Mention of ancient makeup, allusions to its associations, and its connection to female beauty are scattered throughout Latin literature. It may seem a minor, even unimportant concern, but nonetheless one from which we may recover aspects of women's historical experience and knowledge of women as cultural actors. The present study is concerned solely with cosmetics and what impact they may have had on women's realities and on perceptions of women. Although the evidence I collect and present here is mainly literary, evidence of material remains is given where possible. This study is intended as a detailed look at cosmetic substance.

Mention of ancient makeup, allusions to its associations, and its connection to female beauty are scattered throughout Latin literature.1 It may seem a minor, even unimportant concern, but nonetheless one from which I believe we may recover aspects of women's historical experience and knowledge of women as cultural actors. Adornment and cosmetics may be accounted both as significant aspect of some women's lives and, much like prostitution, a field of "intentional female activity."2 As scholars have pointed out, "the use and prestige of cosmetics crossed economic boundaries." A woman did not need to be wealthy to wear perfumes or cosmetics: some inexpensivepyxides were made of wood, the blown glass used to hold unguents was cheap, and most substances used for cosmetics and scents (or substitutes for


them) were widely available. Because of the noteworthy role played by adornment in the lives of ancient women, the present study is concerned solely with cosmetics and what impact they may have had on women’s realities (as far as that is possible) and on literary perceptions of women. It does not explore the ways in which images of made-up women informed political systems or rhetoric.

While the catalogue of literary evidence I present here is somewhat large, and may seem to be an undiscriminating list of material (or verge on the antiquarian), such a inventory is necessary for two reasons. First, this study is intended as a much more detailed look at cosmetic substance than has been advanced in English before. I hope that such a collection of evidence will contribute to the picture of women’s lives in Roman antiquity, as far as that is possible, by underscoring the sheer number of substances used as cosmetic preparations. Secondly, such a list contributes to the overall argument of the paper: all substances utilized as cosmetics had other uses, and most of these substances were at once literal (and figurative) poison and remedy. Altogether I hope to arrive at a more or less positive picture of female adornment in Roman antiquity. Eve D’Ambra has done much valuable work in the area of adornment and female status, but the present study attempts more comprehensive detail in the area of cosmetic materials. After a look at sources and method, we will go on to examine different kinds of substances used by women on the skin.

I. Sources and Method

The spatial and temporal parameters of this article have been restricted to a study of the women of Italy, during what has been termed “the central period” in Roman history; that is, roughly 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. This may seem a long period of time, but there is a serious lack of connected exposition on the subject in ancient texts, and the problems of using male-authored texts to piece together the evidence are considerable.

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1 Kleiner and Matheson (above, n.1) 164 and n.118. Cheap cosmetics may have been popular, however, because the aura of makeup was one of "exclusivity and social status" (K. Peiss, “Making Faces: the Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender 1890–1930,” Genders 7 [1990] 144).

2 On these, see Richlin (above, n.1); Wyke, “Mirror” (above, n.1) and Mistress (above, n.1) 115–54; and T. P. Wiseman, Clio’s Cosmetics (London 1979) 3–8.


4 Although the evidence collected and presented here is mainly literary, evidence of material remains is given where possible. Perfume and hairstyles are not included, due both to considerations of space and to the fact that they are entirely disparate subjects.

5 K. R. Bradley, Slavery and Society at Rome (Cambridge 1994) xi, 6; and P. A. Brunt, The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays (Oxford 1988) 9–12. We should also be alive to the possibility that women of different regions utilized cosmetics in different ways, although that is not the focus of this paper.
women's lives are well-known. Thus, I have used as evidence a number of disparate sources which I believe reflect something of the social history and cultural mores of the period: the expected satirists and erotic poets, but also moralists, historians, and (on occasion) later lexicographers and antiquarians.

To employ such a mosaicist approach, which utilizes and extracts information from many different types of sources to reach a hypothesis, may seem intellectually indefensible. But juxtaposing many genres may give us more information regarding the subject at hand, and taking stories, anecdotes, and bits of text "out of context" and examining them together may result in patterns which would be invisible if the pieces remained scattered in their more conventional places. Combining genres has an added bonus, which is that because many of the representations are inconsistent, using a mosaicist approach can help highlight interpenetration and interplay amongst sources. Thus, Suzanne Dixon maintains that the history of women in antiquity "requires such combinations" of authors and genres, which can add to a richness of textual detail.

The most important caveat in using such an approach is that authors write with different intentions and attitudes. It is essential that we remain conscious of the differences amongst genres. And, as Suzanne Dixon reminds us, it is important to distinguish between information about women's lives and information concerning dominant masculine attitudes to women in the sources. The extraction of facts is mainly what concerns us here, but of course such information may be colored and biased by those same masculine attitudes. This is especially true of cosmetics, which were long suspected in traditional morality as being aesthetically deceptive, repellent, and indicative of sexual immorality. The "anti-cosmetic tradition" seems to provide us with information on many substances used by women as cosmetics, but we must be aware that most of this information comes from satirical or moralistic works, sometimes savagely so, and that such texts may not provide us with unmediated access to women's lives.

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8 On which see, for instance, V. French, "What is Central for the Study of Women in Antiquity?" Helios 17 (1989) 213–20. Flemming (above, n.2) 39 characterizes the evidence as "scarce and slippery evidential resources of a literature produced by men of the imperial élite for their own particular purposes." But French (216) states: "[F]or so poorly documented an area, it seems to me foolhardy to rule any evidence out of court on the grounds that it was male authored and remains largely male-authorized."


10 Barton (above, n.9) 5–6.


12 Dixon (above, n.11) 16–20.


14 Gibson (above, n.13) 174.
In addition, statements concerning makeup in the literary sources may be inaccurate or incomplete, if only because it may be assumed that close examination of cosmetic substance and how it was employed was not a priority for most Roman authors.\textsuperscript{15}

Scholars have pointed out that there was a difference in antiquity between to kosmētikon tēs iatrikēs meros (the preservation of beauty) and to kommōtikon (the “unnatural embellishment” of looks), a distinction clearly found in Galen, for instance.\textsuperscript{16} While the former was acceptable, the latter was not, and “it is hardly coincidental” therefore that most of our works on cosmetics from antiquity concentrate on the former.\textsuperscript{17} I examine both kinds of substances in this paper, but it is noteworthy that most of our information on makeup (to kommōtikon) comes from a hostile tradition. Peculiar or repellent substances said to have been used by women as makeup therefore may tell us more about ancient notions of the feminine than about cosmetic substance.

II. Substance

What follows is a summary of the information that male authors give us about cosmetic substance; subsequent sections will detail how these substances were utilized elsewhere.

A pale, smooth complexion was very much desired (probably as an indicator of social status: fair skin displayed membership in the leisure class), and skin was ideally white all over.\textsuperscript{18} Such

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\begin{itemize}
  \item Thus, the scant information we find concerning female adornment in the ancient sources may not be due to any male “fear” or inherent dislike of cosmetics. See Dixon (above, n.11) 31: “[M]ale literary neglect of female desire might be just a self-centered oversight, like the neglect of mother-daughter relations—it need not be based on a fear of female sexuality.”
  \item On which, see most recently Gibson (above, n.13) 174–75, 186 (an excellent summary of the tradition, with references); and Grillet (above, n.13) 11–18. Gibson (above, n.13) 175. Gal. 12.434f. K.
  \item Gibson (above, n.13) 175. See also Grillet (above, n.13) 18–20; Forbes (above, n.1) 43ff; and Rosati (above, n.1) 46ff. As Gibson points out, this makes the recommendation of cosmetics designed to enhance looks in Ovid Ars am. 3 all the more significant, as it is the only passage surviving from antiquity “which may be construed as containing a recommendation of makeup” (Gibson [above, n.13] 175; Saiko [above, n.1] 220–34). Ovid does state, however, that poems had been written on the subject (Tr. 2.487), and his Medicamina probably contained information on to kommōtikon.
  \item Pale skin: Prop. 2.22.5–6, 8, 2.29.30; Ov. Am. 1.7.51–52, 2.4.41, 2.5.37–40, 2.16.29, 3.2.42, 3.3.5–6, 3.7.7; Ars am. 3.309; Plin. Pan. 48.4; CIL 6.37965; Mart. 4.62; Lucr. 4.1160 (the opposite of the ideal); Hor. Carm. 2.4.3–4; see Apul. Met. 10.30. Pliny the Elder tells us that an ingredient in paint called “ring-white” (anulare) was used in painting to give brilliance to the pale complexions of female portrait sitters (HN 35.48). On femineus pallor, see Sharrock (above, n.1) 40, who notes that eburneus and niveus are “erotic-aesthetic” epithets for the female body in elegy; and Gibson (above, n.13) 176–77. If construction of a particular physical appearance stems from “visualizing the self based on external images,” whether these images be living people or artistic representations (A. Hollander, Seeing through Clothes [New York 1978] 452–53), it seems at least possible that the popularity of pale skin for women could be due not only to status considerations, but also to aesthetic ones: the fact that statues with white marble or ivory “skin” were considered beautiful may have led women to approximate this skin tone as closely as they could. For women specifically described in terms of ivory or marble, see Prop. 2.1.9; Ovid Am. 3.7.7–8, Met. 10.248–249,
  \end{itemize}
pronouncements are found in a variety of authors and time periods. The name Chione, for instance, used by Juvenal and especially Martial to designate an aloof mistress or girlfriend, is itself indicative of the current standards of beauty—the word means “snowy” or “cold” but also “white-skinned.” Various cosmetic substances were said to have whitened the skin (and also functioned, probably, as sun-blocking substances). The most popular preparation was cerussa (sugar of lead), a substance made by pouring vinegar over white lead shavings and letting the lead dissolve. The mixture was then dried, ground, and fashioned into cakes or tablets to be sold. The substance did produce a perfect complexion, and Ovid recommends it to brighten a pasty face. The use of melinum or white marl (clay from Melos mixed with calcium carbonate) also resulted in a pale complexion; Pliny described it as “excessively greasy.” Chalk dust (creta) was used in antiquity (among other applications) for cleansing garments, making seals, and as a polish; it could also be used on the face to whiten it and was safer than white lead, which the ancients knew was poisonous (see below). Chalk was applied mixed with vinegar: Horace speaks of “damp cosmetic chalk.” Martial wryly warned those women who applied chalk dust or cerussa to keep out of the rain lest their makeup streak, and also to avoid the sun, because sweat would likewise ruin the mask. Women reportedly tried other methods to lighten their skin. Ovid claims his recipes for face creams would make a woman’s complexion “pale and brilliant.”

254–255, 275–276; Hor. Carm. 1.19.4–5; Petron. Sat. 126; CIL 6.37965.18 and 20; Mart. 6.13.3–4, 11.60.8; Lucil. In Non. 627L. For women as art objects, see below.

One scholar believes that Greek names for women probably suggested romance or sex (A. Dalby, Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World [London 2000] 127); but on this, see J. Griffin, Latin Poets and Roman Life (London 1985) 1–8, 10–20, 28.

20 Ov. Ars am. 2.209. Perhaps women also carried parasols while outdoors to preserve the complexion naturally: see Mart. 14.28 (umbrella against sun or rain); Juv. 9.50 (umbella). See Croom (above, n.1) 107–8.


22 Plin. HN 34.175–176; 28.139, 183, 34; 35.37.

23 Perfect complexion: Mart. 7.25; Ov. Med. 73; Pl. Most. 258.

24 HN 35.37: nimium pinguitudinem; see Pl. Most. 264.

25 Plaut. Poen. 969 (as a whitener for clothes); Cic. Flac. 37 (as a seal); Plin. HN 33.131 (for polishing silver). Facial whitener: Mart. 2.42, 8.33.17; Plaut. Truc. 294; Petron. 23.4; Saiko (above, n.1) 135; Gibson (above, n.13) 176.

26 Epod. 12.10: umida creta; see also Mart. 6.93.9; Ov. Ars am. 3.199.

27 Mart. 2.41.11–12. St. Jerome also reminded women not to shed tears while made-up (Jer. Ep. 54.7 and 38.3; here a woman’s face is whitened with gypsum). See also Gibson (above, n.13) 184: “[I]t is common in anti-cosmetic contexts to ridicule women by picturing the moment when their cosmetics are made to run through tears or sweat.” Leary (above, n.1) 154 comments, “[O]f course, such dangers might be avoided by staying at home, but one would not then encounter any men. Life without water-proof cosmetics was extremely hard.”

28 Medic. 52: candida, nitere; see Rosati (above, n.1) 72–73; and Mart. 7.13.
dung of a crocodile, is recommended as a facial whitener at Ovid Ars 3.269–270 (on this substance, see below). Some upper-class women reportedly bathed in asses’ milk because it was thought to contribute something to the whiteness of female skin. Martial tells of dusky Lycoris who came to the springs at Tibur, hoping to whiten her skin at the waters which legendarily had the power to bleach substances. So most authors concur in identifying white skin as a component of the attractive woman (and also manage to belittle the woman who uses such substances on her skin in pursuit of beauty).

According to widespread literary sources, rouge was the next most visible element of a woman’s face, often mentioned in “contexts of condemnation.” Cinnabar (red mercuric sulphide) and minium (red lead), both poisonous substances, are sometimes cited by modern authors as ingredients used by the Romans for female cosmetics. But to my knowledge neither of these substances is ever described specifically as women’s rouge, although Ovid mentions the use of “poisonous compounds” to impart a blush. More benign materials occur instead: some women colored with rubrica (red ochre); fucus, a red dye derived from the orchella weed; or red chalk. Dio Chrysostom refers to alkanet as a red dye for the cheeks. Ovid states that rose and poppy petals were used to impart a blush to the face. Ovid and Plautus mention powder dyed with Tyrian purple; Ovid also

29 Plin. (HN 11.238) mentions this fact in relation to all women, more specifically Poppaea; Juvenal (Sat. 6.469–470) in relation to all women; Dio Cassius (62.28) in reference to Poppaea only. Pliny, at HN 34.183, alleges that some women wash their face seven times a day in asses’ milk.

30 1.72.5–6: sic, quae nigrior est cadente moro/curussata sibi placet Lycoris (“thus Lycoris, darker than a falling mulberry, pleases herself when plastered with white lead”). See also 7.13.

31 Condemnation: Gibson (above, n.13) 177. Modern authors: see Forbes (above, n.1) 42; J. Healy, Pliny the Elder on Science and Technology (Oxford 1999) 215–19; and Leary (above, n.1) 153. Minium was of course used to color the face of the triumphator. On cinnabar and minium, see Grillet (above, n.1) 157–60; and Pliny (HN 29.25; 33.118, 119, and 124: quod cum venenum esse conveniat.


34 Dio Chrys. Eub. 117.

35 Medic. 96 and 99; on which, see Rosati (above, n. 1) 80–81.

36 Ov. Ars am. 3.269–270: Pallida purpureis tingat + sua corpora + virgis (“let a pale woman tint her face with sticks of purple”). On “purple” on the cheeks, see M. Hendry, “Rouge and Crocodile Dung: Notes on Ovid, Ars 3.199–200 and 269–70,” CQ 45.2 (1995) 583–88. Hendry (584–86) tentatively suggests that, with the emendation of corpora to tempora, we should read the reference as referring to the solid sticks in which ancient rouge may have been sold; or as the small wooden stick or brush used to apply rouge from a jar. However, “either of these ideas would need a parallel to be totally convincing” (585). Purpura can mean scarlet or pink, but Gibson notes that the woman described as pallida would need stronger color [above, n.13] 205; pale
Cosmetics in Roman Antiquity

refers to faex, the lees of wine. More exotic substances were used for rouge as well: several authors mention crocodilea, the contents of crocodile intestines.

Galen, for example, commented: “[B]ut dainty women highly prize the dung of land crocodiles (those that are small and crawl on the ground); for such women it is not enough that there are countless other cosmetics by which their faces are made smooth and shiny—no, they also include the dung of crocodiles.” Intriguingly, Pliny writes that this crocodile is a land-dweller who lives on sweet-smelling flowers; hence, the contents of its intestines are pleasantly fragrant. He recommends the substance be applied mixed with starch or chalk, or the droppings of starlings. Horace speaks of “a complexion tinted with the dung of a crocodile.” This is an instance in which information about women’s lives may well be colored by dominant masculine attitudes: such is the desire to achieve beauty that (frivolous? desperate?) women will even apply excrement to their faces. One scholar has noted, however, that the term crocodilea “may be an Egyptian code-word for ‘Ethiopian soil’ (presumably a particular earth found beyond Upper Egypt; Lemnian and Samian earths were highly prized for skin preparations); thus it appears in the substitution list in Betz.”

These varied substances may have produced different tints: Ovid warns the young man who surprises his mistress at her toilette that he will see pyxides and “a thousand colors,” an allusion to cosmetics which possibly includes colors of rouge. It is also intriguing to note a disjunction between art and literature on this subject: extant portraits of Roman women in fresco and mosaic do not in fact present us with images of women in artificial red and white “masks,” but with, instead, a natural-looking skin tone. Perhaps the “plastered” face is a hyperbolic fantasy of the authors in the anticosmetic tradition, who exaggerate in order to comment on the nature of the feminine: deceptive and frivolous.

women were encouraged to use rouge at Ars am. 3.200). For tempora as referring to “forehead,” see Prop. 2.18.31–32. Plautus also mentions powder dyed with purple (purpurissimum) at Mostell. 261 and Truc. 290.

37 Ars am. 3.211–212. Gibson (above, n.13) 184 defines faex as “a facial preparation,” but at Hor. Ars P. 277, the substance is used by actors as face-paint. Given the color of the substance, it was probably used as a type of rouge.

38 On which, see Hendry (above, n.36); and Gibson (above, n.13) 206; Saiko (above, n. 1) 248–49; and J. Vons, L’image de la femme dans l’œuvre de Pline l’Ancien (Col. Latomus 256, 2000).


40 Hor. Epod. 12.10–11: colorque/stercore fucatus crocodili; Pliny also recommended bull’s feces for the same purpose (Plin. HN 28.184).

41 H. D. Betz, The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells (Chicago 1996) 167–69. I am indebted to Prof. T. Rihill (Univ. of Wales, Swansea) for this quotation.

Lining the lids and coloring the lashes may also have been practiced, an activity which, as Gibson points out, was routinely condemned in the anticosmetic tradition. Pliny the Elder states in regard to eyelashes that “daily are they dyed with cosmetic by women: such is their claiming of beauty that they color even their eyes.” He states that eyelashes may fall out due to sexual overindulgence; but he does not specifically attribute this behavior to women in makeup. Different substances were used to outline and enhance eyes. Kohl (stibium) was composed of soot (fuligo), lamp black mixed with grease, antimony (a crystalline metallic element), or ashes mixed with oil, applied with a thin stick or needle (see below). Ovid also mentions saffron as an eyeliner. Eyeliner had the property of magnifying the eye, and for that reason was also called platyophthalmon. Calliblepharum was another cosmetic for women’s eyelashes or eyelids (similar to stibium), with ash of rose-kernels or dates as the principal ingredient. It is unclear in these passages whether lids or lashes are meant as the location of the cosmetic (possibly Pliny and others did not know themselves). He also remarks that oysters with a purple line encircling (ambiente) the beard are said to be calliblephara [= calliblepharata], beautifully eyelidded (HN 32.61). This passage suggests that a line was drawn around the eye, rather than outlining the eyebrow or coloring the eyelid itself. Pliny’s section on the making of antimony (33.103) also includes the information that often the substance was made into tablets to be sold. Kohl was applied to eyelids and brows in powdered form. A thin kohl stick was used, made of wood, glass, bone, or ivory: the stick was dipped in water or scented oil first and then in the powder. Today a rod is placed horizontally on the eyelid and drawn out sideways while the eye is closed; ancient kohl sticks have a rounded point at one end, indicating a similar method was used in antiquity. The shape of the kohl tube (long and thin) also seems to be connected with the method of application. Remains of kohl are sometimes found

43 Gibson (above, n.13) 178; and Glazebrook, in this issue.
44 Plin. HN 11.154: mulieribus fuco etiam infectae cotidiano: tanta est decoris adipicio ut tinguantur oculi quoque; see Vons (above, n. 38) 334–36
46 Soot and lamp black: Plin. HN 28.163; Juv. 2.93; black “powder:” Tert. Cult. 2.5.2 (nigrem pulverem). Antimony: Dayagi-Mendels (above, n.1) 42. Ashes (of goats’ meat) mixed with oil: Ov. Ars am. 3.203; Plin. HN 28.166. Pliny also reports that “they say eyebrows are made black by crushed flies” (supercilia denigrari muscis tritis tradunt 30.134). See also Sen. Controv. 5.6 and Saiko (above, n.1) 135–36. Needle: Juv. 2.94.
47 Ars 3.204; see Gibson (above, n.13) 178, with references; and Grillet (above, n.13) 48.
48 Plin. HN 33.102: ideo etiam plerique platyophthalmon id appellavere quoniam in callibleparis mulierum dilatae oculos (“since that is why even a majority of people have called it ‘wide-eye,’ because in eyeliners it magnifies women’s eyes”).
50 See Dayagi-Mendels (above, n.1) 40–42; E. M. Stern, Ancient Glass at the Fondation Custodia (Gröningen 1977) 117; Kleiner and Matheson (above, n.1) 163,
in cylindrical cosmetics tubes which are double or even quadruple-barreled, perhaps for different colors (green and black were known in antiquity). The simplest types probably had a one-piece handle over the top to which the kohl stick would have been attached by a chain.51

Three Latin authors describe a single eyebrow as beautiful, another cosmetic feature which is not borne out by artistic evidence.52 At Ars amatoria 3.201, Ovid writes "with art you fill up the bare common borders of the eyebrow."53 Petronius describes an attractive woman as having eyebrows that "ran to the outline of her cheekbones and almost met again near her eyes." Claudian praises the beauty of Honorius’ consort Maria with the words: "[W]ith how fine a space between do your delicate eyebrows meet on your forehead." Juvenal described effeminate men using stibium or fuligo for lengthening eyebrows; false eyebrows are mentioned by Martial and Petronius.54

Tertullian exhorted Christian women to "color their lips with silence," implying that ordinarily women’s mouths were painted with an artificial substance.55 But there is no evidence in the classical authors that Roman women colored their lips;56 if this was the case, surely tinted lips would have been singled out for mention by the authors, especially the love poets.

I would argue that a beautiful complexion was central to the Roman definition of the feminine, or at least the sexually attractive female; allusions to this feature are found in Roman authors across genre and time period. Most Roman beauty recipes pertain to the skin,57 and rightly so, since it must have been ravaged by dirt, disease, and the effects of lead and mercury in makeup.58 In his no. 116 (double kohl tube, 5th or 6th century C.E., Yale University Art Gallery, Anna Rosalie Mansfield Collection no. 1930.389).

51 During the fifth century, the handles become more and more elaborate, "and finally ended in the sixth century with an elaborate system of interlacing handles in a truly Baroque style" (Stern [above, n.50] 117). The majority of such cosmetics containers are found in graves.

52 Gibson (above, n.13) 177 lists further references: Dioscor, Anth. Pal. 5.54.3; [Theoc.] 8.72ff; Suet. Aug. 79.2.

53 Gibson, tr., (above, n.13) 177.

54 Petron. Sat. 126: supercilia usque ad malarum scripturam currentia et rursus confinio luminum paene permixta; Claud. Epith. 268-269: quam iuncti leviter sese discrimine confert/umbra supercilii. Effeminate men: Juv. 2.93-94. False eyebrows: Mart. 9.37 (on a woman); Petron. Sat. 110 (on a boy). Richlin (above, n.1) 191 cleverly terms these "spare body parts."

55 Tert. Cult. 2.13.7; see also Jer. Ep. 38.3.

56 Contra Balsdon (above, n. 1) 262, and Leary (above, n. 1) 154. Leary does state that there are no references to the practice in extant literature. Women are however sometimes described as having mouths which are "purple/bright" (purpureo ore; Cat. 45.12) or "reddish" (roseo ore; Verg. Aen. 2.593, 9.5).

57 Richlin (above, n.1) 198.

catalogue of remedies for skin complaints,\textsuperscript{59} Pliny mentions pimples \textit{(vari)}, blemishes \textit{(molestiae)}, freckles \textit{(lentigines)}, “spots” \textit{(maculae)}, peeling of the skin \textit{(scobis)}, facial itching \textit{(vitilligo)}, livid bruises \textit{(suggilata)}, eruptive skin diseases \textit{(lichen)}, leprous sores \textit{(leprae)}, scars \textit{(cicatrices)}, pituitous eruptions \textit{(impetus pituitae)}, spreading sores \textit{(vitia quae serpunt)}, and nameless facial “troubles” \textit{(vitia)}.\textsuperscript{60} There were several substances, listed again mainly by Pliny, which were reputed to bring a bright and clear complexion. \textit{Crocodilea} mixed with cyprus oil was efficacious in this regard. Ground oyster shells smoothed the skin.\textsuperscript{61} Pimples could be removed with a mixture of poultry fat and onion, and wrinkles were smoothed away with swan’s fat or asses’ milk, or axle-grease.\textsuperscript{62} The ash of snails (among other substances) was reputed to cure freckles, itch, and leprous sores (HN 30.75). In addition, white lead reportedly had properties of smoothing the face and removing blemishes (Plin. HN 28.183), ironic inasmuch as the continued use of white lead in foundations probably led to the swift disappearance of a youthful complexion (see below). Other recipes employed a variety of ingredients, such as cucumber (HN 20.9), rocket (HN 20.125), anise (HN 20.185), and mushrooms (HN 22.98). \textit{Helenium}, a plant substance, made the face and skin perfect and thereby enhanced sexual attractiveness.\textsuperscript{63}

Celsius reports that honey cleansed the skin, but notes that it was more efficacious in this regard mixed with galls, bitter vetch, lentil, horehound, iris, rue, soda, or verdigris. He gives recipes for

\textsuperscript{59} Negotiating the large amount of information contained in the elder Pliny concerning skin remedies was made considerably easier by the work of Richlin (above, n.1) and Vons (above, n.38) 253–57, who provide exhaustive references and lucid explanation.

\textsuperscript{60} See Plin. HN 30.28–30; HN 28.109 \textit{(maculae)}. \textit{Cicatrices} are mentioned at 28.187; pituitous eruptions and spreading sores at 28.183.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Crocodilea}: Plin. HN 28.108–109, 184 and above. Oyster shells: Plin. HN 32.65: \textit{cutemque mulierum extendit}. Grinding oyster shells in this way would have produced lime, which would burn the skin and possibly make it smoother.

\textsuperscript{62} Pliny Nat. 30.30. Asses’ milk: see above. Axle grease: 28.140. On this topic, see Vons (above, n.38) 258–67. Pliny also mentions in passing (30.30) that branding-marks, presumably on the face of an ex-slave, could be removed by a mixture of pig’s dung in vinegar.

\textsuperscript{63} Nat. 21.159: \textit{Helenium ab Helena, ut diximus, natum favere creditur formae, cutem mulierum in facie reliquaque corpore nutrire incorruptum (“Helenium, which had its origin, as I have said, in the tears of Helen, is believed to preserve physical charm, and to keep unimpaired the fresh complexion of our women, whether of the face or the rest of the body”); see also 21.59. Skin creams were also made from the fat of a sow who had not littered (Plin. Nat. 28.139), or the jelly of a bull’s calf-bone (which also contributed to whiteness of skin, 28.184). Even the foam from beer was thought useful as a means to preserve the skin (Nat. 22.164). Pliny also recommends the ash of the murex shell mixed with honey (applied to the skin every day for seven days and followed on the eighth day by a wash of egg-white; Nat. 32.85). Ashes of cuttlefish bones could remove freckles and other facial troubles (Nat. 32.85). Fish-glue \textit{(ichthyocolla)} could remove wrinkles (Nat. 32.84; and see 22.65). It is worth noticing that outer blemishes could be a sign of inner \textit{vitia}: Pliny the Elder asserts that women with freckles could not make ritual offerings in magic custom (Nat. 28.188; see also 30.16), presumably because freckles denoted a woman who herself was not pure (?). See Richlin 1995: 199–200.
disguising scars, removing pimples, and hiding spots and freckles, although he states that since they are only a rough discoloration of the skin, "freckles are ignored by most" (whether women or medical practitioners he does not say). A cream used to make the skin soft, called oesypum, was made from the grease extracted from unwashed sheep's wool and was widely available; Ovid mentions some from Attica. And we may note that these substances all function in the modern sense as remedies and cosmetics, having both curative and beautifying properties, although they would have been classed by many ancient writers under to kosmétikon.

Ovid's Medicamina has complete recipes for four face packs with an incomplete recipe for a fifth. He writes that the complexion of the woman who uses his recipes for beauty creams "will shine smoother than her own mirror" (Medic. 67–68). Ovid's skin treatments contain a variety of natural ingredients which were thought to improve the complexion: barley and vetch, for instance, which cleared the complexion and removed pimples; gum arabic, which was reputed to eradicate wrinkles and improve the skin; bean-meal (lomentum), used to remedy wrinkles; and aphronitrum or "soda-scum," also used to remove wrinkles and freckles. Iris, too, cured skin complaints and freckles. Other ingredients in Ovid's face packs include frankincense and myrrh, used to cleanse and remove wrinkles and freckles; salt-petre (used for removing warts), rose leaves and poppy (used as

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64 Honey: Celsus Medic. 5.16: cutem purgat mel. Freckles: ephelis vero a plerisque ignoratur, Medic. 6.5. See Richlin (above, n.1) 199–200 on Pliny's recipes for freckle removal and Saiko (above, n.1) 225–34.
65 Ars am. 3.213–214; on which see Gibson (above, n.13) 184. See Plin. HN 29.35–38. L. Allason-Jones, Women in Roman Britain (London 1989) 130, calls oesypum "foundation" (i.e., a product designed to give smooth color to the face), which it clearly was not. Nowadays, purified, the cream is called lanolin.
66 For a detailed treatment of the ingredients in and general efficacy of Ovid's recipes, see Green (above, n.1); and Richlin (above, n.1) 197. Gibson (above, n.13) 180 notes that three of the facepacks in the Medic. could be used to remove defects from the skin and the other two to improve the skin.
67 Ov. Medic. 53–55; Plin. HN 20.20, 22.122, 151, 161, 24.63, 28.183, 30.75; Celsus 2.33.5, 5.16, 5.28.19d.
68 Ovid Medic. 65; Plin. HN 24.106.
69 At Mart. 3.42.1, it is used to conceal a blemish; and see T. J. Leary, Martial Book XIV: The Apophoreta (London 1996) 119–20 and Saiko (above, n.1) 130–32.
70 Ov. Med. 73; Plin. Nat. 31.111–113. It is difficult to say what this substance actually is: soda, soda with salt, or potassium nitrate are a few of the scholarly conjectures: see Healy (above, n.31) 198–99; Green (above, n.1) 385; Leary (above, n.69) 116–17. For a detailed look at all five recipes, see Saiko (above, n.1) 203–15.
71 Skin complaints: Plin. HN 21.143, 23.63, 26.143; Celsus 5.16; Green (above, n.1). Freckles: Plin. HN 28.188.
72 Ovid Med. 83–85. Frankincense is mentioned in Celsus 5.5 as a cleanser and erodent.
73 The elder Pliny states that myrrh is a remedy for many ills, including promoting menstruation, facilitating childbirth, aiding consumptives; sores on the head or face may be cured by a tisane of myrrh and water (HN 24.154). See 6.174, 12.69.
74 Ovid Med. 85. See Green (above, n.1).
a cleanser), and a mysterious substance called alcyoneum. Some recipes for face creams were less salubrious, however, containing poisonous mercury sublimate or white lead.

Propertius (2.29B.30) and Martial (9.37) state that makeup was removed at night. Juvenal mentions a nightly bread-poultice used by an adulterous wife, and an oily cream called pinguia Poppaeana.

This is a dangerous text: the name of the cream is of course meant to align the woman who uses it with the licentious empress, and perhaps should not be taken as indicating an actual cosmetic product.

But all skin creams and treatments had varying degrees of efficacy. To conceal the inevitable blemishes, scars, and ravaged areas of the face, we have a reference to a woman employing white lead foundation to give the complexion a smooth consistency (Mart. 7.25 and 1.72.4–5). More ingeniously, tiny patches called alutae or splenia made of thin soft leather (often treated with alum) were pasted directly onto the skin. These scraps became popular in and of themselves, and in time became fashion rather than camouflage: “a tiny aluta veils cheeks without a blemish,” observed Ovid. Sometimes the patches were cut into different shapes: Martial speaks of crescent-shaped splenia sitting on the forehead. Again, this practice strongly suggests that the ideal female complexion in Rome was one without scars or spots, which must have been very difficult to achieve in antiquity, given the poor sanitation and prevalence of disease.

Several authors, across genre and time period, mention that a beautiful woman had sleek skin with no physical blemishes. Pliny gives a recipe to eliminate stretchmarks (HN 31.84); Martial reports that a paste of bean-flour was used by women to remove belly wrinkles (3.42.1, 14.60). A hairless body may have been the feminine ideal: Ovid states that women ought to shave their legs; Pliny also states that women should remove body hair. The epitaph of Allia Potestas states, “she kept her limbs smooth and the hair was sought

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75 Rose leaves: Ovid Med. 93; Plin. Nat. 21.123–125. Poppy: Ovid Med. 99; Cels. 2.32; see Green (above, n.1) 390.

76 Med. 78; on the substance alcyoneum Green (above, n.1) 386–88. Saiko (above, n.1) 130–32.

77 Ov. Medic. 73–74; Kleiner and Matheson (above, n.1) 160.


79 Ov. Ars am. 3.202: parvaque sinceras velat aluta genas (see Gibson [above, n.13] 178). Saiko (above, n.1) 136. For large patches or plasters with medicinal purposes, Plin. HN 29.126, 30.104. Mart. 8.33.22: talia lunata splenia fronte sedent; at 10.22.1, the patches are used by a man to cover branding-marks; see 2.29.9. The trend has a parallel in eighteenth-century France, where the little patches (mouches ou mouches dans la lait), made of red or black taffeta and cut into shapes, were pasted onto the skin to conceal smallpox scars. As in Roman antiquity, the patches were soon worn merely for the sake of fashion, and their placement could indicate the mood of the wearer (the French coquette would wear one near her lips, for example; de Goncourt and de Goncourt (above, n.42) 258.

80 See above, n.58.

81 Ov. Ars am. 3.193–194, see also 437; Plin. HN 26.164: depilatories are a woman’s cosmetic, psilotrum nos quidem in muliebris medicamentis tractamus (“depilatories I indeed regard myself as a woman’s cosmetic”). See Vons (above, n.38) 277–81.
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out everywhere."82 Lucian writes that apart from her head, "the rest of a woman's body has not a hair growing on it and shines more brilliantly than amber . . . or Sidonian crystal."83 Although a Greek source, it corroborates what certain Latin authors say about female hairlessness.84 Unwanted hair from the legs and genitalia was eliminated in a number of different ways: it was plucked, scraped away by pumice stone, singed off, or stripped by means of pitch or resin.85 Martial speaks of the practice not as a prerogative of status (he says prostitutes do it), but of age. Women supposedly eliminated body hair in preparation for (or in hopes of) sexual activity, and depilation was therefore deemed appropriate only for sexually active young women. He therefore ridiculed depilation in women over a certain age.86

III. Negative Views/Repellence

As two scholars have observed,87 many authors, who no doubt reflected the views of some men and women in Roman society, found the use of adornment by a woman cause for condemnation. Maria Wyke notes that "it is perhaps Ovid . . . who most provocatively and persistently removes the cultus and ornatus of the female body from the realm of moral disapproval."88 There is no doubt that personal ornament was viewed by some as an objectionable activity, dismissed as fatuous, expensive, time-consuming, wasteful, and un-Roman,89 and that the woman who spent time and energy on clothing and makeup was labeled dishonest, sexually licentious, and a locus of social disorder. Previous scholars have done an admirable job of summarizing the moralizing discourse surrounding adorned women, and I will not repeat their findings here.90

Some cosmetics were condemned as disgusting and described with repugnance by authors in different genres.91 Selected beauty preparations

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84 One scholar has postulated that female hairlessness in the nineteenth century connoted childishness, virginity, and purity (Hollander [above, n.18] 146), and it is possible that these resonances were also in place in Roman antiquity.
85 Plucking: Mart. 10.90. See also Sen. Ep. 56.2 (hair-pluckers hawking their services in the bath-houses) and CIL 6.9141. Pumice: Ov. Ars am. 1.506, nec tua mordaci pumice crura teras ("[take no pleasure] in scraping your legs with the biting pumice-stone"); of men. Resin: Mart. 12.32.21–22. Domitian reportedly depilated his concubines himself: Suet. Dom. 22. Dropax, a kind of depilatory ointment, is spoken of in the sources as employed by men (Mart. 3.74 and 10.65.8); and Pliny mentions other depilatory creams (also for men): HN 30.132–134; see also 29.26.
86 Mart. 12.32.21–22, 10.90. Contra D'Ambra (above, n.5) 225, who holds that only elite women depilated. On hairlessness and Greek women, see Ar. Eccl. 60, 67.
87 Richlin (above, n.1) passim; and Wyke (above, n.1) 146–48.
88 Wyke (above, n.1) 145 and Gibson (above, n.13) 175.
89 For the economic aspects of female adornment see especially Wyke (above, n.1) 140–41.
90 Richlin (above, n.1); and Wyke (above, n.1).
91 See Richlin (above, n.1) 186, 189, 190.
were visually displeasing, for instance: Juvenal states that a wife will “swell her face with bread [packs],” thereby making the woman and her face foul and ridiculous.\textsuperscript{92} Martial begs a woman not to cover her beautiful face with black cream.\textsuperscript{93} As well, some cosmetics had a strong (although not necessarily a bad) smell: depilatories, poultices to remove wrinkles, and chalk moistened with vinegar (Mart. 6.93). Juvenal thought that the oily skin cream called \textit{pinguia Poppaeana} had a repellent smell (6.462). \textit{Oesypum} also had a strong odor (Ovid said it turned his stomach, likening it to the Harpies’ excrement on Phineus’ table) and was excessively greasy.\textsuperscript{94}

In the anticosmetic tradition, men were allegedly repelled by the sight of women adorning. Lucretius, for instance, observed that women were well aware that the preparations they made and the substances they used in order to show a beautiful face to the world were in fact repulsive. \textit{Ars est celare artem} governed the proper use of cosmetics, and women ought to be “at greater pains to hide all that is behind the scenes of life.”\textsuperscript{95} Even Ovid counseled women not to beautify themselves before a lover, as such activities will detract from an agreeable body image: “[T]hese things will give beauty, but they are unseemly to look upon: many things, ugly in the doing, please having been done.”\textsuperscript{96} He also advises keeping cosmetic substances hidden from men (\textit{Ars am.} 3.209–218). Gibson has noted that “what unites the present passage with Lucretius is a common assumption that women in their raw state are unpalatable to men”;\textsuperscript{97} otherwise, Ovid “offers compensation to women while the Epicurean does not” (\textit{Ars am.} 3.209–218).

IV. Medicamentum/Medicamen: Remedy and Poison

\textit{Medicamentum/medicamen} was the most common word for a paint, wash or cosmetic. Ovid’s treatise \textit{Medicamina Faciei}, for example, gives recipes for face packs.\textsuperscript{98} Seneca (\textit{Dial.} 7.7.3) and Festus (500L)

\textsuperscript{92} Juv. Sat. 6.461–62: ... foeda aspectu ridendaque multo/pane tument facies.

\textsuperscript{93} Mart. 3.3.1: nigro medicamine.

\textsuperscript{94} See above, n.65 for references. A \textit{pyxis} was used to hold medicine (Sen. \textit{Ep.} 95.18); poisons (Juv. 13.25); or cosmetics (Ov. \textit{Ars am.} 3.210; Apul. \textit{Met.} 6.16). Gibson (above, n.13) 183 notes that in general the \textit{pyxis} is a “repository for revolting substances.” See M. Skinner, “The Contents of Caelius’ \textit{Pyxis},” \textit{CW} 75 (1982) 243–45.


\textsuperscript{96} Ov. \textit{Ars am.} 3.217–218: ista dabunt formam, sed erunt deformia visu./\textit{Multaque, dum fiunt, turpia, facta placet}; and generally, 219–234. There is a theme in Latin literature, noted most recently by Gibson (above, n.13) 182, of surprise intrusions into the private chambers of one’s mistress, finding her unadorned and therefore repulsive: see Lucr. 4.1174–1191; and even Ov. \textit{Rem.} 347–356. A character in Lucian (\textit{am.} 39) states that it is disgusting to see a woman at her toilette, but it is also disgusting to see her as she rises from sleep, her adornment not yet in place.

\textsuperscript{97} Gibson (above, n.13) 182; see Plaut. \textit{Poen.} 240–245.

\textsuperscript{98} See also \textit{Rem. am.} 354–356. Ovid pioneered the use of the word \textit{medicamen} in its meanings as abortifacient (\textit{Epp.} 11.39), magic charm (\textit{Epp.} 12.97), and cosmetic (\textit{Medic.} 36); see Gibson (above, n.13) 179.
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use *medicamentum* as a synonym for cosmetics. *Medicamentum* can also denote an artificial means of improving a thing, as when (for instance) oakwood ashes were used to flavor wine.99 The third and fourth (and perhaps the most intriguing) meanings of *medicamentum/medicamen* are a remedy or, conversely, a poison: Cicero uses both words as “curative;”100 Valerius Flaccus utilizes *medicamen* to mean “toxin” (8.17). Juvenal uses *medicamen* for “drug,” in reference to the potion given to a pregnant woman by an abortionist (6.595), and elsewhere as a remedy against poison (14.254 [see 6.661]). Seneca uses *medicamentum* to mean “poison” (Controv. 7.3.4); Pliny to mean “enchantment” (*HN* 20.101). Tacitus uses *medicamen* to describe the healing remedies given to Zenobia (*Ann.* 12.51), but also for the poison used on the emperor Claudius (*Ann.* 12.67). In addition, he utilizes the term for “medication” (the patches covering the lesions on Tiberius’ face; *Ann.* 4.57)101 and for “toxin” (the poison used on Burrus).102

Tacitus’ uses of the word illustrate well the conflation of remedy and poison in Roman antiquity, but the extension of the semantic field to include “cosmetic” also makes sense in the Roman context. Amy Richlin is surely correct to argue that the properties of poison, medicine, cosmetics, and even magic were conflated in antiquity (“all crafts or skills aiming at a certain kind of control over the body and its surroundings”),103 but there is also a material basis for that association. The fact that Juvenal calls a woman’s made-up face “a wound” (*ulcus*; 6.471–473) is appropriate not because women were derided or injured by a beauty system,104 but because many of the actual substances used for cosmetic purposes were employed themselves as

99 *Medicamen*: Plin. *HN* 14.126. See also Col. *Rust.* 7.8.2 (of additions to cheese); and 12.20.1 (additions to wine).


101 Martin and Woodman note that here “*medicamina* are either salves or cosmetics . . ., the latter perhaps more appropriate to the inveterate dissembler [Tiberius]” (R. H. Martin and A. J. Woodman, eds., *Tacitus Annals Book IV* [Cambridge 1989] 225).

102 Burrus died “by Nero’s instructions, his palate . . . smeared with a poisonous drug [medicamen], ostensibly as a remedial measure” (plures iussu Neronis, quasi remedium adhibetur, inlitum palatum eius noxio medicamine adseverabant, *Ann.* 14.51).

103 Richlin (above, n.1) 186. The OLD defines *medicamen* as “a substance administered or applied to produce specific effects upon the body.” The TLL defines medicamen as: *usu strictiore, de rebus naturalibus vel compositionibus quae ad sanandos morbos; s.v. medicamen* col. 529: (“in more rigorous use, concerning natural substances or mixtures, for the curing of diseases”). Under medicamentum the TLL repeats the preceding and adds *aut exstrinsecus . . . aut intrinsecus . . . adhibentur* (col. 532: “either externally . . . or internally . . . applied”). S. F. M. Grieco, “The Body, Appearance, and Sexuality,” in *A History of Women in the West* vol. 3, N. Z. Davis and A. Farge, eds., (Cambridge, Mass., 1993) 61, reports that in seventeenth-century England, “those who made cosmetics were often suspected of dabbling in the magic arts, for many recipes contained incantations to be recited during preparation and ingredients such as earthworms, nettles, and blood.”

104 Contra Richlin (above, n.1) 200; and Wyke (above, n.1) 137. For a similar idea, see Lucian *Am.* 39.
remedies (and as poisons), a discussion taken up below.\textsuperscript{105} Tellingly, at Digest 48.8.3.3, dealers in cosmetics (\textit{pigmentarii}) may be prosecuted if they recklessly hand over poison.\textsuperscript{106}

It is important to note at this point that not every cosmetic substance was felt to be repellent; some of them were even sweet-smelling (as in Ovid’s skin creams).\textsuperscript{107} Nor was there any substance in Roman antiquity that functioned \textit{purely} as a cosmetic and \textit{only} as a cosmetic. In America, for example, until the late nineteenth-century, most cosmetics were manufactured at home using components like chalk, beetroot, and burnt cloves; “an oral tradition concerning hair and skin care probably comprised an aspect of women's culture.”\textsuperscript{108} All materials applied to the face to improve one’s appearance in Roman antiquity, even the “disgusting” ones, were likewise comprised of natural ingredients: soot, ash, powdered lead, grease from animals’ wool. (This brings up the likelihood that it was the substances’ application as cosmetics that determined repugnance, at least in the anticosmetic tradition). Often these substances had, sometimes primarily, a medicinal or other practical function in addition to their cosmetic use.

Many cosmetic ingredients were used largely as noncosmetic remedies, in keeping with the multiple meanings of \textit{medicamen/medicamentum} as cosmetic, poison, and remedy. The following information is gleaned largely from Pliny and the medical writers. \textit{Oesypum}, for instance, was not used exclusively as a cosmetic; it could be employed as a remedy for a fissured anus, eye inflammations, sores in the mouth, and gout.\textsuperscript{109} Martial implies that white lead was a remedy for wounds: he reports that he daubed his lips with the stuff, pretending to have sores, to avoid kissing an unattractive woman.\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Melinum}, another coloring for the face, was also used as a medicant in various forms: as astrigent, to arrest hemorrhage, or remove granulations of the eye.\textsuperscript{111} Antimony or \textit{stibium} (a cosmetic ingredient) was also used as a medicine for ulcerations or wateriness of the eye, and as a treatment for wounds and burns.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{105} Of \textit{medicamen} see Gibson (above, n.13) 179, who states “the noun need not convey the idea of ‘remedy.’”

\textsuperscript{106} “It is laid down by another \textit{senatus consultum} that dealers in cosmetics are liable to the penalty of this law if they recklessly hand over to anyone hemlock, salamander, monkshood, pinegrubs, or a venomous beetle, mandragora, or, except for the purposes of purification, Spanish fly” (\textit{alia senatus consulto effectum est, ut pigmentarii, si cui temere cicutam salamandram aconitum pituocampas aut bubrostim mandragoram et id, quod lustramenti causa dederit cantharidas, poena teneatur huius legis}). See also Dig. 10.2.4.1 (\textit{mala medicamenta et venena}).

\textsuperscript{107} Peiss (above, n.3) 144–45; see also K. Peiss, \textit{Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture} (New York 1998).

\textsuperscript{108} See Celsus \textit{Medic.} 6.18.7a–b (along with white lead); Plin. \textit{HN} 12.74 (this is \textit{oesypum} made from goats, with no instance of use given); \textit{HN} 29.37. Mixed with Corsican honey, Pliny claimed it could remove spots on the face (\textit{HN} 30.28).

\textsuperscript{109} Mart. 10.22; see also Celsus 6.6.7, n.111.

\textsuperscript{110} Plin. \textit{HN} 35.188, 35.194.

\textsuperscript{111} Plin. \textit{HN} 30.118, 29.130, 33.102.
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Eye-salves could also be made from saffron (Plin. *HN* 20.187) and *crocodila* (HN 28.108–109). Bean-meal or *lomentum* was used for boils and vitiligo.113 *Aphronitrum* was used to clear up ringworm, impetigo, and scabies (and see below).114 The ash of ground oyster shells could be combined with honey to produce a remedy for troubles of the uvula, tonsils, parotid swellings, and abscesses of the breasts (Plin. *HN* 32.65). Certain materials used as rouge were also employed as remedies: red ochre was utilized, among other things, as an enema, to check menstruation, or in plasters and poultices (Plin. *HN* 35.32).

Ovid’s face-packs also contain a wide variety of ingredients used for other noncosmetic remedies. *Lomentum* was used to wash away stains, as a remedy for scrofula, or, with axle-grease and cypress leaves, to cure hernia.115 At Martial 6.93, bean-meal paste is used by a woman to hide offensive body odor; and named elsewhere as a cure for an abscess and to disguise bruises.116 Myrrh was a cleanser and erodent, a cure for creeping sores and scurf, and it was used to heal wounds.117 Dried rose petals were sprinkled on chafed thighs, rose juice used as a remedy for sores in the mouth and for uterine and rectal troubles, among other complaints, and the flower induced sleep. Rose seeds were also used as a remedy for toothache and to clear the head, and the petals were useful for stomach complaints. The dried petals could also be used as an antiperspirant.118 Poppy was used as a fomentation, and as a remedy for headache and gout.119

This close association between cosmetic and remedy is also evident in an archaeological context: distinguishing material remains pertaining to cosmetics120 from those related to the medicinal is difficult. Small glass jars (often with painted lids which have not survived) could have held any one of a number of substances, including thick unguent, face powder, or other cosmetics or medicine in dry or liquid form.121

113 Plin. *HN* 22.140, 24.63; Diosc. 2.127; Celsus 5.28.19.D.

114 Plin. *HN* 24.63; see Celsus 5.28.18, 17C; *HN* 115–22.


121 Two names for these small receptacles in antiquity seem to have been *ampulla* or *ampoulla* (perhaps an irregular diminutive of *amphora*) and *olla*, both meaning...
Cosmetics were extricated with ligula, spoons "with bulbous probes for mixing and applying ointments and disk heads for extraction," but is not always possible to say which instruments were used for medical practices and which for toiletry. Portable mortar-and-pestle sets have been found in Britain, probably once strung together with a leather loop and a bag holding pellets for cosmetic purposes. The slender, curved pestle could have been used to crush various substances and then apply the powders to eyebrows and lashes. But it is clear that these sets could have had a different, even medicinal, function: another indication of the conflation of medicamen as cosmetic and remedy, both a series of controls over the body.

V. Poison

The ancients were aware that at least two cosmetic substances were also poisonous: red and white lead and mercury sublimate. Pliny described white lead as lethal if it were ingested; the substance was thus especially dangerous in cosmetics as it could be easily swallowed. Vitruvius noted that white lead was harmful to the human body and that workers in lead hadcomplexions affected by pallor: "for when, in casting [pipes], the lead receives the current of air, the fumes from it occupy the members of the body, and burning them, rob the limbs of the virtues of the blood." Although the ancients believed it improved the complexion, to judge from comparative evidence, skin treated with cerussa soon lost its youthful tone. Cosmetics in antiquity thus both contributed to and skillfully concealed the devastation of the complexion.


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122 Allason-Jones (above, n.65) 131–32 and fig. 46.

123 See Jackson (above, n.120). None of the grinders have been found outside Britain, but those in Britain have a Roman date. In addition, chatelaines have ointment scoops, nail cleaners, and tweezers: see Allason-Jones (above, n.65) 131 and fig. 46. I can find no ancient evidence for slaves chewing cosmetics prior to application on the mistress, contra Forbes (above, n.1) 38; and Green (above, n.1) 388.

124 Plin. *HN* 34.175–76: *letalis potu*. See T. Hodge, "Vitruvius, Lead Pipes and Lead Poisoning," *AJA* 85 (1981) 486. For white lead which has been swallowed, Celsus recommends drinking mallow or walnut juice rubbed up in wine (*contritae; Medic. 5.27.12B*).

125 Vitr. 8.6.10; 8.6.11: *Namque cum fundendo plumbum flatur, vapor ex eo insidens corporis artus et inde exuere et eripit ex membris eorum sanguinis virtutes*. See also Celsus *Medic. 5.27.12B*; Diosc. *Materia Medica* 5.103; and Galen *Antidotes* 14.144. See Hodge (above, n.124).

126 Dio Chrysostom, for example, wrote that white lead was employed to counterfeit youthfulness (*Eub. 117*). Tracts in fifteenth-century Italy and sixteenth-century England warned women about the harmful effects of makeup, which contained mercury sublimate. Grieco (above, n.103) 60 states that the substance may have been partially responsible for the "fast fading of youth and beauty bewailed by the ladies of Queen Elizabeth's court." The safety of white lead as a cosmetic was further questioned in eighteenth-century France by the newborn chemistry industry, which determined
As a final observation, many medicamina had an additional function besides their cosmetic or medicinal purpose: the materials that women used to paint themselves were often the tints used by ancient artists.\[127\] Soot or ash, used by women to line their eyes, was also collected and used by fresco painters;\[128\] melinium and white lead were employed as paints.\[129\] Chalk was an artist's element in mixing certain artificial colors (Vitr. 7.14). Materials used as rouge were also used as pigments in portraits and in fresco-painting, red ochre or rubrica,\[130\] red lead.\[131\] This is intriguing in view of the fact that it is possible to view the Roman woman of love elegy as an artistic construction, something noted by several scholars.\[132\] She literally constructed herself as an art object using even the same materials as artists.

VI. Conclusions

The purpose of this essay has been to point out the diverse functions of cosmetic substance in Roman antiquity. The words medicamentum/medicamen, terms most often used to mean "cosmetic," also referred to a remedy or a poison. Most substances used by the Roman woman on her face (white lead, oesypum, antimony, crocodilea, melinium) were also employed as remedies by the ancients. Some were poisonous: white lead, for example. It is interesting as well to the substance "incurably impairs and spoils the complexion" (G. Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages, tr., J. Birell [Cambridge 1988] 79–80, 134). Although a government study in England in 1724 determined that the lead, arsenic, and verdigris in women's cosmetics were poisonous, "the popular and scientific press offered more advice on how to contend with the consequences of harmful beauty remedies than it did warnings against their use" (S. Romm, The Changing Face of Beauty [St. Louis 1992] 218).


\[128\] Vitr. 7.10.3; see Allison (above, n.127) 202–3.

\[129\] Vitr. 7.7.3, 7.12; Plin. HN 35.30; see Alison (above, n.127) 201.

\[130\] Plin. HN 35.35; Hor. Sat. 2.7.98; Vitr. 7.7.2.

\[131\] Vitr. 7.12.2; see Alison (above, n.127) 201 (reds), 203 (purple).

\[132\] Wyke Mirror (above, n.1) states that the adorned woman constructs herself as a work of art to which aesthetic categories may be applied" (145), and that "disparagement of care for the female body and, therefore, of the woman who practices it, is least in evidence where the discourses of adornment associate woman with art" (143). She also notes that this mainly occurs in the works of Ovid (145). S. Currie ("Poisonous Women and Unnatural History in Roman Culture," in M. Wyke, ed., Parchments of Gender: Deciphering the Bodies of Antiquity [Oxford 1999] 147–67) states that, "Ovid constructs an elaborate analogy between the female application of cosmetics and artistic creativity" (166, on Ovid Ars am. 3.219–225). E. Downing ("The Praeceptor in Ars Amatoria, Book 3" in J. Porter, ed., Constructions of the Classical Body [Ann Arbor 1999]) states that: "[T]he praecceptor dresses his student in an attempt to assimilate natural woman to an artificial realm of counterfeit appearances, to make an art object" (239 and passim). M. Myerwitz (Ovid's Games of Love [Detroit 1985]) also assumes that women are works of art (135), that Ovid is urging women to turn themselves into works of art (but that a "natural look" is aimed at: see Downing [above] 249–50, n.21 for criticisms). See also Sharrock (above, n.1). On ars and cultus in Ovid Ars am. 3, see most recently Gibson (above, n.13) 128–48, 175, 183, 186–91.
note that there were no materials that operated purely as cosmetics in Roman antiquity—many in fact functioned primarily as medicines or pigments, and only secondarily as cosmetics. Few cosmetic substances could be considered repellent on their own. Modern scholarship on ancient cosmetics and the status of women does not note that most beauty preparations functioned as medicamina generally, not just as cosmetics for women (and note that many of Pliny’s skin-care recipes do not specify whether the facial troubles belong to women or men). These diverse uses and views of the substances a woman put on her face help highlight the ambivalence with which an adorned or painted woman herself was viewed. Figuratively, cosmetics were a remedy used to palliate an appearance which was less than ideal; but makeup was also a poison which, if used in the wrong way, could harm a woman’s sexual and social standing: thus, cosmetics could be seen as both ideological and physical toxin.133

The many recipes for female skin creams and washes hint at the ideal of the female complexion current in Roman society, and how difficult it must have been for most women to achieve. But however strong the prevalent ideal of a smooth, bright female complexion was in Roman antiquity, one author, at least, chided women for succumbing. Martial reproved a friend for writing epigrams that were too perfectly bland and “white,” like a face plastered with lead; such a face, he states, is featureless and uninteresting, and needs a blemish or dimple to hold a viewer’s attention.134

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133 On which see Richlin (above, n.1) 200.
134 Mart. 7.25.2, 6: et cerussata candidiora cute / . . . / nec grata est facies cui gelasinus abest (“whiter than a white-leaded skin . . . even a face without a dimple fails to please”); gelasinus means a dimple which appears when someone laughs. But elsewhere, he advises a woman not to conceal a small or insignificant blemish lest it be thought bigger than it really is (3.42.1).