

## Making Up Empire: Control, *Cerussa*, & Roman Cosmetics

There were many uses for lead (*cerussa/plumbum*) in the Roman Empire, ranging from medicine and beautification to plumbing and weaponry. From sourcing to production and distribution, Roman usage of lead was underpinned by imperial conquest. Lead's toxicity was also well-documented in several Classical sources, including texts by Dioscorides, Vitruvius, and Pliny the Elder. Paradoxically, this harmful metal was integral to Roman daily life; for instance, it was applied to women's faces as a whitening agent. In this paper, I will analyze the production and inclusion of lead in Roman cosmetics through the framework of feminist new materialism. By applying Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, my research explores how lead exerted agency on social structures and beautification experiences in antiquity. This paper will delve into the tensions between patriarchal beauty standards and autonomous feminine adornment. I argue that this toxic metal provides a window into gendered technologies of domination in the Roman Empire. By integrating Actor-Network Theory with a socio-historical analysis of the Roman cosmetic tradition, my scholarship investigates how the inclusion of lead in cosmetics simultaneously rearticulated and subverted Roman social hierarchies.

### Selected Bibliography

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