

## 4

## Roman Slavery

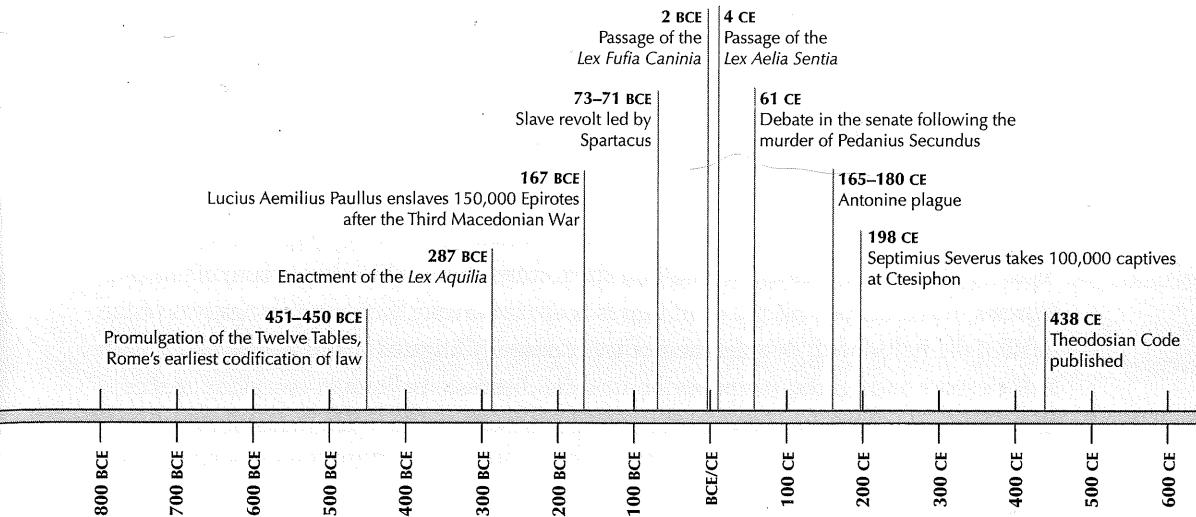
Leslie Shumka

Any viewer of the television series *Rome*, which aired in the mid-2000s, will notice the number of scenes featuring slaves, either in the foreground or background. One such scene is remarkably instructive regarding the role of slaves. It involves a tryst between Atia, virago of the Julian clan, and her lover, Marc Antony. As the scene opens, we find the pair on a sumptuous bed, their naked bodies entwined and glistening from their sexual exertions. They gaze at one another for a moment before Atia languidly raises one arm, snaps her fingers, and hoarsely calls for water. Antony rolls away from her at the same instant and the camera follows suit, cleverly directing our attention to Atia's body slave, Merula, who has been sitting mutely in a corner of the room—or so we are meant to understand. As a passive observer of the couple's intimacy, Merula personifies an essential paradox of Roman slavery: slaves were ubiquitous yet invisible. When we reflect on their presence and contributions in virtually every realm of Roman life, questions naturally arise. For example, how did Rome become a slaveholding society, and how did it manage to sustain a vast supply of slaves?

### Introduction

This chapter offers an introduction to the history of Roman slavery and to some of the methodological approaches specialists use in its reconstruction. Slavery was an established feature of life in the Mediterranean basin long before Rome's ascendancy and played a crucial role in the economic and social life of many cultures, as it did in Roman society.<sup>1</sup> Comprehending Roman slavery involves defining its form (for example, chattel slavery or debt bondage), obtaining an idea of slave numbers, and recovering something of the slave experience. To write its history is to appreciate that

### Timeline



written and material evidence from the early and middle Republic is limited and that this inadequacy makes us more dependent on information from the central period of Rome's history (200 BCE–200 CE). Yet even material from this era cannot tell us everything we wish to know, and so we are obliged to seek practical ways of mitigating its shortcomings (such as engaging in cross-cultural analysis). The challenges of investigating this subject are significant but surmountable.

The following discussion is thematic; however, specific texts have been highlighted to illustrate slavery's chronological breadth and intensification. These excerpts have been selected for their perspectives on legal developments and influential events, but it must be acknowledged that they cannot offer a highly nuanced picture of Roman slavery's evolution. For example, they may create the impression that Rome's transformation was carefully engineered and that, once deeply rooted, the institution of slavery remained unchanged. If, however, we consider slavery against the vast sweep of Roman history, we see that it developed more organically. Effort was certainly expended on maintaining distinctions between free person and slave, securing slave owners' rights, and regulating manumission, but it is essential to remember that this effort was often a response to unforeseen societal stresses (for example, the growth of Christianity or the economic troubles of the third century CE).

As a field of study, Roman slavery has engrossed ancient historians for over half a century, and this engagement shows no sign of abating. It is often hard to fathom the appeal of a history that is fundamentally one of dehumanization, desocialization, and oppression, but a part of this narrative is also the extraordinary story of the extent to which slaves, despite their marginalization, made their mark upon Roman society. A brief but graphic demonstration of their impact is found in the *Digest of Justinian*, a sixth-century CE codification of Roman law. As we might expect, a cursory survey of its contents reveals that jurists provided legal opinions on matters of concern to slave owners: the care of slaves, the freeing of slaves (**manumission**), the punishment of runaways (**fugitivi/ae**), and the regulations governing slave interrogation and torture. But in a broad spectrum of topics—legacies, noxal actions (illegal or injurious acts), commerce, finance, prerogatives of the head of the household, dowries, and other commonly litigated matters—slaves are both at the centre and on the periphery of juridical discussions. Roman law alone makes it abundantly clear that slaves were indispensable to society. But when the legal evidence is coupled with other primary sources (for example, commemorative monuments), we find that the public and private lives of Romans and their slaves were very closely entwined. The fundamental importance of slavery to Roman society will become fully apparent in the following discussion of the definitions of slavery, determination of slave numbers, slave trade, and slave experience and resistance.

## Definitions

Before turning to a discussion of slavery in the Roman context, it is helpful to examine how historians understand and use key terms such as *slaveholding society* and *slave*.<sup>2</sup> Quantitative and qualitative techniques are employed in defining these terms, and while scholarly opinion is often divided on the application and outcome of each method, both have their merits. Where statistical or documentary evidence exists, a quantitative approach can help us define a slaveholding society. Specialists calculate slave numbers and use these figures to distinguish between actual slave societies, where involuntary or slave labour is the dominant form, and societies with slaves, where it is not. These designations are not moral assessments but distinctions that reveal a great deal about the internal dynamics of slavery.

In a genuine slave-owning society the proportion of slaves in the total population reaches a critical mass of 20 per cent or higher and familial, gender, and economic relationships are deeply affected by slaves' presence. For example, between 1750 and 1860, black slaves comprised approximately one-third of the American South's total population.<sup>3</sup> In addition to working field and farm, these slaves served in a range of domestic roles, from child-care provider to body slave (the individual who bathed and dressed the master).

In a society with slaves, the number of enslaved people is comparatively low (perhaps

5 per cent of the entire population) and social relationships are relatively unaffected by their existence. Slaves certainly serve in a variety of capacities, from farmhands to domestics, but their low numbers diminish their impact on free society. By this definition, the part of Canada once known as New France was a society with slaves. Between 1681 and 1818, slaves in French Canada (predominantly *panis* or Aboriginal slaves but also black people) numbered approximately 4,100, which was less than 1 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> This figure hardly approaches the staggering statistics from the American South; nonetheless, it indicates that slaves were a real and visible presence in New France.

Compared to the broad categories yielded by a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach to slavery (that is, consideration of the qualities of slaves) provides insight into different types of slaves. The term *chattel slave* is applied to the individual who is "socially dead." This person is denied any kind of physical autonomy, as well as the legal and social privileges accorded to regular citizens, such as the freedom to marry, have a family, and form kinship ties.<sup>5</sup> Such controls ensure that owners gain slave labour for little cost and have extraordinary flexibility in managing their slaves. There are, in practice, no familial relationships to consider when selling or trading one's slaves because they are legally kinless. Chattel slaves are usually captives transferred into another society, an act that literally and legally transforms them into property. They may also be born in slavery, the result of sexual relations between fellow slaves or a master and his bondswoman. Moreover, the relationship between chattel slave and master is essentially "a relation of domination": the owner's power is unconditional and the slave's non-existent.<sup>6</sup> This situation differs from that of debt slaves, free individuals whose poverty compels them to serve their creditors until their financial obligations are discharged. In spite of this situation, however, these individuals retain their civic privileges.

Neither the quantitative nor qualitative approach reflects the conceptions or paths of enslavement in all cultures across time and place. Yet they can help us to understand the characteristics and dynamics of Roman slavery. Calculating the population of Rome's empire or its urban centres at any point in its history is a challenge: our statistical and documentary evidence is woefully incomplete, leading ancient historians to employ tools (for example, model life tables) used by demographers when studying modern populations. Attempts to quantify ancient slave numbers have produced some interesting results but have also created strong disagreement about how these figures should be formulated and interpreted (some conclude slave numbers are high; others argue that they are low) and whether ancient sources can be relied upon to bolster demographic approximations.<sup>7</sup> We need not engage further with the specifics of these divergent opinions. What must be recognized is that estimates are complicated by a dearth of dependable information and even more so by the vastness of the geographical empire and its chronology.

For example, one estimate puts as many as 1.5 million slaves in Italy by the end of the first century BCE, out of a total population of nearly 6 million (i.e. 20 to 30 per

cent). In contrast, prior to the Antonine plague (165–180 CE) there were 6 million slaves outside of Italy, where the free population may have totalled 45 to 60 or 70 million (i.e. approximately 10 per cent). According to **census** returns for Roman Egypt—an admittedly small sample size but the only province for which real data is available—slaves comprised only 11 per cent of the entire population and were found mainly in the hinterland (*chora*) of large urban centres.<sup>8</sup> Another evaluation claims that, when all the statistical information is thoroughly weighed and we try to formulate the slave population empire-wide, we arrive at a figure of 16 to 20 per cent.<sup>9</sup> And still another presents a more conservative estimate of 5 to 10 per cent in a population of 50 to 100 million in the central era of Rome's history (approximately 200 BCE–200 CE). While some of these calculations suggest that ancient Roman society does not meet the demographic standard for a genuine slave-owning society, others indicate that it meets the criteria at only specific times and places. What all these figures and comments make clear is that the pattern of slaveholding was far from uniform across the Roman world.

If, on the other hand, we consider the qualities of Roman slaves, we find a good deal of similarity with those from other cultures. None of the surviving legal evidence includes a precise definition for the term *slave*, but it is plain that Roman slaves were chattel slaves in the period 200 BCE–200 CE. There are numerous regulations that refer to them as both *persona* (a person) and *res* (a thing).<sup>10</sup> To the modern mind, this designation seems ambiguous and even offensive since, on principle, we find it difficult to accept the objectification of human beings. The Roman legal view was not so morally fraught. The law of persons stated categorically that one was either free or slave (Gai. *Inst.* 1.9) and thus tacitly acknowledged the slave's *persona*. But because slaves laboured for their owners and the law regarded their labour as a commodity, they were also classified as corporeal things (Gai. *Inst.* 2.1, 12–14). Consequently, they were enumerated among their owners' material possessions, just like land, livestock, farm equipment, and domestic paraphernalia.

The **Lex Aquilia** makes this situation clear. Enacted in 287 BCE, this law was concerned with damage to private property and, more specifically, damage that was inflicted illegally: "If anyone kills unlawfully a slave or female slave belonging to someone else or a four-footed beast of the class of cattle, let him be condemned to pay the owner the highest value that the property had attained in the preceding year" (Dig. 9.2.2).<sup>11</sup> Roman law also recognized that this person-object had to be clothed, fed, and (in some instances) protected from excessive abuse by his or her owner (Gai. *Inst.* 1.53). On the face of it, such stipulations seem to recognize the slave's humanity and safeguard his or her well-being. But these laws, which were difficult to enforce, were designed to prevent masters from diminishing their own property through negligence or inattention. Lastly, like their counterparts in other societies, Roman slaves were socially dead:<sup>12</sup> they had no parents, no family connections from which they derived a social identity, and no *conubium* (the

ability granted to Roman citizens to contract a legal marriage), which would have enabled them to create their own kin networks.

The other predominant form of slavery at Rome, at least in its early history, was **nexum**, or debt bondage. Legal evidence, more specifically the **Twelve Tables** (451–450 BCE) and the **Lex Poetelia Papiria** (326 BCE), seems to indicate that this form of slavery was limited to the first 150 years (approximately) of the Republic's existence and was not a phenomenon of the central period of Roman history. A reading of the Tables quickly reveals that early Rome was an agrarian society and that the unpredictability of nature frequently caused economic hardship for smallhold and tenant farmers.<sup>13</sup> *Nexum* made it possible and legal for indigent Romans to pledge themselves (or, more precisely, their labour) as collateral if they were in danger of defaulting on a loan; it required individuals to perform labour for their creditors or to hand over any fruits of their labour.

Debtors' relationships with their creditors were undoubtedly burdensome, but debtors did not relinquish their citizenship or the privileges it conferred, except in extreme circumstances (such as an inability to pay within a reasonable period of time). This fact, however, did not prevent creditors from physically maltreating their bondslaves. Indeed, the historian Livy (8.28) suggests that, by the end of the fourth century BCE, the practice of *nexum* was so widespread and caused such incredible hardship that it had to be abolished. The **Lex Poetelia Papiria** forbade creditors from privately imprisoning debtors, which effectively meant that affluent Romans could no longer economically exploit those individuals who lived hand to mouth. Although property, not person, had to be used as a form of collateral, Roman law still permitted creditors to seek redress by taking the insolvent to court. Whether slave or bondsman, the individual was generally subject to another who monopolized political and economic power.

## Sources of Slaves

It is generally agreed that slavery in the Italian peninsula did not fully take shape until the beginning of the third century BCE, even though we know from textual sources that the inhabitants of Rome probably practised some form of slavery as far back as the Etruscan monarchy (753–510 BCE). This is suggested by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 4.1.1–3) and Livy (1.39), two historians who wrote long after this period. Both state that the mother of Servius Tullius (who, according to tradition, was king from 578 to 535 BCE) was a Latin princess whom the Romans had enslaved. The difficulty with such anecdotes is that they describe a kind of semi-mythical era in Rome's history for which we have very little evidence.

We find more solid proof for the earliest beginnings of slavery if we again turn to the **Twelve Tables**. These are chiefly a collection of regulations—reasonable at times and just

Compare Chapter 15, ◀  
pp. 335–7, on the risks involved  
in agricultural investment.

plain curious at others—that governed marriage, inheritance, crimes, and other matters of import to the small agrarian community that was Rome. To judge from the information in the Tables,<sup>14</sup> Rome's slave population in the mid-fifth century BCE was small (although actual numbers cannot be measured), and general attitudes towards slaves were consistent with what we know from later periods. That society did not value slaves as highly as citizens is evident from a number of regulations, especially one on noxal actions stipulating that a person who causes harm or injury to a citizen must pay a penalty of 300 asses; if he injures a slave, however, the fine is only 150 (12.2). A minor but nevertheless important reference in a section on inheritance points to the existence of manumission, where we read of a slave being freed through a will on the condition that he remunerate the heir with an agreed-upon sum (7.13). A great disparity between free person and slave in terms of penalties for contravening the law is also apparent. Free individuals caught in the act of theft could be whipped and then handed over to the plaintiff for additional punishment. Slaves, however, forfeited their lives: after flogging they were thrown to their death from the Tarpeian Rock, a precipice in the middle of the city of Rome (8.8).

The utter lack of security for the slave's person, his or her need to reimburse his or her master (or master's heir) in return for emancipation, and inequitable treatment under the law all point to a rather fully conceived form of slavery by the mid-fifth century BCE. But how and when did slavery really begin to intensify? If we analyze thoroughly the great era of expansion (the fourth through second centuries BCE), we find that a confluence of events and conditions fostered the intensification of slavery. First, Rome went to war on such a regular basis during this time that its citizens became habituated to annual military operations. Second, while Rome's elite profited both socially and politically from imperialism, their economic gains were equally profound and gave them the capacity to purchase large numbers of slaves. Third, military success resulted in the transport of captives back to Italy as slaves on a previously unprecedented scale. Literary accounts convey something of the magnitude of enslavement: Lucius Aemilius Paullus, for instance, allegedly took 150,000 Epirotes prisoner at the close of the Third Macedonian War (Livy 45.33.8–34.6). If we tally up all reported instances of mass enslavement linked to military campaigns conducted between 297 and 167 BCE, the total number falls somewhere between 672,000 and 731,000.

It is helpful to remember two things about such figures: we cannot substantiate them, and it is highly probable that they are approximations and may even under-represent the actual number taken captive.<sup>15</sup> During the late Republic and the first two centuries of Empire, enslavement on a grand scale occurred only periodically. The imperial biographer Suetonius (*lul.* 15.3), writing in the early second century CE, claims that nearly one million Gauls had lost their freedom by the time Julius Caesar concluded his wars in the west, and the emperor Septimius Severus is said to have taken 100,000 inhabitants of Ctesiphon captive in 198 CE (Cass. Dio 75.9.4). We should also remember that not all captives were transported to Italy. Some were ransomed, some were given to soldiers

as booty, and others were sold to itinerant dealers who conducted informal sales after campaigns. Less fortunate captives were summarily executed.<sup>16</sup> Whether those sent to Italy during the early and middle Republic ever became the dominant labour force is a matter of some debate. That they played a fundamental role in agricultural production, particularly on the *latifundia* (plantations of the wealthy), is not in doubt.

As Republic gradually turned to Empire and geographic expansion slowed, the Romans were compelled to obtain slaves through means other than warfare. For our purposes, it might be more instructive to think qualitatively rather than quantitatively to gain some perspective on the slave supply.<sup>17</sup> In discussing the emergence of the republican *latifundia*, the ancient historian Appian (*B Civ.* 1.1) remarked on the advantages of slaveholding: slaves were ineligible for military service and they produced children, so one's holdings could be maintained and even expand considerably. In one of his books on agriculture, the Roman polymath Varro (*Rust.* 2.10.6) expressed concern for keeping slaves content and working to capacity; he recommended that slave-herdsman, who had to be absent from farmsteads for extended periods of time while they pastured animals, be given female companions with whom there would be offspring. The first-century CE agronomist Columella (*Rust.* 1.8.19) may have had breeding in mind when he proposed incentives (for example, a reduction in work responsibilities, manumission) for slave women who bore a certain number of children. None of these texts explicitly advocates breeding, but the authors clearly recognize that children are a natural outcome of slaves' sexual and emotional relationships.

Offspring from relations between female slaves and their owners also increased holdings because Roman law stipulated that these children take the **status** of their mothers. Legal evidence, in fact, offers support for the thesis that natural reproduction was a key source of slaves, for it contains frequent references to the juridical problems created by the children of slave women (when it came to legacies, for instance).<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, home-born slaves, or *vernae*, held considerable appeal for owners because, in large measure, they presented fewer challenges than other slaves (Sen. *De Ira* 3.29).

Born in slavery and unfamiliar with the life of freedom, they were more easily habituated to a life of servitude than freeborn captives. But like other slaves, *vernae* were still regarded with suspicion, for they were deemed capable of manipulating their privileged position within the household for personal gain.<sup>19</sup> Whatever their perceptions, owners were not blind to the financial benefits that accrued from home-born slaves, and this knowledge must have led some to actively encourage sexual relationships among their slaves.

A second source of slaves resulted from the abandonment and exposure of children. Historians contend that these practices were common, and evidence of imperial date supports this assertion.<sup>20</sup> Parents' decision to discard their children was probably fuelled by their inability to provide the necessities of life rather than by concern for a child's legitimacy or deformity.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch (*Mor.* 497E),

Compare Chapter 3, p. 64, and  
Chapter 5, pp. 103 and 107,  
on *vernae*.

Compare Chapter 5, p. 104, on  
the exposure of children.

writing in the late first or early second century CE, hints at this conclusion when he says that the poor did not rear their children for fear of consigning them to a life of destitution, but this comment also universalizes among the poor a practice whose frequency cannot be measured. By the reign of Constantine, in the fourth century CE, the discarding of children was certainly taken as entirely normative. The fifth-century CE Theodosian Code contains a law, enacted by Constantine, which reinforced the judgments of previous emperors on the subject of abandoned and exposed children.<sup>22</sup> It instructs that anyone who purchases a newborn in good faith is entitled to enslave the infant and further specifies compensation for the buyer if, in the future, someone claims that the child is actually freeborn and so entitled to be set free (*Cod. Theod.* 5.10.1). The law's protection of the buyer—rather than the slave or the individual attempting to recover the enslaved—indicates that, however socially repugnant the discarding of children may have been, it was tolerated.

We possess few details about the methods by which children were exposed or abandoned. How many slaves were acquired in this manner is difficult to say. Even if we could gain some sense of the number, it would have to be considered in the context of the horrific infant and child mortality regime of Roman society. Some historians estimate that nearly 33 per cent of children died within the first year of life, while nearly 50 per cent did not live to see their tenth birthday. Given the precariousness of infancy and childhood under the best of conditions, the survival of exposed children must have been significantly reduced and their contribution to the slave supply lessened by this fact, although arguments are made to the contrary.<sup>23</sup>

Romans also obtained slaves through importation. Literary evidence on this subject is reasonably abundant and has been fundamental in identifying specific communities and ports that facilitated trade between various points within Rome's empire and along its **frontiers**. At Tanais, nomadic peoples of central Europe and western Asia and traders who crossed the Sea of Azov from the Bosphorus met to exchange slaves and other commodities (Strabo 11.2.3). Slaves abducted in central Anatolia (now the interior of Turkey) were transported to Side on the south coast (Strabo 14.3.2), and shipped to many destinations, including Alexandria in Egypt. On the island of Delos, in the southern Aegean, tens of thousands of slaves were delivered, sold, and sent to other markets every day, and the high frequency of this activity purportedly led to the saying: "Trader, dock here, unload, your cargo's already been sold" (Strabo 14.5.2).<sup>24</sup> Inscriptions from commemorative monuments (for example, statue bases and altars) of Hellenistic and imperial date confirm the presence of slave markets (**stataria, venalicia**) in well-known communities along the coast of Asia Minor and in the city of Rome.<sup>25</sup> Inscriptions from the latter are unique in that they mention the *genius venalicium*, or guardian spirit, who presided over the slave market.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the fact that our best literary and epigraphic evidence is connected chiefly to the traffic in slaves in the empire's eastern half, it is essential to keep in mind that the slave population included individuals from

a variety of geographic locales, including Western Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and even India.<sup>27</sup>

Rather surprisingly, self-enslavement provided another source of slaves. The very idea of enslaving one's self was abhorrent to Romans because it defied the cherished ideal that no citizen be divested of his or her freedom or rights without his or her consent (Cic. *Dom.* 29). Yet evidence for the practice is abundant and spans nearly four centuries of the imperial period, which suggests that the need for self-enslavement was chronic. One can easily imagine that acute poverty and the consequent fear of starvation induced significant numbers of Romans, at different times, to enter slavery voluntarily or to sell their children into slavery in the vain hope of a better life: at least the bare necessities would be provided. The individuals who made these difficult decisions had few options. Public grain doles were sporadic, as were special food programs for children, and there was never in the whole of Roman history a concerted state-sponsored relief plan that might have discouraged self-enslavement to some degree.

The Romans obviously drew on different sources to maintain their slaveholdings, but could the yearly demand for slaves be met? It has been argued that, in the final stages of the Republic, roughly 100,000 slaves were required per annum, while this need reached far greater proportions in the early Empire. The historian William Harris conservatively estimates that, in order to maintain a servile population of 5 to 8 million, 250,000 to 400,000 slaves were required every year. Walter Scheidel pushes this number as high as 500,000.<sup>28</sup> Like computations of the slave population, those for the supply are complicated and controversial and should be considered together with the logistical challenges of the slave trade.

One might expect that the annual demand and volume of sales in major cities or trade depots necessitated the construction of buildings that integrated all aspects of the business: short-term housing and latrines for slaves, a place for auctioning and selling, and space for legal and financial transactions. Archaeologists have attempted to locate the remains of *venalicia*, and eight structures—two in Asia Minor, five in Italy, and one in North Africa—have been identified as such. Recently, however, a persuasive reassessment of their form and function has rejected the theory that these structures are *venalicia* and asks whether the slave trade ever required dedicated or purpose-built facilities. Auction or sale could have taken place on the ships that brought human cargo to market or in multi-purpose commercial spaces. Practically speaking, in small towns where the need for slaves was far lower and the trade in slaves seasonal, the community would hardly commit to the construction and maintenance of a building that might be used only periodically.<sup>29</sup> A more efficient approach was for municipal officials to make arrangements when needed; slave sales could have been conducted in any open or conveniently located area where display platforms (*castatae*) could be hastily constructed and dismantled (or omitted altogether). The notion of ad hoc arrangements is attractive. In fact, it is consistent with the reputed practices of itinerant slave dealers who expedited the sale of war captives in similar fashion.<sup>30</sup>

## Slave Experience and Resistance

A fundamental challenge in writing the history of Roman slavery is overcoming the fact that we rely almost entirely on information provided by an affluent, well-educated, slave-owning elite. Slave memoirs, letters, and documents (which might provide a unique perspective on the slave experience) do not exist, and this absence complicates our efforts to reconstruct a precise picture of slavery. How are we able to think of slaves as people or breathe life into their daily experience when our knowledge of them is limited and filtered through the writing of the very people who owned them? Consider the case of a Phrygian slave girl who is known to us through a bill of sale. The fragmentary contract, dated 8 July 151 CE, runs as follows:

In the consulship of Sextus Quintilius Maximus and Sextus Quintilius Condianus, 8th day before the Ides of July, at Side, when the priest of . . . Demonikos son of Myros was *demiourgos*, 16th of the month Panemos. Artemidoros son of Kaisios, an Alexandrian, has bought from Lucius Julius Protoketus, in the market, a girl, Sambatis renamed Athenais or whatever other name she may be called by, a Phrygian by race, 12 years old, for a price of 350 silver denarii. Hermias son of Hephaistas confirms (the transaction) and bids it take place on his own guarantee.<sup>31</sup>

The contractual language is formulaic. The date and place of sale, names of witnesses to the transaction, those of vendor and purchaser, and particulars about the slave (age, origin, price) are stated in a detached manner, underscoring the fact that the sale of the girl was nothing more than a routine business deal: a “prosaic aspect of Roman life.”<sup>32</sup>

We have little more than a hint of what enslavement may have meant to Sambatis. Side, the town in which she was sold, was a familiar port of call for slavers (*venalicii*) but was situated some distance south and east of her native Phrygia. She may eventually have been transported across the Mediterranean for resale since the purchaser, Artemidoros, hailed from Alexandria, a city known for its slave market. After a journey of this length, could the 12-year-old have known where she was? Did she understand the local language well enough to ask? We have no idea at what age Sambatis first became a slave and suffered what is termed **deracination**, physical separation from her natal family and removal from her homeland. But it is evident that she experienced deracination a second time, when she was renamed Athenais, an act that expunged her previous identity and severed any remaining ties she may have had with her natal family or the household of a previous owner.

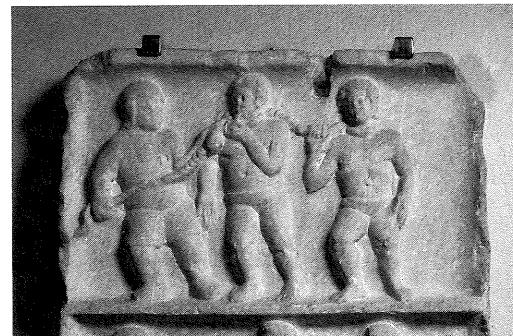
If we speculate on the practical circumstances of her sale, we might ask whether she, like others before her, was made to stand on a *castata* in the market. Did she wear the customary placard (*titulus*) around her neck, bearing information for potential buyers, including mention of her physical and moral defects (for example, epilepsy or a propensity to run

away)? Did Artemidoros and other customers physically examine the 12-year-old, as they were perfectly entitled to do? What did Sambatis feel at the time of her sale? Numbness? Humiliation? Resignation? Defiance? The girl’s experience cannot have differed radically from the hundreds of thousands of nameless slaves who were marched from their homelands in coffles or chained gangs (see Figure 4.1) or transported to bustling slave markets where they were sold like livestock. But how do we know for certain?

Documentary, epigraphic, legal, and literary evidence—much of it indirect—provides significant insight into the daily reality for slaves. Individuals at all levels of society owned slaves, with poorer Romans holding perhaps one or two and others holding more according to their economic status. The most affluent might own several hundred, as was the case of the *praefectus urbi* and former *consul* Pedanius Secundus, who was murdered by one of the 400 slaves he kept in his townhouse in Rome (Tac. *Ann.* 14.42; see Box 4.1). Different factors naturally shaped the experiences of ordinary slaves: age, sex, place of residence (urban or rural), possession of technical or much-needed skills (such as literacy, midwifery, or carpentry), the social and economic status of the owner, and even an owner’s character.<sup>33</sup> Work began in early childhood with age-appropriate tasks such as herding geese and continued well into old age, with elderly slaves serving in less-taxing posts such as doorkeeper. The number and range of tasks to be performed was generally commensurate with the size of the household or estate.

Where estates were large and agricultural production diverse, vast numbers of slaves were essential for keeping them productive. This much is suggested by Columella (*Rust.* 1.9.1–8). To ensure maximum efficiency, he advised owners to have slaves perform one job rather than several concurrently. As needed, slaves could help with tasks outside their areas of expertise. We hear of harvesters, vintagers, herdspeople, beekeepers, animal doctors, provisioners, smiths, and managerial staff, the most prominent of which were the estate manager (*vilicus*) and his wife (*vilica*). Additional slaves saw to domestic tasks such as child care (of slave children), food preparation, laundry, and clothing manufacture for outside workers. Still others were needed to serve in and maintain the owner’s villa, which was at the heart of the estate.<sup>34</sup>

In large urban households a cadre of slaves met the basic demands of owners. Epitaphs for those who worked for some of Rome’s leading families, such as the Statilii and the Volusii, attest to extreme job specialization. Affluent Romans might have one slave to dress them, one to style their hair, another to hold their grooming implements, another to fold clothes and put them away, and still another to mend them. At their dinner tables, there might be waiters, carvers, cupbearers, and



**Figure 4.1** Chained slaves. Ashmolean Museum

## Political History



### Box 4.1: The Murder of Pedanius Secundus and Its Aftermath

In 61 CE, the city prefect Pedanius Secundus was murdered by one of his 400 slaves. Roman tradition dictated that all the slaves in the household where such an event had occurred must be put to death, but the vast number of those who would be killed in this case incited the pity of large numbers of the Roman population. Crowds thronged the **senate** house where the matter was being debated. Some senators argued for mercy, but most were opposed. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.43–4) reports the speech reputedly made by Gaius Cassius, one of those who stood by the blanket death penalty:

Do you believe that a slave took the resolution of killing his master without an ominous phrase escaping him, without one word uttered in rashness? Assume, however, that he kept his counsel, that he procured his weapon in an unsuspecting household. Could he pass the watch, carry in his light, and perpetrate his murder without the knowledge of a soul? A crime has many antecedent symptoms. So long as our slaves disclose them, we may live solitary amid their numbers, secure amid their anxieties, and finally—if die we must—certain of our vengeance amid the guilty crowd. To our ancestors the temper of their slaves was always suspect, even when they were born on the same estate or under the same roof, and drew in affection for their owners with their earliest breath. But now that our households comprise nations—with customs the reverse of our own, with foreign cults or with none, you will never coerce such a medley of humanity except by terror. “But some innocent lives will be lost!” . . . All great examples carry with them something of injustice—justice compensated, as against individual suffering, by the advantage of the community.<sup>1</sup>

Gaius Cassius and his supporters won the day, and the 400 slaves of Pedanius Secundus's household were crucified.

#### Note

1. Translated by Jackson (1937).

food tasters, in addition to entertainers such as musicians and dancers. Job specialization in such elite households did not necessarily aim at efficiency. Slaves often functioned as visible wealth, with their significant numbers enhancing the social status of their owners. There also existed an upper stratum of highly skilled slaves who were connected to a particular household but who worked outside it. They contributed to an owner's financial income by working as craftspeople, providing financial services, or overseeing commerce. Many owners mistreated their slaves, but there were some who recognized that a

family life might keep slaves content and thus encouraged slave unions (Mart. 4.13; Juv. 11.146). The evidence from inscriptions is particularly strong on this subject and reveals that a desire for family life was most definitely present among slaves. Of course, Roman law forbade a bona fide marriage between two individuals of servile status, but slaves could and did form de facto unions (*contubernia*) that produced children. Consider the family life of ex-slave Psyche Herennia, who died at age 70 (*CIL* 11.6998). Despite beginning life as a slave, she enjoyed some semblance of family life, for she was commemorated by Cresimus, who refers to her as his wife; her daughter, Aiecta; and her son-in-law, Alexander. Pointed references to personal relationships in epitaphs like this one are intentional; they created a veneer of respectability and solid membership in a community that was otherwise closed to the deceased and her family.

Even with the reasonably abundant information we have on how slaves were employed in Roman society and what sort of family life they had, we are still left with the feeling that we do not fully comprehend their experiences, especially when these could vary so dramatically with time and place. For instance, Ovid (*Ars am.* 3.239–40) describes the misfortunes of his lover's hairdresser (*ornatrix*), whose perceived ineptitude impelled her owner to stab her in the arm with a hairpin. There is also the instability endured by young slaves, as revealed through bills of sale: one girl was sold twice by the age of 11 and another three times by the age of 14 (*PVind.Bosw.* 7; *P.Mich.* 9.547). Two of the Younger Pliny's letters, which are meant to show him as a benevolent owner, reveal that he allowed his slaves to celebrate at festival time, partake of recreation when chores were done and make wills, with the proviso that the heirs be members of his household (see *Ep.* 2.27, 8.16). If all these slaves could speak, what would they tell us about their lives?

Historians' methodological response to the lack of slave narratives and other gaps in evidence is to engage in cross-cultural analysis. More specifically, they compare New World slaveholding systems (those of Brazil, the Caribbean, and the American South) with practices in Roman antiquity, and this approach has proven fruitful. For the most part, historians concentrate on the memoirs and narratives of ex-slaves from the American South that were recorded primarily during the mid-1930s as part of a Depression-era make-work scheme. Despite originating in a culture vastly removed in time, place, and character, these accounts reveal striking similarities between the attitudes of American and Roman slaveholders. They also contain sentiments that might easily be attributed to Roman slaves: resentment at inhumane treatment; anger at being stereotyped as lazy, immoral, ignorant, and dishonest; genuine fear at knowing that their bodies were subject, both physically and sexually, to the authority of another; and anxiety at the knowledge that owners might arbitrarily dissolve their affective relationships by the sale of their partners and children. In the New World, as in Rome, slave life was marked by hardship and insecurity.

Attitudes that characterize Roman slavery recurred in other slave systems, appearing,

Compare Chapter 5, ←  
pp. 102–3, on *contubernium*.

for example, in much later historical periods in the West. An evocative comparative example is found in the story of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a Portuguese-born black slave who was tried and convicted in June 1734 of setting a fire that destroyed her owner's home and, indeed, most of Old Montreal.<sup>35</sup> Glimpses into Angélique's life emerge from the trial transcripts and record of her final interrogation and torture. We do not know whether she was born in slavery or at what age she was first sold, but we learn that a Flemish man purchased her and that she may have passed through his native Flanders before the transatlantic journey to New England, possibly via New York.

In 1725, at about age 20, she was sold to François Poulin de Francheville, a Montreal businessman, and taken to New France. It was common practice among the French to have slaves baptized and renamed, and this is how the young woman came to be called Marie-Joseph Angélique. She worked chiefly as a domestic for the family, as was typical of slaves in New France, but also helped as needed on their small farm. Between 1731 and 1732, she bore three children, all of whom died in infancy, to a slave from Madagascar. A friend of de Francheville's owned the Malagasy father of Angélique's children, and it is possible that the friends intended the couple to breed. On the death of Sieur de Francheville, Angélique passed into the control of his widow. Theirs was a troubled relationship, and details of the friction between them surfaced as Angélique gave her responses during her trial. She was clearly a spirited individual who could not be intimidated. Mild and unruly by turns, she sassed her owner often and was far too outspoken for a slave, which provoked the Widow de Francheville and the court. As further evidence of her rebellious nature, the inquisitors heard that Angélique had run away once and, at the time of the fire, had been planning a second attempt with an indentured servant of the widow's.

In comparison with the bulk of existing Canadian and American slave narratives, Angélique's story is undeniably sensational. Yet on a basic level, many of her experiences exemplify those of other North American slaves: deracination, verbal and physical maltreatment, attempted escapes, and capture. It is useful to think about these as we contemplate the Roman slave experience. This is not to say that Angélique's life and that of a Roman slave such as Sambatis were identical or that we can speak of a monolithic slave experience—far from it. But there are clear parallels that cannot be dismissed and that allow us to speculate in an informed manner about slave life in Roman antiquity.<sup>36</sup> At a young age, both Angélique and Sambatis were taken great distances from their homelands, sold more than once, and renamed. Angélique formed an attachment with a fellow slave, whether strictly sexual or emotional we cannot say, and had children. If they had survived, the children would have taken the status of their mother, as did home-born slaves in Roman society. From our perspective, perhaps the most interesting question prompted by the trial transcripts concerns Angélique's response to being a slave. She was disobedient, insolent, and troublesome. Is this a coincidence of personality or the behaviour of someone who chafes at being a slave? The fact that she was undaunted by

recapture after she first ran away is telling. A natural question to ask at this point, then, is whether we can detect the same resistance to servitude in the ancient record.

There were, undoubtedly, benevolent slave owners in Roman antiquity, but many slaves still endured harsh treatment and laboured under horrific conditions. As a result, there were revolts. Between 135 and 71 BCE, the Romans had to quell three mass slave rebellions in Sicily and South Italy, the best-known being the one led by the slave-gladiator Spartacus. As insurrections go, they caused a great deal of damage and consternation in the late Republic. There was little repetition of these events during the imperial era, although individuals tried periodically to exploit the discontent of slaves, and runaways sometimes gravitated to the robber gangs that roamed virtually unchecked in the countryside (Tac. *Ann.* 4.27; Cass. Dio 77.10). Intractable slaves also set fire to their owners' property and even took their own lives to resist their position. According to Columella (*Rust.* 1.7.6–7), there were other acts of "sabotage" carried out by agricultural slaves, which endlessly annoyed slave owners:<sup>37</sup> renting out or selling off the master's livestock, neglecting crops, and idleness. Perhaps the best example of non-violent resistance occurs in an amusing anecdote from Plutarch, recounted in Box 4.2. This exchange shows that Roman slaves, like Angélique, clearly devised ways of coping with their enslavement.

See Chapter 11, pp. 241–2, 244, 253 and 256, on brigandage. ↗

## Primary Source

### Box 4.2: Plutarch, *Moralia*, 511D–E.<sup>1</sup>

If anyone will but review and recollect constantly these and similar instances, he may conceivably stop taking pleasure in foolish chatter. But as for me, that famous case of the slave puts me utterly to shame when I reflect what immense importance it is to pay attention to what is said and to be master of our purpose. Pupius Piso, the orator, not wishing to be troubled, ordered his slaves to speak only in answer to questions and not a word more. Subsequently, wishing to pay honour to Clodius when he was a magistrate, Piso gave orders that he be invited to dinner and prepared what was, we may suppose, a sumptuous banquet. When the hour came, the other guests were present, but Clodius was still expected, and Piso repeatedly sent the slave who regularly carried invitations to see if Clodius was approaching. And when evening came and he was finally despaired of, Piso said to the slave, "See here, did you give him the invitation?" "I did," said the slave. "Why hasn't he come then?" "Because he declined." "Then why didn't you tell me at once?" "Because you didn't ask me that."

### Note

1. Translated by Helmbold (1939).

## The Success of Slavery at Rome

Finally, we come to the question of how Roman society maintained the institution of slavery for nearly a millennium. One would have thought that developments such as the growth of Christianity, with its emphasis on equal treatment for all (slave and free person, rich and poor) and its claim that God made no distinction between free person and slave, might have led to the abolition of slavery, or at least undermined it.<sup>38</sup> Yet even Christ himself encouraged his followers to be slaves to one another (Mark 10:43–4).<sup>39</sup> The best answer is that Roman slaveholders employed an effective combination of punishments and incentives that served as control mechanisms. Unmanageable slaves were punished severely by beatings and were kept in check by intimidation. A common threat, so the ancient sources say, was to tell one's slave that he would be packed off to a mill. Here—as in other workplaces—human beings rather than draft animals such as donkeys or oxen regularly powered the heavy machinery. For slaves consigned to a mill, the working environment was horrific and life a constant toil. The North African writer Apuleius, working in the second century CE, provides a detailed description of dreadful mill conditions in his novel *The Metamorphoses*. A quick reading of this text explains why some slaves may have thought twice before acting out: the workers were dressed in rags, brutally scarred by regular beatings, and barely recognizable as human beings (see Box 4.3).

Owners often employed professional slave-catchers to track runaway slaves. Once apprehended, the fugitives were identified as problematic individuals by being branded upon the face (*Petron. Sat.* 103) or being forced to wear a slave collar. To judge from

### Primary Source

#### Box 4.3: Apuleius, *The Metamorphoses*, 9.12.<sup>1</sup>

Good gods, what stunted little men they were! The whole surface of their skin was painted with livid welts. Their striped backs were merely shaded, not covered, by the tattered patchwork they wore: some had thrown on a tiny cloth that just covered their loins, but all were clad in such a way that you could discern them clearly through their rags. Their foreheads were branded, their heads half-shaved, and their feet chained. They were hideously sallow too, and their eyelids were eaten away by the smoky darkness of scorching murk until they were quite weak-sighted; like boxers who fight sprinkled with dust, they were dirtily white-washed with a floury ash.<sup>1</sup>

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Hanson (1989).

the surviving few, the collar was a simple device comprising an iron circle and pendant affixed permanently around the slave's neck. Pendants were sometimes inscribed with the acronym *TMQF*, meaning *tene me quia fugio* or "Hold me, because I flee" (ILS 9454); others bore the owner's name and mention of a reward for the fugitive's return.<sup>40</sup>

Inducements for good behaviour varied. Slaves could receive favours or kindnesses (*beneficia*), such as permission to have sexual relationships or create family units, but by far the greatest "carrot" was the hope of emancipation, or so frequent references in our sources suggest. Manumission was a formal procedure by which a master freed a slave, consequently transforming him or her into a *libertus* (freedman) or *liberta* (freedwoman). Freedom was granted to select slaves, often those who interacted closely with an owner, such as the young slave girl Peina, mentioned in a petition to a local official in Roman Egypt (*P.Oxy.* 50.3555). Although her owner, Thermouthion, sought compensation from the careless donkey driver who maimed the girl while she was on her way to a singing lesson, the petition's tone makes it apparent that their relationship was closer to that of a mother and daughter than one of an owner and slave. Peina's situation differed dramatically, however, from that of public slaves who swept the streets or collected garbage and wretched mine slaves who might be worked to death. Their chances for achieving freedom were greatly diminished.

Manumission conferred most of the Roman citizen's privileges on freed slaves: the legal capacity to marry and to have any children born after emancipation recognized as freeborn citizens (*ingenui* and *ingenuae*) and the ability to enter into contracts, engage in litigation, and write wills that were legally binding. **Freedmen**, like freeborn men, gained the right to vote, although they could not run for public office. It is essential to note that manumission was always granted at the discretion of the owner: it was never a promise or a right, and it did not bring complete legal or personal autonomy. Nor did it guarantee security. For this reason, we might characterize manumission as an ambiguous benefit.

Emancipation certainly reduced the degree of control that owners legally held over their slaves. But because this deed was regarded as a kindness, a reciprocal act on the part of the freed individual was essential. Roman laws ensured that ex-slaves remained socially and economically indebted to those who had set them free. Owners became patrons (*patroni*) of their newly freed slaves and were therefore owed proper deference and respect (*obsequium*). For instance, the law stipulated that freedmen and **freedwomen** could not retaliate when patrons verbally or physically abused them or criticized them openly because doing so was disrespectful (*Dig.* 47.10.7.2). Former slaves were expected to labour annually for those who freed them, performing *operae*, work obligations that had been agreed upon by both parties prior to manumission. Alternatively, the obligations might be waived in exchange for a specified sum of money. That patrons could and did make unreasonable demands upon former slaves where *operae* were concerned is suggested by the opinions of Roman jurists. Gaius (*Dig.* 38.1.19), working probably in the late

second century CE, held that labour demands could not be so onerous that they inhibited the freed individual's ability to earn an adequate personal income, while Paulus (early third century CE; *Dig.* 38.1.17) believed that patrons could not make impossible demands upon aged or infirm freedmen and freedwomen that were detrimental to their way of life.

Although these laws aimed to protect freed individuals, there were other inequities within the system. A freedman or freedwoman may have gained the right to make a will,

→ See Chapter 5, p. 108,  
on manumission and its  
impact on slave families.

but in principle the heir was his or her patron. Similarly, **freedpersons** had no legal claim to partners or children who remained slaves, and familial dislocation might result when slaves were freed but their partners and children were not. Owners looking

to reduce their costs might also manumit aged or infirm slaves and leave them to fend for themselves. With little knowledge of freedom or practice in making their own way in the world, how did these slaves cope?

Despite its ambiguous benefits, manumission was an important technique of social control in that it offered slaves hope of freedom if they demonstrated the proper deference, obedience, and loyalty.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, emancipation helped to perpetuate slavery by theoretically ensuring that only "quality" slaves—those with a demonstrated commitment to Rome and its social ideals—were admitted to the citizenship. How often enfranchisement occurred is much debated, since we have no real quantitative evidence to help us determine its frequency. We do know that attempts were made to restrict manumission. The *Lex Fufia Caninia*, passed in 2 BCE, sought to limit the numbers of slaves who could be emancipated through a will (*Gai. Inst.* 1.1.42–3), while the *Lex Aelia Sentia*, enacted in 4 CE, fixed the minimum age of the manumitter at 20 and the minimum age of the slave at 30 (*Gai. Inst.* 1.1.38, 1.1.20). Scholars generally agree, however, that the practice was common and effective.<sup>42</sup>

## Summary

Roman slavery can be usefully approached through quantitative and qualitative methods, though each provides a different perspective. While it is difficult to be certain about statistics regarding the ancient world, it appears that Roman society would not have qualified as a slave society at all times and places throughout its history. However, qualitative approaches underline that slavery was a central and chronic element of Roman society throughout its history. Warfare provided slaves, as did the reproduction of those already enslaved, importation, and self-enslavement. Servile experience is difficult to recapture, but comparisons with more recent slave-owning societies can provide some valuable insights. In general, the experience of slavery in Rome appears to have been one of exploitation, degradation, and humiliation, conditions to which Roman slaves devised modes of resistance that resonate with those of slaves from more recent periods. Though

not every slave experienced freedom, the very prospect of manumission was a strong force in ensuring the success and perpetuation of the system as a whole.

## Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What were your ideas of Roman slavery prior to reading this chapter? How did the discussion in this chapter confirm or subvert them?
2. Would Rome have become a slaveholding society if the wars of expansion had not brought thousands of slaves into Roman society? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the ways that we calculate the slave population at Rome?
4. How markedly did the Roman slave experience vary? Give examples to support your answer.
5. Why was slavery so successful in Roman society?

## Suggested Reading

Bradley, K.R. 1984. *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This pioneering work on the mechanics of Roman slavery demonstrates how owners used various methods to maintain the institution of slavery.

\_\_\_\_\_, and P. Cartledge, eds. 2011. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This weighty volume comprises a comprehensive series of articles on Greek and Roman slavery that address topics of current interest and employ a variety of methodological approaches.

Garnsey, P.D.A. 1996. *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anyone wishing to understand the

philosophical underpinnings of Greek and Roman slavery should begin with this book.

George, M. 2010. "Archaeology and Roman Slavery: Problems and Potential." In *Antike Sklaverei: Rückblick und Ausblick. Neue Beiträge zur Forschungsgeschichte und zur Erschließung der archäologischen Zeugnisse*. Redaktion: Andrea Binsfeld. (Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei Bd. 38), edited by H. Heinen, 141–60. Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag.

In recent years, specialists have begun to consider more seriously the significant contributions of archaeology to the study of Roman slavery. This article offers a much-needed assessment of these contributions, their limitations, and the direction of future research.

Joshel, S. 2010. *Slavery in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The scholarship on Roman slavery is vast, but this compact monograph offers a sound introduction to the subject and includes discussion of and references to seminal and innovative work.

McKeown, N. 2007. *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* London: Duckworth.

Deliberately polemical, this book offers an overview of problems, methods, and concepts in current studies of ancient slavery.

## Notes

- 1 Snell (2011: 4–21) is a short but useful introduction to Egyptian, Israelite, Hittite, Aegean, and African slavery.
- 2 See Dal Lago and Katsari (2008: 3–11) on definitions. They also offer a valuable and concise overview of scholarship on slavery by ancient and modern historians and historical sociologists.
- 3 Wahl (2010).
- 4 Donovan (1995: 5).
- 5 Patterson (1982: 38–45). Compare Finley (1980: 74–6).
- 6 Patterson (1982: 334).
- 7 McKeown (2007: 124–40) has a useful summary of the main arguments and a brief description of the demographic tools.
- 8 Bagnall and Frier (1994: 48); Scheidel (2005: 64; 1997: 158, n. 16).
- 9 Harris (1999: 65); McKeown (2007: 11).
- 10 Garnsey (1996: 26).
- 11 The translation is from Mommsen, Krueger, and Watson (1985).
- 12 For criticism of this formulation when applied to Greek and Roman slaves, see McKeown (2007: 33–4).

Patterson, O. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This book is fundamental for anyone wishing to understand the usefulness of cross-cultural analysis in the study of ancient slavery.

Thompson, F.H. 2002. *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. London: Duckworth.

This book offers the only detailed survey of the archaeological evidence of ancient slavery.

- 13 Cornell (1995: 272–92) is a solid introduction to the Twelve Tables, their reconstruction, and textual idiosyncrasies. For the text of the Tables, see Crawford (1996: 584–721).
- 14 Crawford (1996: 584–721).
- 15 Scheidel (2011: 294–5).
- 16 Bradley (1994: 33).
- 17 Compare Bradley (1994: 31).
- 18 Bradley (1994: 34).
- 19 Scheidel (2011: 306).
- 20 Laes (2011: 201, nn. 170 and 171).
- 21 Harris (1994: 1), and especially Vuolanto (2003).
- 22 Compare Harris (1994: 6).
- 23 Harris (1994); Scheidel (2011).
- 24 The translation is from Wiedemann (1981: 110).
- 25 Trümper (2009: 20–4). The others are Sardis, Magnesia on Maeander, Thyatira, and Acmonia.
- 26 Ibid.: 27.
- 27 Scheidel (2011: 304, with references). On the sub-Saharan slave trade in particular, see Bradley (2012: 164–80).

- 28 Harris (1980: 118; 1994: 18); Scheidel (2011: 293).
- 29 See Trümper (2009: 83–4).
- 30 Harris (1980: 125–8). Compare Bradley (1987: 33).
- 31 Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern (1964: no. 490). In the analysis of this contract I follow the approach of Bradley (1994: 4) on the sale of a 10-year-old girl named Abaskantis at Side in 142 CE (*P.Turner* 22) and Joshel (2010: 79–80) on the epitaph of Gaius Julius Mygdonius, an ex-slave from Parthia (*CIL* 11.137).
- 32 Bradley (1994: 2).
- 33 Joshel (2010: 129–30).
- 34 For a comprehensive list of estate workers, see Joshel (2010: 168), following Bradley (1994: 60, Table 2).
- 35 Beaugrand-Champagne (2004) and Cooper (2006) offer compelling yet different accounts of Angélique's life, trial, and conviction.
- 36 Bradley (1994: 44).
- 37 Ibid.: 115–17.
- 38 See for instance St Theodore's discussion of St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (7.22; translation from Wiedemann [1981: 245]): It is our custom to call someone who is an ex-slave a freedman; Paul applies this term to the slave who has been blessed by Faith. He calls the free man Christ's slave, and the slave his freedman, both in order to teach those who are free that they have a master, Christ, and similarly to teach slaves that they have attained true freedom.
- 39 For a thoughtful response to the question of why Christian slaveholders did not oppose slavery, see Glancy (2010).
- 40 Joshel (2010: 120, Figure 35).
- 41 Bradley (1984: *passim*); Joshel (2010: 129). Compare here the attitudes of Canadian slave owners (Trudel 1960: 295–7, 309–10; Winks 1971: 96–113) who resisted government attempts to regulate manumission or abolish slavery. Many American slaveholders were similarly opposed to the manumission of their slaves (Harrill 1995: 53).

## 5

## The Roman Household

Alison Jeppesen-Wigelsworth

Literary evidence of Roman family life exists for only a limited segment of the population: the upper classes. Death, however, was common to all, and there was great social pressure to bury and commemorate the deceased in Roman society. Epigraphical sources in the form of funerary commemorations—that is, tombstone inscriptions or epitaphs—are, therefore, reflective of a wider population. All could afford at least a modest burial, with the exception of the very poorest of Romans (who might be given anonymous burials in open pits that also contained dead animals and garbage). Since tombs tended to house the remains of many members of individual households, epitaphs are among the best sets of evidence for the family life of the non-elite. It must be admitted that epigraphical evidence presents its own interpretive problems, often raising as many questions as it answers. For example, epitaphs tend to be expressed according to accepted formulas, making it difficult to gauge the sincerity behind the sentiments. Nonetheless, funerary commemorations present unique evidence for non-elite families and can help to illuminate the realities of household relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The following inscription demonstrates the potential of tombstone epitaphs to tell us about the realities of the familial relations and dynamics of the non-elite:

May malicious evil be absent from this monument. To the Spirits of the Dead: Scribonia Attice made this for herself and for Marcus Ulpius Amerimnus, her husband, and for Scribonia Callityche, her mother, and for Diocles, and for all her freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants, with the exception of Panaratus and Prosdocia. This monument must not follow an external heir.<sup>2</sup>

This inscription is found on a household tomb at Isola Sacra, a necropolis (literally, “city of the dead”) about 30 kilometres from Rome. As we shall see, the Roman

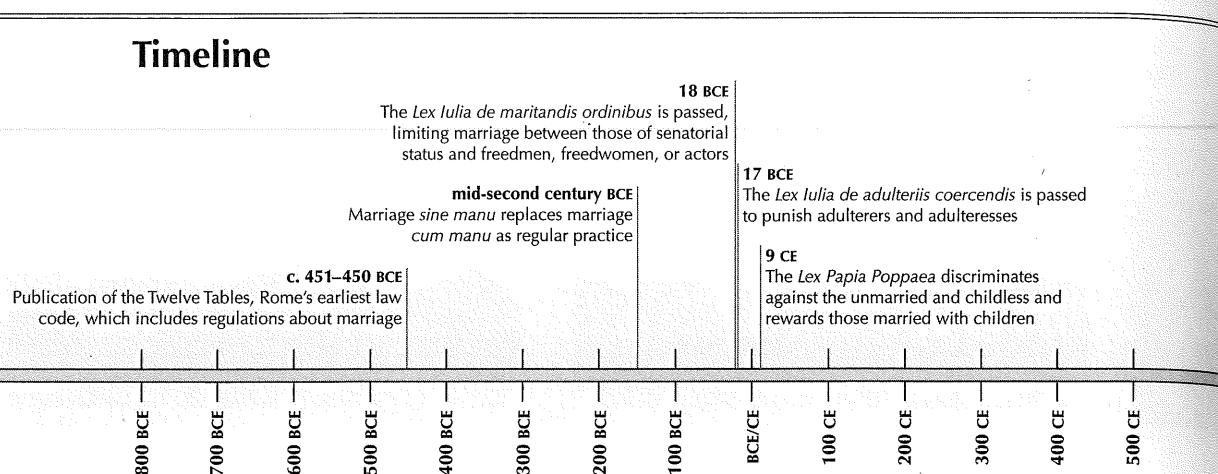


**Figure 5.1** Photo of Tomb 100, Isola Sacra. Tomb of Scribonia Attice, a midwife, c. 140 CE. Left panel: Relief of Scribonia's husband bathing a patient's foot. Centre panel (not shown, text given above): Inscription. Right panel: Relief of Scribonia Attice delivering a child. © Alison Jeppesen-Wigelsworth

household was expected, in Roman law and ideals, to circle around a male authority figure—the *paterfamilias*—while women existed to fulfill supporting roles of dutiful wife, mother, or daughter. Yet here we have Scribonia Attice, a midwife, as the dedicatrix of the tomb. The tomb depicts equally her work (delivering a baby) and her husband's (he was a physician) in two relief panels (see Figure 5.1). She commemorates her husband, but he had nothing to do with the building of the tomb (he may have died before she had it built). It is *her* mother who is also included in the inscription. No children of her own are mentioned; perhaps Scribonia Attice was not a mother or was a mother no longer. Instead, the tomb would welcome the remains of others: a male (whose single name suggests that he was a slave), Scribonia Attice's former slaves, and *their* children. Scribonia Attice, childless professional woman, wife, daughter, slave owner, and patron of her freedmen and freedwomen, is at the centre of this familial unit. This family would be deemed atypical in light of literary and legal evidence, but it was probably, in reality, very ordinary.

### Introduction

To investigate the Roman household is, in many ways, to investigate Roman society itself. The ancient household cannot be explored in isolation from either the private or public aspects of Roman society, given that the family and familial concerns have relevance to all facets of Roman life. It is therefore unsurprising that, in the last 40 years, studies of the Roman household and family have formed a cornerstone of Roman social history. Topics of interest have ranged from Roman marriage and divorce to children and childhood, intergenerational relationships, bonds between



free and servile household members, demographic considerations (such as the age at first marriage), and the “shape” of the Roman family (was it nuclear, as ours tend to be, consisting of parents and children, or extended, embracing step-parents, half-siblings, slaves, and freedpersons?). These studies have exploited sources of information that stretch beyond the legal texts and male-authored literature that have generally informed more traditional historical investigations. They have made use of, for example, inscriptions, papyri, and archaeological findings, revealing a more nuanced impression of the family and household in the ancient Roman world than is evident in the literary sources alone. These same sources and studies have also allowed for some perspective on the families and households of the Roman non-elite. This chapter explores different aspects of the Roman household—its members, their relationships, and its physical structures. It examines the stereotypes of the Roman family and presents the more recent arguments that have overturned them.

## Terms, Concepts, and the Shape of the Roman Family

Suetonius (*Ner.* 50.1; *Dom.* 17.3) includes a fascinating detail in his biographies of two of the most hated Roman emperors, Nero and Domitian: their childhood nurses ensured their proper burial, since they were the only people who still cared for them. This information points to a critical difference between modern and Roman society. For us, the concept of “family” is probably more relevant than “household,” but when we discuss the Roman family we almost always end up discussing the Roman household. The reason for

this is simple. Members of a Roman household do not always correspond to members of a modern family, as illustrated by the example of Nero’s and Domitian’s wet nurses, non-blood relations with whom bonds could nonetheless be important and lasting.

There are two Latin terms used to indicate the household: *familia* and *domus*. These words have overlapping but not identical meanings. *Familia* is often translated as “family” but more often means the members of a household who were under the legal power (*patria potestas*) of the “father of the household,” or *paterfamilias*. As the eldest free male in the household, the *paterfamilias* had legal authority over free and non-free members of his household (Dig. 50.16.195–6; see more on this power below), but the absolute nature of *patria potestas* should not be exaggerated. Few adult Romans were likely to have a living *paterfamilias*, and few women entered into their husbands’ *potestas*, much less that of their husbands’ fathers. Domineering *patresfamilias* were unlikely to have been common during the period under consideration here. Furthermore, the entirety of a Roman family was not made up only of those biologically tied to the *paterfamilias*. Although the word *familia* included the biological descendants of the *paterfamilias* and, by the second century BCE, usually excluded his wife (although she might be referred to as the *materfamilias*<sup>3</sup>), it was often used to refer specifically to the household’s slaves.

*Domus*, on the other hand, is closer to our understanding of family as it implies the members of the household widely defined (children, spouses, slaves, and other relatives on both the father’s and mother’s sides). But it also includes the physical house where the members lived.<sup>4</sup> As the concepts of both *familia* and *domus* suggest, the Romans in many ways had a wider understanding of family than we do. Furthermore, it is clear that the family did not consist simply of parents and children; that is, the Roman family was not strictly nuclear but extensive. It was most probably marked by divorces, deaths, remarriages, step- and half-children, siblings, and parents and was a conglomeration of free, freed, and servile persons, bound both legally and (often) emotionally.<sup>5</sup>

The potential complexity of household membership is evident on tombstone inscriptions, which are sometimes perplexing to the modern reader. Consider the following epitaph from Rome:

Titus Pompeius Reginus, son of Titus, made this for himself and for Titus Pompeius Reginus, son of Titus, his brother, and for his mother, Valeria, daughter of Gaius, and for his father, Gnaeus Pompeius, and for Gnaeus Pompeius, son of Sextus, his stepfather, and for his wife, Posilla. (CIL 6.24501)

This inscription leaves us with more questions than answers. Why does Titus Pompeius Reginus have the same name as his brother? Was the name reused because the brother was older and died young? Why is their father referred to as Titus, then Gnaeus? Did Valeria remarry after her husband’s death, or were all still alive at the time of commemoration?

Even with these questions, the epitaph is an excellent demonstration that the Roman family could be convoluted.

## Household Members and Relationships

Cicero tells us that the degrees of respect and duty that a free male Roman citizen owes to the members of his household vary and exist in descending order: he is responsible first to his parents, then to his dependants (children and slaves), and, lastly, to his other relatives (see Box 5.1). It is interesting to observe that, although she is ranked first for companionship elsewhere (Cic. *Off.* 1.54), a wife (*coniunx/uxor*) is not explicitly included on the list of those deserving dutiful attention. Certainly a man must have a wife: in order to have legitimate children, he had to be legally married to their mother. A man could, of course, have illegitimate children, but legitimate offspring were required for the perpetuation of the familial name(s) and the transmission of property and familial ritual. Indeed, the goal of any Roman household was the continuation of that household. This meant legitimate children and legal marriage, although, as previously stated, a wife was rarely a legal member of her husband's *familia* after the second century BCE.

### Wives and Marriage

For marriage to be considered legitimate, three criteria usually had to be met by the partners. First, they had to be Roman citizens (or belong to a community that had been granted the right of intermarriage with Roman citizens). Second, they had to be of minimum age, probably 14 for boys and 12 for girls. (The average age at which people actually got married is unknown, although estimates range between early and late twenties for boys and mid-teens to early twenties for girls.<sup>6</sup>) Third, they could not be too closely related. If the couple met these requirements, they were considered to have the legal capacity to marry (*conubium*).<sup>7</sup>



### Primary Source

#### Box 5.1: Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.58.

But if there were a contest or a comparison about who should get most of our dutifulness, then first would be our country and our parents to whom we are obligated for the greatest benefits. Next would be our children and our whole household (*domus*), who look to us alone and who have no other shelter. And finally, our relatives who are well disposed to us and with whom our fortune is held in common.

There were two possible forms of Roman marriage. Historians call the first and older form **marriage cum manu** and the second **marriage sine manu** (the Romans did not use titles to describe the two categories). Although the latter was the norm for most of Roman history (certainly by the first century BCE), its unique nature can be understood only in the light of the former. The word *manus* means "hand" and, by extension, "authority" or "control." In the context of marriage, it is used to indicate the legal authority, *potestas*, of a husband over his wife. If a woman entered into a marriage *cum manu*, she was henceforth under the legal authority of her husband (or his *paterfamilias*, were he still living). She would be a legal part of her husband's *familia* and would worship the same household gods as her husband. If her husband died without a will, she would stand to inherit as if she were his daughter, but she would not inherit from her own father's family. This form of marriage, however, became increasingly rare over the span of the Republic.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the second century BCE, it was used only for the marriages of certain priests, such as the *flamen dialis*.<sup>9</sup>

Compare Chapter 9, pp. 209–10, ← on household religion.

Marriage *cum manu* was largely replaced by marriage *sine manu*. The differences between this form and its predecessor concern the amount of independence that a woman had from her husband and inheritance patterns. A woman who entered into marriage *sine manu* did not pass into the power of her husband and was not a legal member of his *familia*. She retained the worship of her birth family's household gods and, perhaps most important, inherited from her father. Legally and financially, she was independent of her husband and would be independent (*sui iuris*) upon her father's death, although she would still technically have a legal guardian (*tutor*). This form of marriage also invested her with a greater ability to divorce her husband. Although she required her father's permission to do so, the law considered his consent to be given if he did not explicitly object.<sup>10</sup>

Since a woman was under her own *paterfamilias' potestas*, her father could also legally force her to divorce her husband and marry another man. It is unlikely that this practice happened often, although there is evidence of a situation of political jockeying in which a would-be bridegroom attempted to persuade a father to do just that (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25, 52). Quintus Hortensius, seeking an alliance with Cato the Younger, asked to marry his daughter Porcia, even though she was already married with two children. Once Porcia gave him a son, Hortensius was willing to divorce her and allow her to return to her previous husband. Cato refused to force Porcia's divorce, perhaps recognizing, given what we know of Porcia's personality from other sources (see, for example, Cic. *Att.* 15.11), that the potential fight with his daughter was not worth it. Instead, Cato divorced his own wife, Marcia, so that she could marry Hortensius. He did so with the consent of Marcia's father, who would not give her in marriage to Hortensius without her ex-husband's agreement and presence at the wedding; the two men, father and ex-husband, jointly gave her in marriage. Six years later, Hortensius died. Marcia, who had never produced a child for Hortensius, inherited the bulk of his estate and returned to Cato.

Though Plutarch could find nothing wrong in this situation, it is clear that Cato's political enemies did.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Plutarch quotes Julius Caesar's accusations of wife-trafficking: If Cato loved Marcia, why would he divorce her? If he did not want to be married to her, why would he take her back? According to Plutarch (*Cat. Min.* 52), Caesar believed that this was a political alliance cemented by the exchange of a woman. It is hard not to agree that this tale, one of the most bizarre stories of Roman marriage, was a most blatant case of marriage-seeking for political advantage and heir production. It also demonstrates both the continued legal authority of a father over his adult daughter if she married *sine manu* and the fact that some, like Cato (if not Marcia's father), might be hesitant to use it.

When contemplating women's experience of marriage *sine manu*, it is likely that the continued legal authority of a father over his daughter was less important than the financial considerations. Couples married *sine manu* were financially separate; therefore, the property of the wife's natal *familia* was never at risk of alienation. A woman married *sine manu* did provide a dowry to her husband to cover her living expenses, and he could use it for the duration of their marriage. However, it was legally hers or her family's; in the case of divorce, it had to be paid back to her or her father. Husband and wife were not even normally permitted to give gifts to one another, as doing so clouded ownership. This is not to say that generosity between spouses was completely absent or that a wife did not contribute to the family. Indeed, wives performed critical economic duties. A wife was the guardian (*custos*) of the household. In a small household, a wife's ability to estimate the family's usage of its products could mean the difference between survival and starvation. In a larger household, this economic role would be even more complex, involving the management of multiple houses and large numbers of slaves as well as significant amounts of personal property.<sup>12</sup>

Terentia and Cicero provide a good example of how separate finances might work within a marriage and how much a wife might contribute. Terentia was married *sine manu*, and she appears to have been *sui iuris* for much (if not all) of her marriage. She owned a great deal of property (including various farms and blocks of buildings), some of which she sold in order to aid her husband while he was in exile (*Cic. Fam.* 14.1; *Att.* 2.4). Cicero was horrified at this decision. He could not stop Terentia from selling her property, but he was guilt-ridden over the fact that his actions had made it necessary for her to try to support him and thereby possibly put her financial security (and their children's future inheritances) at risk. In supporting her husband, Terentia proved herself to be Cicero's "very faithful" (*fidelissima*) wife, but her faithfulness is illustrated through actions she took autonomously for the good of the family in a perilous situation.

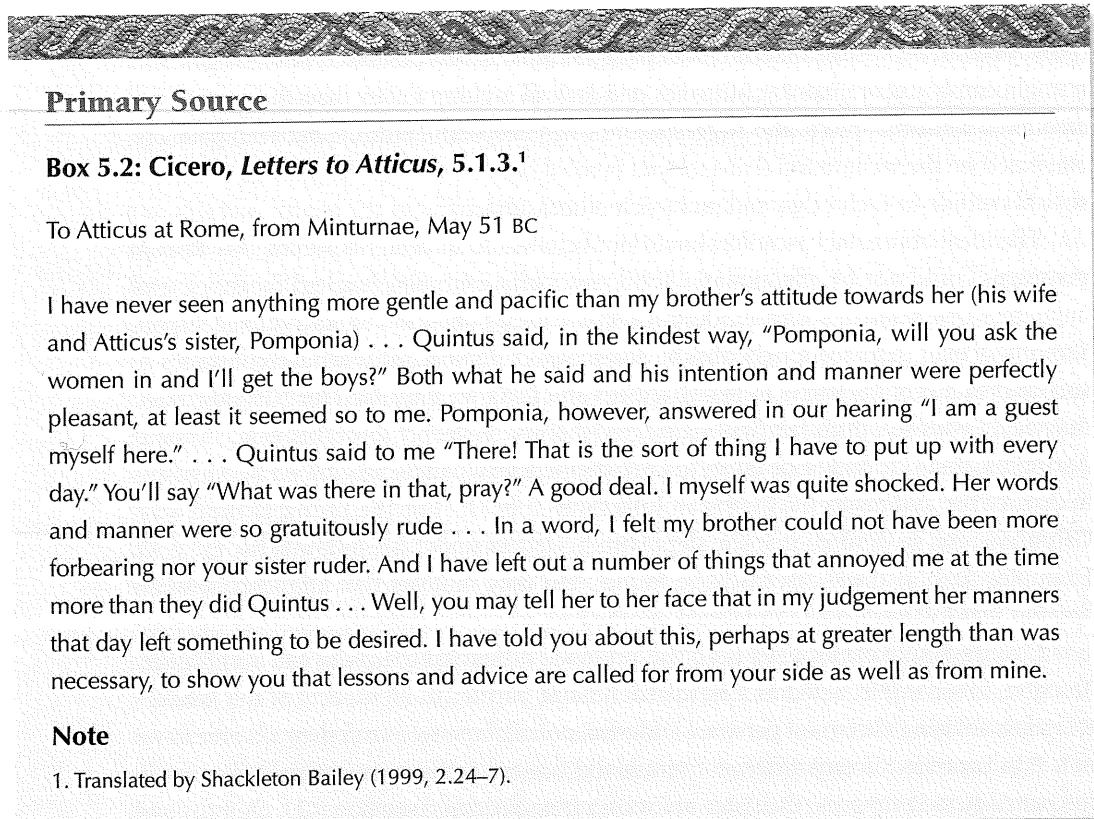
As the laws of Roman marriage differ from modern unions, so do the ideals of marriage. Roman unions were not supposed to be based on notions of romance or passion, although these elements might be present or develop later. Marital relationships were supposed to be formulated for the good of the broader family, to produce legitimate

offspring. An ideal marriage was one characterized by harmony between the spouses (*concordia*). It is possible that the concept of *concordia* is best described in the negative—it might imply uncomplaining attitudes or a lack of arguing rather than the presence of emotional warmth—but it also suggests a mutually respectful attitude between partners, one based on the recognition that each put familial concerns above the personal. Partners should confide in each other and seek each other's advice.<sup>13</sup>

The ideal of marital *concordia* should not be taken to indicate, however, that Roman marriages could not be affectionate. There are many examples marked by the sort of happiness that resonates with modern readers. Cicero's devotion to, and reliance upon, Terentia is one; their seemingly abrupt divorce after 35 years of marriage continues to surprise readers of his letters to her. Augustus and Livia were married for 53 years (*Suet. Aug.* 62). Livia's son from her first marriage, Tiberius, so deeply loved his wife, Vipsania Agrippina, that care had to be taken to keep them apart when he was forced by Augustus to divorce her and marry his stepsister, Julia (*Suet. Tib.* 7). Pliny the Younger's third wife, Calpurnia, was so devoted that she slept with his letters under her pillow (*Plin. Ep.* 6.7). Examples such as these can easily be found, and they indicate that affection between spouses was fostered and found social approval.

Cicero's family exemplifies both the presence of marital *concordia* and its absence. Terentia, for example, acted as Cicero's friend and partner in all aspects of the *familia's* interests, advising Cicero on personal and even political matters until their divorce in 46 BCE.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Cicero's brother Quintus did not enjoy the same marital harmony in his marriage to Pomponia, the sister of Cicero's friend Atticus (see Box 5.2). Quintus and Pomponia married, probably at the suggestion of Atticus and Cicero and in keeping with normal marital practice, to forge a family bond between two friends.<sup>15</sup> The marriage, as Cicero's letter indicates, was fraught with squabbles and bad feelings. It reached the point that Cicero and Atticus felt that they should intervene in their siblings' relationship in order to establish (or restore) a measure of *concordia*, showing that concerns over marital harmony clearly extended beyond the married couple to include siblings and in-laws. This situation also indicates how complex family relationships could be. When Cicero's brother was unhappy, Cicero was unhappy. When his daughter, Tullia, was distressed in her marriage to Dolabella (her third husband), Cicero was beside himself. Concern over family members' marital contentment is palpable.

It is safe to say that divorce existed in Roman society, but it is impossible to tell how often it occurred or by whose standards it was "common." For example, should it be measured by contemporary North American standards? Absolute percentages of marriages ending in divorce in Roman society cannot be guessed at, nor can we tell if divorce rates were higher among the elite or non-elite. But certainly divorce was not unknown, and remarriage was usual, either after divorce or the death of a spouse. Despite the Roman ideal, death and divorce made it difficult to achieve a long marriage, and women



## Primary Source

### Box 5.2: Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 5.1.3.<sup>1</sup>

To Atticus at Rome, from Minturnae, May 51 BC

I have never seen anything more gentle and pacific than my brother's attitude towards her (his wife and Atticus's sister, Pomponia) . . . Quintus said, in the kindest way, "Pomponia, will you ask the women in and I'll get the boys?" Both what he said and his intention and manner were perfectly pleasant, at least it seemed so to me. Pomponia, however, answered in our hearing "I am a guest myself here." . . . Quintus said to me "There! That is the sort of thing I have to put up with every day." You'll say "What was there in that, pray?" A good deal. I myself was quite shocked. Her words and manner were so gratuitously rude . . . In a word, I felt my brother could not have been more forbearing nor your sister ruder. And I have left out a number of things that annoyed me at the time more than they did Quintus . . . Well, you may tell her to her face that in my judgement her manners that day left something to be desired. I have told you about this, perhaps at greater length than was necessary, to show you that lessons and advice are called for from your side as well as from mine.

#### Note

1. Translated by Shackleton Bailey (1999, 2.24–7).

were unlikely to remain unmarried, especially given that marriage was often necessary for their economic stability.<sup>16</sup> It was once thought that remarriage by Roman women was a contravention of a closely held ideal of female behaviour, the *univira*, or the woman who was married just once. However, Hanne Sigismund Nielsen's recent work on inscriptional evidence suggests that this ideal, although an element of the moralizing ideology of the Augustan period, was not really in full force until the later Christian period. There are 71 epitaphs that use this term (or a variation of it) to commemorate women, only 29 of which date between 200 BCE and 200 CE, with only three pre-dating the Augustan period. The remaining 42 date to the Christian period.<sup>17</sup>

To this point, discussion has focused on legal marriage, which was just one of the affective relationships present in Roman society. As mentioned above, marital relationships needed to meet three requirements to be considered legitimate. Intent, however, was also needed, particularly on the part of the male: he needed to consider himself married in order to be married. If intent was lacking—a situation that appears to have been normal in relationships between men and women of different **status** (often, but not exclusively, freeborn men and their **freewomen**)—the relationship was not called

Compare Chapter 13, p. 287, ←  
on the use of similar terminology in  
a military context and Chapter 4,  
p. 85, on slave families.

marriage but **concubinage**.<sup>18</sup> A union in which one (or both) of the partners lacked not the intent but the legal capacity to marry, often because one or both were slaves, was called **contubernium**. Slaves might, therefore, not call themselves spouses (*coniuges*) but companions (*contubernales*, literally, "tentmates"), a term that recalls the basis of their relationship as fellow slaves.<sup>19</sup>

The realities of both concubinage and **contubernium** can be quite difficult to discover. Did they mimic legal marriage or were they something quite different? For example, legal sources occasionally indicate that a concubine who was the freedwoman of her partner was to be held to the same standard of behaviour where sexual fidelity was concerned, while a *contubernalis* was explicitly not held to this account by the law. But, as Susan Treggiari observes, the fact that the law "could raise the question of adultery at all shows how *contubernium* was compared with marriage." On the other hand, funerary inscriptions praise wives and concubines with different terms, suggesting that ideals of behaviour were not identical.<sup>20</sup> Sources perhaps do not contradict each other so much as they present the breadth of possibility.

While the continuation of concubinage depended upon the intent of the male partner, the continuation of slaves' quasi-marital relationships depended entirely upon the goodwill of their master (*dominus*). He might choose to allow the couple to live as though they were married or he might decide to sell one or both partners or their children in different directions (children born to servile parents belonged to their parents' master and were known as *vernae*, "home-born slaves"). Slave partners might attempt to reunite or to impart legitimacy to their relationships if one member gained his or her freedom and could buy (and then free) the other. This transaction, however, also depended upon the goodwill of the master to sell the slave and to set an achievable price.<sup>21</sup>

## Parents and Children

Since the purpose of Roman marriage was the production of legitimate offspring, children were an essential element of the Roman household, the means of providing a continuous line of inheritance and ensuring the maintenance of familial ritual. We can see the centrality of the parent–child relationship in Cicero's hierarchy of duty (see Box 5.1): children must be dutiful to their parents (*parentes*, their *pater* and *mater*) first and foremost, a responsibility that is reciprocated in a measure greater than to all others, save only that shown to their own parents (should they be alive). This ideal is witnessed on tombstone inscriptions, as commemorations of children often state that they were most dutiful (*pietissimus*). As the funerary medium of this evidence suggests, however, the spectre of death (of either child or parent) was ever-present and, as we shall see, influenced both Roman child-rearing practices and our understanding of intergenerational relationships.

In the study of Roman familial relations, the relationship of the *paterfamilias* to his descendants has received special attention, as he had the greatest responsibility for the preservation of his *familia* and was therefore also endowed with the greatest legal powers over its members. The legal meaning of the term *paterfamilias* had less to do with emotional relationships and more to do with property ownership; the *paterfamilias* was, as far as the law was concerned, an estate owner.<sup>22</sup> The concept of ownership, however, extended to the living members of his household who were under his *patria potestas*, as the law appears to have invested him with the power of life and death (*vitae necisque potestas*) over his slaves and his children throughout his life.<sup>23</sup> Despite evidence pointing to fond fathers (Cicero, for example, doted on his daughter Tullia; he affectionately referred to her as “Tulliola,” or “little Tullia,” in his correspondence and was devastated by her death),<sup>24</sup> scholars long embraced the vision of the Roman household led by a cruel and heartless *paterfamilias*. In reality, however, his power was circumscribed by his own mortality and by law. Many Romans would not have had a father living by the time they were 15 years old<sup>25</sup> and instead might be raised by a widowed or remarried mother, a stepfather, or a group of extended family members. Upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, his freeborn children would henceforth be under their own legal authority (*sui iuris*), although daughters of any age and pre-pubescent sons would have a guardian to oversee any legal transactions.

Even fathers who survived to see their children grow up did not exert the power to kill their children on a whim, as has been previously imagined. A Roman father had to call a council of extended relatives (*consilium*) and present evidence in order to kill his grown child. Even so, there are very few examples of fathers actually killing their adult children and, in most of these, the father was justified by the fact that his child was committing a crime against the state.<sup>26</sup> Augustus’s adultery laws of 18 BCE (see Box 5.3) also asserted that a

father could kill his daughter, but only if she was caught in the actual act of adultery in her father’s house or that of her husband and if her father killed her lover at the same time, a confluence of events that is unlikely to have occurred very often.<sup>27</sup>

Where a father retained the right of life and death, it was in his power to expose (abandon to die) or kill an infant newly born into the *familia*. There were many reasons for exposing a child—physical deformity, its sex, and doubts about its paternity, for example—but it is unknown how prevalent infanticide was in Rome. The evidence is not conclusive, but it is possible that girls were abandoned more often than boys (see for example, *Ov. Met.* 9.669–81; *P.Oxy.* 4.744). If so, this might have been because females were simply valued less than males and because girls would need to be given dowries and therefore might be seen as a financial drain on a household’s resources.<sup>28</sup> Exposed children might die or be picked up by others and raised as servile or free foster children (*alumni*).<sup>29</sup>

→ Compare Chapter 8, pp. 172–3 and 184–6, on Augustan legislation concerning sexual conduct.

## Political History

### Box 5.3: Roman Marriage and Morality: The Legislation of Augustus

Between 18 BCE and 9 CE, Augustus passed a series of laws to curb adultery and to encourage marriage and the production of legitimate (and upper-class) children.<sup>1</sup> These laws were ostensibly designed to revitalize Roman morals and promote the stability of the Roman *familia*, but the underlying purpose (or at least one of them) was perhaps to increase the population of the upper classes in order to fill administrative positions and the military.<sup>2</sup> The legislation limited marriage between social groups, specifically between the **senatorial order** and **freedmen**, freedwomen, or actors. Freeborn men of any class were forbidden to marry prostitutes, brothel owners, the freedwomen of pimps (since it was thought that they had most likely been prostitutes while in servitude), actresses, condemned women, and adulteresses.

Although the law limited marriages between certain statuses, it penalized the unwed and childless and rewarded marriage and the production of legitimate children. A childless person could lose half the sum of an inheritance to which he or she was otherwise entitled, while bequests were null and void if contingent on the inheritor not marrying. In contrast, benefits of the law passed to those who were engaged or married. As a result, some men became engaged to very young girls so that they could reap legal benefits without actually marrying. In 9 CE the Papio-Poppaeian law closed this loophole: a man now had to marry his betrothed within two years. This meant that he could not become engaged to a girl under the age of 10 (12 was the minimum legal age at which a girl could marry).<sup>3</sup>

The legal benefits of child-bearing (*ius liberorum*) were various. For example, political prestige while holding the consulship was now earned not by age but by children: the senior **consul** would no longer be the elder but the one with more children. Three children earned freeborn women freedom from perpetual guardianship (*tutela*) and freeborn men from having to be guardians. Freedmen who had two or more children born to them after they were freed, or one child who had survived to age five, no longer had to provide services to their patrons (*Dig. 38.1.37 pref. 1*), while freedwomen were released from the guardianship of their ex-masters, now patrons, if they gave birth to four children following their manumission (*Gai. Inst. 1.145*).

It is unknown how well these laws actually worked, in part because it is uncertain how much incentive the benefits offered. For example, as the **Lex Aelia Sentia** of 4 CE set the minimum age of manumission at 30, it is doubtful that many freedwomen were able to produce four children following emancipation. It is also not clear that freedom from guardianship would have made much of a difference to many freeborn women, whose guardians do not appear to have intervened much in their lives. The benefits, however, to a young man entering political office were greater if he married, and there is some evidence that the age of first marriage for men dropped after these laws were enacted (*Tac. Agr. 6.1, 3; Plin. Ep. 7.24.3, 8.23.7*). The emperor also had the ability to

grant dispensations from the laws, and there is evidence that these were courted. Pliny (*Ep.* 2.13) reports that he had obtained the *ius liberorum* for a friend who did not have three children. Pliny himself, although he married three times, also failed to have the required three children.

### Notes

1. For more on the adultery laws, see Chapter 8 of this volume.
2. Tregiari (1991: 60–80).
3. Cass. Dio 56.1.2, 6.6, 10.1; Gai. *Inst.* 2.286a.

Parents who exposed newborn children, however, ran the risk of eventual childlessness, even if they had a number of older, living children. Death rates for young children were high, with one-third dying by the age of one year and only half of all children born likely to live to age five.<sup>30</sup> The *familia* bereft of a younger generation might adopt an heir or heirs in order to preserve itself, but Romans tended to adopt full-grown adults, those who had survived the perilous years of childhood. The adult son, now adopted, took the name of his new father (although, were his natal family politically illustrious, an element of his original name might be retained as an aid to his own political career) and cut legal ties to his natal family.

An example of this phenomenon is the complex story of the Cornelii and Aemilii Paulli families. When Publius Cornelius Scipio (son of the great Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, who had defeated Hannibal in 202 BCE) had no son, he adopted one of Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus's four sons. The child took the name Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus (to which were eventually added Africanus Numantinus, after subsequent military successes). Although the newly adopted child had no legal entitlement to his natal family's property, he did not necessarily cut emotional ties or snuff out all sense of duty to his birth parents (nor did they to him). For example, when Scipio Aemilianus inherited from his adoptive family, he immediately gave his inheritance to his birth mother, Papiria, who had been left destitute after his natal father had divorced her (Polyb. 31.26–8). Papiria returned the property to him upon her death, an inheritance that he then gave to his birth sisters. As for Lucius Aemilius Paullus Macedonicus, he died without a male heir: he had given his two elder sons up for adoption, and his remaining two sons died in childhood. He left his property to the former, thereby passing it out of the family. With his death, the *familia* of the Aemilii Paulli ceased to exist.

As Cicero tells us, children—whether freeborn blood relations to the *paterfamilias*, *alumni*, or adopted adults—had responsibilities to their parents and broader *familia*. As discussed above, children were supposed to be amenable to marriages contracted with political, economic, and/or social advantage of the larger *familia* in mind. Children were

also expected to care for their elderly relatives and ensure their proper burial and commemoration.<sup>31</sup> Those born to illustrious families should maintain or increase the family's wealth and political glory; those born to more humble families should contribute to its financial well-being, starting from youth. All children, whether freeborn, foster, or servile, might be trained from a young age to do useful work.<sup>32</sup> The expectation that children would work does not negate the care felt for children or the grief at their loss. Parents who lost a child described themselves on tombstones as miserable or most unlucky (*infelicissimi*): "To the Spirits of the Departed Calpurnius Trygetus. Calpurnius Trygetus and Calpurnia Hermione, his most unlucky parents, made this for their very dutiful son who lived 10 years, 6 months, 10 days, and 11 hours."<sup>33</sup>

### Slaves and Freedpersons

Slaves and **freedpersons** were recognized as integral elements of the *familia* and the household by both law and custom. Large households might have hundreds of slaves living on various properties, while the running of even a relatively small Roman household could not survive without slaves. However, the economic value of slave labour was not always visible to the Romans. The historian Richard Saller, for example, compares the work of slaves, particularly female slaves, to that of the modern housewife: with no wage associated with the work, Romans did not fully recognize the significant contribution to their economy.<sup>34</sup> Individual Romans were perhaps more inclined to value the emotional relationships that often developed between free members of the household and some of its slaves. *Vernae*, for example, might be treated better and could be raised as companions for the household's freeborn children, a situation that could blur the line between children and slaves in the Roman household. Indeed, their favoured positions might earn *vernæ* their freedom more often than other slaves.<sup>35</sup> It is probable that some *vernæ* were even fathered by free members of the household, an (unintentional, perhaps) economic spin-off of the regular sexual use of slaves by their masters.

See Chapter 3, p. 64, and Chapter 4, pp. 79, on *vernæ*.

Upon **manumission**, freedmen and freedwomen were expected to continue to contribute economically to the household: they had a responsibility to perform certain duties (*operae*) for their former masters (who were now their *patroni*). They might even perform the same occupations as they had before manumission, either in a lesser or equal capacity. This was certainly the case for Cicero's personal secretary, Tiro, who was his trusted aide and companion in both servitude and freedom.<sup>36</sup> Ex-masters, for their part, also had responsibilities to their freedmen and freedwomen, who became to some extent their legal, social, and economic protégés. In some situations the relationship was even closer; freed slaves might be adopted by or even marry their former masters, who might have freed them specifically for these purposes. Naming practices further demonstrate

that freed slaves were expected to continue to be members of the households that had owned them. A freed slave, who had previously had a single name, took his or her former owner's first name (*praenomen*) and family name (*nomen*) and retained his or her servile name as a sort of surname (*cognomen*).

Within the larger *familia*, as we have already seen, slaves might attempt to form their own family units by taking another slave as a companion and having children. These slave families often appear to have adopted ideals of duty similar to those of free society and could experience and sustain strong emotional bonds, despite the difficulty of staying together. As unity depended upon the whim of the master, slave families were always at risk of separation. Unity of the slave family was not assured even when mother and child stayed in the same household: sources suggest that newborn slaves were often separated from their mothers to be suckled by wet nurses in order to allow their mothers to resume work.<sup>37</sup> The possibility that servile parents or children might be sold away from each other, however, was ever present. In addition, the *Digest* (40.7.3), a legal source, suggests that some masters might allow a slave woman to gain her freedom after producing three children for him (female slaves had their highest value during child-bearing years). In such a situation, the mother would be freed, leaving her children in slavery and with no guarantee that she would be able to maintain contact with them or purchase their freedom in the future.<sup>38</sup>

There is also evidence, however, that some servile parents and children might, against the odds, maintain contact even when sold to different households. In a funerary inscription, three sons who were born as slaves into different households jointly commemorated their deceased mother, a freedwoman (*CIL* 6.2318). Apparently, at some point after giving birth to her first two sons, the woman was sold to another house, where she had another son before being freed. Yet the three sons were aware of each other and had sufficient contact with each other to commemorate their mother together. How they managed to maintain a family unit from seemingly separate households is a mystery that again illustrates how complex and flexible the Roman understanding of family could be.

Another tombstone inscription from Rome reveals the complicated legal history of another slave family: "To the Spirits of the Departed Decimus Publicius Antiochus and Publicia Musa, his wife. Publicia Albana, their illegitimate daughter, made this for her most worthy father and mother, together with Marcus Caesonius Primus a freedman" (*CIL* 6.25122). Publicia Albana's self-identification as illegitimate tells us that she was born before her parents were legally married. Given that all three have the same *nomen* (Publicius/Publicia), her parents were likely both freed from the same household. The mother was freed before their daughter was born, but the father was not (or else Publicia Albana would be listed as his daughter rather than as his illegitimate offspring). To make matters more interesting, Publicia Albana commemorates her parents together with a freedman, Marcus Caesonius Primus, whose name indicates that he did not belong to any of the others mentioned on the tombstone and whose relationship to them is, therefore, entirely unclear.

## Primary Source

### Box 5.4: Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, 6.5.1–2.<sup>1</sup>

Those rooms which no one is allowed to enter without an invitation are considered "private": bedrooms, dining rooms, bathrooms and so on. But the public rooms are those which people have a right to go into without being invited: entrance halls, courtyards, porticos and so on. It follows that men of average wealth do not need wonderful entrance halls, vestibules and courtyards, since their social obligations consist in going to pay their respects to others rather than receiving their own clients. Those whose wealth comes from agriculture must have room to keep their livestock and produce on display in their entrance hall . . . Those who lend money or are engaged in government contracts need houses that are both pleasant and impressive, and safe from thieves . . . Those of the highest status, who are involved in politics and the struggle for office and have to appear in public, must have high and impressive entrance halls, wide courtyards and wide porticos lined with trees to show off visibly how important they are.

#### Note

1. Translation slightly adapted from Gardner and Wiedemann (1991: 9–10).

## The Physical House

The physical structures in which the households of Roman society lived varied widely according to social status and wealth (see Box 5.4). A dwelling, called an *aedes* or *domus*, could range in size and opulence from a small unit in an apartment building (*insula*) to an urban mansion or country villa, depending on the family's social standing and wealth. Many urban dwellers lived in modest apartments.<sup>39</sup> Wealthy families often had both urban and rural properties, between which the free members of the *familia* moved at will. Slaves tended to belong to either the urban or the rural household (members of the *familia urbana* or *familia rustica*, respectively) as their jobs dictated.

In his treatise on architecture, Vitruvius, an architect and engineer, presents idealized visions of Roman houses. In reality—or at least as the remains of the Italian towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum suggest—these ideal forms were rarely realized: the physical remains of Roman houses are much more varied, and it is clear that even preference for basic designs changed over time. For example, the atrium/peristyle house (discussed in greater detail below) was a popular design during the Republic but fell out of favour in the imperial period and was replaced by a design featuring a single courtyard surrounded by elaborate chambers for entertaining.<sup>40</sup>

Most striking to the student of ancient domestic architecture is the fact that public and private spaces were never as clearly defined by function for the Romans as they are for us. Even *cubicula*, rooms that are usually translated as “bedrooms” and which Vitruvius tells us could not be entered without an invitation from the house’s inhabitants, could be multi-functional rooms used for dining, entertaining, and storage, in addition to (possibly) being used for sleeping. Different rooms might be used in different seasons, and furniture could be moved to repurpose a chamber.<sup>41</sup> As discussed further below, it is also often very difficult to tell which rooms were used by which members of the household.<sup>42</sup> There is, moreover, evidence that owners of large-scale houses may have rented out rooms on the second or third floors as apartments and that their houses were closely associated with nearby commercial buildings. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has argued for “moving away from the standard image of the Roman *domus* as a ‘single-family unit’ and towards thinking of it as a ‘big house’ inhabited by a ‘houseful’ rather than a household,” which included everyone from extended family to slaves to commercial tenants.<sup>43</sup> The lines between public and private, free person and slave, and rich and poor blur when it comes to Roman domestic space.

Despite the variations possible for the atrium/peristyle house—Wallace-Hadrill notes that the design implied by this label was the “ideal rather than typical”<sup>44</sup>—it is possible to reconstruct a generic floor plan of this type of dwelling (see Figure 5.2). The Romans traced this style, which tended to house the elite, to their Etruscan predecessors (Varro *Ling.* 5.161). Houses from Pompeii, such as the House of Sallust and the House of the Prince of Naples, provide evidence of this style (with variations) and are the same type that Vitruvius describes in Box 5.4.<sup>45</sup>

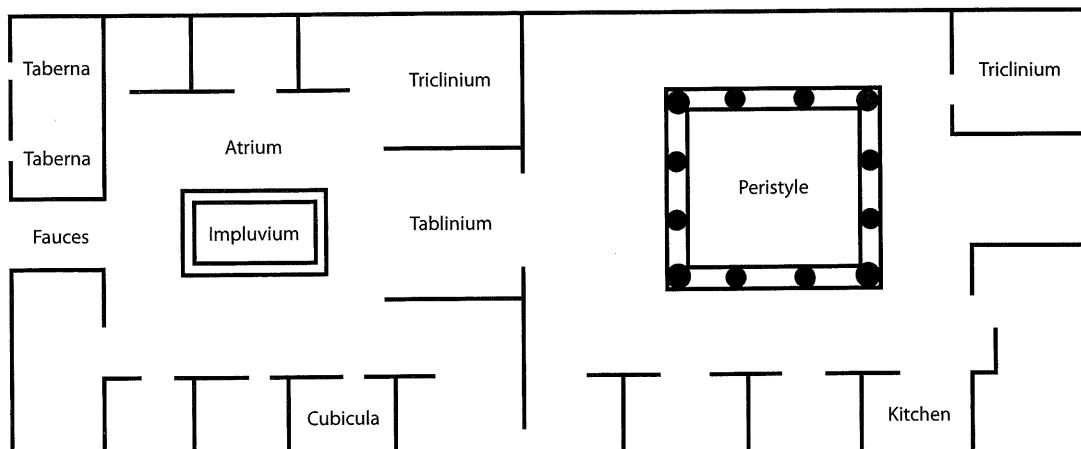


Figure 5.2 Generic Plan of an Atrium/Peristyle House

In this type of house, access was gained through the entrance hall, or *fauces*. This hall could be flanked by *tabernae* (restaurants or taverns) or small shops. The House of Sallust, for example, featured six rooms that flanked the entrance hall and had doorways into the street, spaces that were likely used as shops. Houses could also include exterior stairs leading to additional lodgings, which perhaps provided housing for a family’s slaves or freedpersons or were rented out to lower-status families. The less wealthy might also have dwelt behind or above their shops and businesses with their slaves and apprentices.

The atrium was the central room of the house and was visible from the street through the *fauces*. It often had a roof that sloped inward from a rectangular opening (*compluvium*) to allow light and water to enter. The water then fell into a central basin called the *impluvium*. It was in the atrium that the master of the house would meet his clients and welcome visitors. Literary evidence can supplement archaeological remains to provide information about the typical contents of the atrium. For example, we learn of an assault made on the home of a Roman politician during the late Republic. When the attackers entered his atrium, they smashed the wax images of his ancestors (*imagines*) on display there, turned over his wife’s couch, and tore out the weaving from her loom (which was likely there for decoration or the use of her slaves rather than for her own use).<sup>46</sup> Archaeological remains suggest that the family’s shrine to its ancestral deities (*lararium*) might also be placed in the atrium, although *lararia* frequently turn up in other rooms, too.

*Cubicula* surrounded the atrium and could serve as bedrooms or dining chambers (*triclinia*). In the House of the Prince of Naples, however, the rooms on one side of the atrium, because they had less light, have been identified as servants’ quarters. In this example, there is also a kitchen and toilet off the atrium, along with a small chamber (likely belonging to the doorman) that contains stairs to the second floor, which perhaps featured more slave quarters. Often *triclinia* opened on to the atrium in its far corners, and the back of the atrium gave way to the *tablinum* (the office of the *paterfamilias*). The *tablinum* was open to the peristyle at the back of the house. The peristyle was a colonnaded porch surrounding a garden that allowed light into the house; the kitchen and latrine (which were regularly located next to each other) often opened on to the peristyle.

We would like to know where different members of the *familia* slept (and with whom) because information about sleeping habits could potentially reveal a great deal about the nature of different relationships between members of the household. Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence is inconclusive: bed frames and bed niches remain, but there is no easy way to distinguish between what we would call single and double beds. Thus, it is hard to pinpoint the room occupied by the *paterfamilias* and his wife as opposed to the rooms occupied by children, slaves, and other members of their *domus*.<sup>47</sup> Whether spaces designated as slave quarters functioned as bedrooms is also uncertain. Indeed,

See Chapter 3, p. 53, and  
Chapter 17, p. 384, on *imagines*.

See Chapter 9, p. 209–10,  
on domestic shrines and cult.

it is possible that slaves often did not have dedicated areas in which to sleep but slept wherever there was space and whenever there was opportunity.

That said, it is clear that some slaves might be expected to sleep with free members of the household, suggesting that the latter, including the married couple, neither had nor desired much privacy, even in their bedchamber. Sources such as Tacitus (*Dial.* 59) describe children sleeping with their nurses.<sup>48</sup> We also have evidence of slaves sleeping in the same room as their (adult) masters; for example, the *Digest* (29.5.14) describes a slave girl (*ancilla*) sleeping in her mistress's chamber when other slaves entered to assassinate her mistress. They threatened to hurt her if she cried out, so she stayed silent while they murdered her mistress—a choice for which she was later punished by death so that slaves would know “not to look to themselves” when their owner was in physical danger.<sup>49</sup>

In short, there was little physical separation between household members of different status; there was also a good deal of physical proximity between landlords and renters and between domestic and commercial activity. The physical space of the Roman household, characterized by its lack of space demarcated for specific functions or for people of specific status, reflects the heterogeneous nature of the *familia*.

## Summary

The Roman household was complex. It included people of various statuses, the property belonging to the freeborn members of the household, and the physical structure of the dwellings in which the members of the household lived. The Roman household does not precisely equate to our understanding of a family, although we often merge the Roman household and the Roman family in discussions. There was also no single, typical “Roman household” in the way that we might consider the nuclear family to be typical of modern contemporary society. The human element of the Roman household consisted of complex arrangements of married couples, their children, other relatives, slaves, and freedmen and freedwomen. The composition of any given household, furthermore, fluctuated over time. Although every *familia* had to be headed by a *paterfamilias*, family members could be separated by death or divorce, and new families and stepfamilies formed. Slave families were at even greater risk of separation. There was little to stop a slave master from selling off various members of a slave family to other households. And yet, as inscriptional evidence demonstrates, slave families might be able to keep in contact with one another and find each other later in life, although this was not guaranteed.

Economically, the various members of the household worked together for the good of the household, but not all work was valued equally. Property divisions between husband and wife were also clear. Although the husband and wife would form a partnership for the *familia* and *domus* that contained their mutual children, their individual property and wealth remained individual.<sup>50</sup>

Just as familial composition was variable, so was the structure and room usage of the physical house. It is difficult to tell from the archaeological remains of houses where the various household members slept, worked, dined, or relaxed with each other or with friends and associates. Our very inability to pinpoint these behaviours (and our desire to do so) points to real differences between Roman family life and contemporary expectations of our own.

## Questions for Review and Discussion

1. What are the key Latin terms related to the Roman family, household, and their members? How do they compare to modern conceptions?
2. How did slaves and former slaves contribute to the household? What was the family experience for slaves?
3. What were the expectations of children in the household? How does the treatment of children compare with that in modern society?
4. Did the Roman concept of family change? If so, in what ways?
5. What did a Roman house look like and how did it function?

## Suggested Reading

Bradley, K. 1991. *Discovering the Roman Family*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Each chapter in this book is a self-contained examination of different aspects of family life. Topics include the role of men, remarriage, child labour, and the social role of nurses.

Dixon, S. 1992. *The Roman Family*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dixon provides a clear introduction to the topic of the Roman family by focusing on the definition of the family, Roman law and the family, marriage, children, and life cycles within the family.

Frier, B., and T. McGinn. 2003. *Casebook on Roman Family Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This sourcebook of case law related to the Roman family includes detailed explanations.

Gardner, J., and T. Wiedemann, eds. 1991. *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook*. London and New York: Routledge.

Arranged thematically, this sourcebook brings together a host of well-translated sources on the family.

George, M., ed. 2005. *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This collection of essays examines the family in the light of literary, iconographic, epigraphic, and papyrological evidence, both within Italy and in provincial regions such as Africa, Lusitania, Pannonia, Egypt, and Judea.

Rawson, B., ed. 2011. *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

This monumental work brings together 32 chapters on all aspects of families and family life in the ancient Mediterranean basin, covering Classical Greece through early Christianity. The bibliography is also extensive.

Saller, R.P. 1984. "Familia, Domus and the Roman Conception of the Family." *Phoenix* 38: 336–55.

Saller's article on the differences between the terms *familia* and *domus* is very important to understanding the Roman household.

## Notes

- 1 See Sigismund Nielsen (1996: 35–60) for the limitations of epigraphical evidence.
- 2 IPOstie-A, 00222 = ISIS 00133. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- 3 According to Ulpian, any woman could be termed a *materfamilias* whether she was married, widowed, or divorced, provided she lived a respectable lifestyle (*Dig. 50.16.46.1*).
- 4 Saller (1984: 336–55).

\_\_\_\_\_, and B. Shaw. 1984. "Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves." *Journal of Roman Studies* 74: 124–56.

This article uses evidence from commemorative tombstones to examine the Roman family.

Sigismund Nielsen, H. 2001. "The Value of Epithets in Pagan and Christian Epitaphs from Rome." In *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, edited by S. Dixon, 165–77. London and New York: Routledge.

By comparing pagan and Christian epitaphs from Rome, this article demonstrates a change in Roman attitudes to family as the use of morally charged terminology increased. This shift included a new focus on women's chastity.

Tregiari, S. 1991. *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The definitive book on Roman marriage, this text covers every aspect of the subject, from betrothal to divorce or death.

- 5 Free and freed members of the household often shared a tomb. See, for example, *CIL* 6.24658, from Rome: "To the Spirits of the Dead. For Pomponia Fortunata, her mother, and for Aulus Aulienus Iustus, her brother, and for Aulus Aulienus Saturninus, her father, Auliens Iusta, daughter of Aulus, made this, they were well-deserving, and for herself and for all their freedmen and freedwomen and descendants."

- 6 See Scheidel (2007b) for a summary of estimates and the problems involved in accepting any of them.
- 7 Tregiari (1991: 37–49).
- 8 Even in the Twelve Tables, the earliest Roman law code, a wife had options for staying out of her husband's power: she must spend three nights each year away from her husband (*Gai. Inst. 1.111*).
- 9 Tregiari (1991: 22–5).
- 10 Ibid.: 445.
- 11 For more on the Stoic view of Cato's actions, see *Luc. 2.326–89*.
- 12 See Saller (2003: 190) and Columella *Rust. 12. pref. 7*; compare *Xen. Oec. 7–10*.
- 13 On various interpretations of the expectations of marriage, see Bradley (1991: 126–8); Dixon (1992: 83–90); and Tregiari (1991: 229–61).
- 14 See further Jeppesen-Wigelsworth (forthcoming).
- 15 *Nep. Att. 5.3*; Tregiari (1991: 109).
- 16 On "serial marriage," see Bradley (1991: 130–9).
- 17 See Sigismund Nielsen (2001: 170, 173–5, Table 10.2; forthcoming ["Killing the *Univira*"]); I am grateful to Dr Sigismund Nielsen for permitting me access to this material.
- 18 Tregiari (1991: 51–2); Dixon (1992: 93–4).
- 19 Tregiari (1991: 52–4); Dixon (1992: 90–2). Note that the term *contubernalis* in the context of slave unions had mostly dropped out of use by the second century CE.
- 20 Tregiari (1991: 52–3, 180–01 [quote from p. 53]). Bradley (1987: 48–9) comments on the use of similar phrasing in inscriptions to describe slave and free unions, and Jeppesen-Wigelsworth (2010: 258–330) contrasts the portrayal of *concubinae* and *contubernales* with that of legal wives (*coniuges* and *uxores*).
- 21 On the slave family, see Bradley (1987: 47–80).
- 22 Saller (1999: 182).
- 23 The fourth of the Twelve Tables includes this formula, but it is unclear how absolute it was originally. Some saw it as all-encompassing (*Gell. NA 5.19.9*; *Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.26.4*), but Cicero (*Leg. 3.8.19*) tells us that it applied only to deformed children. Gaius (*Inst. 1.52, 1.55*) states that a master has the power of life and death over his slaves, who are in his *potestas*, and points out that children are also in a father's *potestas*; therefore, the two laws are often read together. Even if this understanding is correct, few fathers likely ever exercised this power, and it may truly have been symbolic. See Saller (1994: 114–21).
- 24 See Bradley (1991: 139–40) for examples.
- 25 Saller (1994: 52) estimates that 37 per cent would have lost their fathers by age 15.
- 26 Dixon (1992: 47). Spurius Cassius tried to become a king (*Val. Max. 5.8.2*; *Livy 2.41.10*), and Aulus Fulvius tried to join Catiline's conspiracy (*Val. Max. 5.8.5*; *Sall. Cat. 39.5*; *Cass. Dio 37.36.4*).
- 27 For more on the realities of the *paterfamilias* versus the Roman myth of the *paterfamilias*, see Dixon (1992: 31); Saller (1984: 336–55; 1999: 182–97); Shaw (2001); and Frier and McGinn (2003).
- 28 See Harris (1994). For the view that female infanticide was not prevalent in antiquity, see Engels (1980).
- 29 Dixon (1992: 128–9).
- 30 Gardner and Wiedemann (1991: 88). For more discussion, see Scheidel (2001b). Children's tombstones often express parental sorrow and affection; see Bradley (1991: 139).
- 31 Parents might also remark on their own dutifulness. See, for example, *AE* (1902, 00081), from Rome: "To the Spirits of the Departed Titus Flavius Heliodorus, a son who was very sweet and who lived 3 years, 10 months, and 9 days. His father, Titus Flavius Maximus, an *evocatus* (recalled veteran) of the emperor, and his mother, Aurelia Antonia, made this (together) as very dutiful parents."

- 32 Dixon (1992: 108–12); Sigismund Nielsen (2007: 39–54). As far as the law was concerned, slave children under the age of five had no value but gained it thereafter, as they were expected to work (*Dig.* 7.7.6.1–2).
- 33 *CIL* 6.14202. Numerous other examples can be found on Roman tombstones.
- 34 Saller (2003: 185–204).
- 35 This manumission did not necessarily occur any earlier, however. For example, a tombstone inscription records a *verna* who died at age 27 (*CIL* 6.5195).
- 36 Cicero frequently mentioned Tiro in letters to Atticus. Twenty-seven letters written to Tiro survive (all of Book 16 of Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares*) and highlight Cicero's concern for Tiro's bad health and the work that he continued to perform for Cicero as a freedman. See *Cic. Fam.* 16.13, 16.14 for health concerns and *Fam.* 16.22 for some duties performed by Tiro.
- 37 Dixon (1992: 128).
- 38 Gardner and Wiedemann (1991: 148); Saller (2003: 201–04).
- 39 The *c(o)enaculum* largely equates to the modern understanding of a multi-room apartment (see Storey [2004: 51–2]), but *insula* could also indicate “an independent unit within the structural fabric of some other edifice” or an entire city block (Storey 2004: 54–5). For more on Roman *insulae*, see Packer (1971); Storey (2004: 47–84); and Bergmann (2012: 237–40).
- 40 Wallace-Hadrill (1994: 82–5, 51–7).
- 41 For example, *Suet. Aug.* 72 and *Plin. Ep.* 2.17.
- 42 Wallace-Hadrill (1994: 8–14, 50–61).
- 43 Wallace-Hadrill (2003: 4). On experimenting with population density, Wallace-Hadrill has argued for seven to eight people per house. For more on the “public” versus “private” aspect, see Riggsby (1997: 36–56).
- 44 Wallace-Hadrill (1994: 82–5, 51–7 [quote on p. 83]). For further examples and an analysis of the remains found in Roman households, see Allison (2004) and Allison's *Pompeian Households: An On-line Companion*, available at [www.stoa.org/projects/ph/index.html](http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/index.html).
- 45 For more on the House of the Prince of Naples (VI.15.8), see Wallace-Hadrill (1994: 26, 47–51). For more house plans from Pompeii, see [www.stoa.org/projects/ph/houselist.html](http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/houselist.html). For a detailed example of a “typical” *domus*, see [www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/house.html](http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/house.html).
- 46 *Asc. Mil.* 38.
- 47 Wallace-Hadrill (1994: 91–117). On the survival of beds, Wallace-Hadrill notes that there is one exceptional child's cot/crib that survives. From Suetonius's description of the rift between Tiberius and Julia, it is clear that married couples often shared a bedchamber. See *Suet. Tib.* 7.3 and Fantham (2006: 83).
- 48 See also *Sor. Gyn.* 2.12.19 and Bradley (1991: 13–36).
- 49 Compare also *Dig.* 29.5.1.28 for a slave boy (pre-adolescent) who slept at the foot of his master's bed and was also put to death as punishment for not crying out (out of fear) when other slaves entered the room to kill their master.
- 50 For more on the multiple aspects of ancient families, see Rawson (2011).

## Education in the Roman World

*Fanny Dolansky*



In the mid-second century CE, Lucian of Samosata wrote *The Dream (Somnium)*, a speech about how he came to pursue a career in literary studies.<sup>1</sup> When he had finished school, his father and his father's friends discussed his future. Further studies would be costly, as he came from a family of modest means, so it was determined that he acquire a trade instead—one that would be easy to learn, provide him with a decent living, and be suitable for a man of free birth. They decided that he should apprentice with an uncle to become a sculptor and stonemason. Initially, Lucian was happy about this plan, but that changed on his first day of training. Striking a stone tablet too hard with his chisel, he broke it; his uncle flew into a rage and beat him with a stick. Lucian ran home crying. That night, he dreamt that the figures of *Technē* (Craft) and *Paideia* (Education) were vying for his allegiance. *Technē*, appearing as a dusty worker with calloused hands and dirty hair, made her pitch. Then *Paideia* countered. A sculptor's life, she claimed, would be a life of poverty, obscurity, and constant service. But a life of learning would yield great moral and material benefits:

I shall adorn your soul, the most essential part of you, with many noble ornaments—moderation, justice, piety, gentleness, fairness, understanding, endurance, love of beauty, and a yearning to achieve the sublime. For these are the purest adornments of the soul . . . You are now poor and the son of a nobody, and you thought of taking up such a sordid craft. Soon everyone will admire and envy you; you will be praised and honoured, enjoying high esteem for the finest qualities, respected by the rich and the noble, wearing clothes like this (pointing to her own brilliant attire) and considered worthy of office and precedence. If you go abroad, not even on foreign ground will you be unknown or unnoticed. I shall put such identification marks on you that everyone seeing you will nudge his neighbour and point to you, saying, “That's the man.” (*Lucian Somn.* 10–11)<sup>2</sup>