

**Exploring the Significance of the Exposed Right Breast on the Hellenistic Old Market
Woman**

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Art History

Title: Exploring the Significance of the Exposed Right Breast on the Hellenistic Old Market Woman

The Old Market Woman is a nearly life-size free-standing statue that depicts a walking elderly woman. It is a 1st-century CE Roman copy of a Hellenistic original statue. Her identity, appearance, and her function have been extensively explored by previous scholars. However, outside of commentary about its appearance, function, and relation to other statues of elderly people, very little attention has been given to her exposed right breast and its significance. This thesis aims to explore the significance and nuanced nature of this exposed right breast by analyzing the statue's elderly appearance, examining the role of elderly women in Hellenistic society, comparing the statue with another Hellenistic depiction of an elderly woman (the so-called Drunken Old Woman), and discussing its context and votive function.

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I. Introduction

The Old Market Woman¹ (see Figure 1) is an almost life-size marble statue that is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and was found in Rome, Italy. The subject matter of this sculpture is an elderly woman wearing tattered but high-quality clothing: a chiton (an ancient Greek garment like a sleeveless dress) of thin material and a heavy himation (an ancient Greek mantle) on her shoulders. She is holding a basket and three chickens. On her head she wears a wreath of ivy. This statue commonly is thought to be a 1st-century CE Roman copy of a Hellenistic original of the 2nd century BCE,² although recent scholarship has debated that.³ This statue, considered to be a genre statue, is a part of the Hellenistic tradition of depicting ordinary, non-idealized characters. Depictions of elderly women are rare in Hellenistic sculpture. However, one aspect of the Old Market Woman's representation is something that is ordinarily not seen on statues of older women, and that is a nearly fully exposed right breast. The many scholars who have examined and discussed this statue have not discussed the significance of the exposed right breast on this highly complex statue, and this thesis aims to do so. I will consider this statue through the framework of intersectionality, exploring the multiple valences of the statue's exposed breast in relation to the figure's social status, gender, and age.

¹ Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Museum Inv. 09.39. For the statue and previous bibliography, see Stewart 2014, 235; Hemingway 2021, 42, 45, 154-7; Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 141-2.

² Stewart 2014, 235.

³ Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 141-2; The authors argue that the Old Market Woman is an early Hellenistic original due to the curvature of her back and the style of carving done to her clothing.

The examination of the Old Market Woman and other similar statues is important because during the Hellenistic period of Greek art, marginalized individuals, such as older women, are depicted more frequently in the visual culture. To better understand the attitudes of this period's artists and viewers towards marginalized individuals, it is important to understand how the representations they made of these individuals were meant to be perceived. The research question I seek to answer in this thesis is this: what is the significance of the exposed breast on the Old Market Woman? Another question that I seek to answer is: do the social and physical mobility and body language of the Old Market Woman play a role in the ancient Hellenistic viewer's interpretation of this sculpture within its original context? When examining the exposed breast on the Old Market Woman and its significance, I aim in this thesis to explore the nuances of Hellenistic attitudes towards older women in art and beyond and how the statue's partial nakedness helps us to understand these attitudes. In addition, I will also be comparing the Old Market Woman to the Drunken Old Woman replica in the Capitoline Museums—I have conducted close autopsies of both statues during a research trip for this thesis.

To accomplish this, in Chapter 1, I discuss the archeological context of the statue; in Chapter 3, the history of the scholarship; in Chapter 4, understanding the statue's age; and in Chapter 5, looking closely at the exposed breast. In Chapter 6, I offer a conclusion.

II. Archaeological Context of the Statue

The circumstances around the discovery of our statue are uncertain, like those of many of the statues found during the late 19th- and early 20th-century in Rome. The Old Market Woman was found in the beginning of September 1907. It was reportedly buried in a hollow, or empty space, of the subsoil of the cellar of a building belonging to the Congregazione degli Operai della Divina Pietà, in Rione Sant'Angelo, Rome, Italy.⁴ The statue was unearthed during the demolition of the old huts belonging to the church. Owing to the fact it was taken care of by antique dealers first, followed by the public, then the press, the exact date and circumstances of the find is unknown. This is despite the investigations performed by Roman authorities about the context of the statue's discovery.⁵

We do, however, know more about the location in which the statue was found. The hollow in the subsoil in the cellar where the statue was found, which was approximately two by two meters wide, was at the northern corner of the construction site. The Congregazione, which is located at the corner of Via della Consolazione and Via Montecaprino near the Capitoline Museums in Rome, had its construction site extending nearly ten meters below street level. The Old Market Woman was found about six meters below street level. Near the hollow, about 8.4 meters below street level, were found parallelepipeds made of peperino, a type of volcanic rock made from compacted and cemented volcanic ash, also called tuff. These parallelepipeds formed the side of an ancient construction. There were also a few other lithoid tuff and other peperino

⁴ Mariani 1907, 17.

⁵ Mariani 1907, 17.

parallelepipeds found upturned approximately 3.5 meters below the modern road's level. Modern scholars have not determined what the parallelepipeds constructed in antiquity.⁶ In addition, at the same excavation level as the Old Market Woman, fragments of the Capitoline Temple of Fides were found. This may allude to the original votive function and deity of dedication of the statue.⁷

The Old Market Woman was later acquired in 1909 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art through the Rogers Fund, where it remains to this day. When the statue first arrived at the museum, the lower part of the statue was still coated with an incrustation of lime, which was soon removed.⁸ It also had remnants of faded pink pigment in the crevice between the basket and the himation of the old woman and on the right sandal strap.⁹ Today, my close autopsy confirms that pink pigment is hardly visible to the naked eye.

This statue stands approximately 126 centimeters high, which makes it slightly smaller than life-size. The old woman is hunched over, apparently from old age (see Figure 2) and is stooping towards her right. Her right arm, now missing, was originally outstretched. In her left hand she carries a basket with fruit and three chickens. On her head she wears a headscarf wrapped around her hairline in the fashion of a peasant woman and a crown of ivy leaves on top of the headscarf. On her wreath are holes bored by a running drill, which could possibly indicate that the sculpture was decorated during

⁶ Vaglieri 1907, 525.

⁷ Stewart 2014, 235.

⁸ Robinson 1909, 54.

⁹ Robinson 1909, 54.

festive celebrations (see Figure 3). She wears a tattered yet high quality chiton, an ancient Greek tunic that was made of thin, translucent fabric. Over the chiton she wears a himation, an outer garment worn over the shoulders. The himation has fallen off her left shoulder leaving it exposed except for the strap of the chiton and her poor posture and stooping gesture leave her right breast partially exposed as well (see Figure 4). Notice as well how her face shows signs of old age, such as hollow cheeks and sunken eyes (see Figure 5), but her body appears youthful.¹⁰ On her feet she wears a pair of thinly constructed thongs that are also assumed to represent high quality shoes. Her right foot steps in front of her left foot and she leans into her step in the manner of an old woman shuffling to carry her wares to an unknown destination, possibly the market.¹¹ She has also been interpreted as setting out to a religious festival.¹² She stands on a marble base without an inscription. My close autopsy confirms that there are still remnants of pigment on the statue; bright pink left on the border of the himation and dark green on the sandal strap of the left foot. Because of the quality of her clothing, she is oftentimes identified as an aged, upper-class courtesan, or hetaira that has fallen on difficult times.¹³

The figural form of the Old Market Woman is also important to discuss regarding the exposed breast. Both arms of the sculpture are broken off, but the upper portion of both arms are still intact. The left arm which carries the basket of produce and chickens was probably bent at an angle with her elbow pointed out slightly behind her. The right

¹⁰ Richter, 1954, 111.

¹¹ Robinson 1909, 53.

¹² Hemingway 2012, 37.

¹³ Stewart 2014, 235.

arm's original position has been widely discussed,¹⁴ with some claiming that the Old Market Woman must have used a cane,¹⁵ which would be typical of the iconography seen in older male figures as they usually used a supportive cane to denote their age. However, there is little evidence that this was the case. This is because for the cane to be present, the base of the statue would have extended forward towards the right. From my close autopsy of the sculpture, I did not find any signs of breakage at the base of the statue or any indication that the base was originally large enough to accommodate an outstretched arm and accompanying cane.

The Old Market Woman has also been the focus of various attempts at restoration since the Metropolitan Museum of Art's acquisition of it. The most notable area of the reconstruction attempts on the Old Market Woman is her face, especially her nose, mouth, chin, and eyebrows (see Figure 6). Dorothy Abramitis asserts that when initially acquired by the museum, the Old Market Woman's face was partially destroyed due to "vandalism" and received, to an extent, a "cosmetic makeover" to try and repair some of the damage.¹⁶ Through my close autopsy of the sculpture, I have found that today the Old Market Woman is untouched and unrestored.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has made attempts to analyze the statue's pigment as well. For example, Marco Leona notes that the Metropolitan Museum of Art learned that a copper alloy was present in a microscopic speck of azurite or Egyptian blue

¹⁴ See Ridgway 1990, 333; Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 141-2.

¹⁵ Ridgway 1990, 333.

¹⁶ Abramitis 1997, 30-32.

pigment and that blue was used to color the sculpture.¹⁷ And Amalie Skovmøller contextualizes the statue within a corpus of other marble works from antiquity with pigment.¹⁸

¹⁷ Leona 2009, 7.

¹⁸ Skovmøller 2020, 158, 160; While she often provides illustrations of other “painted” reconstructions of marble sculptures in her 2020 book, Skovmøller only shows a photograph of the Old Market Woman in its current, apparently unpainted state in its home museum.

III. History of the Scholarship

Initial Publications

Previous scholarship about the Old Market Woman started shortly following its discovery. In 1907, Dante Vaglieri, an Italian archeologist, published “Notizie Degli Scavi di Antichita” which briefly discusses the archeological context of the work¹⁹ The same year, another Italian archeologist, Lucio Mariani published a short article which gives a journalistic update of the statue’s whereabouts and his own thoughts on the subject of the statue.²⁰ He proposes that the old woman’s social status is apparent due to what she is carrying and he claims she is a seller of products from the countryside. Owing to her low social status, he concludes that this statue is a typical Hellenistic “genre” statue and compares her to other famous Hellenistic marble statues, such as the Old Fisherman (see Figure 7) and the Old Shepherdess with the Lamb (see Figure 8). He discusses her as a caricature of age and low social status.

Two years later, curator and later art director Edward Robinson published an article titled “The Old Market Woman,” which announces and praises the Metropolitan Museum of Art for acquiring a Hellenistic original statue.²¹ The museum, however, has since changed its position and asserts that the statue is a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original.²² Robinson also mentions the museum’s restoration of the statue, the beginning

¹⁹ Vaglieri 1907, 525-9.

²⁰ Mariani 1907, 257-66.

²¹ Robinson 1909, 204-6.

²² See Picón and Hemingway 2016, 94-5.

of a long history of restoration that the museum continues nearly a century after its acquisition.

In 1916, Salomon Reinach discussed this statue in his article "Quatre mille statues antiques," which surveys a wide range of sculpture from antiquity, focusing primarily on sculpture from Greece and Rome. He discusses the Old Market Woman in the context of the female form and female nude and draws comparisons between her and a variety of other statues.²³

Publications by Museum Curators

Gisela Richter, a prominent classical scholar and a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, wrote extensively on the Old Market Woman between 1917 and 1970. In her first publication about the statue, Richter includes it in a discussion about the “realistic trend of this [Hellenistic] period.”²⁴ Richter relates her description of the realistic, non-idealized statue to her assertion of the identity of the statue as a working-class older woman taking her wares to market. Richter's mention of the Old Market Woman in her 1953 publication is similar.²⁵ However, Richter's 1954 description of the statue describes the body of the older woman to be like that of a young girl, although Richter still asserts her chest, neck, and face are aged.²⁶

Hemingway, who has also published on the Old Market Woman, not only discusses her garb in relation to his identification of her as a hetaira, but he also discusses

²³ Reinach 1916, 349.

²⁴ Richter 1917, 235.

²⁵ Richter 1953, 143.

²⁶ Richter 1954, 111.

to whom the statue may be dedicated.²⁷ On the assertion that the statue is a Roman copy, he proposes two solutions for the Roman context: Fides, the goddess of Trust, or Ops, the goddess of agriculture. This reasoning is due to the statue's findspot in Rome. He also continues the tradition of asserting the claim that in the Hellenistic context, this statue would have been a dedication at a sanctuary to Dionysos. Lastly, he discusses the damage done to the statue, particularly the defacement of the woman's face and breast. He claims this may have been done by early Christians who would have been offended by the pagan subject.²⁸

One recent publication about the Old Market Woman continues the debate about her identity. A recent book, published after an exhibition and conference, titled *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World*, was co-edited in 2016 by Carlos Picón and Seán Hemingway. In that volume, Hemingway discusses the identity of the old woman regarding her garb. He claims that at first glance, the Old Market Woman is simply an older working woman taking her wares to market. However, because she is wearing an elegant double-belted gown, an ivy wreath, and pretty sandals, he claims that she is more than likely an aged hetaira, or high-class courtesan, and she is on her way to a festival where people of all ages would celebrate. He takes a highly narrative approach in their analysis of the statue and places her directly in a Dionysian context along with others in the Hellenistic world.²⁹ Picón has also talked about the statue's supposed courtesan identity in his earlier works, such as his 2007 publication, "Art of the Classical

²⁷ Hemingway 2021, 42.

²⁸ Hemingway 2021, 154-5.

²⁹ Picón and Hemingway 2016, 94-5.

World in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Greece, Cyprus, Etruria, Rome.” In addition to discussing her identity, Picón also talks about the composition of the statue. He claims that the flattened composition of the Old Market Woman is typical of sculpture that was created during the late second century BCE.³⁰

Since it acquired the statue, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has periodically published catalogs that discuss it as well. As the Metropolitan Museum of Art houses many similar statues from the Hellenistic period, the Old Market Woman is often talked about in the context of those other statues. In addition, its various catalogs tend to contextualize the statue broadly within the aftermath of the reign of Alexander the Great.³¹

Exploring the Statue’s Age, Identity, and Function

Other scholarship discusses the Old Market Woman thematically. Like Lucio Mariani’s article, Bessie Richardson’s 1933 book *Old Age Among the Ancient Greeks* groups the Old Market Woman with a variety of other similar statues that depict elderly people, such as The Old Fisherman and The Old Woman Carrying a Lamb.³²

The Old Market Woman has also been compared to the Drunken Old Woman by another scholar. Oskar Waldhauer published an article in 1946 titled “Myron’s Anus Ebria and the Drunken Woman in Munich,” which discusses the Old Market Woman’s

³⁰ Picón 2007, 371.

³¹ E.g. Zanker, Hemingway, Lightfoot, and Mertens 2019, 156-8, 160.

³² Richardson 1933, 178.

face and stature in comparison to the Drunken Old Woman in Munich. He focuses on the Old Market Woman's realism and old age.³³

In 1961, Margaret Bieber also wrote about the Old Market Woman in her book *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age* in which she discusses this statue's age, class, and gender, and she groups the statue with other similar statues of older women.³⁴

More recently, Susan B. Matheson's and J.J. Pollitt's book *Old Age in Greek and Roman Art*, published in 2023, explains that the Old Market Woman is associated with the goddess Ops. However, Matheson and Pollitt challenge the Metropolitan Museum of Art's assertion that the Old Market Woman is a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original. Instead, these two scholars state that the statue is a "late Hellenistic sculpture" instead of a Roman copy due to how roughly the back is tooled in comparison to the front of the statue.³⁵

Pollitt, in addition to his recent publication with Matheson, has written extensively on Hellenistic art and sculpture, including on the Old Market Woman. In his 1986 textbook *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, he explores the possible religious context of the statue, age and appearance of the statue, identity of the Old Market Woman, and its place within the context of other similar statues and within the context of the greater scope of the Hellenistic world. He claims that she is "probably depicted in the act of hailing potential customers in a market square, hoping to sell the chickens and the baskets of

³³ Waldhauer 1946, 244-6.

³⁴ Bieber 1961, 141.

³⁵ Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 141-2.

fruits and vegetables that she holds in her left hand.”³⁶ He also says that the ivy wreath on her head might indicate she is either selling or offering her goods as part of a religious festival, possibly Dionysian.³⁷ One prominent contribution to the discourse surrounding the Old Market Woman and other similar statues of elderly people in Hellenistic art is his attempt to answer the questions: to whom did these sculptures appeal; what was their function; and when were they made?³⁸ He explores two possible answers to these questions. The first is that they were privately commissioned works created towards the end of the Hellenistic period during the time the influence of Roman art collectors was becoming widespread. He claims if this is the case for these statues, such as the Old Market Woman, then as scholars we should treat them as merely decorative, a form of “Hellenistic Rococo.”³⁹ The second answer is that these statues of elderly individuals are votive statues which were created in connection with popular urban festivals, possibly Alexandrian in origin. The evidence he cites is that Ptolemy IV Philopator enjoyed a rustic festival called “Lagynophoria” in which the festivities allowed him to “play” at being a peasant.⁴⁰ Overall, he concludes that these sculptures are Hellenistic originals which “reflect a peculiar mixture of poetic fantasy and social realism.”⁴¹

³⁶ Pollitt 1986, 143.

³⁷ Pollitt 1986, 143.

³⁸ Pollitt 1986, 143-4.

³⁹ Pollitt 1986, 146.

⁴⁰ Pollitt 1986, 146.

⁴¹ Pollitt 1986, 146.

Andrew Stewart, who has also written extensively on the topic of Hellenistic art and Greek sculpture, has shared his thoughts on the Old Market Woman. He writes twice on the statue in his 1990 book *Greek Sculpture* and his later 2014 publication *Art in the Hellenistic World*. In both works, he asserts, refuting claims from Pollitt and others about her identity and original religious context, that she is an aged hetaira who has fallen on hard times. In his earlier 1990 publication, he discusses her appearance, calling her face “hideous” and exploring her aesthetic in the greater context of statues of older persons dated from the Hellenistic period.⁴² He claims in that book that she is a peasant woman taking her basket to a rural festival and that her modeling is similar to that of the Laocoön (see Figure 9) and the “Small” Pergamene dedication.⁴³ However, in his 2014 book *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, he gives more time into his analysis of the Old Market Woman. He claims that instead of an older peasant woman, her “elaborate sandals” and translucent chiton identify her as a hetaira (courtesan) in a later, more difficult phase of her life. He also says that the Hellenistic original and Roman copy were both used for votive purposes, and he claims the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Roman copy was probably used for a similar purpose. The evidence he uses to point to this conclusion is how the Old Market Woman’s pose, composition, and theme is like that of a statue of a fisherman (for an example of a fisherman statue, see Figure 7). Stewart dates the Hellenistic original Old Market Woman to the second century BCE. He also claims that, due to its findspot and the archeological evidence discovered around the statue, the Roman copy of the Old

⁴² Stewart 1990, 225.

⁴³ Stewart 1990, 225.

Market Woman that exists today was probably dedicated to Fides or the agricultural goddess Ops.⁴⁴

Brunilde Ridgway, like Stewart, writes about the Old Market Woman in her 1990 book *Hellenistic Sculpture I*. Here she discusses the Old Market Woman regarding other statues of marginalized individuals, the statue's function, and the different ways the statue's right arm may have originally looked. She asserts that the Old Market Woman is probably an older woman participating in a Dionysiac festival and, as suggested by an earlier scholar, she might be offering goods at an altar. This explanation goes against previously suggested possibilities of original construction of the Old Market Woman leaning on a staff or cane.⁴⁵ Ridgway also dates the Old Market Woman to the Augustan period due to the classicizing appearance with of her drapery,⁴⁶ which is also discussed by Stewart⁴⁷ and Pollitt.⁴⁸

R.R.R. Smith writes about the Old Market Woman briefly as well in conversation with other statues of older persons, particularly peasants and fishermen, and claims her as a peasant woman. He places her in a Dionysian context with a votive function because of her ivy wreath on her head. He believes that richer patrons would commission such sculptures for dedication since "real fishermen obviously could not afford them."⁴⁹ Smith

⁴⁴ Stewart 2014, 235.

⁴⁵ Ridgway 1990, 333.

⁴⁶ Ridgway 1990, 338.

⁴⁷ Stewart 1990, 225.

⁴⁸ Pollitt 1986, 146.

⁴⁹ Smith 1991, 138.

comments on her garb and its quality, claiming the sandals are “clearly her best, not for the farmyard” which puts her within the narrative of walking on her way to a Dionysos festival.⁵⁰ Smith continues to discuss this sculpture as well as others and thinks that these Hellenistic works are meant to be viewed as “neutral portrayals of poverty and old age.”⁵¹

Henning Wrede discusses the Old Market Woman along with other Hellenistic statues of older women in his 1991 article “Matronen im Kult des Dionysos: Zur hellenistischen 'Genreplastik.'” Wrede explores several aspects of the sculpture that have been contested between scholars. First, he argues that the statue is meant to be in a Dionysian context because of the wreath of ivy that is associated with Dionysian festivities.⁵² Wrede notes that the costume of the Old Market Woman is that of an older wealthy matron and that she is taking her basket of chickens and produce to a Dionysian meal as well.⁵³ Wrede also discusses the Old Market Woman’s exposed breast, but he describes it as heaving and claims that because of its non-idealized representation, she cannot be sexualized and is not a hetaira as other scholars have previously and still debate.⁵⁴ In addition, he also explores the possibility that the identity of the Old Market Woman is a Dionysian priestess.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Smith 1991, 138.

⁵¹ Smith 1991, 139.

⁵² Wrede 1991, 174.

⁵³ Wrede 1991, 175.

⁵⁴ Wrede 1991, 175.

⁵⁵ Wrede 1991, 177.

Other authors, however, discuss and debate the context of the Hellenistic original statue and the Roman copy of it. For example, in addition to J.J. Pollitt⁵⁶ and Henning Wrede,⁵⁷ Jane Masegla,⁵⁸ and Christian Kunze discuss the statue's possible Dionysian context. Masegla takes this discussion a step further by discussing her old age and movement regarding this context. She also rejects the proposal of the missing right arm holding a cane and claims that the Old Market Woman possibly had an arm outstretched.⁵⁹

Miscellaneous Publications

A unique publication on the Old Market Woman focuses not on her age, class, or gender, but rather the attribute in her right hand: the basket of food and three chickens that she is carrying. In her 1999 book *Art, Culture, and Cuisine: Mediterranean Gastronomy*, Phyllis Pray Bober writes about the food and dining practices of the Hellenistic era. Bober discusses how food practices during this period often highlighted luxury, and who was a “have” and who was a “have-not.” Bober uses a photograph of the Old Market Woman as a visual aid to illuminate different practices of Hellenistic food consumption.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Pollitt 1986, 142-3.

⁵⁷ Wrede 1991, 176-7.

⁵⁸ Masegla 2012, 415, 420; Masegla 2015, 253-5.

⁵⁹ Masegla 2015, 253-5.

⁶⁰ Bober 1999, 140.

Conclusion

Although these previous scholars address the statue's date and context, her clothing and other parts of her costume and the age of its subject, no one discusses the statue's exposed breast within the context of the highly complex identity of the aged, working woman who is portrayed in this sculpture. Therefore, my thesis fills a gap in the scholarship.

IV. Understanding the Statue's Age

To begin our discussion of this statue, it is important to culturally contextualize one of the Old Market Woman's characteristics which would make her a social outlier: her elderly state. Age is one of the most fundamental ways in which society is ordered,⁶¹ and the Greeks were wary of the different ages in which one would enter and were particularly wary of old age. The age of the figure depicted in the Old Market Woman has also been widely discussed in previous scholarship as a wonderful example of a depiction of an elderly person. In this chapter, I would like to explore answering the following questions: how is she depicted as old, and most importantly, why could she be depicted at such an elderly age? To answer these questions, I will begin my discussion with first outlining what aging meant to the ancient Greeks. Then I will move onto how older women were portrayed and treated in Greek literature and society. Finally, I would like to revisit the identity of the Old Market Woman and tie this back to her age.

A Lifespan, Conceptualized in Antiquity

Ancient Greek authors divided one's life period into a variety of stages, with the number of stages and the attributes of each stage of life differing among authors. Solon, for example, divided life into ten sections of seven years each.⁶² Aristotle divided life into three sections: youth, prime of life, and old age,⁶³ with life progressing in the model of a bell curve as it peaked in adulthood. Like Aristotle, the Spartans had a similar belief as Aristotle and conceptualized life as having three stages. In performances at Spartan

⁶¹ Kennell 2013, 4.

⁶² Solon *Poetae Lyrici Graeci* 2.27 (ed. Bergk).

⁶³ Arist. *Rhet.* 2.1389.

festivals, three choirs sang and each of the choirs corresponded to the three ages of men: the age of boys, the age of youth, and old age.⁶⁴ The Greeks did not often live to old age. Evidence from funerary inscriptions shows that only about ten percent of the population reached sixty years old.⁶⁵ But when was someone considered “old”? A man was typically counted as old when he was no longer qualified for military conscription, which was around fifty-nine years of age.⁶⁶ For women, it was when they could no longer bear children—this was perhaps around fifty years of age.⁶⁷

The Greeks were particularly terrified of aging and thought of it as an inescapable curse. Subsequently, youth and agelessness were praised. Various Greek writers over centuries have also commented on how much aging was culturally despised. Antiphanes claims old age is the “altar of ills”,⁶⁸ where he metaphorically transforms old age into a place where all must sacrifice themselves to the evil that eventually takes over the human body. Theognis of Megara calls old age the “most evil of all things” and “more grievous than death and all diseases.”⁶⁹ Theognis’ claims illuminate how the ancient Greeks found death to be a better alternative than participating in becoming old. They were concerned about the loss of beauty and health associated with youth.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Richardson 1933, 2.

⁶⁵ Minois 1989, 68.

⁶⁶ Kirk 1973, 127.

⁶⁷ McClure 2020, 115.

⁶⁸ Antiphanes *CAF* 2.255 (ed. Kock); translated by Richardson 1933, 7.

⁶⁹ Theognis 2.271-4 (ed. Bergk); translated by Richardson 1933, 4.

⁷⁰ Richardson 1933, 71.

The Advantages of Being an Elderly Woman

One of the most obvious anxieties surrounding femininity that women in Greek society and literature faced was aging. Women in ancient Greece used cosmetics, dyed hair, and sometimes wore false hair or head coverings to combat the appearance of aging.⁷¹ Some of these signs of aging they would try to combat, which can be seen on the Old Market Woman, would include sagging jowls and sunken eyes (see Figures 3 and 5). Despite their beautification attempts, women in ancient Greece were typically classified as old when they were no longer of child-bearing age or sexually desirable.⁷² There is no evidence found that claims men also did these things, a cultural indicator that women's primary function in society is sexual desirability for their male counterparts. However, once women reached an age in which they were no longer deemed sexually desirable, they enjoyed some new social privileges.⁷³

But before that is discussed, let us first talk about how the ancient Greeks treated their elderly. Richardson argues that aging was detested in ancient Greece. However, she notes that this detestation towards aging was primarily targeted at the physical effects of aging. Aging, in the spiritual and mental sense, was often praised as a reward of wisdom for the hard life that one had lived.⁷⁴ The Greeks also thought it important to care for their elderly. Aeschylus, a Greek writer known as the father of tragedy, gave three important rules in his play *The Suppliants* in which supreme honor is found: to honor the

⁷¹ Richardson 1933, 11.

⁷² McClure 2020, 115.

⁷³ Bremmer 1987, 192.

⁷⁴ Richardson 1930, 21.

gods, to honor one's parents, and to hurt neither man nor beast.⁷⁵ The second rule of Aeschylus implies a few important characteristics of the Greeks' treatment of their elderly. The first is that the elderly are to be respected and thought of highly, only second in importance and authority to that of the gods. The second is that parents should also be supported in their old age when they need further assistance. And most importantly, that the duty of elderly care would fall on the individual and thus be motivated by the individual's sense of duty towards their parents. This meant that the state would have a minimal role in caring for its elderly. Indeed, the role of the *polis*, or city-state, was minimal in caring for the elderly and the burden fell on the *oikos*, or household. Injury to an elderly person, whether through striking or neglecting a proper burial, was a matter of the courts.⁷⁶

Richardson also writes that older persons were revered also for their sanctity and thus closeness to the spiritual world.⁷⁷ Because of this, they were often called to perform in services in connection to prayer, the pledging of oaths, and sacrifice.⁷⁸ We see this ideology surrounding the elderly as far as back as the *Iliad*, where Agamemnon, Nestor, and the old priest Chryses, slay a fat bull for sacrifice,⁷⁹ pray to Zeus for the Achaeans,⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 680-9.

⁷⁶ Richardson 1933, 55.

⁷⁷ Richardson 1933, 39.

⁷⁸ Richardson 1933, 39.

⁷⁹ Hom. *Il.* 2.402-422.

⁸⁰ Hom. *Il.* 15.370-76.

performing first rites of sacrifices through handwashing,⁸¹ and burn and slice the thigh of a sacrifice to perform a libation.⁸² Older women were also known to participate alongside men in religious events and ceremonies such as purification rituals as well as occasionally be the leaders for groups of pious women.⁸³

One of the primary new freedoms that women enjoyed once they were considered old was freely venturing outside the *oikos* (household). Poorer women had more freedom to venture outside the house and work, as seen for example in Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*⁸⁴ while elite women were not allowed such freedom. But older women, regardless of status, were granted the social freedom to leave their houses without scrutiny. Hypereides, a fourth-century BCE orator, comments on women's social mobility outside of the household: when a woman leaves the house, she ought to be at the stage in life when one would ask whose mother she is rather than whose wife.⁸⁵ We can see other ways that older women were seen as having more social freedom than their younger counterparts. They could not only move outside of the house more freely while avoiding scrutiny from onlookers, but they could maintain professions that younger women could not as easily, such as saleswomen or midwives.⁸⁶ Because an elite woman's ideal role was to her and under her husband and within the *oikos*, women were

⁸¹ Hom. *Il.* 3.444-46.

⁸² Hom. *Il.* 1.457-74.

⁸³ Bremmer 1987, 197-8.

⁸⁴ Ar. *Eccl.* 448.

⁸⁵ Hyper. *Stob.* 74.33.

⁸⁶ Bremmer 1987, 197.

not permitted to leave the household domain without someone attending her, and typically this was with other women or groups.⁸⁷ An example of this can be seen in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. In this work, Demeter strategically chooses the guise of an old woman. This allows the goddess to move undetected and unbothered through different spaces.⁸⁸

Laura McClure notes that women were typically confined to the domestic sphere. But the role of women in the household beyond their domestic duties should be noted. McClure discusses that since women were entrusted with the domestic sphere and widely confined to it, and their primary social function was to raise children and to take care of the men in their families, as a result, a woman's worth and age were determined by her ability to produce children.⁸⁹ However, women often heard and participated in their husband's affairs. In a passage from Demosthenes *Speeches* in which the prosecution of a courtesan is being discussed, McClure notes that wives were meant to be guardians of the household,⁹⁰ and McClure interprets the implications of such a speech: Greek men, upon returning back to the oikos at night, would have to deal with the repercussions and judgments from their wives if they made poor legal and political decisions.⁹¹ Evidence seen in legal speeches show that older women, in particular widows, were the manager of

⁸⁷ Bremmer 1987, 191.

⁸⁸ *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 104.

⁸⁹ McClure 2020, 115.

⁹⁰ *Dem.* 59.111.

⁹¹ McClure 2020, 117.

the affairs of the household, family business, and beyond—their knowledge about their business operations was extensive.⁹²

To portray older women as powerless in ancient Greek society is incorrect. They played important roles in social, political, and religious affairs. And even in portrayals of literature, which will be discussed below, their roles and personalities were not confined within the boundaries of stereotype.

Elderly Women in Literature

This next section will be devoted to reviewing some of the ancient literature surrounding older women. I aim to show that older women were portrayed in ways to convey humorous characters, powerful characters, matronly characters, and were not necessarily confined to a certain trope due to their age.

As Chris Gilleard notes, both old men and old women are frequently seen as stock characters in literature, both in comedy and in tragedy.⁹³ An example of age mockery towards women is found in Nicarchus, a later Greek writer whose works survives through fragmented epigrams. He gives a description of an old woman who brings wheat (*puroi*) and a bow (*tozon*) instead of cheeses (*turoi*) and vinegar (*ozon*) because she is hard of hearing, making her the butt of the joke.⁹⁴ This punny, clever, and yet demeaning joke is made at the expense of the dignity of an older woman. Part of the cleverness of the joke is not just the usage of puns, but the slowness of the old woman to understand what is being actually said. Slowness in the sense of decreased mental sharpness and decreased

⁹² McClure 2020, 117.

⁹³ Gilleard 2005, 84.

⁹⁴ Nicharchus Paton 4.74; translated by Richardson 1933, 7.

physical agility is also a sign of aging. This can be seen on our Old Market Woman as well with her incredibly hunched over appearance due to her back which is caved forward due to her age that would have impeded her mobility and the task of traveling, she is performing (see Figure 2).

As men and women were seen as characteristically oppositional in nature, the literature in antiquity sometimes further contrast characters of different genders and ages to emphasize certain disagreeable traits of marginalized, unlikeable characters. Thomas Falkner discusses how Euripides' *Children of Herakles* explores how various human traits are embodied in various older characters. Falkner draws a comparison between Iolaus and Alceme, two older characters in the play, the former male and the latter female. He discusses how they are "identified insistently and repeatedly as *gerôn* and *graia*."⁹⁵ While Iolaus is characterized by his old age, physical weakness, and consequential dependence on others as the choir often sings about,⁹⁶ Alceme as a character has less agency but embodies what are seen as almost "masculine" qualities. Alceme continuously acts more and more aggressively as the play progresses, acting with authoritativeness. In addition, Falkner contrasts Alceme with Macaria, Herakles' only daughter. Both of these two women seek to fulfill the same goals in the play, but Alceme seems to "disregard for the canons of womanly deference."⁹⁷ The *Children of Herakles* portrays a representation of an elderly female who is aggressive but also frightening to

⁹⁵ Eur. *Heracl.*; Falkner 1989, 115.

⁹⁶ Falkner 1989, 115.

⁹⁷ Falkner 1989, 117.

the other characters in the play as well.⁹⁸ Older women in literature existed outside of the realm of comedy and were portrayed as powerful characters. It may be possible to interpret the breast in a similar vein, and that idea will be explored further in the next chapter.

In addition to portraying powerful characters, elderly women were also used as comedic tropes. Gilleard argues that older women were seen as being sexually undesirable, this would play out in various comedies throughout Greek literature as characters comically targeted for their lack of eroticism.⁹⁹ Aristophanes, a famous Greek playwright associated with Old Comedy, an era in comedy that predates the Hellenistic era by almost two hundred years, often uses older women's lack of sexual desirability as a punchline in many of his plays. For example, his comedic play *Assemblywomen* is about a hypothetical takeover of the Athenian government by the women of Athens. These women enforce many societal rules that the Greeks would have been deemed "topsy-turvy" at the time, such as prioritizing sex with the elderly. In one scene, a young man, Epigenes, has his sights set on a young girl. But three older women protest what would be deemed normal desires in Greek culture by citing this new rule as while dragging him away against his will.¹⁰⁰ In another Aristophanes play, *Wealth*, one of the characters, an old woman, is mocked about her age and haggard appearance.¹⁰¹ There are many other such examples of such portrayals of older women in ancient Greek literature.

⁹⁸ Falkner 1989, 123.

⁹⁹ Gilleard 2005, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Ar. *Eccl.* 991-1110.

¹⁰¹ Ar. *Plut.* 1055-69.

Finley has argued that it is apparent from these characters and situations that the ancient Greeks found the sexuality of older women a comedic affair because they still had sexual appetites but had no way to satisfy them as they were deemed societally sexually undesirable.¹⁰²

Ultimately, older women should not be treated as merely tropes and with a stereotypical lens. Rather the portrayals of them, both in literature and in art, like our Old Market Woman, along with exploring the significance of her exposed breast, should be attempted to be understood with a nuanced lens.

Why Depict the Old Market Woman as Elderly?

We have gone over how the statue is portrayed as old, with her sagging jowls, wrinkles, sunken eyes, and arched back. In addition to these, she also has her mouth gaping open, which is unusual for a person to do, but the artist chose this facial pose to show her toothless mouth, another sign of her elderly state. While men have also been portrayed as being toothless, it is primarily female subjects that are portrayed as toothless. This may be because one of the effects of pregnancy on women is tooth loss and decay.¹⁰³

With all these characteristics that point to her age, we must answer the question posed earlier, which is why she is depicted as old. Siri Sande suggests that the influx of marble statues of specifically older women may have been used to represent Dionysian

¹⁰² Finley 1981, 164.

¹⁰³ Sande 1995, 33.

devotees. This seems likely due to her various Dionysian attributes, which will be discussed further in comparison with the Drunken Old Woman in the next chapter.¹⁰⁴

Since the Old Market Woman sculpture is clearly ambivalent with her age and partial nakedness, I want to discuss why it is depicted as old in relation to her partial nakedness as well. To begin this, I want to pose a question about the age of our sculpture of focus: would the Old Market Woman be perceived the same if she was a younger woman? This is unlikely because the exposed breast and the aged elderly body create a sense of visual contrast. The Old Market Woman may be depicted as elderly because the artist wanted to make room for a breast on the sculpture that would escape inducing arousal. And in this way, it allows for the breast to act significantly within the work, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Sande 1995, 30.

V. Interpreting the Breast of an Old Woman

The Old Market Woman's exposed breast has been described by modern scholars with generally unflattering terms like "sagging"¹⁰⁵ or "withered"¹⁰⁶ (see Figure 4), which I find inaccurate given the flattened upper chest of the Drunken Old Woman (see Figure 11), which gives the breast less visual significance. Given what is known about the ancient Greek perception of older bodies, which is that there was a detestation towards them, we must ask: why depict an older woman with an exposed breast, and how is showing this breast different from other exposed breasts? This chapter will begin by contextualizing nakedness practices in ancient Greece; continue examining eroticism and old age by exploring the Drunken Old Woman copy in the Capitoline Museums; then end with a discussion of the significance of where the breast is on the statue that will tie in the previous sections.

Examining Nakedness Practices in Ancient Greece

The act of wearing or not wearing clothes in ancient Greek society was significant. Although public nakedness was not accepted, nakedness was an inherent part of Greek society. The Greeks believed that clothing was one of the important aspects of human practice that separated humans from animals.¹⁰⁷ Nakedness, while seen frequently in Greek visual culture, was also associated with the state of enslavement, the state of poverty, and the practice of punishment for both genders.¹⁰⁸ This belief led to the practice

¹⁰⁵ Pollitt 1986, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Wrede 1991, 175.

¹⁰⁷ Bonfante 1989, 569.

¹⁰⁸ Bonfante 1989, 561.

of nakedness used for shame and humiliation in Greek society. Larissa Bonfante, who has written extensively on the topic of nakedness in antiquity, explores in her article “The Naked Greek” how nakedness in ancient Greek society was used as a method of separation: from Greek to barbarian, citizen from slave, and men from women.¹⁰⁹ This last distinction between genders is important as men were allowed to be naked publicly but for women it was frowned upon, which only furthered the distinction in nakedness practices between genders.¹¹⁰

Despite the lack of acceptance of public nakedness in Greek society, there were important exceptions to when and where nakedness was allowed, and these exceptions were primarily reserved for men. Gymnasiums, athletic buildings where men would gather to train, compete, and leisurely discuss philosophy and politics, were an important part of the civic life for male citizens. Another important part of male lives that involved nakedness was oftentimes the symposium. These lively gatherings were essentially drinking parties with enjoyable discussion. No symposium would be complete without the presence of *pornai* (female common prostitutes), *pornoi* (male common prostitutes), and *hetairai* (female courtesans)—sex would be involved, and thus, nakedness in spaces where male citizens gather. This was artistically represented on a variety of different symposium drinking vessels found in the Classical era, the era occurring before the Hellenistic period.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bonfante 1990, 30.

¹¹⁰ Bonfante 1989, 544.

¹¹¹ Burton 1998, 143.

Ultimately, the ancient Greeks, particularly men, were often exposed to nakedness, whether it be their own, each other's, or that of non-citizens. And the primary ways in which the Greeks were exposed to nakedness were in athletic or military contexts or erotic moments in symposia in the context of drinking.¹¹² In this way, nakedness, and partial nakedness, took on multiple meanings in Greek society.

Introducing the “Drunken Old Woman”

Our Old Market Woman is unique for two reasons: 1.) because, as a woman, she would not be allowed to be naked in public for decency's sake, and 2.) because, as an older woman, she is not a partially naked sculpture that is typically conveyed by a younger woman. To explore the notion of partial exposure on older women in sculpture, a conversation must be had about another famous sculpture of an older woman. I would like to visit the significance of the breasts within both the so-called Drunken Old Woman and the Old Market Woman. To do this, I want to present a brief visual analysis of the Drunken Old Woman, look at the similarities and differences between the Old Market Woman and the Drunken Old Woman, and explore why the breast is exposed in either of the statues.

The Drunken Old Woman¹¹³ (see Figure 10) is a statue of a seated elderly female which survives in two copies, one in the Glyptothek in Munich and the other in the Capitoline Museums in Rome. The original is thought to be Hellenistic while the copies that survive are thought to be Roman. The copy in the Capitoline is a slightly smaller

¹¹² Bonfante 1989, 554.

¹¹³ Capitoline Museums, Rome; Museum Inv. No. 299. For recent scholarship, see Masegla 2012, 413-29; Masegla 2015, 246-9; Barrow 2018, 62-75; Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 143.

than life-size statue of an older woman sitting down and clutching a wine jug with her head thrown back and mouth gaping open. She is presumably drunk, and her large wine jug suggests that she has been drinking for a while. Her *chiton* has slipped off her right shoulder, revealing her shoulder and the upper portion of her chest (see Figure 11). Wrede comments that she clearly has Dionysian attributes, like the grape leaves on her jug and her drunkenness.¹¹⁴ This statue represents an older woman clearly portrayed in an unflattering way. Some scholars such as Rosemary Barrow, however, believe that while the Drunken Old Woman is a comical interpretation of this sort of scene, this sculpture could also be interpreted as a celebration of the non-idealized body.¹¹⁵

Similarities Between the Two Statues

The Old Market Woman and the Drunken Old Woman contain many different similarities to be highlighted. Some scholars have suggested that the Drunken Old Woman, like the Old Market Woman with her fine garb, is a wealthier woman due to the quality of her clothing.¹¹⁶ With their fine quality of clothing, the old women depicted in the Drunken Old Woman copies and the Old Market Woman might be represented as being in similar, respectable social classes.¹¹⁷ These women too, both being old, would have been able to move around in public freely and unbothered and respected as is the tradition of treating the elderly in ancient Greek culture.

¹¹⁴ Wrede 1991, 170.

¹¹⁵ Barrow 2018, 65.

¹¹⁶ E.g. Pollitt 1986, 143; Stewart 1990, 225.

¹¹⁷ Pollitt 1986, 143.

Another similarity between the two statues is the area of exposure. Although the Old Market Woman's breast is almost fully exposed and the Drunken Old Woman's breast is only exposed near the top, both of their exposures are on their right side. The right shoulder and breast being exposed has also been interpreted by some to be a cultic feature.¹¹⁸ This explanation of exposure may be likely.

Comparatively, another similarity between the statues that I would like to highlight is their functions. As the Old Market Woman is thought to have a votive function, the Drunken Old Woman is also thought to be a votive statue in the Hellenistic context.¹¹⁹ Another similarity between the two statues is their Dionysian attributes. One significant Dionysian motif on the Drunken Old Woman is the contrast between the dignity of old age and drunken uninhibitedness.¹²⁰ Dionysus, besides being the god of wine and revelry, was also thought to promise redemption to those from socially marginalized groups.¹²¹ In the case of the identity of the Old Market Woman, this would include hetairai and peasant women and would also make her a follower of Dionysus.

Comparing Viewership of the Breasts

Let us revisit the two exposed breasts of these two statues. They are exposed quite differently in their extent of the exposure as well as how, within the narrative of these works, these breasts are exposed. The slippage of the Drunken Old Woman's clothing has

¹¹⁸ Wrede 1991, 177.

¹¹⁹ E.g. Maseglia 2012, 416; Matheson and Pollitt 2023, 141-2.

¹²⁰ Wrede 1991, 170.

¹²¹ Wrede 1991, 170.

often been interpreted as erotic and fitting within a sexualized narrative.¹²² This seems unlikely though as she is old and would escape being sexualized. As well as their breasts being exposed due to their different actions and movements, additionally, the exposure of the Old Market Woman is much more open. Her arms are spread more openly than the Drunken Old Woman clutching the wine jug. The breast on the Old Market Woman is much more open and is meant to be gazed at. The details created in the fabric of the clothing also act as evidence which point to this conclusion. As Matheson and Pollitt have written about the tooling on the Old Market Woman's back, I have found that the Capitoline copy of the Drunken Old Woman was clearly carved with more attention to the fabric on the back (see Figures 2 and 12). In comparison to the Old Market Woman, the drapery is much more tooled—the folds in the fabric are clearly emphasized for the viewer to look upon and admire, implying viewership from the rear of the statue. In this way, the Old Market Woman's breast has more visual significance to the viewer because of how the statues are meant to be viewed. The breast on the Old Market Woman is central to how the statue is meant to be viewed, which is with immediacy.

Possible Explanations for Interpreting the Breast and its Significance

The exposed right upper breast and shoulder on the Drunken Old Woman has been theorized to signify a variety of things, such as Dionysiac cultic devotion¹²³ or as an older woman with a lack of *sophrosyne* (moderation, self-control, temperance) and has been noted by scholars such as Masegria.¹²⁴ In this section, I want to also explore the

¹²² E.g. Zanker 1989, 41f.; Smith 1991, 137f.

¹²³ E.g. Smith 1991, 139; Wrede 1991, 176; Hemingway 2019, 115.

¹²⁴ Masegria 2015, 417.

possibilities of the significance of the exposed breast on the Old Market Woman. These explanations, while different, are not incompatible with each other.

Let us explore the aesthetic purpose of the exposed breast. A possibility for the exposed breast's presence on the statue is for the artist to highlight the aged body itself. The Old Market Woman has been praised for how her age has been depicted. The breast might have been another way for the artist to highlight the woman's age as it is sagging and exposed for the viewer to see. The breast is also meant to be noticed.

Compositionally, the breast is centralized on the body. The right arm, though now broken, must have been initially outstretched. During my close autopsy of the sculpture, I examined the direction of the broken metal reinforcement that is exposed because of the broken marble and saw that the metal reinforcement was pointed away from the shoulder and forward and in the same direction that the old woman's feet were pointing toward (see Figure 13). If we were to reconstruct the sculpture, we would see that this creates a sort of chiasmus, which is a form in Greek sculpture that resembles the Greek letter chi (X). The artist of this sculpture opted to modify the basic chiasmus form which is usually reserved for men of physical prowess, such as athletes and gods, to fit the age of the woman and the curvature of her limbs which is a result of her aging. The chiasmus is not just a static form in which a statue could be constructed, but a dynamic one that signifies physical and psychological engagement within the narrative of the statue—it is a rhetorical form.¹²⁵ The form of the chiasmus can be thought of to glorify the figure being represented. Therefore, the Old Market Woman might be a celebration of old age, and the

¹²⁵ Thomas 2013, 51-2.

sagging, older, exposed breast might be a part of that celebration. The wrinkles, or the gaping, toothless mouth might be attributes of that as well.

The significance of the exposed breast on the Old Market Woman is that it is also a visual representation of her eagerness to participate in Dionysian festivities. The Old Market Woman's stooped posture, her stance showing she is mid-stride, and her gaped, toothless mouth may indicate she is instead anticipating being drunk and is hurrying towards her destination. In fact, she is in such a hurry that she has carelessly caused her garment to slip and her breast to be partially exposed. Both the Drunken Old Woman and the Old Market Woman are caught in a part of a narrative regarding Dionysian festivities—the Drunken Old Woman is celebrating, and the Old Market Woman is on her way to do the same. The exposed breast is meant to be a part of the narrative of the work, to demonstrate the anxious emotional state of the Old Market Woman as she quickly hurries to her destination: the festivities and her future drunkenness.

Another possibility is that the exposed breast draws the viewer's attention to the woman in the statue's class. The Old Market Woman's identity has been theorized to be that of a peasant. It is possible that the breast is there to draw attention to the woman's lower- social status. In her movement towards venturing outside her rural setting, her breast is exposed. Her breast might be exposed to highlight her lower social status, giving the exposed breast significance in how the statue is meant to be interpreted by the viewer. Or, if we are to assume the Old Market Woman is meant to be an aged hetaira, the exposed breast might serve to highlight the sex work that the Old Market Woman participated in. It might allude to the woman's profession as well as her social status. The breast, in this way, might be aesthetically, sexually, and narratively significant.

The exposed breast might highlight not just the class of the woman but her social mobility as well. As a peasant woman who labors, as a hetaira who also works, or as an older woman in general, she would have been able to move around freely in public without being disturbed or questioned about her place in public. Her breast is exposed due to her physical movement forward towards her destination, which would not be possible without her age or occupation. Her breast could be exposed to highlight her age or occupation.

The Old Market Woman's exposed breast operates with nuance. It is presented to the viewer to celebrate the aged body; to highlight the journey the old woman is taking towards a Dionysian festivity, and to comment on her social status and occupation. While many scholars have overlooked its significance within the work, it is arguably one of the most important attributes of this statue.

VI. Conclusion

Despite the extensive previous scholarship and discussions about the Old Market Woman, no one has explored yet the significance of her exposed breast. My thesis has aimed to do so.

Our ambivalent statue, which possibly depicts a hetaira or peasant woman, resides in the realms of partial nakedness as well as old age. To explore the significance of the exposed breast, I have highlighted several things in the previous chapters. The first is the significance of the statue's old age. I have shown how the Old Market Woman is represented as elderly. The evidence provided is her wrinkles, her sagging jowls, her gaping, toothless mouth, and her hunched posture. I have also demonstrated how the literary depictions of elderly women are wide ranging and therefore visual depictions of elderly women should be treated with special care and nuance. The elderly state of the Old Market Woman is important because the exposed breast would be perceived differently on a younger body, regardless of what her supposed identity would be. I have also explored the meaning of the partial nakedness on the Old Market Woman by comparing the sculpture to the Capitoline copy of the Drunken Old Woman. Through both their similarities and differences, I have discussed the possibilities of the significance of the breast having multiple purposes: to be a part of a Dionysiac festival narrative, to highlight the older women's occupation or class, to refer to her social mobility which she reaches in old age, and as another way to emphasize the aged body. The breast is a highly significant part of this work and gives the viewer further context for interpretation of the Old Market Woman and understanding the range of depictions of elderly people in the Hellenistic period.

Appendix



Figure 1: The Old Market Woman in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023).
Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 2: Old Market Woman (hunched over), Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider

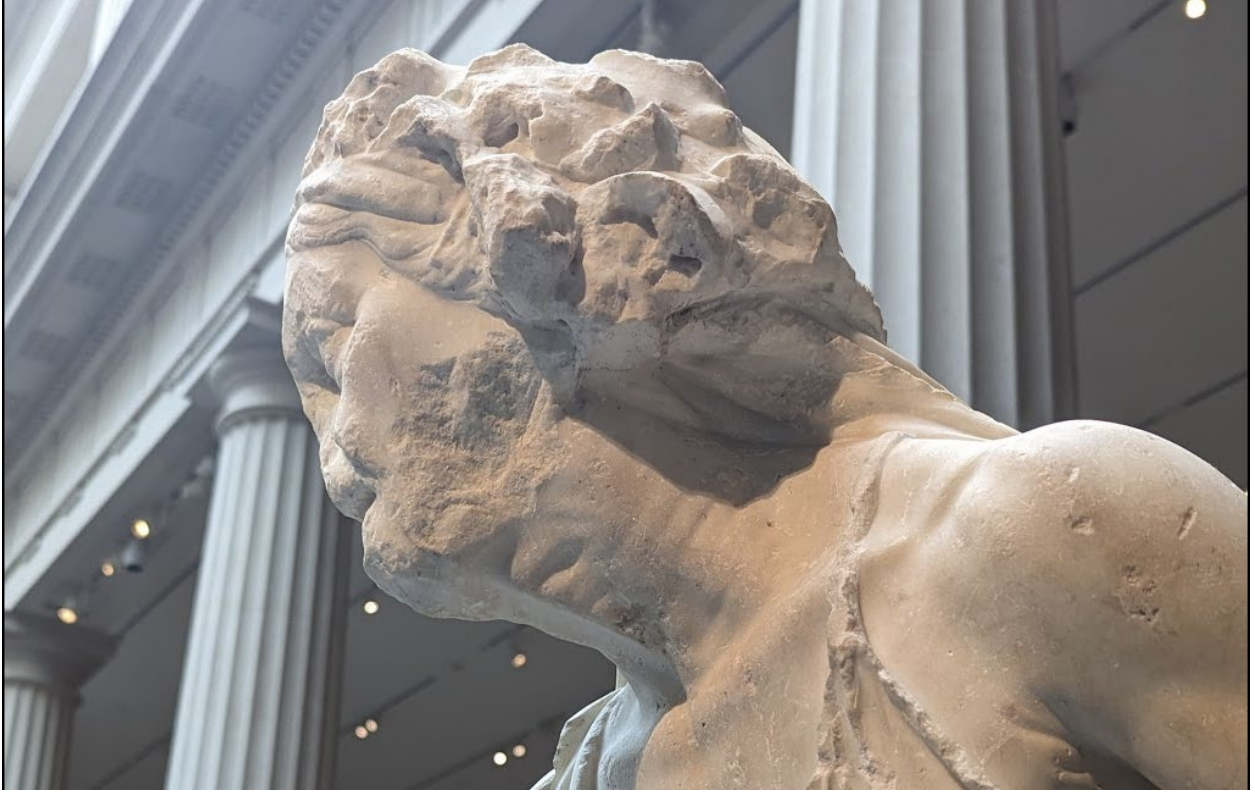


Figure 3: Old Market Woman (close-up of ivy wreath), Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 4: The Old Market Woman's stooped posture and exposed right breast, Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 5: Close-Up of details of face of Old Market Woman, Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 6: Attempted reconstruction of the Old Market Woman's face in 1909. Photo: Abramitis 1997, fig. 3



Figure 7: Old Fisherman, Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 8: Old Shepherdess with a Lamb, Capitoline Museums, Rome. Photo: Richardson 1933, fig. 18.



Figure 9: Laocoön, Vatican Museum, Rome. Photo: Brilliant 2000, fig. 2.



Figure 10: Drunken Old Woman, Capitoline Museums, Rome (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 11: Detail of head and shoulders of the Drunken Old Woman, Capitoline Museums, Rome (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 12: Detailed backside of the Drunken Old Woman, Capitoline Museums, Rome (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider



Figure 13: Edited photo of inside of broken right arm of Old Market Woman (September 2023). Photo: Tatymn Chen Snider

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