Speech of Cato the Elder for the maintenance of the Lex Oppia

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If each of us Roman citizens had taken care to preserve the rights and dignity of a husband with regard to his wife, we would have fewer problems with women as a whole; but our freedom, having been destroyed at home by the violence of women, is crushed and trampled on even in the forum; and, for not having been able to stand up to each in particular, we fear them as a whole. For my part, I regarded as a mythical tale and a fiction the story according to which all the men of a certain island had been exterminated by a conspiracy formed by women. But there is not a category of people who does not expose you to the greatest dangers, if you tolerate its meetings, its plots and its meetings. And I have a hard time deciding what,of the act itself or the example it sets, is the worst.

(…)

Our ancestors wanted women not to be able to handle any business, even private, without the guarantee of a guardian, that they are in the hands of their parents, their brothers, their husbands; and we, great gods! We even suffer that they get involved in the government, that they interfere in the life of the forum, in the assemblies and in the comitia. For today, what else are they doing, by roads and crossroads, than to support the bill of the tribunes of the plebs and to recommend the repeal of the law? Let go of the reins to frenzied natures and indomitable beasts and flatter yourself that they themselves put the brakes on their license, if you do not do it yourself. This defense is the least of those to which women suffer with difficulty from being constrained by customs or by law.What they want is full freedom or, rather, license, if we have to call things by their name. If they win, what will they not try?

(…)

Roman citizens, you have often heard me deplore the expenses of women and, often, those of men, not only of ordinary citizens, but also of magistrates, and to complain of the fact that the State is undermined by two contrary vices, greed and luxury, scourges which destroyed all the great empires. The better and more flourishing the situation of the State becomes, the more its domination extends - we have already penetrated into Greece and Asia, where we find all the attractions of pleasure; we are already touching the treasures of kings - the more I fear that we do not get hold of these things, but that it is they who get hold of us. It was for a hostile design, believe me, that the statues of Syracuse were brought into this city.I hear too many people bragging and admiring the ornaments of Corinth and Athens and making fun of the clay antefixes of the temples of our gods. As for me, I prefer these gods who are auspicious to us and will continue to be, I hope, if we leave them in their place.

Livy, Roman History, Book XXXIV, 1-4, translated from Latin by BK after the version by M. Nisard.