 97f. changes the reading and hence translation of the inscription which is perfectly legible (cf. the picture in Carlsen, *ibid.*). According to his reading, Obinius Epicadus and Trebia Aprodisia were freedman and freedwoman of one and the same person, that is Gaius Obinius. Of course, Obinius Epicadus was the freedman of Gaius, but Trebia Aprodisia was freed by a woman, which is indicated by the reversed letter C after her name on the inscription.

managers on the estate. In sum, then, whilst the inscription from Corfinium is clear evidence for a *vilica* as the ‘wife’ of a *vilicus*, the inscription from Atina is clear evidence for a slave management team, and both might also imply the other meaning, but not necessarily so. Thus, there is no single unambiguous identification of a slave ‘husband’-and-‘wife’ management team in the inscriptional record.

What may emerge from the study of these two inscriptions, however, is the pride these slaves and freedmen took in announcing their professional titles on stone. Such pride was not an isolated phenomenon. On the basis of a study of epitaphs from Rome that mention *contubernales*, Susan Treggiari has been able to show amongst the group of servile commemorators a strong desire to declare one’s status through job titles. She concludes that “[...] jobs, where mentioned, are of the more desirable type [...] Slaves with jobs like these were more likely to want to mention them on their inscriptions.”<sup>30</sup> The same, one would expect, was the case with *vilici rustici* – male and female. Yet, if it was reasonable “[...] to identify these women [= the *contubernales* of the *vilici*] with the *vilica* as described by the Roman agricultural writers”,<sup>31</sup> the number of epigraphically attested *vilicae* – albeit in disguise – would distort the sex ratio that one ought to expect to find amongst this group of dedicators;<sup>32</sup> in the light of the evidence presented here, we would also need to conclude that *vilicae* were an exception to the epigraphic habit displayed by this section of society. While individual commemorators may have had reason to neglect to mention their own professional titles, it seems unlikely that practically all the women that appear as partners of the *vilici* in the inscriptions from Table 2 would not have wanted their titles to be mentioned had they been *vilicae*: this would be difficult to integrate into a picture of a status-oriented society like Roman Italy. Becoming a *vilica* was after all one of the rare opportunities for a female (agricultural) slave to rank well above her fellow slaves. There was no good reason to have been modest about this. Rather, it appears inexplicable within the wider view of the epigraphic habit displayed by slaves and freedmen that these women (or for that matter their partners who set up the stone for them) lacked the desire to inscribe their professional title on stone. If inscriptions were used by these sections of society to display public status, and clearly they were, then it seems most logical to conclude that the status of the women who were remembered as *contubernales* of *vilici* lay in its most literal sense in their personal relationship to a *vilicus*, made obvious by their very choice of commemoration. In other words, these women’s status was truly associative, and it is in this dimension that they were commemorated. They were, thus, not *vilicae*.

**Table 1:**

Term used	Inscription/s	Percentage of total number of inscriptions (3 = 100%)
<i>Vilicus</i>	<i>CIL X 5081</i> (?) <i>Epigraphica</i> 1997, 241ff	2 = 66%
Partner identified by other means	<i>CIL XI 871</i>	1 = 33%

<sup>30</sup> S. Treggiari, ‘*Contubernales* in *CIL* 6’, *Phoenix* 35 (1981), 42-69, at 47.

<sup>31</sup> Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5), 198.

<sup>32</sup> See the Appendix ‘The Sex Ratio in *vilici* inscriptions from Roman Italy’ below.



PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

**Table 2:** An asterisk (\*) indicates that the *vilicus* is not a *vilicus rusticus*.

Term used	Inscription/s	Percentage of total number of inscriptions (44 = 100%)
<i>coniunx</i>	<i>CIL</i> V 7852* <i>CIL</i> VI 8495* <i>CIL</i> VI 8495* <i>CIL</i> VI 8669 <i>CIL</i> VI 8672 <i>CIL</i> VI 8676* <i>CIL</i> VI 9987 <i>CIL</i> VI 9988 <i>CIL</i> VI 10163* <i>CIL</i> VI 32461 <i>CIL</i> VI 37827 <i>CIL</i> VI 37829 <i>CIL</i> IX 59* <i>CIL</i> IX 820 <i>CIL</i> IX 3651 <i>CIL</i> X 1749 <i>CIL</i> X 1751 <i>CIL</i> XIV 198 <i>CIL</i> XIV 199 <i>AE</i> 1959, 300 <i>AE</i> 1966, 106 <i>AE</i> 1968, 110a <i>Eph. Ep.</i> VII 1247	23 = 52.3%
<i>conserva</i>	<i>CIL</i> IX 2485 <i>CIL</i> IX 3446 <i>CIL</i> XI 4422 <i>CIL</i> XIV 2726	4 = 9.1%
<i>contubernalis</i>	<i>CIL</i> V 4503* <i>CIL</i> VI 8759 <i>CIL</i> VI 33733* <i>CIL</i> VI 37828	4 = 9.1%
<i>uxor</i>	<i>CIL</i> V 8650* <i>CIL</i> X 3964*	2 = 4.5%
<i>vilica</i>	<i>CIL</i> X 5081(?) <i>Epigraphica</i> 1997, 241ff.	2 = 4.5%
Partner identified by other means	<i>CIL</i> VI 4431 <i>CIL</i> VI 4435* <i>CIL</i> X 1750 <i>CIL</i> XI 1231* <i>CIL</i> XIV 2751 <i>AE</i> 1977, 87 <i>AE</i> 1978, 80 <i>AE</i> 1980, 229 <i>NSc</i> 1923, 369	9 = 20.5%

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

Of course, *vilicae* did inscribe their title on stone: the three inscriptions from Table 1, plus three others which do not refer to partners, make this sufficiently clear.<sup>33</sup> Beside the inscriptions from Atina and Corfinium, the third *vilica* inscription that mentions a partner provides additional information on the question at issue. The inscription comes from Mutina and was set up by the partner of the *vilica* Nice, himself called Dama, a slave of a Statullus.<sup>34</sup> Whilst Dama does not choose to use any of the typical terms for a partner as employed in most of the inscriptions listed in Table 2, it seems fairly safe to assume their relationship because of the nature of the dedication.<sup>35</sup> What is not clear is whether Nice was a *vilica* and the slave of (the slave) Dama, i.e. his *vicaria*, or whether she was an acting *vilica*, with the status designation firmly placed before the qualification, *vicaria*.<sup>36</sup> It is in any case obvious that Nice's partner is not titled *vilicus* (or given any other professional title) in the inscription. Bearing in mind the findings of Treggiari, when comparing the Mutina epitaph with the inscriptions from Corfinium and Atina, the former does not convey the same pride in job and title on the part of the male as the latter two. All things considered, I would like to suggest that Dama was not a *vilicus*, and hence Nice not the partner of any such person. If Nice was herself a *vilica*, she was either at the head of a managerial unit, and no *vilicus* existed, or the *vilicus* had his own personal set-up with a different partner.<sup>37</sup> Whatever, then, the personal and professional relationships of our six Italian *vilicae* known through inscriptions may be, epigraphically attested *vilicae* and *vilici* appear as a rule to be married to someone other than a slave farm manager or manageress, and *vilicae* and *vilici* seem to have received their titles through their professional achievement.

### **LABOUR OF LOVE? OR THE VILICA IN THE LITERARY SOURCES**

Columella was quite certain: The *vilicus* “should be given a woman companion to keep him within bounds and yet in certain matters to be a help to him.”<sup>38</sup> Although Columella does not say so, this woman is usually identified with the *vilica*, the slave farm manageress, who consequently became an adjunct to the *vilicus* in our historical imagination. Her job was that of the loving ‘wife’, there to help when help was needed. But is this the most obvious interpretation? Columella provides another, much longer passage that invites discussion of his farm managers’ personal relationships, which is placed in the chapter on the *vilica*’s duties.<sup>39</sup> This owes much to Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* – or, to be more precise, to Cicero’s Latin adaptation of the text – and the ideal of a perfect division of labour between man and woman it

<sup>33</sup> *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 504 (Rome); *CIL* V 7348 (Forum Vibii); *CIL* X 5081 (Atina); *CIL* XI 356 (Ariminum); *CIL* XI 871 (Mutina); *Epigraphica* 58 (1997), 241ff. (Corfinium).

<sup>34</sup> *CIL* XI 871 (Mutina): *Vivit / v(ivus) / Dama Statulli / Nicini vilicae / vicariae suae / et suisque / p(edes) q(uadrati) XII*.

<sup>35</sup> If Nice was simply Dama’s *vicaria* (and not his partner), a possible rendering of the text, it would represent an unusually emphatic notification of a master’s (i.e. an *ordinarius*’) obligation (if that is what it was) to ensure his slave’s burial, even if she was a *vilica*.

<sup>36</sup> The latter suggested by Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5), 202.

<sup>37</sup> On the possibility of a female at the head of a managerial unit see the considerations by Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 140f. Cf. also the examples given by Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5), 204 with regard to two inscriptions from Regio VIII and Regio IX respectively, which may be evidence for female farm manageresses at the head of a managerial unit.

<sup>38</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 1.8.5: *Sed qualicumque vilico contubernalis mulier assignanda est, quae contineat eum, et in quibusdam rebus tamen adiuvet.*

<sup>39</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

expresses.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the play on the natural aptitudes of male and female and their respective roles as used in the *Oeconomicus* helps to structure the argument. This is reinforced by adding to it a second argument on the decline of Roman values caused by excessive luxury and idleness, and leading to *an end of Roman estate management by a husband-and-wife team*: nostalgia at its best. Farm management by a husband-and-wife team is replaced by a slave management team: Columella consequently mentions *vilica* and *vilicus* throughout this introduction to Book 12 by their professional titles.<sup>41</sup> What is more, however, the whole introduction sets up two *parallel* roles for *vilicae* and *vilici*. This is most pronounced at the point when he explains how the change from a (landowner) husband-and-wife team to a slave management team came about as a result of the disappearance of traditional values: management by a *vilica* has necessarily come into being so that the duties formerly carried out by the Roman matron are taken care of; “just as bailiffs too have succeeded to the positions of the owners of property [...]”<sup>42</sup> – a bizarre way of putting it had they been viewed as ‘husband’-and-‘wife’. The chosen parallelism remains purely professional, and is indeed carried over into the next section. Here, Columella sets out to describe the duties of the *vilica* in more detail, as well as her personal and physical characteristics – in due analogy to the precepts laid out for the *vilicus* in Book 1, to which he at once refers the reader.<sup>43</sup> In what follows, then, the reader is reminded of the (personal) duties and ideal character traits of not only the *vilica*, but the *vilicus* too: “she ought also to have sound health and neither have an ugly appearance nor on the other hand be very beautiful; for unimpaired strength will suffice for long vigils and other toils, and ugliness will disgust her mate (*contubernalis*), while excessive beauty will make him slothful. Similarly (*itaque*) care must be taken that our bailiff (*vilicus*) is not of a wandering nature and does not avoid his wife’s company (*contubernium*), and that, on the other hand, he does not waste his time indoors and never far from her embraces.”<sup>44</sup> If one follows Columella’s invitation and links this passage with the first mention of the *vilicus*’ duties in Book 1, including the only other mention of the *vilicus*’ personal set-up as briefly quoted at the outset of this section, the parallelism becomes even stronger: there, Columella merely described the *benefits* for the *vilicus* deriving from his personal relationship; now, when instructing the *vilica* on her personal *duties* in *her* personal relationship, he adds a quick word as regards the *vilicus*’ *duties* towards *his* relationship – a point he forgot to make originally in Book 1.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the emphasis is not, as widely favoured, on a

<sup>40</sup> On Xenophon’s influence on Columella see S.B. Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary, with a New English Translation* (Oxford, 1994), ch.6. It is notable that Xenophon does not envisage a ‘husband’-and-‘wife’-slave management team in the *Oeconomicus*.

<sup>41</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.pref. 8 and 10.

<sup>42</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.pref. 10: *quoniam et vilici quoque successerunt in locum dominorum [...]*

<sup>43</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.1.1 (referring to 1.8.3): *[...] propter easdem causas, quas de aetate vilici retulimus / [...]* for the same reasons as we mentioned when speaking of the age of a bailiff.

<sup>44</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.1.1f.: “*Nam illibatum robur et vigiliis et aliis sufficiet laboribus: foeditas fastidiosum, nimia species desidiosum faciet eius contubernalem. Itaque curandum est, ut nec vagum vilicum et aversum a contubernio suo habeamus, nec rursus intra tecta desidem, et complexibus adiacentem feminae.*” The Loeb Classical Library translates *itaque* as ‘so’, which does not convey the force of the Latin.

<sup>45</sup> Incidentally, the *vilica*, just like the *vilicus*, can rely on her partner ‘*in quibusdam rebus tamen adiuvet*’: Columella, *De re rustica* 12.3.7: “*Illud vero etiam in perpetuum custodiendum habebit, ut eos, qui foris rusticari debebunt, cum iam e villa familia processerit, requirat, ac siquis, ut evenit, curam contubernalis eius intra tectum tergiversans fefellerit, causam desidia sciscitetur, exploretque*

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

reciprocal reading of the instruction to both *vilica* and *vilicus*, but on a complementary one: just as the *vilica* ought to do this, that and the other to keep *her* partner happy, so too must the *vilicus* in order to ensure the smooth running of *his* relationship (and thus essentially of the estate). The whole passage, then, sets up two distinct, albeit parallel roles for the *vilica* and the *vilicus*, which were not designed to overlap either in the professional or in the personal sphere.

Columella's republican predecessors are no help in resurrecting the view of a relationship between male and female slave *vilici*. Cato's only remark regarding the personal relationship between *vilica* and *vilicus* does not describe the *vilica* as the *vilicus*' 'wife' by necessity, but is put in conditional form: "If the master has given her [=the *vilica*] to you [=the *vilicus*] as wife [...]"<sup>46</sup> Varro, on the other hand, does not provide any explicit reference to either the *vilicus*' or the *vilica*'s partner at all, but merely ponders over the benefits of slave families on the *fundus* and the provisioning of foremen (*praefecti*) with partners in general.<sup>47</sup> Outside the agricultural writers, things do not look much better either: a handful of references mention a *vilica*,<sup>48</sup> but none of these also mention a *vilicus*, or any other partners. One of these, however, draws on circumstances that support the notion that the title of the *vilica* was primarily of a professional nature: Martial, in one of his epigrams, explores the scenario of sexual exploitation of slaves by their masters with the example of a *vilica rustica* and her master Linus.<sup>49</sup> We are not informed if the *vilica* has a partner amongst her fellow slaves, but as Linus himself is present on the estate, it appears that he does not require a *vilicus* in his stead; the *vilica* has obviously received her title in her own right. The same conclusion is also applicable to a fragment of a *togata* by T. Quinctius Atta, which refers to both the title of *vilica* and *vilicus*, but again puts a personal relationship between male and female *vilici* into question: the brief question "Does your father work as a *vilicus*, or is your mother a *vilica*?" (my emphasis) keeps separate the professional roles of *vilicus* and *vilica* from their personal arrangements.<sup>50</sup> References to male *vilici* more readily include mention of partners or personal set-ups. Plautus' *vilicus* Olympio from *Casina* is well known for his endeavours in arranging marriage with the house slave from whom the play takes its name. Nowhere in the play is *Casina* referred to as a prospective *vilica*, but repeatedly as future wife (*uxor*) of the *vilicus*.<sup>51</sup> What is more, interpretation of *Casina* as future

---

*utrum adversa valetudine inhibitus restiterit, an pigritia delituerit* / She will also have to be perpetually on the watch, when the slaves have left the villa, and seek out those who ought to be doing agricultural work outside, and if anyone, as sometimes happens, has managed to skulk indoors and escape the vigilance of her mate, she must inquire the reason for his laziness and find out whether he has stayed behind because bad health has prevented him from working or whether he has hidden himself through idleness."

<sup>46</sup> Cato, *De agricultura* 143.1: "Si eam tibi dederit dominus uxorem [...]" See already K.D. White, *Roman Farming* (London, 1970), 354. Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 197 agrees with White, but writes in his more recent study that "[...] Cato [...] mention(s) the *vilica* as the wife of the bailiff [...]": *Vilici* (above, n.1), 92.

<sup>47</sup> Varro, *De re rustica* 1.17.5. On the subordination of *praefecti* under *vilici* see Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 180.

<sup>48</sup> Juvenal, *Saturae* 11.65; Martial, *Epig.* 1.55.11; 4.66.11; 9.60.1; 10.48.7; 12.18.19.

<sup>49</sup> Martial, *Epig.* 4.66.11f.

<sup>50</sup> cf. O. Ribbeck, *Scaenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta, vol.II: Comitorum fragmenta* (Lipsiae, 1873<sup>2</sup>), 163: "Pater vilicatur tuus an mater vilica est?" (my translation). But see also Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 197f. who sees the fragment as supporting a 'husband'-and-'wife' relationship between *vilicus* and *vilica*.

<sup>51</sup> Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 203, is of a different opinion. He sees the future role of *Casina* as

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

*vilica* would require us to believe that Olympio's farmstead functioned quite happily without a *vilica* until Olympio had found love – unless, of course, a *vilica* was really only the *vilicus*' 'wife'.<sup>52</sup> Even in the high empire a *vilicus* was not expected to be married to a *vilica* (or *vice versa*). The fictional *vilicus* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, probably written in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, was indeed married, but not only is it clear from the storyline that his 'wife' was not involved in his business activities, but also that he was in full charge of all household activities by himself; no *vilica* seems to have been called for.<sup>53</sup> However one wants to interpret in detail the various passages referring to *vilicae* and *vilici*, they do not once mention them as personal partners by necessity. In fact, not a single passage knows of any specific *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage'. Seen as a whole body of evidence, the literary sources have very little to help construct the concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage', but much that supports the notion that the title '*vilica*' was of achieved status.

### LEGAL DEALINGS OR THE VILICA IN THE DIGEST

There are only two mentions of a *vilica* in the Digest, and two further passages that mention a *vilicus*' partner. In the latter two, the *vilicus*' partner is not given any professional title at all, but is simply referred to as his *contubernalis*, not allowing for a positive identification of these women's professional role.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, one of the passages that names a *vilica* clearly identifies her also as the personal partner of the farm manager, the *vilicus* Severus.<sup>55</sup> Yet, the identification is made outside a

---

*vilica* confirmed in the allusions to her future child-bearing. There is to my knowledge no evidence that justifies any qualification and hence identification of the *vilica* as a 'breeding machine'.

<sup>52</sup> I do not want to exclude the possibility that depending on size and production type not every farmstead needed both a *vilicus* and a *vilica*. But Olympio was undoubtedly looking for a (sexual) partner, not a new member of staff.

<sup>53</sup> Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8: "*Servus quidam, cui cunctam familiae tutelam dominus permiserat suus, quique possessionem maximam illam in quam deverteramus villicabat, habens ex eodem famulatio conservam coniugem, liberae cuiusdam extrariaeque mulieris flagrabat cupidine* / There was a servant whose master had entrusted him with the stewardship of his entire household and who acted as overseer of that extensive holding where we had stopped for the night. He was married to another servant in the same household, but was passionately in love with a free woman who lived outside the estate."

<sup>54</sup> Digest 32.41.5: "*Concubinae inter cetera his uerbis legauerat: fundum in Appia cum vilico suo et contubernali eius et filiis dari volo: quaesitum est, an nepotes quoque vilici et contubernalis eius testator ad concubinam pertinere voluit. respondit nihil proponi, cur non deberentur* / A testator had left a legacy among others to his concubine in these words: 'I wish her to be given my farm in Appia with its manager and his partner and their children.' The question was whether the testator had wished the grandson of the manager and his partner to belong to the concubine also. He replied that there was no reason given why they should not."

Digest 50.16.220.1: "*Sed et Papirius Fronto libro tertio responsorum ait praedio cum vilico et contubernali eius et filiis legato nepotes quoque ex filiis contineri, nisi uoluntas testatoris aliter habeat: filii enim appellatione saepe et nepotes accipi multifariam placere* / But Papirius Fronto says in the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of his Replies that if an estate with a *vilicus* and his *contubernalis* and their sons is legated, grandsons born from these sons are also included unless the intention of the testator was otherwise; for there are all sorts of reasons for grandsons often being included in the designation 'son' (correcting the translation in the Watson edition).

<sup>55</sup> Digest 40.5.41.15: "*Herede filio suo ex asse instituto libertatem dedit in haec uerba: 'December dispensator meus, Seuerus uilicus et Uictorina uilica Seueri contubernalis in annos octo liberi sunt' [...]* / A man instituted his son as sole heir and made a grant of freedom in these terms: 'My clerk of accounts, December, my bailiff, Severus, and Victorina, my housekeeper and Severus' *contubernalis*, are to be free after eight years [...]"



professional context: the *vilica* is also titled *Severi contubernalis*, a pleonasm if *vilicae* were usually ‘married’ to *vilici*, and in that case essentially unnecessary – unless the professional title would not transfer, as I argue, the meaning carried by the personal signifier. The other remaining passage offers very little else, in fact, and I would argue, nothing at all. It falls into the section of the *instrumentum fundi*, and the specific issue addressed by the lawyers is that of the determination of the legacy of an estate, in particular as to what may count as part of the *instrumentum fundi* legated in the will. Agreement over the correct practice was not easily achieved in this matter as the list of lawyers quoted, from Alfenus, Trebatius and Labeo, to Pegasus and Neratius indicates – and is still not settled even in our time.<sup>56</sup> The passage, then, lists the *vilica* with many other elements that form part of the *instrumentum*.<sup>57</sup> Oddly enough, the *vilica*’s inclusion appears to be conditional; she is only to be considered part of the *instrumentum* if she assists her ‘husband’ in his duties: *si modo aliquo officio virum adiuuet*. Bradley labels the *vilica* from Digest 33.7 as the *vilicus*’ ‘wife’, although the Digest offers no identification of the ‘husband’ in question.<sup>58</sup> Jesper Carlsen simply concludes that the *vilica* “[...] is considered as part of the *instrumentum fundi* like other members of the *familia rustica* [...]”<sup>59</sup> The lawyer Siro Solazzi goes even further in his equation of the *vilica* with the *focaria* (who is listed together with the *vilica*), and logically includes her amongst the *instrumentum instrumenti*, i.e. amongst the items provided for the benefit of the *instrumentum*, but not directly for the operation of the *fundus*.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the *vilica* is not understood as playing an essential role in the production processes herself, but merely as a means to enhance the economic performance of those who are considered a vital component of economic activity at the *fundus*: male slaves, including in particular, but not only, the *vilicus*. This interpretation of the professional role of the *vilica* presents a particularly androcentric reading of the relationship between *vilicus* and *vilica* – for not only is the *vilica* defined in the private dimension as dependent on her male counterpart, but also in the public dimension: her job is ultimately defined through the *vilicus*, and in fact directed at him. Do we have to follow this reading?

<sup>56</sup> See the survey of modern approaches by U. John, *Die Auslegung des Legats von Sachgesamtheiten im römischen Recht bis Labeo* (Karlsruhe, 1970), 1-7.

<sup>57</sup> Digest 33.7.12.5: “*Trebatius amplius etiam pistorem et tonsorem, qui familiae rusticae causa parati sunt, putat contineri, item fabrum, qui uillae reficiendae causa paratus sit, et mulieres quae panem coquant quaeque uillam seruent: item molitores, si ad usum rusticum parati sunt: item focariam et uilicam, si modo aliquo officio uirum adiuuet: item lanificas quae familiam rusticam uestiunt, et quae pulmentaria rusticis coquant* / Trebatius further thinks that a baker and barber, intended to serve the needs of the rural household, are included; likewise, the mason, who is intended to repair the villa, and the women who cook bread and look after the villa; likewise, the millers, if they are intended for use on the estate; likewise, the kitchen maid and the steward’s wife, provided she assists her husband in some duty; likewise, the woolmakers who make clothes for the rural household and those women who cook relishes for the rural slaves.”

<sup>58</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (above, n.9), 59.

<sup>59</sup> Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5), 197.

<sup>60</sup> S. Solazzi, ‘Il rispetto per la famiglia dello schiavo’, *SDHI* 15 (1949), 187-192, at 190f. (also published in *Scritti di diritto romano VI* (Naples, 1972), 576-581, at 579): “La preoccupazione di non separare la donna dal suo uomo Trebazio non la sentiva di certo, quando esigeva che anche la *focaria* del *vilicus* prestasse un lavoro utile al suo *contubernalis* e perciò indirettamente al fondo cui il *vilicus* soprintende [...] Perché sia compresa nel legato non fa mestieri che la *focaria* copra un *officium* speciale e distinto da quello che è insito nella sua qualità di *focaria*. Nel loro buon senso pratico i giuristi romani riconoscevano che il servo, *vilicus* o no, ha bisogno per motivi naturali e sociali di una compagna; il servo è necessario al fondo, la *focaria* al servo; di conseguenza la *focaria* è *instrumentum instrumenti*.”

Modern understanding of the *instrumentum fundi* in republican times, especially as regards the human resources within it, does not entirely depend on the legal sources, but also on the agricultural writers. Cato and Varro are in agreement that the slave labour force which is kept on a farm for the purpose of agricultural production there was part of the *instrumentum fundi*.<sup>61</sup> It is Cato's lists of agricultural slave labourers that are of particular interest for an understanding of the *instrumentum fundi* in this period. In these, Cato states very clearly that both *vilica* and *vilicus* (amongst other slaves) form an integral part of the *instrumentum* of an olive grove or a vineyard.<sup>62</sup> Of course, agronomists and lawyers may differ in their understanding of, or approximations to, reality: Arthur Steinwenter consequently allows himself to question whether the Roman lawyers were equipped to know economic conditions well enough, or indeed, whether it was in their interest to sketch these as realistically as possible.<sup>63</sup> But if the agricultural writers viewed the *vilica* as part and parcel of the estate's *instrumentum*, how come this would have slipped the attention of the lawyers?

Other passages in the Digest suggest inclusion of the *vilica* in her own right amongst the *instrumentum fundi*, in perfect agreement with the description of her professional tasks offered in the agricultural writers.<sup>64</sup> The passage in question, however, appears to deny the *vilica* this right through the odd addition that makes her inclusion dependent on assistance provided to her 'husband'. The passage lists a whole range of other people who did not directly qualify to be reckoned amongst the *instrumentum fundi*, but who, because of the significance of their contribution for the smooth running of the market-oriented productive activities at the *fundus*, i.e. towards the maintenance of both the labour force and the means of production, were also regarded as part of the estate's *instrumentum*: a baker, a barber, a mason, women who make bread and look after the villa, millers, a kitchen-maid – a *vilica*. The clash is obvious: a number of (slave) labourers – and the estate manageress. The string of titles that otherwise combines solely menial labour is clearly broken by the inclusion of the *vilica*.

Of course, the *vilica* contributed to the maintenance of the labour force just

<sup>61</sup> Cato, *De agricultura* 10.1f.; 11.1ff.; Varro, *De re rustica* 1.17.1.

<sup>62</sup> A. Steinwenter, *Fundus cum instrumento. Eine agrar- und rechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Wien and Leipzig, 1942), 26 advocates a narrow interpretation of the republican concept of *instrumentum*, which excludes the (slave) labourers from it on the basis of Cato's use of the verb *instruere* instead of the noun *instrumentum*. I follow however the argument by John, *Die Auslegung des Legats* (above, n.56), 8-12 who regards the verb as sufficiently strong to include in, and define the *instrumentum fundi* by, the items listed thereafter, including the human resources.

<sup>63</sup> Steinwenter, *Fundus cum instrumento* (above, n.62), 9.

<sup>64</sup> This is most pronounced in Digest 33.7.8: "*In instrumento fundi ea esse, quae fructus quaerendi cogendi conseruandi gratia parata sunt, Sabinus libris ad Uitellium euidenter enumerat. quaerendi, ueluti homines qui agrum colunt, et qui eos exercent praepositiue sunt is, quorum in numero sunt uilici et monitores: praeterea boues domiti, et pecora stercorandi causa parata, uasaque utilia culturae, quae sunt aratra ligones sarculi falces putatoriae bidentes et si qua similia dici possunt. cogendi, quemadmodum torcularia corbes falcesque messoriae falces fenariae quali uindemiatorii exceptoriiue, in quibus uuae comportantur. Conservandi, quasi dolia, licet defossa non sint, et cuppae* / Sabinus states plainly in his books on Vitellius that those things are included in the *instrumentum* of a farm which are provided for the producing, gathering, and preserving of the fruits. Thus, for producing, the men who till the soil and those who direct them or are placed in charge of them, including stewards and overseers, also domesticated oxen and beasts kept for producing manure, and implements useful in farming, such as plows, mattocks, hoes, pruning hooks, forks, and similar items. For gathering, such things as presses, baskets, sickles, scythes, grape-pickers' baskets in which grapes are carried. For preserving, such things as casks, even if not set in the ground, and tuns."

PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

like the other slaves listed here; yet her primary duty was defined quite differently: she was heavily involved in the organisation of numerous activities at the villa as briefly described at the outset of this article.<sup>65</sup> What makes matters worse is her close association with the *focaria*: given the nature of the professional role allocated to the *vilica*, namely supervisory, this combination is truly awkward.<sup>66</sup> The *focaria*, on the other hand, fits perfectly into the string of jobs listed. As kitchen-maid, the woman carrying this title would have been one of the lesser female slaves on the estate and her inclusion in the *instrumentum fundi* only on fulfilment of certain conditions is comprehensible.<sup>67</sup> *Focariae*, unlike *vilicae*, would not have directly contributed to production for the market. How should this inconsistency be explained?

The answer, I think, lies in the text. The grammatical verb structure which follows the phrase containing *focaria* and *vilica* is in the singular. It thus differs in its choice of number from that chosen elsewhere in the text; relative clauses elsewhere agree in number with the number of agents to which they relate: the baker and barber are followed by a plural, the mason by a singular. Although grammatically not incorrect, the singular following both the *focaria* and the *vilica* seems an odd diversion from the rule. If the singular was meaningful, i.e. if the conditional clause was to refer to one person only, the choice made by Bradley and Carlsen creates a bizarre scenario: for if we view Digest 33.7.12.5 as evidence for a *vilicus-vilica*-‘marriage’ (and thus relate the condition to the *vilica*), the *focaria* is included in the *instrumentum fundi* outright, whilst the *vilica* only just gets in on grounds of her personal relationship. At this point, I think it more reasonable to side with a group of scholars who discarded ‘*et vilicam*’ as a later gloss.<sup>68</sup> Recognition of the *vilica* as an interpolation solves both linguistic and historical problems attached to her inclusion in the text. And although the hunting of interpolation has gone out of fashion, there is to my mind no better explanation for the many inconsistencies and contradictions which the text presents as it is.<sup>69</sup> This however leaves us with virtually no evidence at all in the Digest that suggests construction of a widely dispersed concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-‘marriage’. Instead, the little there is implies that a *vilicus* may or may not be married to a *vilica*, suggesting in turn achieved status of both titles.

### **MANAGING THE MANAGERS OR SLAVERY AND ROMAN ESTATE MANAGEMENT**

Good estate management was crucial for the smooth and successful running of the

<sup>65</sup> So Cato, *De agricultura* 143 and Columella, *De re rustica* 12.

<sup>66</sup> An interpretation of the title *vilica* as the term for a professional female weaver or textile worker as offered by E.M. Shtajerman, *Die Krise der Sklavenhalterordnung im Westen des römischen Reiches* (Berlin, 1964), 32 lacks support in the sources.

<sup>67</sup> cf. same use of the title in Digest 33.7.15pr.; 33.7.12.6; Pauli *Sent.* 3.6.37. Solazzi, ‘Il rispetto per la famiglia dello schiavo’ (above, n.60), actually describes the *focaria* as the general term for a (male) slave’s concubine because of its confusion with the usage of the term for a soldier’s concubine in imperial times (for which see P. Meyer, ‘Die *focariae militum*’, *Hermes* 32 (1897), 484-487).

<sup>68</sup> B. Kuebler and R. Helm, *Vocabularium Iurisprudentiae Romanae, Vol.I, Fasc.II* (Berlin, 1898), 225, and E. Levy and E. Rabel, *Index Interpolationum quae in Iustiniani Digestis inesse dicuntur, Tomus II* (Weimar, 1929), 286. The gloss was also suspected by Solazzi, ‘Il rispetto per la famiglia dello schiavo’ (above, n.60) who however concludes with an equation of *vilica* and *focaria*, which has been heavily criticized: John, *Die Auslegung des Legats* (above, n.56), 23, n.55.

<sup>69</sup> On the development of ‘interpolation hunting’ within Roman law studies, and a critical assessment of its decline in recent years see D. Johnston, ‘Justinian’s *Digest*: The Interpretation of Interpolation’, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 9 (1989), 149-166.

rural enterprises of aristocratic Romans. Next to the organisation of the labour force itself, the organisation and management of those that would keep an eye on it was highly significant. After all, the managerial tasks of both *vilica* and *vilicus* were manifold, including on the one hand the management of the slave *familia*, and on the other the management of the estate itself. Management of the labour force was of particular importance amongst the duties ascribed to farm managers by Cato.<sup>70</sup> Personal characteristics and the professional training needed by a *vilicus* in order to exercise good estate management were key issues for Columella.<sup>71</sup> In Bradley's words, Columella's description implies "[...] that although he should be prepared for the post from boyhood a slave should not be appointed as farm bailiff (*vilicus*) before the age of thirty-five, so great were the prior knowledge and experience needed for such an important position."<sup>72</sup> Columella's ideal may not have found much of an echo in real life: he calls the bailiff that he has himself constructed the '*vilicus perfectus*',<sup>73</sup> and he is acutely aware of the possibility of cheating *vilici*, as well as of *vilici* who lack the basic skills to perform their duties well.<sup>74</sup> Yet, it is clear that the profession required a certain amount of knowledge and expertise. As the *vilicus*, so the *vilica* should be selected and prepared for her future task according to the kind of precepts laid out by Columella.<sup>75</sup> If, at the same time, *vilica* and *vilicus* were meant to form a household unit, their personal relationship(s) could easily come into conflict with their professional obligations: *contubernium* held with other slaves prior to their appointment to the position of farm managers would need to be dissolved, families split up, children left behind.

Take the case of the *vilica* Nice, herself partner of Dama Statulli who commemorates her in a funerary inscription.<sup>76</sup> Carlsen sees Nice merely as the *vilica*'s *vicaria*, and more specifically as her assistant or future replacement.<sup>77</sup> This interpretation of the inscription is not impossible – but it is incompatible with the concept of an institutionalised *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage', which Carlsen holds simultaneously. For if Nice was to replace the present *vilica* after her retirement, her relationship to Dama would be in conflict with any new relationship that the job might bring with it. To be sure, 'divorce' amongst slaves because of professional separation appears to be evident in some commemorative inscriptions from Rome, and these seem to stress the masters' final word even in matters of slaves' personal affairs.<sup>78</sup> Yet, the writings of the agronomists display a very different attitude. The provisioning of slaves with partners was rooted very clearly in the hope that it might settle the slaves more onto the estate and make them feel more at home and attached to the place.<sup>79</sup> This does not gel well with any intended separations by the masters. A passage in the Digest confirms this attitude towards family relationships amongst agricultural slaves: in the case of (male) slaves being legated in a will as part of the

<sup>70</sup> Cato, *De agricultura* 5.

<sup>71</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 1.8; 11.1.3-29.

<sup>72</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (above, n.9), 68.

<sup>73</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 11.1.12.

<sup>74</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 1.7.6f.; 1.8.4. See also Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 62.

<sup>75</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 12.1.1-3.

<sup>76</sup> CIL XI 871 (Mutina): *Vivit / v(ivus) / Dama Statulli / Nicini vilicae / vicariae suae / et suisque / p(edes) q(uadrati) XII* (cf. also n.34 above).

<sup>77</sup> Carlsen, 'The *vilica*' (above, n.5), 202.

<sup>78</sup> Treggiari, 'Contubernales in CIL 6' (above, n.30), 42-69, at 61f. This view is further developed in S. Treggiari and S. Dorken, 'Women with Two Living Husbands in CIL 6', *LCM* 6.10 (1981), 269-272.

<sup>79</sup> Varro, *De re rustica* 1.17.5; 2.1.26; 2.10.6. Columella, *De re rustica* 1.8.5.



*instrumentum* of an estate, the lawyers rule that their ‘wives’ and children ought to be legated, too, for it was inconceivable that their former master wanted to impose such a harsh separation.<sup>80</sup> But if job and title of slave estate managers went with a specific relationship, such disruption and separation would have been unavoidable. If steady personal relationships amongst agricultural slaves were as a rule viewed positively by the masters – and clearly they were – it seems inconceivable that managerial slaves should not have benefited from such a security in their lives. Thus, it seems to me more logical to presume that both professional and personal allocations remained unchanged upon the promotion of one’s partner to the management level at the *villa rustica*. This however would imply a management structure that was not based on, or that did not incline to specific personal relationships.<sup>81</sup>

Alternatively, take the case of Festus, the slave of Ti. Catus Caesius Fronto, known to us through two inscriptions: in one Festus titles himself *vilicus*, in the other *actor*.<sup>82</sup> Both inscriptions were set up by Festus himself, and come from the Pagus Fificulanus. It seems therefore plausible to suggest that Festus was promoted from the management position of *vilicus* on an individual estate to the role of *actor*, and thereby assumed supervisory control over more than one estate.<sup>83</sup> Caesia Nympe, Festus’ partner, mentioned in the second inscription, is not identified by any professional title. Was she already Festus’ partner during his time as *vilicus*, had she been the *vilica*? And if so, are we to believe that she lost her professional title upon Festus’ promotion to a different position? Or are we to believe that whoever was Festus’ partner during his time as *vilicus* remained in the position of *vilica* but was allocated a new partner, i.e. the new *vilicus* who would have taken over from Festus?

In a comparable case from Noricum, Carlsen has suggested a similar promotion from *vilicus* to *actor* of Urso, mentioned in an inscription as partner of the *vilica* Flora.<sup>84</sup> The suggestion however depends entirely on the concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-‘marriage’ – and clashes with it at the same time: for if we ought to identify

<sup>80</sup> Digest 33.7.12.7: “*Uxores quoque et infantes eorum, qui supra enumerati sunt, credendum est in eadem uilla agentes uoluisse testatorem legato contineri: neque enim duram separationem iniunxisse credendus est* / It should also be held that the testator wanted the wives and children too of those enumerated above, if they live in the same villa, to be included in the legacy; for it is not credible that he would have imposed a harsh separation.”

<sup>81</sup> I do not want to exclude that geographical separation between slave partners may have occurred in individual cases upon a partner’s professional promotion. But again, there is no strong reason to propose that any such (long-)distance relationships were necessarily doomed to termination. Evidence from the New World is full of material documenting long-distance relationships between slaves from different plantations (and different masters). It also vouches for the masters’ efforts to restrict their slaves’ (sexual) relationships to amongst the slaves on the same estate. The latter may be the modern parallel to Varro’s recommendation to provide his foremen with partners specifically from amongst their fellow-slaves: Varro, *De re rustica* 1.17.5. On the modern evidence see D.G. White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York and London, 1985), 76 and 153ff. On the same phenomenon amongst urban slaves in ancient Rome see M.B. Flory, ‘Family in *Familia*: Kinship and Community in Slavery’, *AJAH* 3 (1978), 78-95, at 82. Columella, too, knows of slaves wandering off the estate for reasons other than their masters’ business: *De re rustica* 1.8.7; 1.8.12f.; 11.1.23f.

<sup>82</sup> See *CIL* IX 3571: *L(ibero) p(atri) Festus Cati Frontinis vil(icus)*, and *CIL* IX 3579: *Caesiae / Ursillae / vixit a(nnos) XXII / Secundo / Ti. Caesi Fronto/nis arcar(io) / Caesia Nympe / et Festus act(or) / filiae piissimae et gene(ro) posterisque suis / et sibi / p(osuerunt)*.

<sup>83</sup> This promotion is also suspected by Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 454 and 469, and was indeed assumed by Mommsen in *CIL* IX. On the duties of the *actor* see Aubert, *op.cit.*, 186-196.

<sup>84</sup> *CIL* III 5616 (Noricum: Rothof): “*D(is) M(anibus) / Flora vilica / Urso actori / marito caris/simo o(bito) an(norum) XLV / et Iucundo / socio e(t) Succ(ess)a(e) socr(a)e pie/ntissimis et / sibi viva fecit / et Successus f(ilius) parentib(us) pientissimis*”. Cf. Carlsen, ‘The *vilica*’ (above, n.5), 203f.



PBSR 72 (2004), 101-124

Urso as former *vilicus* purely on the grounds of his (continued) relationship to the *vilica* Flora, we are subsequently left in the dark as to the functionality of this concept regarding the personal set-up of Urso's successor as *vilicus*: he could obviously not be 'married' to the *vilica* Flora who was still with Urso, now *actor*. The central issue underlying all three examples is the incompatibility of the concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage' with the practicalities of estate management. Appointments to and promotions from management positions at rural estates would have caused major family upsets if they entailed specific personal relationships. The concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage' thus depends on a view of a 'husband'-and-'wife' slave management team that fails to sit comfortably in its practical context.

A distinction between *vilica* and *vilicus* on the household level is also implied by Cato in his *De agricultura* when providing grain rations for each of them separately.<sup>85</sup> The separate allocation is puzzling if the two regularly formed a 'husband'-and-'wife'-team – and a household unit. In that case, it would have been much easier for Cato to provide a single (if larger) ration for the *vilicus* (which would have also covered the *vilica*), and which is the model used for the grain allocations for his other management staff. Cato's account is of course an ideal treatment and not a realistic study. But if *vilicae* and *vilici* were ideally meant to receive separate allocations so as to support two distinct household units, where does this leave us with the concept of a (not less ideal) *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage'? Other grain ration schemes known for Roman Italy work equally on the assumption that (named) recipients would share their allocations with their (male and female) dependants; they were supporting whole families, not individuals. The grain dole for citizens in republican Rome was no exception: Cicero tells us that this was set at five *modii* per month and recipient, i.e. the head of a citizen family.<sup>86</sup> The grain rations allocated to *vilica* and *vilicus* would, if believed to support one household only, be in excess of what was given out to whole families at the dole in Rome by around one *modius*. I do not want to exclude the possibility that agricultural slaves were better looked after than many would suppose, but I find it difficult to believe that their basic grain allocation was intended by Cato the Censor to exceed a citizen's. Attempts by Roman slave masters to save on rations by manumitting slaves, with a view to enlisting them in the grain dole at Rome as new citizens, supports the argument presented here that sees a similarity in the principle of distribution and overall ration size between slave and free grain recipients.<sup>87</sup> An allocation of rations for individuals within the same household unit implied by the concept of a *vilicus-vilica*-'marriage', in contrast, lacks a historical precedent in Roman Italy. Cato's food rationing scheme, then, mentions *vilica* and *vilicus* separately in order to provide for two separate household units, one of the *vilica* and the other of the *vilicus*. The distinct ration scheme only makes sense if the *vilica* was not as a rule part of the *vilicus*' household, and if further to this she assumed her title in her own right, based upon the importance of her professional role.<sup>88</sup> Hence food management, just like appointment structures, at rural estates

<sup>85</sup> Cato, *De agricultura* 56: *Familiae cibaria. Qui opus facient per hiemem tritici modios IIII, per aestatem modios IIII S, vilico, vilicae, epistatae, opilioni modios III* / Grain rations for the hands: four modii of wheat in winter, and in summer four and a half for the field hands. The *vilicus*, the *vilica*, the foreman, and the shepherd should receive three (my translation). The issue of food rations and family relationships between agricultural slaves is elaborated in detail in U. Roth, 'Food Rations in Cato's *De agricultura* and Female Slave Labour', *Ostraka* 11.1 (2002), 195-213.

<sup>86</sup> Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.5.52. See also Polybius 6.39.13.

<sup>87</sup> See Dion. Hal. 4.24.5 and Suetonius, *Augustus* 42.2.

<sup>88</sup> The concept of grain rations as a sign of a slave's professional role is discussed at length by A.

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

renders the maintenance of the concept of an institutionalised personal relationship between *vilica* and *vilicus* very difficult. Instead, the organisation of slave staff management at the highest level suggests that *vilica* and *vilicus* were two distinct professional roles that complemented each other – often, but not always – but were not laid out to overlap in the personal sphere: *Vilica* and *Vilicus* made a pair – an asymmetrical pair, but *not* a dyad.<sup>89</sup>

OA COPY

---

Bürge, ‘*Cibaria*: Indiz für die soziale Stellung des römischen Arbeitnehmers?’, in M.J. Schermaier and Z. Végh (eds.), *Ars boni et aequi. Festschrift für Wolfgang Waldstein zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart, 1993), 63-78.

<sup>89</sup> Playing on J. Henderson’s “*Vilicus* and *Vilica* make a pair – an asymmetrical pair, but still a dyad”: ‘Columella’s Living Hedge: The Roman Gardening Book’, *JRS* 92 (2002), 110-133, at 122.

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

## APPENDIX. THE SEX RATIO IN *VILICI* INSCRIPTIONS FROM ROMAN ITALY

The purpose of this appendix is to analyse the sex ratio inherent in the inscriptions attesting rustic *vilicae* and *vilici* from Roman Italy (and Sicily). By doing so, it aims to add to the discussion of the epigraphic material presented above by proposing that the six epigraphically attested *vilicae* are all that one ought to expect to find from a numerical point of view – and that, in contrast, identification of personal partners of *vilici* as *vilicae* would create a numerical pool of the latter that would go far beyond what one can reasonably explain within the epigraphic habit displayed by female (agricultural) commemorators and commemores.

At first sight, then, the sex ratio between *vilicae* and *vilici* seems highly biased towards the male farm managers: six epigraphically attested *vilicae* stand against 202 epigraphically attested *vilici*, producing a sex ratio of roughly 1:34. The sex ratio in occupational inscriptions is, of course, at best highly biased; yet, the typical sex ratio found amongst epigraphically attested individuals of servile provenance from Rome, who are mentioned by name and occupational/professional title, is around 1:7.<sup>90</sup> The high sex ratio of the *vilici* inscriptions might thus lend support to the view that the *contubernales*, etc. of *vilici* mentioned in Table 2 above are *vilicae* in epigraphic disguise, which, if correct, would reduce the sex ratio dramatically and make it more acceptable. Yet, there is a much simpler explanation.

To begin with, *vilicae* were found in substantially fewer trades than *vilici*: a *vilicus* could be in charge of mines and metal workshops, amphitheatres, libraries, tax collection, public finances, and much more.<sup>91</sup> And the bulk of the epigraphic evidence on *vilici* stems from these areas. At best, only twenty-seven of the 202 *vilici* known to us through these inscriptions suggest an agricultural or rustic occupation of some sort, but not necessarily employment at a *villa rustica*. At least 74 imply a positive identification with one of the non-agricultural work areas listed above.<sup>92</sup> This much wider application of the title *vilicus* would have had a huge impact on the original number of inscriptions, and subsequently on those available for study today. In addition to these, there is a large group of *vilici* inscriptions that do not allow any form of professional identification either way. These embrace half of the *vilici* known to us, i.e. 101 in total. This described differentiation between *vilici* who engaged in an agricultural profession, those who clearly did not, and the group of those who do not easily offer any professional identification is laid out in Chart 1 below.

As regards those *vilici* who do not offer any professional identification on the stone, Jean-Jacques Aubert has suggested that the “lack of specification may suggest that a *vilicus* was attached to an agricultural estate [...]”<sup>93</sup> I find this a difficult proposition to follow. Of the 101 inscriptions that do not easily allow professional identification, fourteen, mentioning seventeen *vilici*, are dedications to the god

<sup>90</sup> See Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status* (above, n.28), 16ff.

<sup>91</sup> For a list of the fields in which *vilici* were employed according to the epigraphic evidence see Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n. 1), 173ff.

<sup>92</sup> I follow the identifications in Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 173f. and 445-461. The abundance of non-Italian evidence given by him only further supports the wider employment of the term. The *vilicus* known through the Corfinio inscription is included in the ‘rustic’ section for reasons made explicit above p.[7].

<sup>93</sup> Aubert, *Business Managers* (above, n.1), 443.

Silvanus, mainly from Rome.<sup>94</sup> We do not know enough about the cult of this rustic god, but it seems unlikely that all these dedications in the city would have been set up by *vilici rustici* who happened to be in charge of a suburban estate just outside Rome and who were all equally devoted to the cult of this deity. And Peter Dorcey has shown that the cult, while having rustic roots, had by the empire become a means for town dwellers to express a sentimental nostalgia for the countryside;<sup>95</sup> this should not exclude the group of *vilici* who were amongst the god's most devoted followers in urban centres.<sup>96</sup> Of course, none of this excludes a strong following and continuing importance of the cult in the countryside: two of the inscriptions (from Furfo and Trebula Mutuesca) stem from a rural context, and they may be evidence for such a continuation.<sup>97</sup> But the remaining fifteen *vilici* are difficult to associate with the countryside, and it seems they were *vilici urbani*, rather than *vilici rustici*. Thus, in the absence of any occupational specification, it makes in my view more sense to put these fifteen *vilici* tentatively into a context of urban professions, and to view them as yet another group of servile and/or lower class origin in the cities that adhered to what was originally an agricultural cult, thus increasing the number of non-rustic *vilici* from 74 to 89. The number of *vilici rustici* is in turn raised from 27 to 29. The change in numbers between all three groups of *vilici* in question is laid out in Chart 2 below.

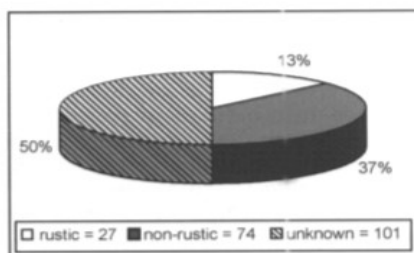


FIG. 1. Professional identification of Italian *vilici*, as revealed by inscriptions.

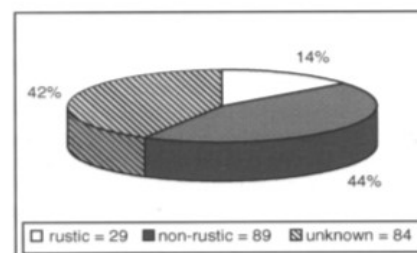


FIG. 2. Revised professional identifications of Italian *vilici*, with amended attributions for the seventeen *vilici* associated with dedications to the god Silvanus.

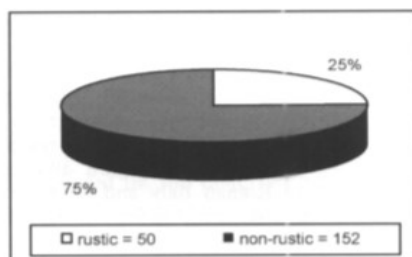


FIG. 3. Revised professional identifications of Italian *vilici*, with the unknown section divided into rustic and non-rustic occupations according to the ratio of definite identifications.

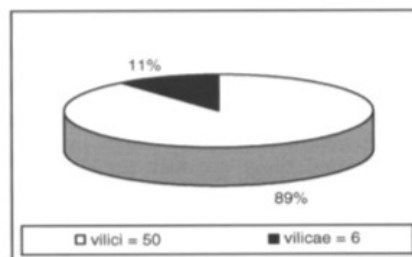


FIG. 4. The ratio between rustic *vilici* and *vilicae*.

<sup>94</sup> *CIL* VI 586; 615; 619; 662; 664; 666; 679; 696; 31010; 36823 (all Rome); *CIL* IX 3517 (Furfo); *CIL* IX 4664 (Aquae Cutiliae); *CIL* IX 4877 (Trebula Mutuesca); *CIL* XI 6947 (Luna).

<sup>95</sup> P.F. Dorcey, *The Cult of Silvanus. A Study in Roman Folk Religion* (Leiden, 1992).

<sup>96</sup> Dorcey, *Cult of Silvanus* (above, n.95), 119 goes as far as stating that "Silvanus ranks as the most popular deity among *vilici*, but most of these are from Rome or other Italian cities, and may never have lived on a farm."

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of rural sanctuaries which held agricultural land under the management of *vilici rustici* see J. Carlsen, 'CIL X 8217 and the Question of Temple Land in Roman Italy', in J. Carlsen *et al.* (eds.), *Landuse in the Roman Empire* (Rome, 1994), 9-15.

*PBSR* 72 (2004), 101-124

The subsequent ratio between *vilici* from a rustic, non-rustic and unknown professional context as suggested in Chart 2 is to my mind likely to be still very generous with regard to those that have been subsumed under the rustic section and in the unknown category. Yet, even as it stands, this allows only a maximum of 113 *vilici rustici* – if one assumed that those 84 *vilici* still without any professional identification were to be subsumed under the rustic section together with the 29 that have already been placed there. There is, however, no reason to propose that lack of professional specification in any way implies a rural dedicator. From a statistical point of view, the group of unknown professional provenance should divide into rustic and non-rustic occupations according to the ratio identified between these two groups. If put to the test, the result suggests a majority of 152 *vilici urbani* as opposed to a meagre 50 *vilici rustici* as laid out in Chart 3 below. This would provide a total of 56 Italian *vilici rustici* (including the six *vilicae*) known through the epigraphic material. The sex ratio amongst these still seems extreme at first sight with 89% *vilici* and only 11% *vilicae*, i.e. roughly eight *vilici* to one *vilica* as demonstrated in Chart 4 below. But this is in perfect keeping with the slightly weaker bias inherent in the much larger group of occupational inscriptions known from the city of Rome referred to above. So it seems that the total number of *vilici rustici* known to us from the epigraphic evidence is not so large after all, and the discrepancy between the number of inscriptions mentioning a *vilicus* and those mentioning a *vilica* not completely implausible or surprising. Thus, there is no need to ‘search’ for more *vilicae* beyond those six that are already known to us. In contrast, to regard all the *contubernales*, etc. mentioned in the *vilici* inscriptions from Roman Italy and Sicily as *vilicae*, would not only cause serious problems with our understanding of the epigraphic habit displayed by slaves and freedmen, but also create a numerical pool of *vilicae* that is much larger than we should expect to find.

ULRIKE ROTH, The University of Edinburgh, [u.roth@ed.ac.uk](mailto:u.roth@ed.ac.uk)

This article has been published by *PBSR* and should be cited from that publication, including from the journal's page numbers.