

Lily Whelden  
Personal Narrative  
3.6.24

My name is Augusta Andromeda Medica, I am twenty-six years old, and I am the local physician of our town. I am what is known as a *medica*, or a female physician.<sup>1</sup> My family has a long history in the Roman Provinces, but we have not always had freedom.

My grandfather, Andreas, was born in Greece to a poor family. He served as an army doctor for the Greek forces. When he was around my age he was brought to the city of Rome as a slave. He was bought by a wealthy Roman family upon his arrival. He served as a tutor to the young children of the family, but formed such a relationship with the head of the household that upon his death he would become a freedman.<sup>2</sup> After many years, the man died, and my grandfather became a freedman. Once freed, he worked to create his own medical practice, as he had been practicing medicine before he was brought to the province.

Life as a Greek doctor was difficult in the Roman provinces. He moved around a lot, and Andreas faced much prejudice as a foreigner.<sup>3</sup> However, he found a wife, had many children, including my father, Andreas Augustus Medicus, who grew up and studied to be a doctor as well. I often wonder if my grandfather gave his children more Roman names so that they would not face as much prejudice as he did. Because my father had been born Roman citizen, he struggled less to build his business and establish a shop in our province. He married my mother, who was a trained *obstetrix*. When I was younger, she began teaching me the ways of midwifery and I thrived as a midwife. It is customary for midwifery and other female medical training to be

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, "Women Doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 133.

<sup>2</sup> Shelton, *As the Romans did*, 249.

<sup>3</sup> Shelton, *As the Romans did*, 262.

passed through families.<sup>4</sup> Although my mother trained me in the ways of becoming an *obstetrix*, my true passion lies in treating all people and their ailments.

I am the oldest surviving child of my family. My only brother died serving in the Roman army years ago, so I am the only one able to take over the business of my father. *Medicae*, other women in my profession, are the female version of the male *medicus*, and while we are not treated as equal, we are formally educated in similar ways.<sup>5</sup> It is fair to say that we are not equal to doctors. There are fewer of us, and while we are similarly trained to the male *medici*, *medicae* are set apart.<sup>6</sup> I am quite talented at making tinctures and medicaments. Medicaments, as I have learned, can cure almost anything if created and applied correctly.<sup>7</sup> I have been under the supervision of my father who has allowed for me to work under him for many years. My father is old, and has stopped working many hours as of late, and thus I have taken on more responsibility. For many years women like me have worked hard to be recognized as medical professionals, and often we are put down, but many of us are capable and are intelligent in the ways of medical care.<sup>8</sup> As my skills progressed, I managed to earn recognition as a healer and as a medicament specialist. I now live alone in the apartment above our family's small apothecary shop.

I haven't always lived in this apartment. When I was younger, I lived with the rest of my family in a larger apartment across the province. My current apartment is barren and quiet without my family, and I often miss celebrating holidays with them to honor our ancestors. Many of the *Lares* we honor relate to our work in the medical field, but two, in particular, honor

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<sup>4</sup> Parker, "Women Doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 135.

<sup>5</sup> Parker, "Women Doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 135.

<sup>6</sup> Flemming, "Women, Writing and Medicine in the Classical World," 257.

<sup>7</sup> Celsus, *De Medicina*, 5.15-18.

<sup>8</sup> Parker, "Women Doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire," 133.

specific family members: one for my brother and one for my grandfather, Andreas.<sup>9</sup> Our family is not as religious as other families in the province, but we greatly value honoring those that came before us and those that have been lost from us. Although my apartment is barren, I still keep a small shrine near my window to honor both of these ancestors because I would be nowhere without them.

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<sup>9</sup> Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 136.