Introduction

Let us not put wreaths on our front doors, or assemble troupes of dancers, or decorate the streets. Let us not feast the eyes, or mesmerize the sense of hearing, or make effeminate the sense of smell, or prostitute the sense of taste, or gratify the sense of touch. These are ready paths to evil and entrances of sin.

Gregory Nazianzen, *Homily on the Nativity of Christ*, 5

In the late fourth century CE, Gregory Nazianzen remarked on the ability of the senses to provide gateways to experiencing the environment we live in. This could lead to good, but, as Nazianzen notes, could also lead to ill. Recently, there has been increased interest in the idea of “sensory perception” within historical studies generally; however, there has been only modest interrogation of these topics within the field of ancient history. What has been done has largely attempted to reconstruct the sensory experience in antiquity rather than to explain its creation or implications. This book aims to address this notable lacuna by helping to explain certain taboos within Roman society using the framework of the senses. A pivotal aim of the book is to go beyond restoration to application. This is achieved by exploring the effects of taboos such as corpse pollution, rancid odors, and sensual foods within commercial markets and their role in rendering certain trades sordid or disreputable. By exploring how sensory taboos informed the status and economic opportunities of tradesmen in the Roman Mediterranean between 45 BCE and 565 CE, it is made clear that Roman notions of pollution and the institution of certain taboos organized and helped to structure Roman society. These attitudes do not exist in a vacuum, but are instead informed by a number of factors, including culture norms and economic status. Thus perceptions of wine versus beer, for example, were informed by cultural attitudes that upheld wine as a civilized drink and beer as a barbaric one. As a result, wine merchants were held in higher esteem than Roman brewers. Despite the fact that the Roman world appears at first glance to be a familiar, parallel realm, attitudes towards touch, sound, smell, sight, and taste in fact often differed greatly from our modern predilections. I argue that in order to fully understand constructions of disrepute in antiquity, attitudes must be situated within their own socio-cultural milieus. However, it is Roman tradesmen themselves that help us best explore the benefits, consequences, and changes in these sensory attitudes.

Description of Book:

In many ways, this book is about perceptions and their impact on Roman society. In the book, *Caste, Class, and Democracy: Changes in a Stratification System* (1976), Vijai Singh examined shifts in the stratification system of India over time, isolating various factors—legal, social, institutional—that helped to shape this system. In a similar mode, the goal of this book is to reveal the construction and motivations for Roman attitudes towards various trades as “sordid”, and then explain how these attitudes created inequalities,
informed institutions, and changed over time. This book uses the senses as an organizing framework in order to uncover the attitudes responsible for creating social stereotypes and economic niches, but does not take these attitudes as either static or homogenous in nature. The book approaches these themes with an introduction, conclusion, and five individual studies: funeral workers (touch), criers (sound), tanners (smell), mint workers (sight), and bakers (taste). There are three main goals: 1) To present what is known about certain trades in Roman antiquity in terms of the literary, archaeological, and inscriptional (i.e., epigraphic) evidence. 2) To consider what the full range of effects of certain sensory attitudes, e.g., towards smells or ideas of death pollution, had on the lives of Romans and the professionals who engaged these sensory stereotypes regularly. 3) To show how religious, political, and cultural shifts mutated certain taboos over time and, as a result, not only helped to reshape economic markets, but also to either improve or degrade the status of the professionals at work within these markets. Overall, this book attempts to apply new methodological approaches to ancient history, but also broaches a number of topics concerning taboos, trade, and status that have not yet been raised.

The book is organized into seven chapters. The introductory chapter introduces the reader to the highly stratified world of the Roman Mediterranean. Disrepute existed on a spectrum within this society, and could be imposed legally, socially, and even geographically. The traditional theories behind notions of disrepute and commercial trade are reviewed (Finley, 1973; D’Arms, 1981), before proposing that these studies have not fully explained the phenomenon or successfully indicated how disrepute was dealt with or how it changed over time. It is then proposed that a broader consideration of notions of pollution, elite prejudices, and the use of various legal and social taboos be considered in order to help us readdress the idea. It provides a historiography of major works in the study of pollution, marginality, and the use of voluntary associations generally, before defining the basic layout of the book.

The first two chapters of this book investigate legal taboos in the form of infamia and other stigmas of legal disrepute. Chapter One centers on touch and the construction of death pollution through an examination of the funeral trade in the Roman empire from the late Republic to the death of Justinian. Roman ideas of death pollution, which emanated from corpses, meant that funeral workers in many cities worked at a clandestine job that cast them outside the city proper. The chapter builds on the current analysis of funeral workers in Italy (Bodel 1994, 2000, 2004) and expands it to consider comparable funeral trades beyond the Italian peninsula, in Greco-Roman Egypt (Derda, 1991) and within the Jewish communities of Roman Palestine. The second half of the chapter indicates how early Christian attitudes modified beliefs concerning death pollution. These, combined with an increased focus on poverty and the right to burial, helped transform the funeral trade. As a result, numerous churches within the ancient Mediterranean began to employ clerical and non-clerical funeral workers in caring for the Christian dead. Shifts in the taboos surrounding corpses allowed funeral workers to depart from the nocturnal margins of society and work in the daytime, as persons of higher status than earlier in the empire.

Chapter Two examines taboos connected to sound through a study of Roman crier-auctioneers, called praecones. The discrepant status of the crier is investigated and reconstructed based largely on literary evidence that demonstrates elite Roman perceptions of selling one’s voice and the connection of praecones with the funeral trade. In addition to this stigma, their marginalization from the political sphere was partially due to late Republican anxieties over criers gaining extraordinary economic and social clout.
Inscriptions, frescoes, and reliefs indicate that Republican criers formed voluntary associations and functioned as important economic and social mediators in Roman communities. Criers were agents that contributed to almost every sphere of commerce in the Roman city and, as such, reveal a great deal about a society, whose literacy rate hovered at between 10 and 20% (Harris, 1989). The chapter illustrates that while in the Republic these professionals were largely used as private auctioneers to disseminate information and sell off slaves, goods, and other products, the expansion of the empire under Augustus necessitated a bureaucratic enlargement. The growth in state-employed criers endowed prominence and position on those criers employed within the entourages of governors. By applying Thomas Friedman’s (2005) sociological ideas of internet “flattening,” the expansion of gubernatorial staffs throughout the empire to include criers is used to point to a similar “flat effect” for communication and connectivity in the Roman empire following the reign of Augustus. Unlike the funeral workers who benefitted from shifts in ideas of pollution surrounding corpses, some criers benefitted from the shift in the size of Rome’s bureaucracy beginning in the principate.

Chapter Three explores the role of smell in determining status and social perception. The chapter explores to what extent Greco-Roman and Jewish attitudes toward smell and pollution helped to determine the social status of tanners in the Roman Mediterranean from the first century BCE to Late Antiquity. Professional tanners were often mocked for their engagement in such a malodorous trade. Tanning required the use of strong, noxious astringents, including urine, in order to soften and strip hides. Whereas Roman literary evidence points to the low social status of these workers and the physical marginalization of tanning shops outside the city, the archaeological evidence from Pompeii and elsewhere within the Roman West does not reveal this level of marginalization. Particularly outside Rome, tanning workshops were not as topographically outcast as literary sources would suggest and were in fact often housed within the city walls. The “embedded” nature of fragrant commercial workshops has been similarly suggested in respect to Roman fulleries (Flohr 2012, 2013). As such, it is concluded that there was often a disconnect between the literary landscape and the actual one in Roman antiquity. Epigraphic sources in particular indicate that these workers were often organized into highly visible voluntary associations that, within some communities, played integral roles in civic euergetism. This chapter questions the modern interpretations of Roman tanners as stigmatized persons, and suggests that their reputation as social pariahs was largely a trope employed by classical poets and politicians, rather than a marginalization grounded in reality. In this case, the disrepute exists largely within the literary sphere.

Chapter Four explores the role of mint workers in producing the most prolific piece of visual propaganda at the disposal of the emperor: coinage. This chapter examines the legal status, participation in voluntary associations, and social mobility of Roman mint workers from the Republic to later empire, and explores how intense imperial control over the visual medium of coins was extended to encompass control over the mint workers themselves. Although much has been written about the location of Roman mints and the coins they produced, there has been relatively little investigation into the lower-level laborers that facilitated the Roman monetary system. A study of these laborers reveals that while they provide pivotal insight into the organizational structure of such a massive system, they also illustrate the state use of legal status in the later empire in order to marginalize workers essential to the economic functioning the state. Whereas previous chapters have explored the ways in which disrepute embodied certain culturally perceived biases (e.g., corpse pollution, malodorous smells), this chapter indicates that legal disrepute...
was used increasingly in Late Antiquity as a means of securing laborers within certain professions deemed essential to the state. Despite the limits on their occupational and social liberties, mint positions appear to have gained clout and become increasingly attractive in the later empire due to the office’s exemption from military service and other compulsory services. By the sixth century, working at a mint had become a markedly more high-status position than it had been in the late Republic in both the Greek East and the Latin West. This is a curious development that exemplifies both the complex nature of disrepute in Late Antiquity, and the fact that legal disrepute did not always mirror social attitudes.

Chapter Five focuses on taste by exploring the taboos surrounding professionals that provided luxurious foods. It explores the perception of tradesmen such as fishermen, cooks, and bakers viewed as effeminate by some elites, and excluded from the military in Late Antiquity. In the late Republic, Cicero’s *De officiis* decreed that the least respectable of all trades were those that catered to *voluptas* (sensual pleasure). This included “fishmongers, butchers, cooks, poulterers, and fishermen” (Cic. *Off.* 1.150; Cf. Ter. *Eun.* 257). The chapter begins by exploring the reasons for Cicero’s diatribe against these tradesmen via Roman attitudes towards Greek culture, trade, luxury, and gustatory pleasures. It also notes the association of bakeries with unsavory institutions such as taverns, inns, brothels, and penal workshops. Despite Cicero’s opinions, the role of bakers in Roman society increased from the Republic to the high empire as a result of their role in providing bread to the city of Rome and the military. Cicero’s earlier comments are then considered along with an edict in the Theodosian Code that banned inn workers, disreputable tradesmen, cooks, and bakers from becoming soldiers, as well as a passage in Vegetius that recommended similar bans on these tradesmen within the military. Although it has recently been argued that Vegetius is here reflecting the earlier gender stereotypes attached to certain trades, I argue that it was instead the “caste system” (as A.H.M. Jones termed it) that helped to define commercial trades in the later empire that are the more likely motivation behind excluding these “sensual tradesmen” from military service. Old literary tropes from Cicero supplied a handy justification for such actions. As Chapter Four explored, legal disrepute was increasingly used to immobilize workers employed in pivotal commercial sectors, rather than as a means of marginalizing those deemed socially reprehensible. Although the elite may have once demeaned bakers as purveyors of sensual pleasures, by the later empire, they were integral to the feeding of the populace and, as such, were socially immobilized by the state. The last two chapters of the book approach the issue of legal disrepute largely devoid of social stigma, and indicates that the legal construction of unseemly trades was one tool at the disposal of an empire struggling, among other things, to provide trustworthy coinage and adequate food supplies to its people.

The Conclusion will briefly summarize the findings of the book and reiterate the role that certain sensory taboos had in shaping Roman topography, hierarchy, and commerce. The overall conclusion is that disrepute was not a straightforward, one-dimensional concept in antiquity, but was in fact shaped by a number of factors that could and did change over time.

State of Current Scholarship:

Although broad analyses of the Roman legal concept of disrepute have been undertaken (Greenidge, 1894; Kaser, 1956), these have been largely top-down studies focused on the legal texts rather than the voice of the professional. *Taboo and Trade*
explicitly reconciles legal texts with the inscriptions, graffiti, coins, and archaeological remains for sordid professionals within the Roman Mediterranean in order first to recognize biases against these professionals, and then to explore the mechanisms used by dishonorable persons to achieve status and associative identities. Moreover, these legal scholars have often viewed disrepute in a static context, with little allowance for change over time, whereas the expansive time period of *Roman Sensibilities* allows for shifts and transformations to become more apparent. In regard to disreputable trades, recent scholarship on the experience of disrepute has targeted the sex and entertainment industries (McGinn 1998; Edwards 1993, 1997) over the less ‘sexy’ trades that likewise contributed to Roman economic and social networks. However, through these professionals, the dynamism, diversity, and transformations within the Roman Mediterranean are highlighted and exemplified. I argue that, much as honor has been taken as a means of ascertaining cultures both ancient (Lendon, 1997) and modern (Shields Kollmann, 1999), we must also turn to the notion of disrepute in order to fully understand the complexities, shifts, and experiences of a society—Roman or otherwise.

In terms of sensory history, there have been a number of approaches generally within the field of history, and a few quite recent additions within antiquity studies in particular. Journals dedicated solely to sensory history have sprung up to accommodate this relatively new interest, in addition to books meant to guide those interested in undertaking it (Smith, 2007). Particularly in regard to the early modern world, scent has become a popular topic (Dugan, 2011). Additionally, Constance Classen (2012) has recently provided a cultural history of touch, and Jonathan Sterne (2012) has constructed a reader for those taking on sound studies. Classics has not been completely devoid of sensory studies either. After all, the study of food is indeed often a consideration of the sensual experience of dining. However, there has been less investigation particularly into negative sensory reactions, e.g., reactions to bad smells. Currently, Mark Bradley is working on an edited volume on smell called *Smell in Antiquity*. Jerry Toner is also at work on an edited volume on ancient sensory history generally called *Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* (Bloomsbury). Additionally, there has been interest in the senses within manuscripts and edited volumes produced by Ray Laurence (1994, 2010, 2011)—particularly as concerns Pompeii. There is still much room left to explore in this field, and there remains a great deal to say about the sensory landscape of Roman antiquity. This book is not a straightforward sensory history, but rather uses the senses as an organizing framework for further understanding the marginalization of various trades in Roman antiquity that have often received little formal treatment.

**Present Status of Book:**

In the spring of 2012, I completed an Andrew Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Ancient History at Washington and Lee University, where I worked extensively on editing chapters from my dissertation to be added to the manuscript. Over the course of my first year at Marquette University as an Assistant Professor of History, I wrote the smell chapter and began to research the taste chapter. The smell chapter was more finely polished while I was in residence as a Visiting Scholar at the American Academy in Rome this summer (2013), but the Taste Chapter and Conclusion still remain to be finished. During the course of this academic year and the following summer of 2014, I intend to finish the manuscript entirely, and to return to Rome to finish exploration of the antique and early medieval industrial districts in and around the Janiculum.
Outstanding Features List and Competition:

Unlike the treatment it has received in Greek history (Parker, 1983), few books have attempted to analyze ideas of Roman pollution. Most recently, Mark Bradley’s edited volume (Cambridge, 2012) on the subject of pollution and propriety in Rome and Jack Lennon’s forthcoming manuscript on religious pollution (Cambridge, 2013) have given the subject more visibility. My approach is novel in taking the idea of pollution and indicating how it affected tradesmen through various legal, social, and geographic taboos, rather than exploring its impact on Roman religion, the lives of priests, or its role in ritual. Another outstanding feature is my treatment of numerous trades that have had little to no study. For instance, mint workers and tanners are two trades that, while mentioned in conjunction with the acts of minting coins or tanning, have not been comprehensively studied with a mind to the worker and their social organization at the level of the voluntary association. Finally, I have sought to, wherever possibly, break down the odd, modern barrier that often exists between those that study the Roman empire and those that study “Late Antiquity” (c. 212-565 CE). The long duration of my occupational studies allows for the transformations in taboos to be demonstrated, but also shows that the separation of these two time periods is detrimental particularly within the area of Roman social history.

Audience:

While the centerpieces of this investigation are case studies of how specific taboos informed the status of various Roman professionals, this book should be of interest to a wider audience than just Roman socio-economic historians. The study itself is interdisciplinary in approach, incorporating evidence and theory from the fields of history, archaeology, sociology, and urban and environmental studies. It has a broad potential academic audience particularly within comparative anthropology and sociology due to its application of anthropological ideas of “pollution” and the “taboo.” It will also represent a comparative model to those studying outcasts, subalterns, or caste systems within other cultures, such as Japan, early modern Germany, or India.

Apparatus

I expect the book to contain 10 photographs, two line drawings, and three maps. It will likely be around 95,000 words. It will include an abbreviations section, a glossary, a bibliography, references, and an online appendix of the inscriptions used in the book and places mentioned. A good example of the accompanying online material that (in my opinion) should come with each new book in ancient history, is Richard Talbert’s *Rome’s World: The Peutinger Map Reconsidered*, which can be accessed here: [http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/](http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/). I will be responsible for the online content, however, I would ask that it be linked to the publisher website, as exemplified above.

Conclusion:

The ancient sources are filled with references to taboos within the sensory landscape; things one should or should not touch, the sounds of a crier outside the Roman speaking from the auction block, the smell of tanneries next to the Tiber, and the freedman’s indulgence in a sweet pastry next to a bakery. This book studies the ways in which these attitudes were expressed within Roman society at the legal, literary, and spatial levels. Moreover, it shows the ways in which these taboos affected the lives of Romans and
influenced the manner in which they viewed the world around them. Although this book is not meant to be a comprehensive handbook to stigmatized occupations in Roman antiquity, it provides an original approach to questions of status, class, and disrepute by applying new historical approaches concerned with ideas of the anthropology of pollution, the senses, and social control. This book investigates how these biases structured and defined Roman society, and ultimately influenced the topography of many Roman cities, both physical and textual.
TABOO AND TRADE:
SORDID PROFESSIONS IN THE ROMAN MEDITERRANEAN

Sarah E. Bond

Introduction: Roman Pride and Prejudices
I. Roman Prejudices and Trade
II. History on the Margins
III. Pollution and Taboo
IV. Outline of Book

Chapter 1: Touch: Tactility and Taboo in the Funeral Trade
I. Roman Attitudes Toward Touch and Pollution
II. Funeral Workers in Roman Italy
III. Funeral Workers in Egypt and Jewish Communities
IV. Early Christian Attitudes Toward Corpses
V. The Christian Right to Burial
VI. The Clerical Funeral Worker

Chapter 2: Sound: The Call of the Praeco: The Status of Roman Criers
I. Criers and Roman Soundscapes
II. The Crier-Auctioneer and the Taint of Money
III. Criers and Funeral Associations
IV. Criers and Communication in a Largely Illiterate World
V. Augustus, Criers, and the ‘Flattening’ of the Empire

Chapter 3: Smell: Scent and Sensibilities: Tanners in the Ancient Mediterranean
I. Introduction
II. Scent and Civility: Graeco-Roman Attitudes Towards Tanners
III. Taboos and the Roman Meat-Processing Industry
IV. Rome and the Organization of Tanners
V. The Topography of Tanneries in the Latin West
VI. Tanneries and Tanners in the Greek East
VII. Conclusion

Chapter 4: Sight: Ignominy and Monetarii: Mint Workers in the Later Roman Empire
I. Coins as Visual Propaganda
II. Julius Caesar and the Necessity for Mint Control
III. Servile and Freedman Mint Workers
IV. The Creation of Compulsory Trades in Late Antiquity
V. Mint Workers in the Later Roman Empire

Chapter 5: Taste: Men of Military Material: Sensual Trades in the Late Roman Army
I. Cicero’s List of Sensual Trades
II. Bakers and the Roman Grain Supply
III. Bakery Complexes: Mills, Inns, Taverns, and Brothels
IV. Sensual Trades and Military Service in the Late Roman Empire
V. Bakers and Compulsory Trade in Late Antiquity

Conclusion: Assessing Sensory Attitudes and Notions of Disrepute