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Roman Slavery: A Study of Roman Society and Its Dependence on  
Slaves

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in History

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by  
Andrew Mason Burks

August 2008

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Keywords: Rome, Roman, Slavery, Slave

## ABSTRACT

# Roman Slavery: A Study of Roman Society and Its Dependence on Slaves

by

Andrew Mason Burks

Rome's dependence upon slaves has been well established in terms of economics and general society. This paper, however, seeks to demonstrate this dependence, during the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, through detailed examples of slave use in various areas of Roman life. The areas covered include agriculture, industry, domestic life, the state, entertainment, intellectual life, military, religion, and the use of female slaves. A look at manumission demonstrates Rome's growing awareness of this dependence. Through this discussion, it becomes apparent that Roman society existed during this time as it did due to slavery. Rome depended upon slavery to function and maintain its political, social, and economic stranglehold on the Mediterranean area and beyond.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my father, Jonathon James Burks

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thanks to Cassidy Burks, my loving wife, and  
Colonel William R. Cubbins

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It's no fun being a slave. And it's not just the work  
But knowing that you're a slave, and that nothing can change it.

Slave character in Plautus, *Amphitryo* c. 200 B.C.<sup>1</sup>

While it is known that ancient Rome was dependent upon slaves, not enough has been done in English scholarship to demonstrate this dependence on the ground level, instead of focusing on economics and slavery in general. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate this dependence during the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire using detailed examples of slave use in various areas of Roman life. After an overview of Roman slavery, the areas of Roman life discussed will include agriculture, industry, domestic life, the state, entertainment, intellectual life, military, religion, and the use of female slaves. Through these examples, I will attempt to show Rome's day-to-day dependence upon slaves. Even Romans themselves had a growing awareness of their dependence on slaves, and thus changed their behavior towards slaves in an attempt to keep them compliant. One specific change in behavior was that of manumission, where good working slaves were freed.

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, Vol. 1, *Sociological Studies in Roman History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 99.



Through this discussion, it becomes apparent that Roman society existed during this time as it did due to slavery. Rome depended upon slavery to function and maintain its political, social, and economic stranglehold on the Mediterranean area and beyond. Special attention will be paid to the roughly four hundred years surrounding the fall of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire. However, a discussion of the development of slavery as an institution and in the various areas of Roman society will need to cover the span of ancient Roman history.

### Growth of Slavery

Little is known about the origins of slavery in Rome. However, it was common in ancient societies to keep slaves. The likely origin of Rome as a small village, or collection of villages, lends itself easily to early slavery. It would not have been uncommon for even a small village to maintain a few slaves; captured from another local village or perhaps bought through trade. However, there are a few references to slavery before the third century BC, and those speak of small-scale slavery.<sup>2</sup> Only the extremely rich could afford these slaves, and even then, they could only afford a few slaves. With military

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<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 24.

victories and expansion, slavery grew at an incredible rate. With victory came money, and with money came more slaves.

In 225 B.C., there were an estimated 600,000 slaves in Roman Italy, but only 194 years later that number grew to approximately two million. This included a growth from 15% to 35% of the total population.<sup>3</sup> These numbers reveal the extent of the institution of slavery in Roman society. In a study of Roman tombstones, nearly three times as many inscriptions memorialized ex-slaves as freeborn citizens.<sup>4</sup> These numbers reveal an astounding number of inhabitants of Rome who were once slaves. As the numbers of slaves rose, so did the number of occupations in which slaves were used. Initially serving only as domestic servants, masters eventually used slaves in virtually every realm of life from brute manual labor to the intellectual tasks of teaching and government office.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to the American experience, Roman slavery was not primarily an issue of race or ethnicity. However, slaves from abroad often looked different from their Roman masters.<sup>6</sup> In the

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<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 101.

<sup>4</sup> W.W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (New York: AMS Press, 1908), 115.

<sup>5</sup> William Blair, *An Inquiry into the State of Slavery Amongst the Romans: From the Earliest Period till the Establishment of the Lombards in Italy* (Detroit: Negro History Press, 1970), 3. This, of course, refers only to those positions that were not restricted to citizens only. However, this did not stop citizens from employing slaves in lieu of themselves.

<sup>6</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 177.

earlier days of Rome, when the city was less diverse, light-skinned, blue-eyed slaves would stand out, and Romans might easily identify them as slaves. Some ethnicities were used in certain slave occupations more than others. For example, Romans preferred Ethiopians, Egyptians, and Asiatics as personal attendants.<sup>7</sup>

Few people, if any, were safe from the possibility of becoming a slave due to the many methods of enslavement. From the very inception of slavery in Rome, freedom was not as simple as slave and non-slave. There were three different social classes of freedom. The first group was the *ingenuus*.<sup>8</sup> These people were the freeborn who were at no point lawfully enslaved. The second classification was the *libertinus*. These freedmen, while once being slaves, had gained freedom through manumission. The last category was, of course, the *servus*. These people were currently and legally enslaved. A freeborn citizen could not rightfully be a slave, excluding extenuating circumstances such as criminal activity. Except through special commendation from the state, a freedman could not be an *ingennus*.

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<sup>7</sup> Blair, 150.

<sup>8</sup> Buckland, 438.

## Slave Rights

Most slave owners allowed their slaves some measure of freedom. Slaves could own their own property, though this normally consisted of money. This property was called a *peculium*.<sup>9</sup> Often masters paid their slaves for their services, though this compensation was normally nominal. While a slave's *peculium* technically belonged to his or her master, it was uncouth for a master to appropriate his or her slave's holdings. A slave could use his or her money for nearly any purpose; two uses, however, were most common. The first was the purchase of a slave of his or her own. It was possible for slaves to purchase their own slave to either do their work for them or to do any other various tasks they wished. The second common use for a *peculium* was to purchase one's own freedom. It was not uncommon for a master to free a slave if the slave could pay the master for a replacement.

Though a slave did have certain rights, his or her status in Roman society was the lowest of the low. Society legally considered the slave little more than human *res*.<sup>10</sup> The word *res* can have many meanings, but it is essentially a thing or

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<sup>9</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Buckland, 3.

object.<sup>11</sup> He or she was, therefore, not a person but a possession.<sup>12</sup> Gaius' commentary on the *Lex Aquilia* in the second century BC admits, "It therefore appears that the law places in the same category with slaves animals which are included under the head of cattle, and are kept in herds..."<sup>13</sup>

During the Republic, masters were not required to mark their slaves in any way in order to distinguish them from the free people of Rome. In the late Empire, some slaves had collars to impede the possibility of escape.<sup>14</sup> Later in the Empire, some restrictions were applied to the clothing allowed a slave as well.<sup>15</sup> These restrictions included the banning of long hair and "garments made of skin" within the city of Rome.<sup>16</sup>

Familial ties among slaves were an important aspect of slave life. A slave could not technically be married; however, he or she could enter into *contubernium*, a union with no legal or civil rights.<sup>17</sup> As with most slave markets, the Roman market:

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<sup>11</sup> The Chinese University of Hong Kong, "Latin = English Dictionary," <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/Latin/> (created October 21, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Buckland, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Gaius, *On the Provincial Edict*, Book VII, in *The Civil Law*, ed. S.P. Scott (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 3: 323.

<sup>14</sup> F. Hugh Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 238.

<sup>15</sup> Buckland, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Theodosian Code and Novels, and Sirmondian Constitutions*, trans. Clyde Pharr (New York: Greenwood Press, 1952), 415.

<sup>17</sup> R.H. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire* (New York: Dial Press, 1928), 158.

operates best by denying family ties, partly because buyers do not necessarily want to purchase a whole family unit, partly because slaves themselves might not be able to pay for the release of all family members at one time.<sup>18</sup>

This being the case there is evidence that some "married" slaves were able to stay together despite the odds. In 325 AD, Constantine instructed an official in Sardinia not to split slave families up.<sup>19</sup> This refers only to families that were already slaves, not families that were being sold into slavery. Varro suggests that farmers should reward foremen with "mates from among their fellow-slaves to bear them children; for by this means they are made more steady and more attached to the place. It is on this account that slave families of Epirus have the best reputation and bring the highest price."<sup>20</sup> In this way, slave-owners used families to placate slaves. It is possible that the only relationship legally validated was that of a mother and child, for it was through the mother that the child

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<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Varro, *On Agriculture*, in *The Loeb Classical Library*, trans. William Davis Hooper, ed. T.E. Page, E. Capps and W.H.D. Rouse (London: William Heinemann, 1934), 227.

was born a slave.<sup>21</sup> However, the master could still sell the child away from his or her mother at any time.

Despite the large number of educated and skilled slaves coming in from abroad, especially Greece, some slaves had the opportunity for a limited education. This education was mostly vocational. The master or his or her slaves usually did the training with an eye towards bringing a higher price at sale or for his or her own private use. The slave-owner could have trained his or her slave in industry, agriculture, or even in reading and writing. In the first century AD, Seneca wrote of an owner having "eleven slaves taught to recite Homer, Hesiod, and the nine lyric poets by heart."<sup>22</sup>

#### Sources of Slaves

Slaves came from a wide variety of sources. The primary sources of slaves, especially in the early years of Rome, were those acquired through "the chance of war"<sup>23</sup>. After a conflict, victors often sold the enemy captives as slaves into Roman territory. For example, at the end of the Third Punic War in 146 BC, Scipio Africanus sold the entire Carthaginian population

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<sup>21</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 165.

<sup>22</sup> Barrow, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 62.

into slavery.<sup>24</sup> However, the Romans had not defeated all the captives coming into their territory. In the later Roman period, tribal war often resulted in the selling of defeated and captured tribes to the Romans.<sup>25</sup> The prices at the borders tended to be lower than in the heart of Rome due to this influx of slaves.<sup>26</sup>

Kidnapping was also a tool of the slave trader. Pirates took the unlucky into their custody and sold them to the highest bidder. At times, this made travel perilous in the Mediterranean. In the first century BC, pirates captured a young Julius Caesar.<sup>27</sup> However, the pirates found him too precious to sell as a common slave. Instead, they ransomed him for fifty talents, a decision the pirates would later regret when Caesar hunted them down and killed them.<sup>28</sup> A fair amount of shipping brought slaves from slave markets outside the Roman state as well.

Slaves also came from within the territory of Rome itself, predominately from slave families. Romans considered the child

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 144.

<sup>25</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 298.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, *Decline of the Ancient World*, 297.

<sup>27</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. John Dryden (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 2: 217.

<sup>28</sup> Plutarch, 218.



of any slave woman to be a slave, regardless of the father.<sup>29</sup> Exposed children were also a source for slaves. Though it was technically not illegal until late in the Empire<sup>30</sup>, child exposure was viewed as morally suspect.<sup>31</sup> The intention in exposing a child was death. However, slavers saved some children by taking them in. This could be a mercy, though the life gained was that of a slave. Slavery could also be a punishment for criminal activities. The slaves would most likely become mineworkers. However, some would become gladiators in the arena.<sup>32</sup> Even those criminals sentenced to death would become slaves between the time of sentence and execution.<sup>33</sup> Debt could also lead to slavery. The government gave a creditor the right to sell the debtor into slavery only if the debtor was unable to pay.<sup>34</sup>

Nearly any person in the ancient world could become a slave. Slaves who could prove their Roman citizenship had some recourse against their wrongful enslavement. However, not all were lucky enough to have the opportunity.

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<sup>29</sup> Gaius, *The Four Commentaries of Gaius on the Institutes of the Civil Law*, in *The Civil Law*, ed. S.P. Scott (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 1: 93.

<sup>30</sup> *The Code of Justinian*, in *The Civil Law*, ed. S.P. Scott (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 6: 332.

<sup>31</sup> Barrow, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Buckland, 404.

<sup>33</sup> *Digest*, in *The Civil Law*, ed. S.P. Scott (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 3: 200.

<sup>34</sup> *The Laws of the Twelve Tables*, in *The Civil Law*, ed. S.P. Scott (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 1: 63.

Slavery grew at a rapid rate in ancient Rome. Initially, the extremely wealthy had only a few slaves, but over time, slave use was common. During the late Republic and early Empire, slaves comprised a large number of the workforce in nearly every realm of life. Slaves even bought their own slaves to do their work. As the use of slaves increased, Romans became more dependent on them to maintain their society and their influence in the world.

## CHAPTER 2

### AGRICULTURAL SLAVES

#### Agriculture in Rome

The importance of the farm in Roman history, both economically and ideologically, cannot be understated. Romans considered the farmer the backbone of Roman society. Cato wrote in the second century BC that "when they [the early Romans] would praise a worthy man their praise took this form: 'good husbandman,' 'good farmer'; one so praised was thought to have received the greatest commendation." He also stated, "It is from the farming class that the bravest men and sturdiest soldiers come, their calling is most highly respected."<sup>35</sup> Columella, in the first century AD, called agriculture the "own sister to wisdom."<sup>36</sup> It is not a coincidence that one of Rome's earliest heroes was Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus. Cincinnatus was a lowly farmer of only "four acres" who led his people to defeat an invading army of Sabines in the fifth century BC.<sup>37</sup> Despite Rome's elevated view of the farmer, the use of slave labor eventually displaced most of these farmers to the extent

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<sup>35</sup> Cato, *On Agriculture*, ed. T.E. Page, E. Capps and W.H.D. Rouse, trans. William Davis Hooper, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Columella, *On Agriculture*, trans. Harrison Boyd Ash, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 1: 5.

<sup>37</sup> Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. B.O. Foster (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 191.

that the majority of Roman farm-owners were little more than absentee landlords.

A law limited farmers to owning no more than five hundred acres.<sup>38</sup> The rich, however, bypassed this in the second century BC by gobbling up large parcels of land that were designated public. As time passed, these rich families began to assume that this long appropriated land was by all right theirs. Tiberius Gracchus, a newly elected tribune in 133 BC, attempted to reverse this trend and redistribute the land back into the hands of small citizen farmers.<sup>39</sup> To push through his legislation, Tiberius extended his power to the legal limit and beyond. This tactic led to his death at the hands of a mob of political officers in 132 BC.<sup>40</sup> Ten years later his brother Gaius secured the tribunate and was able to push through the redistribution, but the results were limited and did not last long.<sup>41</sup> The rich expelled as many as 1 ½ million small farmers from their land by purchase or force in the seventy-two years between 80 and 8 BC. In the same time period, the percentage of free rural peoples dropped by an alarming 29 percent. These large farms were able to change the face of Roman agriculture. A surplus market economy emerged from the subsistence farming of

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<sup>38</sup> Plutarch 2: 391.

<sup>39</sup> Grant, *History of Rome*, 169.

<sup>40</sup> Plutarch, 2: 401.

<sup>41</sup> Grant, *History of Rome*, 172.

earlier eras.<sup>42</sup> This was fortuitous as the displaced small farmers relocated to urban Rome, becoming dependent on the free bread and corn provided by the state.<sup>43</sup> A massive influx of slaves, many captured and imported as war prisoners, replaced the free laborers, forcing them to join the urban poor.<sup>44</sup>

During the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, large landowners preferred slave labor to free labor for several reasons. Status among the aristocrats accompanied the ownership of slaves.<sup>45</sup> Since all soldiers were citizens, free laborers could have been called away at a moment's notice, perhaps never to return. It then behooved the landowners to use slaves who could not be used for military service.<sup>46</sup> Even though slaves were not inexpensive and required upkeep, they were still far more economical than free labor.<sup>47</sup> The constant pay for wage laborers was a continuous draw on the house budget and slaves could be a renewable resource, to some degree, if encouraged or allowed to breed. The wage for a free laborer not only supported that laborer, but his family as well. A slave needed

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<sup>42</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 2-3; 55; 67.

<sup>43</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 1: 696.

<sup>44</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, 219.

<sup>47</sup> W.L. Westermann, "The Economic Basis of the Decline of Ancient Culture," in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Donald Kagan (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1962), 36. Westermann's conclusion is not shared by all and there is much debate about the cost of slave labor versus the cost of free labor.

only shelter and food for him or herself. With constant warfare and, therefore, constant influx of prisoners of war and booty, rich Romans could afford the expense of buying slaves.<sup>48</sup> Masters could also have forced slaves to work longer hours and during holidays. A slave was also the perfect choice for highly specialized skills. It was a much better investment to train a slave with a guaranteed time of service (barring incident or accident), than to spend the money to train a free laborer, who might have chosen to leave at anytime for other employment or military service.

### Vilicus

During the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire, slaves on the farm could work a myriad of jobs, but none more important than the *vilicus*.<sup>49</sup> This slave steward, or overseer, was the manager of the entire farm.<sup>50</sup> Most owners of farms, preoccupied by the hustle and bustle of Roman politics, lived in Rome. Given the importance of his task, several contemporary sources spoke of the duties and qualities that one should look for in a *vilicus*.

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<sup>48</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 111.

<sup>49</sup> Harold Whetstone Johnston, *The Private Life of the Romans* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1903), 96.

<sup>50</sup> W. Warde Fowler, *Social Life at Rome in the Age of Cicero* (New York: MacMillian & Co., 1964), 217.

A *vilicus* was to carry out any and all of his master's orders, as well as keep the slave workers busy and provide for their needs.<sup>51</sup> He would offer no sacrifices excepting those his master ordered.<sup>52</sup> The overseer was to settle any arguments among the slaves and punish any guilty slave. He was responsible for collecting any outstanding loans and could not lend anything unless directed by his master with whom he was to review the farm's accounts frequently.<sup>53</sup> Top priorities for a *vilicus* were keeping the farming equipment in good repair and keeping the slave clothing properly maintained so they may work any day, regardless of weather.<sup>54</sup> Masters often required that he always be present on the farm property to ensure that all the necessary work was finished. The *vilicus'* ability to perform all the duties on the farm in the presence of his fellow slaves, helped to keep his charges accountable in both the speed and quality of their work.<sup>55</sup> Masters often gave the *vilicus* a wife in order to keep him from becoming intimate with anyone else inside, or outside, the farm.<sup>56</sup> The overseer was the first to rise in the morning and the last to go to sleep after settling the day's accounts.<sup>57</sup> Cato believed the *vilicus* was to maintain the feast

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<sup>51</sup> Cato, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Columella, 87.

<sup>53</sup> Cato, 13; 15.

<sup>54</sup> Columella, 87-89.

<sup>55</sup> Cato, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Columella, 87.

<sup>57</sup> Cato, 13-15.

days and make sure not to hire the same day laborers for more than one day. Observing no personal business, the overseer could not draw upon any slave for his own personal use; neither could he use his master's food stores to glut.<sup>58</sup> He was also to consider his master's friends as his own<sup>59</sup> and shelter no guest but his master's friends and family<sup>60</sup>.

In order for the *vilicus* to perform his multitude of tasks well, Columella in the first century AD, and Cato in the second century BC, expounded on the qualities they believed were of the utmost importance. Cato's dislike of Greek influences and conservative views temper much of his opinion on what qualities he preferred in a *vilicus*.<sup>61</sup> Having grown up on a farm, however, gave him a practical view of the subject as well. Columella, likewise, had much experience with life on a farm.<sup>62</sup> He grew up on his uncle's farm and owned several farms himself throughout his lifetime. These qualities undermined in many ways the Roman tradition of slaves as *res*.<sup>63</sup> Columella believed a *vilicus* should not be from or have any association with urban areas except for that which he needed for supplying the farm, as he will surely be infected with the laziness and tendency towards

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<sup>58</sup> Columella, 89-91.

<sup>59</sup> Cato, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Columella, 87.

<sup>61</sup> Cato, IX.

<sup>62</sup> Columella, XV.

<sup>63</sup> Buckland, 3.



coarse entertainments that city life breeds. Instead, Columella preferred that he be from farmer stock, so he would be well acquainted with the rigors of farm life. Strong and healthy, the *vilicus* for Columella could not be too young, too old, or too attractive, and he must be skilled in the operations of a farm. The overseer should not be too lax, or too cruel, in punishing his charges. He should not consult with soothsayers or witches. He should be a quick learner, not one who thinks he knows more than he does. Columella also references Cornelius Celsus' belief that an overseer could be illiterate, as it would be more difficult to appropriate money or goods if he was unable to fudge numbers.<sup>64</sup> Cato brought his own opinion the subject of the *vilicus*. He thought the overseer should appreciate good work, be levelheaded, and listen well. He must also avoid fortunetellers, prophets, diviners, and astrologers. For his own protection, the *vilicus* should also never assume that he knows more than his master.<sup>65</sup> The wife of the *vilicus* had similar tasks and characteristics though hers were confined to the domestic staff.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Columella, 85; 87; 89; 91.

<sup>65</sup> Cato, 13-15.

<sup>66</sup> K.D. White, *Roman Farming* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 354.

## Other Jobs

Aside from the *vilicus* and his wife, farm owners used a number of other slaves as either laborers or other managerial staff. If the owner possessed more than one farm, he might employ a *procurator*. His job would be to oversee all the different farms and report to the master. Often, the overseer divided the manual labor slaves into gangs. The *operum magistri* oversaw each gang.<sup>67</sup> There were, of course, various slaves to deal with the day-to-day function of the farm, cooks, cleaners, as well as those to serve the owner when he was there. The jobs of the manual laborers depended greatly upon the focus of the farm, whether wheat, vines, or livestock. Gardeners kept the grounds around the villa clean and pruned in case of the master's arrival. Alongside the permanent slave staff, the *vilicus* brought day laborers in at certain times of the year. During planting and harvesting season, a farm may have needed more work than its slave numbers could accomplish.

The number of slaves on the farm could dictate the treatment of slaves on the farm. A *vilica* could not be too cruel since his charges could revolt, nor could he be too gentle as he was answerable to his master. A slave on a farm was often out from the eyes of his master and therefore would be less

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<sup>67</sup> White, 355.

likely to receive his freedom and get special treatment. Cato rather impersonally suggests that an owner sell old or sick slaves as he would an old wagon or a worn-out ox.<sup>68</sup>

Roman agriculture was dependent on the slave work force at the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire. Farm owners used slaves to work the entire spectrum of farm work. Slaves planted the crops and plowed the fields. They supervised the work and kept the books. They cooked, cleaned, and maintained the grounds. Farm owners used free laborers occasionally at planting and harvesting times, but their efforts were only supplementary to the work of the slave. Rome was dependent upon the slave to provide the daily labor necessary to produce the local agricultural supplies that helped keep Rome fed.

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<sup>68</sup> Cato, 9.

## CHAPTER 3

### INDUSTRIAL SLAVES

#### Industry in Rome

Industry in Rome dates back to the early days of the monarchy. The second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, attempted to unify the two tribes, the Sabines and the Romans, in the seventh century BC by dividing them into eight guilds: musicians, goldsmiths, carpenters, dyers, shoemakers, skimmers, braziers, and potters. He also created a ninth guild, which collected all other skilled craftsmen.<sup>69</sup> This division became the blueprint of industry throughout the history of Rome. Nearly every craft or industry had a guild or was part of a guild. Electing their own officers, often for five-year terms<sup>70</sup>, these *collegia* solved their own disputes. They were mainly for the worship of gods that could be particularly advantageous to their careers. Each guild celebrated its festivals individually, accompanied by music, parades, and brightly colored decorations. Though individuals were not required to join a *collegia*, guild members would undermine non-members with vandalism and disruption to

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<sup>69</sup> Plutarch, 1: 106.

<sup>70</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Roman Economy: Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History*, ed. P.A. Brunt (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), 44.

their business.<sup>71</sup> Slaves could hold membership in the *collegia tenuiorum*, a catchall guild with no particular power.<sup>72</sup>

The markets of ancient Rome took three basic forms. Trade was intimately connected with the first. These were normally associated with harbor towns where captains of trade ships would simply unload their ships and sell their wares at a harbor "wholesale market."<sup>73</sup> Small business owners would often come here to buy raw material for use or foreign wares for sale.

The second form of market was the shop. These businesses were individual shops in the city itself. Often times, similar shops gathered in the same area, which would then carry the name of that business.<sup>74</sup>

The marketplace was the third type of market. In Rome, the marketplace was located just off the Forum. In the first century BC, Julius Caesar built his section to solve the crowding of the Forum.<sup>75</sup> Augustus (first century BC to the first century AD), Nero (first century AD), and Trajan (second century AD) eventually expanded the market. The market held virtually

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<sup>71</sup> William Stearns Davis, *A Day in Old Rome: A Picture of Roman Life* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1972), 249-252.

<sup>72</sup> M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 1: 178.

<sup>73</sup> Tenney Frank, *An Economic History of Rome*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1962), 313.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, 252.

<sup>75</sup> Cowell, *Life in Ancient Rome* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 125.

everything a Roman citizen could desire. Trajan's addition contained 150 shops, as well as a basilica and library.<sup>76</sup>

As the city expanded, money and taxes from the provinces flooded into Rome. Exceptionally wealthy, Pompey had 175 million *denarii* when he died in the first century BC.<sup>77</sup> With such wealth, Romans gave into luxury, which led to a massively unbalanced trade. Imports far outweighed the exports of Rome. This was true for the rest of Italy as well. Wine was the chief export along with some iron and bronze items and, for a short period, olive oil.<sup>78</sup> Romans exported many other products, though their impact on the market was negligible. Therefore, local products comprised a much smaller percentage of the market in comparison with imported commodities.<sup>79</sup> With Rome's newfound taste for luxury during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire, Romans looked more and more towards slaves to provide the labor necessary for the production and trade of products.

### Use of Slaves

The use of slaves in trade between the second century BC and the second century AD was extensive. There are even two

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<sup>76</sup> Tenney Frank, ed., *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), V: 67.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, *The Roman Economy*, 121.

<sup>78</sup> Frank, *Economic History of Rome*, 309.

<sup>79</sup> Davis, 223.

references to slaves as *negotiatores*.<sup>80</sup> *Negotiatores* were primarily moneylenders, but in this case also entered into trade.<sup>81</sup> However, these two references appear to be the exception rather than the rule. More often slaves had labor-intensive roles. They were used to load and unload boats and in warehouses to move products.<sup>82</sup> The most labor-intensive use of slaves was towing ships and barges. When traders did not use oxen, slaves could be found on paths besides canals and rivers pulling ships and barges upstream on foot by ropes.<sup>83</sup>

The use of slaves in the rest of industry was extensive. Slaves fell into one of two categories, skilled or unskilled labor. Slaves did the majority of the work in most factories.<sup>84</sup> For example, the famous Arrentine pottery in the late BCs and early ADs bore stamps upon them. These included both the stamp of the factory and the stamp of the mold maker. All of the surviving pottery has the name of slaves as the mold maker. If the craftsmen were slaves, it is likely that the majority of manual labor employed were also slaves. Masters also trained unskilled slaves in certain occupations advantageous to their master. In the first century BC, Marcus Licinius Crassus bought

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<sup>80</sup> H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols. in 5. (Berlin, 1892-1914), 1514,7389.

<sup>81</sup> Ethel Hampson Brewster, *Roman Craftsmen and Tradesmen of the Early Empire* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), 36.

<sup>82</sup> Barrow, 108.

<sup>83</sup> Cowell, 115.

<sup>84</sup> Frank, *Economic History of Rome*, 326.

as many as five hundred slaves in a period of eight years. Crassus used these slaves to rebuild buildings that he had purchased cheap after fire engulfed them.<sup>85</sup>

Some masters allowed their slaves to set up a business of their own. The slave's master would invest a certain sum of money to start up the business. The masters gave their slaves more freedoms and the slaves did not work under the direct supervision of their masters. There were several different ways the owner could reap the benefits of his investment. The slave would pay his or her owner a set amount of money every year, or only retain a percentage of the profits. A more generous master could just require a repayment of the initial capital invested.<sup>86</sup> Such a move by a master could be quite beneficial. If he kept his slave under his control, he would gain a profitable business and get free services in the business specialty. If he at some point freed his slave, he would of course keep the free service, plus he would garner the prestige and honor as his former slave became a member of his client base. His master's help in setting him up with a livelihood would perhaps increase the loyalty of the former slave.

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<sup>85</sup> William Linn Westermann, "Industrial Slavery in Roman Italy," *The Journal of Economic History* 2 (1942), 154-55. -(Accessed through JSTOR.)

<sup>86</sup> Johnston, 95.



One long-term problem with industrial dependence on slavery was the lack of innovation. Romans did not need time and labor saving inventions if they did not have to pay wages to freemen. The lack of this innovation also stunted the growth of new products.<sup>87</sup> This of course did not allow industry to grow beyond a certain limit. Perhaps if Rome had been more open to the progress of industry, it would have been able to reverse the horrible balance of trade.

The sweat of slaves oiled Roman industry and trade during the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire. Factories depended upon slaves to create the products they manufactured. The markets depended upon slaves to work the shops, some even running their own businesses. Even the massive importation of products was dependent upon the slave. Slave labor transported these items to the Roman markets. Without the daily labor of slaves, Roman industry would have had a hard time functioning, much less making a profit.

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<sup>87</sup> Frank, *An Economic Survey*, V: 217.

## CHAPTER 4

### DOMESTIC SLAVES

#### The Family in Rome

Domestic life in ancient Rome was an important aspect of the Roman lifestyle. Though the father and to some degree the mother held the power in the house, during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire, they became more dependent upon slave labor to keep the home functioning. There were essentially two types of residences in urban Rome. The *insulae* was an apartment building that housed many families.<sup>88</sup> The numerous poor normally lived in this type of home in Rome. This section will focus primarily on the *domus*. The affluent of Rome, be they nobility or wealthy merchants, used these single-family homes. Romans divided their homes into two sections. They built the rear area around a central garden or open area.<sup>89</sup> The gardens would help to keep the Romans in touch with their agrarian heritage in the otherwise urban environment. This would be the core of the house where the family had their private rooms. The staff performed the usual household duties here as well. The front area around the *atrium* allowed for a private open space that was otherwise missing in the crowded

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<sup>88</sup> Johnston, 117.

<sup>89</sup> Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Christopher Woodall (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 94.

city.<sup>90</sup> Romans designed this area with the guest in mind. It would serve to welcome visitors and display the owner's wealth.<sup>91</sup> From the outside of the home, little could be seen. As the rooms faced inwards towards the central courtyard, the outside was a windowless wall, with perhaps just one doorway.<sup>92</sup>

The organization of the family in the household was extremely hierarchical. The father of the house was the ultimate power within the home.<sup>93</sup> The head of the family in Rome was the *pater familia*. This father of the family was the oldest male in the family. His authority extended to all his progeny regardless of their marital status, age, and where they lived.<sup>94</sup> The only exceptions to this were his daughters. If they were married, then they were transferred to the domain of their in-laws power. As long as the *pater familia* lived, his sons were dependent upon him for approval of all their actions, economic, political, and personal. The *patria potestas* extended even from life to death.<sup>95</sup> At a child's birth, the mother or a servant placed the child on the ground before the father.<sup>96</sup> If the father accepted the child, it was fed and reared. If he did

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<sup>90</sup> Cowell, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Dupont, 92.

<sup>92</sup> Johnston, 117.

<sup>93</sup> Fritz M. Heichelheim and Cedric A. Yeo, *A History of the Roman People* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 56.

<sup>94</sup> Dupont, 104.

<sup>95</sup> L.P. Wilkinson, *The Roman Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 32.

<sup>96</sup> Davis, 184.

not, then the child would either starve to death or be tossed out to die of exposure and perhaps be picked up by a stranger for whatever purpose he or she saw fit. This right did not die as the child grew. A father could "kill, mutilate, expel, or sell into slavery" his children regardless of their age.<sup>97</sup>

The wife, though technically under the complete control of her husband, did have some rights and duties. There was not one single type of marriage. Some husbands allowed their wife more independence than others.<sup>98</sup> The husband shared the responsibility of running the household with his wife. However, often he left her to run it as business otherwise occupied him.<sup>99</sup> The wife was not kept isolated but could sit and discuss affairs with her husband, share a meal, and entertain with him. She would, of course, have to defer to her husband in matters of dispute. The role of the wife or *matron* was elevated in Roman society, in ideal, if not always in practice. When she left the house dressed in her *stola matronalis*, people stepped to the side and made way for her and her always present escort. The household was not just the home of the family; it often housed slaves as well.

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<sup>97</sup> Heichelheim, 56.

<sup>98</sup> Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>99</sup> Fowler, *Social Life*, 144.

## Use of Slaves

It is thought that the domestic realm was the largest user of slaves during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire.<sup>100</sup> Slaves were also common in the homes of the middle class and perhaps even some of the lower class. The example exists of Dioscorus, a man driven to begging, though he still owned several slaves. This is, of course, an exception rather than the rule.

The treatment of domestic slaves often depended on the position the slave held, as slaves ran the gamut of domestic occupations and importance. One account speaks of a slave ordered thrown to lampreys for having broken a dish. It was not uncommon for slave's tongues to be cut out.<sup>101</sup> All slaves were under the power of the master and his family, though often the *matrona* saw to the daily affairs of the house.<sup>102</sup> They were at the constant disposal of their masters. The slaves lived in small cells with the rather rudimentary furniture of a thin mat to sleep on and an often ratty blanket.<sup>103</sup>

During the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire, a select number of trusted slaves occupied the top of the slave power structure. The slave-owner gave the *procurator* the power

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<sup>100</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* 2: 851.

<sup>101</sup> Wilkinson, 126.

<sup>102</sup> Fowler, *Social Life*, 144.

<sup>103</sup> Davis, 48.

to manage business outside the home, including buying supplies. The *atriensis* was the manager of the house. The *dispensator* controlled the supplies and their storage. The *silenarius* maintained the discipline of the slaves and kept the home quiet.<sup>104</sup> The slave-owner divided the rest of the slaves into groups in regards to their given tasks. These *decuriae* usually contained ten slaves.<sup>105</sup> However, each slave usually performed only one specific function. With this differentiation of responsibility, it is easy to see the numbers of slaves used in the home. Near the end of the first century AD, Pliny the Younger had as few as 500 slaves.<sup>106</sup> During the same period, C. Caelius Isodorus had 4,116 slaves, though it should not be assumed that these numbers were normal.

Domestic slaves could hold any number of specialized jobs during this period: front door watchmen, foot washers, hairdressers, pages, and litter bearers.<sup>107</sup> There were even slaves used to help their master remember names. There were entertainers such as dancers, jesters, dwarfs, and even misshapen freaks.<sup>108</sup> Others were personal assistants, secretaries, letter writers, accountants, and managers.

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<sup>104</sup> Davis, 131; 132.

<sup>105</sup> Johnston, 98; 99.

<sup>106</sup> Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Henry T. Rowell, trans. E.O. Lorimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 70.

<sup>107</sup> Johnston, 99.

<sup>108</sup> Johnston, 100.

Households sometimes kept tutors, doctors, and readers.<sup>109</sup> Cooks, dairymen, bakers, fire boys, pantry keepers, caterers, tasters, table wipers, carvers, and waiters helped fill out the kitchen and dining room staff.<sup>110</sup> The cleaning staff included curtain hangers, sweepers, hall keepers, silver plate cleaners, and gold plate cleaners, among others. There were even slaves whose only job was to attend the toilets in the house. These are but a few of the slave jobs that were written down. It is mind boggling to consider the number of positions that have not survived or been mentioned. There was little that a wealthy Roman would have had to do for himself in his own house. Even the less wealthy homes used slaves. However, these slaves tended to be less specialized.

Pragmatically, the functioning of the home was not dependent on slave labor. Most of the very rich could afford to pay free laborers from among the urban poor to accomplish many of the tasks. In addition, the wife and children could also perform household tasks. However, the court of public perception during the late Republic and early Empire encouraged daily domestic dependence on slaves. The use of slaves became a public show of affluence, thus increasing a family's prestige.

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<sup>109</sup> Carcopino, 58.

<sup>110</sup> Blair, 133-134; 135.

## CHAPTER 5

### STATE SLAVES

#### Public Services

In the early Empire, the Emperor created perhaps the greatest addition to the government, the public services.<sup>111</sup> Under these services, the government instituted ambitious building programs, and safety in the city became feasible. The development of these public services was done with the use of slaves.

There was a *cura aquarum*, an organization dedicated to the preservation of the aqueduct system. During the Republic, private citizens under contract maintained this organization.<sup>112</sup> However, this changed when the current contractor Marcus Agrippa died in 33 BC. Agrippa used his own slaves for this purpose and willed these slaves to Augustus at his death. Augustus, in turn, left these slaves to the people of Rome. From that time forward, the government used slaves to maintain the aqueducts. It consisted of as many as 700 public slaves, and "slaves of Caesar".

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<sup>111</sup> Leon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions from City to State* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 319.

<sup>112</sup> Westermann, "Industrial Slavery", 155-156.



Romans had to guard their city against the ever-present threat of fire. Romans were even encouraged to have water at hand in their house in preparation of a house fire.<sup>113</sup> Augustus organized a professional fire department in 22 BC.<sup>114</sup> Augustus used this group of public slaves until he reformed the department in both 6 BC and 6 AD when he began to use free citizens.<sup>115</sup> These free citizens were comprised of mostly freedmen and some of the lower classes.<sup>116</sup> It was from this initial slave group that the policing organization was born as well.<sup>117</sup> The government did not use slaves in this way later, but the public slaves still worked the jails.<sup>118</sup>

At the beginning of the empire, the government started a flurry of public building projects.<sup>119</sup> While many of the workers were freemen, slaves and animals still did the heaviest work.<sup>120</sup> Despite the fact that most of the workers were freemen, the building projects were still dependent on slave labor. The government used brick factories staffed by large numbers of slaves in the building projects.<sup>121</sup> There were a myriad of brick

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<sup>113</sup> Carcopino, 39.

<sup>114</sup> Westermann, "Industrial Slavery", 156.

<sup>115</sup> Barrow, 136.

<sup>116</sup> Westermann, "Industrial Slavery", 156.

<sup>117</sup> Carcopino, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Barrow, 136.

<sup>119</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 1: 736.

<sup>120</sup> Cowell, 117.

<sup>121</sup> Barrow, 115.

making factories with as many as 50 slaves turning out bricks in each factory.<sup>122</sup>

### Mining

Mining was a large employer of state, or public, slaves during the late Republic and early Empire. A slave or perhaps a freedman managed the state mine.<sup>123</sup> The workers themselves were slaves as well. These excavators of gold and silver did not have a long life expectancy due to hard work and poor conditions, including lack of air circulation.<sup>124</sup> Mining needed a high volume of workers resulting in legislation in Rome aimed at keeping the numbers of slave miners low in Italy, though not in the rest of the empire, out of fear of a slave rebellion.<sup>125</sup> Despite these attempts, slaves were vital to Rome's ability to mine vital minerals and metals.

### Governmental Positions

One of the most interesting uses of slaves was in the functioning of the government. Though the slaves could not hold magisterial positions, it was not unusual to see them filling in the lower positions.<sup>126</sup> The Republican government used slaves as "clerks, cashiers, accountants, watchmen, heralds, lictors,

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<sup>122</sup> Cowell, 118.

<sup>123</sup> Cowell, 118.

<sup>124</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 119.

<sup>125</sup> Barrow, 112.

<sup>126</sup> Homo, 300.

beadles, janitors, etc." This use of slaves continued into the empire.<sup>127</sup> In the late Empire, especially in the East, eunuchs held a very powerful position. It was illegal to castrate within the borders of the Roman Empire, so all eunuchs were imported slaves.<sup>128</sup> The eunuchs in the imperial household could be either a slave or an ex-slave.<sup>129</sup> Initially, the eunuchs served only to protect the emperor. However, it was not long before they used this power to influence imperial policy. Eunuchs could allow, or withhold, the right to see the emperor. Often, they would accept bribes from those seeking an audience. This became so common that these bribes became official fees.<sup>130</sup> The power allowed them to affect policy depending on whom they allowed or did not allow to see the emperor.<sup>131</sup> Their power was so great that at times they seemed to rule the empire.<sup>132</sup>

The state itself became dependent on the daily labor of slaves during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire. For a time, slaves protected the city from the threat of fire. They ran the jails and worked the mines. Slaves supplied the labor that made the massive public building projects possible. Perhaps even more importantly, they stocked

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<sup>127</sup> Homo, 310.

<sup>128</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, 201.

<sup>129</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 172; 177.

<sup>130</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, 201.

<sup>131</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 177.

<sup>132</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, 202.

the bureaucracy with the heavy workload, low prestige jobs.  
Without slaves, the paper trail necessary for Roman government  
would have slowed if not stopped altogether.

## CHAPTER 6

### ENTERTAINMENT SLAVES

Shows and spectacles in ancient Rome were much more than a way to while away an afternoon. They played an integral part in the functioning of Roman society. In the late first, early second centuries AD, Juvenal writes that the mob's only lust was for bread and circus (games).<sup>133</sup> In some ways, games were a means to occupy the masses of the Roman mob, but quickly they became a tool of political hopefuls. From early in the Republic, the state provided the games to honor the gods.<sup>134</sup> Elected officials using a Senate approved budget organized the games in association with festivals.<sup>135</sup> Later, these officials would add their own fortunes to the budget in order to mount grander spectacles and amass the personal influence that came with them. Those seeking to gain political office garnered support from the Roman mob by bankrolling private games. As these games increased in number, their religious nature disappeared, becoming only political tools.<sup>136</sup> Games normally consisted of different contests such as gladiatorial fights, hunts, and chariot races. These will be discussed in further

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<sup>133</sup> Johnston, 220.

<sup>134</sup> Carcopino, 203

<sup>135</sup> Richard C. Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>136</sup> Johnston, 220.

detail later, as will another form of entertainment, the theatre.

### Trials, Baths, and Banquets

Trials were another popular attraction in Rome during the late Republic and early Empire.<sup>137</sup> The trials attracted many Romans with their great orators and mudslinging. Technically, there were no lawyers, since payment for lending legal services to another was illegal.<sup>138</sup> However, in true Roman style, they found ways to circumvent this law. The law, while outlawing payment, said nothing in regards to gifts. This loophole allowed representatives such as Cicero, in the first century BC, to earn a very good living off his work in the courts. It is of special interest in this paper to note the treatment of slaves in the courts. A slave brought as a witness would find his or her testimony inadmissible unless given under torture.<sup>139</sup> Romans thought that no slave would give an honest testimony if he or she believed that his or her master would beat him or her upon returning home.

Another mainstay of Roman society and its amusements during this period was the public baths. There were eleven public baths in Rome alone by the time of Constantine in the fourth

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<sup>137</sup> Fowler, *Social Life*, 273.

<sup>138</sup> Johnston, 301; 302.

<sup>139</sup> Davis, 357.

century AD, not to mention the myriad of private baths.<sup>140</sup> The cost of public baths must have been enormous as the personnel heated palatial rooms and huge quantities of water with wood from outside the city. Both slaves and freedmen staffed these baths. Slave labor was essential to maintain the grounds and serve the bathers as masseurs, anointers, delapidators, and perfumers in the baths.

While limited to the rich, banquets became more than just a meal, but a social engagement with great luxuries. The guests and master would recline at large tables and eat their way through a bevy of sumptuous courses. There is a reference to as many as twenty-two courses at a single meal.<sup>141</sup> Slaves served as both the cooks and the servants. His or her role was to make sure that no plate went empty and no glutton went ungorge. Slaves served food and drink, but they also entertained the diners as well.<sup>142</sup>

### Games

The gladiators seem to capture the attention of the modern reader more than anything else in ancient Rome. The origins of the gladiatorial contests were staged slave combat from Etruscan

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<sup>140</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 1:705; 1:735.

<sup>141</sup> Johnston, 214.

<sup>142</sup> Beacham, 198.

funerals<sup>143</sup>, or from human sacrifices at the funerals in Campania.<sup>144</sup> Gladiators came from a wide variety of places during the late Republic and early Empire. Trainers recruited some, and some were down on their luck sons of well-known families.<sup>145</sup> The vast majority, however, were prisoners of war and criminals who were sold and sentenced to slavery.<sup>146</sup>

The training of gladiators was both a public and private affair. Four public schools for training were set up in Rome at state expense during the empire, while a myriad of private businessmen trained gladiators for hire.<sup>147</sup> These soldiers of entertainment were on close terms with death. They were constantly reminded of this fact as their career began with an oath "to suffer death by fire, in chains, or by the sword without protest."<sup>148</sup> Before each battle, they were to acknowledge their mortality by saluting the Emperor and declaring that "those who are about to die salute thee."<sup>149</sup> The life of a gladiator was decidedly monotonous. Lorded over by their normally cruel manager, they trained every day to keep

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<sup>143</sup> John Pearson, *Arena: The Story of the Colosseum* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 26.

<sup>144</sup> Fik Meijer, *The Gladiators: History's Most Deadly Sport*, trans. Liz Waters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 16.

<sup>145</sup> Carcopino, 237.

<sup>146</sup> Wilkinson, 159.

<sup>147</sup> Johnston, 247.

<sup>148</sup> Meijer, 51.

<sup>149</sup> Carcopino, 240.



their bodies at top fitness and to master their chosen weapon.<sup>150</sup> They lived in small cells usually with no windows.<sup>151</sup> Any misconduct, whether active or passive, earned a severe whipping.<sup>152</sup> They ate their barley porridge communally.<sup>153</sup> Living, training, and eating together created a sense of camaraderie undermined only by the fact that they could kill each other the next day.

The managers trained gladiators so rigorously for the battles themselves. The night before a contest the gladiators attended a banquet.<sup>154</sup> On the day of the battle, the rich could visit a gladiator's cell, allowing those who desired to ogle at him.<sup>155</sup> A defeated, but still living, fighter might appeal to the crowd and the Emperor for mercy.<sup>156</sup> If denied mercy, a gladiator's opponent would strike him dead with no hesitation.<sup>157</sup> Despite these severe drawbacks, a successful gladiator had a few benefits. He could earn his freedom or be rewarded with expensive gifts or money. His name would often appear in the

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<sup>150</sup> Pearson, 103.

<sup>151</sup> Meijer, 52.

<sup>152</sup> Davis, 392.

<sup>153</sup> Meijer, 56.

<sup>154</sup> Johnston, 262.

<sup>155</sup> Davis, 392.

<sup>156</sup> Meijer, 61.

<sup>157</sup> Johnston, 262; 263.

streets either in graffiti praising his skill or on the lips of adoring women.<sup>158</sup>

The most well known gladiator was Spartacus. A Thracian in the Roman army, Spartacus deserted and was captured.<sup>159</sup> In Capua in 73 BC, Spartacus led his fellow gladiators to break out of a gladiatorial school.<sup>160</sup> They had accumulated as many as 90,000 runaway slaves<sup>161</sup> before Crassus defeated them in 71 BC.<sup>162</sup> This, more than anything, showed the potential power of slaves in the heart of the Roman Italy.

Animal hunts were also a popular form of entertainment in the games during this period. These battles pitted animals with humans. Sometimes the men would be criminals or even gladiators.<sup>163</sup> The criminal battles would often be little more than executions bringing to mind the "Christians thrown to the lions".<sup>164</sup> The most popular type involved the gladiators. These used slave gladiators fighting a myriad of animals from local species such as foxes, boars, bears, bulls, and stags<sup>165</sup> to more exotic fare such as panthers, tigers, lions, and elephants<sup>166</sup>.

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<sup>158</sup> Davis, 392.

<sup>159</sup> Meijer, 31.

<sup>160</sup> Pearson, 99.

<sup>161</sup> Cowell, 106.

<sup>162</sup> Johnston, 88.

<sup>163</sup> Davis, 398-399.

<sup>164</sup> Johnston, 264.

<sup>165</sup> Beacham, 12.

<sup>166</sup> Carcopino, 238.

Chariot races were a particularly popular game. These races featured four chariots pulled by two to four horses.<sup>167</sup> They would race for seven *spatial*, or laps, for close to six miles.<sup>168</sup> The drivers were normally slaves or freedmen of a lower class.<sup>169</sup> Charioteers were hired out by one of several racing factions named for the color of the racer's tunic.<sup>170</sup> There were the red, the white, the blue, the green, the purple, and the gold. The races could be deadly as the drivers had their leather reins wrapped around them.<sup>171</sup> In the event of a crash, they would have to cut the reins or risk having the horses drag them to death.

### Theatre

The theatre was another popular form of entertainment during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire. It was not uncommon for actors to be slaves specifically trained in the dramatic art.<sup>172</sup> Several names of slave actors were recorded including Antiphon and Panurgus. The origins of Roman theatre lay with the Etruscans. The earliest reference to acting in Rome is in 364 BC. It was during this time that Etruscan actors were imported to appease the gods in hopes of ending a plague

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<sup>167</sup> Cowell, 172.

<sup>168</sup> Carcopino, 216.

<sup>169</sup> Cowell, 172.

<sup>170</sup> Johnston, 237.

<sup>171</sup> Cowell, 171.

<sup>172</sup> Peter D. Arnott, *The Ancient Greek and Roman Theatre*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 131.

that was devastating the city. Initially, plays were little more than dance recitals with a story line. They had no lines or singing. The actors performed with action alone. It was not until the Greek influence that stage shows reached the classical form.

There were several forms of theatre in Rome. The classical comedy and tragedy were the highest forms. Mime was a collection of short performances "akin to vaudeville." Pantomimes were dance pieces usually built on myths and legends.<sup>173</sup>

Entertainment in Rome during the late Republic and early Empire was dependent upon the slave. Slaves provided the necessary labor that allowed the popular public baths to function. They cooked and served at the banquets and worked both in front and behind the scenes of the Roman theatre. Perhaps most importantly, they risked their lives in the games. These games appeased the mob and gave political influence to aspiring politicians. Without the use of slaves in Roman entertainment, the ruling class would have spent more effort maintaining their dominance over the mob and less time maintaining Rome as a world power.

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<sup>173</sup> Arnott, 95; 132; 138; 144.

## CHAPTER 7

### INTELLECTUAL AND MILITARY SLAVES AND RELIGION

#### Intellectual Slaves

When writing of Rome's intellectual pursuits it is important to remember that only the highest strata of Roman society had the time and financial resources to not only become educated but also to make use of intellectual slaves. Though there were a myriad of occupations available for intelligent slaves, such as "clerks, cashiers, accountants,"<sup>174</sup> imperial eunuchs,<sup>175</sup> overseers,<sup>176</sup> *procurator*,<sup>177</sup> money lenders,<sup>178</sup> readers<sup>179</sup>, and financial managers<sup>180</sup> (most of which have been previously mentioned), this section shall focus on the areas of education and medicine.

Education in Rome was not the responsibility of the state; instead, a child's education rested squarely on the shoulders of the parents, particularly the father.<sup>181</sup> The home was the center of education for young children in Roman society. Young men in early Rome continued their education in the army.<sup>182</sup> However by

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<sup>174</sup> Homo, 300.

<sup>175</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 172.

<sup>176</sup> Fowler, *Social Life*, 217.

<sup>177</sup> White, 355.

<sup>178</sup> Barrow, 108.

<sup>179</sup> Barrow, 61.

<sup>180</sup> Westermann, "Industrial Slavery", 158.

<sup>181</sup> Dupont, 224.

<sup>182</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 76.

the late Republic and early Empire, parents began to educate their children in a more systematic way. Parents often left their infants in the charge of a nurse.<sup>183</sup> Quintilian suggested, in the first century AD, that she speak well since the child would learn his first words from her.<sup>184</sup> From the time of the nurse's dismissal, a *pedagogue* would take over the child's education. A pedagogue wore many hats. This slave was a chaperone, tutor, and attendant.<sup>185</sup> It was here that the child would learn the fundamentals of reading.<sup>186</sup> Their father had a decision to make on the next step of education. If he were rich enough, he would hire a Greek slave to be a *tutor*.<sup>187</sup> If not, he might choose to send his child to a school. It was not uncommon for one man's slave to serve as a tutor for more than his own children. These were not the only choices, however, as Cato was more than willing to point out. He held so tightly to his conservative beliefs that he did not want his son to feel indebted to a slave for the attainment of knowledge and learning.<sup>188</sup> At this level, children learned the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.<sup>189</sup> From the ages of twelve to fifteen, children moved on to a secondary school where they

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<sup>183</sup> Davis, 189.

<sup>184</sup> Carcopino, 104.

<sup>185</sup> Barrow, 39.

<sup>186</sup> Carcopino, 104.

<sup>187</sup> Davis, 192; 193.

<sup>188</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 76.

<sup>189</sup> Davis, 198.

learned Greek.<sup>190</sup> The third stage of education focused on rhetoric. The higher one progressed in their education, the less likely it was that a slave would teach you.

Slaves also worked in the area of medicine during this period. Most of the early doctors and, in fact, medicine itself came from Greece.<sup>191</sup> They worked in many different environments. They routinely functioned on farms to maintain the health of the farm hands.<sup>192</sup> It was not uncommon for the top families in Rome to own their own slave doctors.<sup>193</sup> In the city at large, most private practice physicians were freedmen who had been trained in the homes of the rich<sup>194</sup> or apprenticed under private doctors when they were slaves and then were manumitted<sup>195</sup>. However, for a long time most doctors remained slaves.<sup>196</sup>

### Military Slaves

The military use of slaves in Rome was not altogether unheard of. They officially could not serve as soldiers due to the danger of a slave revolt.<sup>197</sup> Augustus, however, freed a number of slaves to use in his army around the first century BC.

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<sup>190</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 77.

<sup>191</sup> Cowell, 131.

<sup>192</sup> Barrow, 84.

<sup>193</sup> Dupont, 265.

<sup>194</sup> Barrow, 62.

<sup>195</sup> Paul Veyne, "The Roman Empire," in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1, *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1987), 59.

<sup>196</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 106.

<sup>197</sup> Barrow, 146.

They served as rowers in the navies as well.<sup>198</sup> Emergency situations could also call for the use of slaves militarily. Such was the case when Rome feared a march on Rome by Hannibal in 216 BC.<sup>199</sup> The government quickly marshaled two legions of slave troops. Slaves also held another role in the military. Many soldiers kept slaves with them while they were serving.<sup>200</sup> These slaves served as "batmen" or personal attendants. It was even common for more affluent officers or soldiers to keep more than one slave with them. It appears that soldiers often entered into slave trade. This would be easy for soldiers who might be able to take prisoners of war.

### Religion

Religion played an important role in the slave's life, and the slave played an equally notable function in the religion and its festivals. Coming from nearly every region and culture of the empire, and its neighbors, Romans for the most part allowed slaves to maintain their personal religions, with few exceptions, up until the time of mass Christianity in Rome.<sup>201</sup> Romans tolerated these religions assuming they "were not dangerous socially or morally or politically."<sup>202</sup> Romans also required these religions to be tolerant. Though in general the

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<sup>198</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 110.

<sup>199</sup> Heichelheim, 131-32.

<sup>200</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 647.

<sup>201</sup> Buckland, 74.

<sup>202</sup> Barrow, 161.



state religion was open-minded in regards to the slave's role, it still excluded slaves from many Roman cults.<sup>203</sup> This was apparently not done out of an attempt to debase slaves but simply since slaves were outside the traditional lines of Roman society. Slaves, however, did have their own cult of Diana. Festivals and temples were open to slaves and they played central roles in some of these festivals.<sup>204</sup> In the *Saturnalia*, slaves would switch roles with their masters, if only symbolically, for a short time. The women of the house served their slaves in the festival of *Matronalia*. The entrance of Christianity added a new opportunity to slaves. A slave who joined a monastery would become free, at least until he left monastic life.<sup>205</sup> In the sixth century AD, Justinian adapted this to a permanent freedom after three years as a monk. Later, Justinian changed the rules again. If a slave could gain his master's permission to join a monastery, he would immediately gain his freedom. If he could not get his master's permission, the master had only one year to reclaim his slave or lose him.

Slaves were important in the daily intellectual, military, and religious life of Rome during the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire. Greek slaves taught the Roman children. Slave doctors healed the people of Rome. When the

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<sup>203</sup> Buckland, 73; 74.

<sup>204</sup> Barrow, 160.

<sup>205</sup> Buckland, 600.

city fell under threat, the slaves tipped the balance in Rome's favor. They played integral roles in many of Rome's most important festivals. Slaves taught, healed, and protected the city of Rome.

## CHAPTER 8

### FEMALE SLAVES

#### Women in Rome

The view of women in ancient Rome was full of contradictory perspectives. The traditional entrance of women into Rome is itself conflicting. When the Romans escaped with the Sabine women, the females were little more than possessions for the plundering. However, when the Sabines returned for their women, it was the newly made Roman wives "whose wrong had given rise to the war, with loosened hair and torn garments, their woman's timidity lost... dared to go amongst the flying missiles... to part the hostile forces and disarm them of their anger."<sup>206</sup> The very destruction of the kings of Rome was brought about around 509 BC, when Lucretia's "resolute modesty was overcome, as if by force, by his victorious lust; and Tarquinius (the son of the King) departed, exulting in his conquest of a woman's honor."<sup>207</sup> Though Livy admits that many of these older traditional stories "are rather adorned with poetic legends than based upon trustworthy historical proofs," the stories themselves reveal much about the Roman view of women.<sup>208</sup> Even the very lifeblood of Rome was entrusted to women. The Vestal Virgins kept the

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<sup>206</sup> Livy, 19.

<sup>207</sup> Livy, 73.

<sup>208</sup> Livy, 4.

flame of Rome alight. Romans long held that as long as the flame stayed lit, Rome would not fall. However, despite these rather lofty views, women were not given full legal and social rights.<sup>209</sup>

Though not possessing full legal rights during the Republic, women in Rome held a much more free life than most women in the ancient world, particularly those of Greece. They had no political rights at all, and their civil rights were not their own.<sup>210</sup> Considered incapable of controlling themselves, any attempt to use their civil rights or economic power must be given express permission by their "tutor." This guardian was normally the "*pater familia*." If she were unmarried, this would be her father. If married, this would be her husband. When she was unmarried and her father had passed away, she would be under the guardianship of her closest male relative.<sup>211</sup> When she needed her guardian's permission, and was unable to get his approval, she might be able to appeal to a magistrate "to have his assent forced, or to have a different guardian appointed." However, under Augustus, some women were able to free themselves from the bonds of tutelage altogether. This right was only

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<sup>209</sup> This being said, women in Rome held a much higher position than their counterparts elsewhere in the ancient world.

<sup>210</sup> Eva Cantarella, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 113.

<sup>211</sup> Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 151.

possible through the rigors of childbirth. Three children raised would liberate a freeborn woman, while four children did the same for a freedwoman.

It was the role of mother and *matrona*<sup>212</sup> for which women were raised. This role found the women in control of the running of the household.<sup>213</sup> This included the supervising of slaves, raising of children, and to some degrees even the household budget. Roman society even celebrated her with a Roman Mother's Day, the *Matronalia*, on which she was given gifts. Unlike her Greek counterparts, Roman women attended public games, theater, and some religious ceremonies of state.<sup>214</sup>

#### Use of Female Slaves

There were many occupations available to a female slave during the late Republic and early Empire. Many of these are discussed in other sections of this paper, but some will be further discussed here. Either these were, of course, positions that were unique to female slaves, or positions in which women were treated differently than men who held the same occupations.

Though the following jobs were divided into different realms, they were by no means exclusive. A slave in an

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<sup>212</sup> This refers the role of woman of the house, a role only obtained through marriage.

<sup>213</sup> Johnston, 65.

<sup>214</sup> Johnston, 64.

entertainment or intellectual position may have been able to play to the public at large or retained simply for the use of a single person or family. A weaver or spinner could work on a farm, a factory, or a private household. However, for the sake of simplicity, these occupations were relegated to their most logical area. In the agricultural arena, the most important woman would normally be the wife of the estate manager.<sup>215</sup> This *vilica* would be in charge of supervising domestic affairs. Other female slaves would be in charge of grinding grain or cultivating the field.<sup>216</sup> Among the factories and shops, female slaves worked as spinners and weavers as well as clothesmakers.<sup>217</sup> Female slaves most often worked in the domestic realm. They were used as attendants, ladies maids, clothes folders, hair dressers, haircutters, mirror holders, menders, kitchen staff, and masseuses.<sup>218</sup> They also cleaned the house.<sup>219</sup> Unlike their counterparts in Greece, female slaves were not normally water carriers due to the use of aqueducts in and around Rome.<sup>220</sup> A more specialized use of female slaves is that of the child nurse or wet nurse for the children of the master.<sup>221</sup> State owned female slaves could be used as infirmary

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<sup>215</sup> White, 354.

<sup>216</sup> Canterella, 114.

<sup>217</sup> Pomeroy, 191.

<sup>218</sup> Pomeroy, 191-192.

<sup>219</sup> Cantarella, 114.

<sup>220</sup> Pomeroy, 191-192.

<sup>221</sup> Sandra R. Joshel, "Nurturing the Master's Child: Slavery and the Roman Child-nurse," *Signs* 12, no. 1 (1986): 3-22. -(Accessed through JSTOR.)

attendants, attendants, and occasionally as clerks or secretaries.<sup>222</sup> Some women worked in jobs specifically for their intellectual prowess. These women were often secretaries, clerks, and readers. Many female slaves were also used as entertainers of varying types.

### Prostitution

During the end of the Republic and beginning of the Empire, prostitution in Rome was not merely a job for slaves, or women alone, but many of those employed were both, at least according to Dio Chrysostom in the late first century AD.<sup>223</sup> Prostitution of one's slave was indeed a source of good money for the slave's owner.<sup>224</sup> A woman was considered a prostitute when she had sex for money, and even when she "openly prostitutes herself without doing so for money."<sup>225</sup> It was also unfortunate that once a woman ceased to sell her body, she was still "branded with infamy... for the disgrace is not removed." Slavers raised many exposed babies for this type of work.<sup>226</sup> It would only require the finder of the baby to raise the child (using it for slave labor) until she reached an acceptable age, and then she would

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<sup>222</sup> Pomeroy, 191-192.

<sup>223</sup> Rebecca Fleming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit: The Sexual Economy of Female Prostitution in the Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 38-61. -(Accessed through JSTOR.)

<sup>224</sup> Pomeroy, 192.

<sup>225</sup> *Digest*, in *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, ed. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 118.

<sup>226</sup> Cantarella, 116.

be sold to a brothel or more likely ownership would be retained and she would be licensed out independently. Prostitution centered in taverns, inns, bathhouses, but most often brothels. A *leno*, or procurer, headed these brothels.<sup>227</sup> Prostitutes in a brothel lived a very closed life. *Lenos* confined them to the house, where they ate meals together and were otherwise socially isolated from the outside world. Their "transactions" would take place in a small cell, above whose door hung a plaque telling the price and specialties of the occupant. The *leno* handled and kept all the money and lorded over his charges often in a "cruel and coercive manner," meeting only the prostitute's basic needs. Later in the Empire, in the fifth century AD, however, Co-Emperors Theodosius and Valentinian declared, "If any fathers or masters... should impose upon their daughters or female slaves the necessity of sinning, we do not allow such procurers to enjoy the right of ownership... of so great criminality."<sup>228</sup> Thus, the government forbade prostituting a slave against her will.

#### Wet-Nurses

Wet-nurses, were for obvious reasons, an exclusively female task. It is important to note that not all wet-nurses were slaves. In the second century BC, Licinia, Cato the Elder's

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<sup>227</sup> Fleming, 43.

<sup>228</sup> *Theodosian Code*, 435.



wife, breastfed her children and the children of her slaves, though this appears the unusual rather than the norm.<sup>229</sup> In the second century AD, Tacitus, however, implies that most wet-nurses were either slaves or ex-slaves.<sup>230</sup> Wet-nurses were used for both children of affluent families<sup>231</sup> and for slave children<sup>232</sup>. It could be that the vanity of wealthy women aiming to keep their figures kept them from breastfeeding, but wet-nurses could also have been used to keep the wife free to have more children.<sup>233</sup> Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the use of wet-nurses for slave children had a much more pragmatic purpose. They were used so that the mothers could be sent back to work, thus decreasing the number of female slaves who were incapacitated by the need to breastfeed. Soranus encouraged women, in the second century AD, to nurse their own children in order to encourage a maternal bond.<sup>234</sup> This refers, of course, to free women and their children, as a maternal bond among slaves would be troublesome to a slave owner. Soranus also gave his recommendations on wet-nurses. He declared that wet-nurses should not only be physically healthy but also

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<sup>229</sup> Keith R. Bradley, "Wet-nursing at Rome: a Study in Social Relations," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 202.

<sup>230</sup> Bradley, "Wet-nursing", 203.

<sup>231</sup> Pomeroy, 168.

<sup>232</sup> Bradley, "Wet-nursing" 207.

<sup>233</sup> Bradley, "Wet-nursing", 212.

<sup>234</sup> Pomeroy, 168.

emotionally and mentally, holding only positive traits "since by nature the nursling becomes similar to the nurse."<sup>235</sup>

### Sexual Availability

A necessary note on the lives of female slaves is that of sexual availability. A master had total sexual rights over his slaves regardless of his marital status.<sup>236</sup> While this refers to both male and female slaves, there are many more references to the use of female slaves. The master was not the only person who had sexual rights to his slaves, but it extended to those to whom the master gave permission, be they friends or family.<sup>237</sup> Cato the Censor even charged his male slaves for sexual encounters with his female slaves, thus, creating an in-home brothel.<sup>238</sup> Seneca referred to "unchastity as a necessity for a slave."<sup>239</sup> Roman society so accepted this sexual availability that it was commonly known that leading figures such as Scipio Africanus, Emperor Augustus, and Emperor Claudius had female slave lovers.<sup>240</sup> At the beginning of the Roman Republic, Appius Claudius, a prominent politician, attempted to have his way with a freeborn woman by claiming that she was no more than a

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<sup>235</sup> Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H.A. Shapiro, ed., *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 379.

<sup>236</sup> Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy and Shapiro, 300.

<sup>237</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 96.

<sup>238</sup> Pomeroy, 192.

<sup>239</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 96.

<sup>240</sup> J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1962), 230.

slave.<sup>241</sup> It reveals the Roman attitude towards slaves that the sexual taking of another's slave was not a crime against the slave, but an unlawful use of another's property.<sup>242</sup>

The use of female slaves was integral to the functioning of Roman society during the late Republic and early Empire. They nourished the Roman infants daily from their own breast and were normally the voice that the children first learned to mimic. They were also a rather prominent form of sexual release for the men of Rome, either as prostitutes or as private slaves. The female slave helped keep the domestic peace of Rome.

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<sup>241</sup> Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy and Shapiro, 227.

<sup>242</sup> Jonathon Walters, "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35.

## CHAPTER 9

### MANUMISSION

It appears that the freeing, or manumitting, of slaves was as extensive as the practice of slavery itself. A study of the means and methods of manumission may reveal much about the place of slaves and slavery in Rome. Looking at the development and changes in manumission throughout the history of Rome, it is apparent that Rome was becoming increasingly aware of its dependence on slaves. Rome countered this dependence by attempting to keep its slaves compliant by increasing the methods of manumission. Slaves would be less likely to perform slowly or rebel if they held the hope of one day gaining their freedom.

#### Monarchy

The Monarchy of Rome lasted from 753 to 510 BC. Historians know little about slavery during the Monarchical period. This is simply due to a lack of surviving documentation. The true origin of slavery and manumission in Rome is unknown. However, since slavery was a common institution throughout the ancient world, it seems quite possible that its origin lies in the very birth of Rome. In the first century BC, Dionysius of Halicarnassus gave a little information. He attributed

manumission of slaves to the king Servius Tullius who reigned in Rome from 578-535 BC.<sup>243</sup> Dionysius, however, does refer to the institution of slavery before the reign of Servius Tullius. He wrote that Romulus himself allowed fathers to sell their sons into slavery.<sup>244</sup> Thus, though the origins of slavery in Rome are unknown, it had developed into a firmly established institution by the time of the Republic.

### Republic

The Republic ran roughly from 510 to 27 BC. The first form of manumission under the Republic was *censu*. This form was perhaps one of the oldest ways of manumission in Rome. The difficulty for slaves was that the government only performed the *censu* in the city of Rome itself.<sup>245</sup> Rome took a census every five years. The government conducted the census in order to regulate the citizenry in terms of taxes and military service. For the census, citizens had to appear before the Censor who recorded their names. Owners used this system to their advantage to manumit their slaves. The owner brought his or her slave to the census. The slave then professed (*professio*) him or herself to be a citizen, *censu profitebantur*. Once the

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<sup>243</sup> Buckland, 439.

<sup>244</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*. Book II: 27. Translated by Earnest Cary. December 2007. [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dionysius\\_of\\_Halicarnassus/2A\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dionysius_of_Halicarnassus/2A*.html)

<sup>245</sup> Buckland, 440.

Censor had the master's consent (*iussum*), he would then inscribe the slave's name on the list of citizens. Thus, the slave became a free citizen. It is unclear when the slave actually gained his freedom. Since it was impossible to complete the census in one day, it is uncertain as to whether the slave gained freedom when the Censor wrote his name on the census or when the government officialized the papers.

*Testamento* was the most popular form of manumission, and for good reason. In this form, the master granted freedom in his *testamentum in comitiis calatis*, or will.<sup>246</sup> There were however, some restrictions with this form. The slave had to be the property of the will maker both at the time of the writing of the will and at the master's death. The master could also apply conditions to the slave's freedom. This most likely involved either a job that the slave could hold or some social function that the slave had to perform for the family of the deceased. This was understandably the most popular form of manumission. This allowed a master to keep his most trusted and productive slaves for his entire life. He was also able to keep his slaves loyal by giving them the hope that he might free them upon his death. Perhaps the most important reason a master freed his slaves in this way was the memory that he would leave behind. Since Roman society was a shame culture rather than a

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<sup>246</sup> Buckland, 443.

guilt culture<sup>247</sup>, the face that a Roman citizen showed to the public was the most important social and political mechanism he had. By freeing his slaves upon his death, the master guaranteed that the last action he took would leave an impression of generosity and benevolence. Moreover, he left a group of freedmen who remained loyal to his family long after his death.

The last formal mode of manumission was *vindicta*. This form was a variation of the process called *causa liberalis*.<sup>248</sup> In *causa liberalis*, the government freed an unlawfully enslaved man. Masters later used this system to manumit legitimate slaves. It appears that the magistrate who officiated the procedure was fully aware that the claim of unlawful slavery was fraudulent. However, he allowed the claim to stand. Upon the transfer of freedom, the magistrate (often a *lictor*) tapped the slave on the shoulder with his official staff. While this legally freed the slave, a symbolic act would often follow. The owner of the slave grasped his slave's hand, and then turned his slave around to symbolize the turning over of a new leaf. This allowed him to shed his slave life and enter into his new life as a freed man.

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<sup>247</sup> A shame culture is a society in which the shame placed upon one by the society holds a greater weight. In a guilt culture, the shame that one holds against oneself holds a greater weight.

<sup>248</sup> Buckland, 441; 442.

Along with these three formal methods of manumission, several informal processes existed. One such form was *inter amicos*. This was a simple statement from a master to his slave that the slave was among friends (*inter amicos*) essentially meaning that they were now peers.<sup>249</sup> Another was that of *per epistolam*, a simple letter declaring the slave's freedom. The master wrote this letter and then presented it to his slave.

The government could also manumit public slaves. Officials could give freedom to any slave who performed his or her task with distinction.

A short survey of manumission through the Republic will reveal more details about the use of manumission. The government first taxed the freeing of a slave in 357 BC.<sup>250</sup> When Hannibal entered Italy around 216 BC, Romans feared a march on their capital.<sup>251</sup> They then freed 8,000 slaves in order to have more men to fight. Sulla, in the late Republic, freed 10,000 men in order to increase his own political influence.<sup>252</sup> When a famine fell upon Rome in the first century BC, the government passed an edict that levied a tax on slaves in the attempt to

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<sup>249</sup> Buckland, 444.

<sup>250</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 83.

<sup>251</sup> Appian, *Appian's Roman History*, trans. Horace White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912) 4: 347.

<sup>252</sup> Appian, I: 187.



gain enough money to import grain.<sup>253</sup> When Sextus Pompeius was in need of oarsmen, he freed 20,000 men.<sup>254</sup>

### Empire

The Roman Empire existed from approximately 27 BC to 476 AD. During the period, *Vindicta* and *Testamento* remained in use and *Censu* ceased being used. However, one new formal mode of manumission during the empire was *in sacro sanctus ecclesiis*. It is possible that this existed during the republic, but it was not until the empire, specifically Emperor Constantine, that the government legally recognized this form.<sup>255</sup> With this method, the priests and bishops possessed measure of governmental and social power. In this form, a church official, as opposed to a civil magistrate, could manumit a slave. In addition, the priest or bishop could free his own slaves with absolutely no accountability. There was no requirement of other witnesses or written confirmation. The government even gave special allowances to *in sacro sanctus ecclesiis*. On festival days and Sundays, Constantine forbade litigations and suits. This was not the case with manumission through *in sacro sanctus ecclesiis*.

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<sup>253</sup> Appian, 4: 491.

<sup>254</sup> W. E. Heitland, *Agricola: A Study of Agriculture and Rustic Life in the Greco-Roman World from the Point of View of Labour* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1921), 326.

<sup>255</sup> *The Theodosian Code and Novels*, 87; 88.

During the Imperial period, many of these previously informal methods became formal. The government gave legitimate status to *inter amicos*, or the declaration of being among friends. As is often the case in law, this could only become legitimate upon the completion of certain steps. The signature of five witnesses completed this act.<sup>256</sup> Likewise, *per epistolam* also gained official status. In this era, the letter (*quasi ex imitatione codicillorum*) required five witnesses' signatures to be official. The government did not consider the slave manumitted until he or she took possession of the letter. The act of formally adopting a slave as a son (*apud acta*) was another mode of manumission. This of course required both documentation and at least one witness. The ceremonial destruction of the papers of slavery or handing over of these papers to the slave was another form of manumission. Again, the government required witnesses.

At least one mode remained informal. A slave gained his freedom by wearing the "cap of liberty" on at least one of two occasions.<sup>257</sup> The first was the wake, where he would stand next to his master's body. The second required the slave's participation in the funeral procession. One method was manumission directly by the state. If a slave felt his or her

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<sup>256</sup> Buckland, 554.

<sup>257</sup> Buckland, 555.

master treated him or her cruelly, he or she could escape to the main square and seek asylum under the statue of the Emperor.<sup>258</sup> The authorities would then investigate the matter, and they could manumit the slave if the accusations were true.

While the same forms of manumission were available to women, there was at least one form that was available only to women. This mode involved the marriage of a slave woman to a freeman. This of course was only the case if the slave woman's master gave his permission for the marriage.<sup>259</sup> If the master's permission was not given, not only would she remain a slave, but the marriage itself would be nullified.

As Roman politicians used the practice of law to garner a reputation in the public eye<sup>260</sup>, the laws governing slavery were not simple. For every law or institution, there were a myriad of special caveats. A few of these will now be discussed. A slave used as collateral in a contract or loan could not be manumitted.<sup>261</sup> This was the case regardless of the owner's ability to replace the slave in the contract with another slave or with money. If a slave was owned by more than one person or by a company, he or she could not be freed except by the consent of all owners. When one owner attempted to free the slave, his

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<sup>258</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 222.

<sup>259</sup> Buckland, 555.

<sup>260</sup> Johnston, 301.

<sup>261</sup> Buckland, 573; 575; 584.

property rights were forfeit and the slave passed into the exclusive ownership of all other stakeholders. A recently divorced woman was a rather interesting exception. A woman was unable to manumit or sell any slaves within sixty days of the termination of the marriage. This was in order to keep track of potential witnesses in cases of adultery. This law however, did not take into account the promise of freedom that the wife might offer for the slave's protection (perjury) from her affair. The government could revoke a manumission if it was found that the master had been forced to free his or her slave.<sup>262</sup> It seems likely that this law was a response to the chants of the crowd to free a gladiator after a particularly satisfying win. A slave could not free his or her own personal slave without the permission of his master.

Slaves and manumission played a varied role in the Empire. In year 4 AD, the Lex Aelia Sentia limited the right to citizenship of manumitted slaves.<sup>263</sup> During the first century AD, ex-slaves held many high level positions in the central government.<sup>264</sup> In the early Empire, a person's will could free only a certain number of slaves due to a restriction by Augustus.

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<sup>262</sup> Buckland, 593; 596.

<sup>263</sup> Thomas E. J. Wiedemann, "The Regularity of Manumission at Rome," *The Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 162-175. -(Accessed through JSTOR.)

<sup>264</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 116; 128.

There are a number of reasons for freeing a slave. When a master freed his slave, he did not sever ties with his slave. Instead, the slave became a client of his master. This relationship was one of dependence and honor. The patron expected support from his slave in political matters, while the client expected help from his patron through the granting of favors. A master might free his slave in order to build up his client base, and therefore shore up more political support. There is also the matter of social reputation to consider. A master might manumit his slave or slaves in order to appear more magnanimous to the community at large. Since Rome was, as previously stated, a shame culture rather than a guilt culture, this motivation should not be overlooked. The master might also wish to flaunt his affluence through manumission. Though slavery was a huge aspect of Roman culture, slaves were not cheap. For a master to free a slave with no compensation, he would essentially be burning money; something only the rich could afford to do. When a slave had grown old beyond his ability to be of any use, an owner might manumit him simply to be free of the burden. Manumission might also be a form of reward. A master could free a slave who had proven him or herself as loyal and efficient through exceptional service. It appears that it was common for masters to promise freedom to their slaves for their devoted service.

Manumission was extensive in Rome. There were a myriad of forms and reasons for manumitting a slave. It is through looking at slavery and manumission that one can see both the morality and sense of humanity that the Romans held.

The evolution of manumission serves as a map to the development of slavery in Rome. As Romans became more aware of their dependence on slaves, their attitude towards their slaves changed. The methods of manumission became more varied and lax. The increase of slave manumission can be seen as a mechanism to keep their slaves happy and hopeful. If the slaves rebelled, not only would this cause a massive conflict, but also the absence of these laborers would cause many if not all of Rome's societal institutions to fail. It appears that even the Romans were aware of their dependence on slaves.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

The cage is a double degrader. Any bar, whether concrete or intangible, that stands between a living thing and its liberty is a communicable perversity, dangerous to the sanity of everyone concerned.<sup>265</sup>

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Slavery as an institution certainly degrades both the slave and the master and it was no different in Rome. Slaves were degraded to the status of *res* or thing.<sup>266</sup> To be listed alongside beasts in personal accounts and law records was to become not just a thing but sub-human.<sup>267</sup> On the other side, Romans as well were degraded as they revealed their more base behaviors. Slaves could be beaten, branded, hung by their hair, and maimed for the smallest mistake, be it theirs or happenstance.<sup>268</sup> Romans displayed the disfigurements of their deformed slaves or dwarfs. Not all masters were so vicious, yet there was little to save a slave if he were. Only the slave's

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<sup>265</sup> Tom Robbins, *Another Roadside Attraction* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 70.

<sup>266</sup> Buckland, 3.

<sup>267</sup> Gaius, *On the Provincial Edict*, 323.

<sup>268</sup> Barrow, 31; 29.

monetary worth protected him or her from a cruel master.<sup>269</sup> This behavior surely debased the slave owners as well as the slave. This is to some degree a modern projection on an ancient society, but even Seneca states that Romans punish for absurd reasons.<sup>270</sup>

The effect of the degrading view of slaves does not end with morality. When one looks down upon the person, he or she looks down upon the position that person holds. No proper free man would want a job that he viewed as only fit for a slave. In this way, the Romans became dependent upon slaves to do the jobs that they would not do. Those wageworkers who would even do the job would demand a compensationally higher wage; surely more than it would have cost to have a slave perform it in the first place. With a lack of experience in these occupations, Romans would lose the skills to accomplish the tasks, thus becoming more dependent on slave labor.

During the late Republic and early Empire, the Romans grew accustomed to luxury and this led to further dependence upon slaves as their laziness increased. Though the extravagance of Trimalchio's dinner party is satire, it is a distortion of behaviors and attitudes that were present in Rome.<sup>271</sup> There was

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<sup>269</sup> Johnston, 102.

<sup>270</sup> Barrow, 30.

<sup>271</sup> Barrow, 24.



little a wealthy Roman had to do for him or herself if he had the capital to buy someone to do it for him.

This dependence upon slaves between the second century BC and the second century AD showed itself in the use of slaves in all the areas of Roman life. In agriculture, they provided the manual labor as well as the organization and leadership. This provided Rome with a certain amount of food and economy. Slaves became even more important in later Rome, as the rich pushed the rural poor off their lands into the city, where they would eventually lose their skill for agricultural work.

During this period, slaves worked the factories, again as both the physical labor and the administration, which supplied Rome with products and economy. They were also the proverbial grease that lubricated the trade of Rome. They brought in the much needed grain and supplies and the much sought after luxury items from the rest of the world. Slaves ran many of the shops and services that kept Rome's economy functioning.

In the home, slaves performed nearly every task when financially possible. They cooked, cleaned, entertained, guarded, and even attended their masters in the bathroom. In the richest homes, families used slaves so extensively that each slave had only one highly specialized job. This resulted in a huge number of slaves in the household.

The state grew dependent on slaves during the late Republic and early Empire. They maintained the city's water supply and, for a time, were both the fire department and police force. If not for these services, the city would have ground to a halt. They mined the gold and silver that augmented the taxes in the treasury. They provided the muscle that, quite literally, built the city of Rome. Slaves were used in a myriad of positions in the governmental machinery, almost controlling it by the late empire.

Slaves were vital to the entertainment of Rome. They staffed the popular baths. They performed on the stages that brought culture to the masses. The popular games were impossible without slaves. They were the ones who died in the races, hunts, and gladiatorial combats that appeased the mob thus allowing the politicians to do as they pleased.

If not for slaves, Rome would not have been educated in the philosophies and knowledge of the Greeks. Slave *tutors* taught the Romans about Greek culture and literature as well as the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Slave doctors healed the sick. The slave often took over public and private financial management.

When Rome was in peril, the slaves stood by their masters to protect the city. They served soldiers as batmen and armor

bearers. In many religious festivals, slaves performed an important function.

Slave women spun the wool and wove the clothes of Rome. They were sexually available for whatever their masters needed. As prostitutes, they introduced many Romans into sexual life. They even fed and nurtured the Roman children from their own breast.

During the late Republic and early Empire, slaves did all the things that the Romans would or could not do. They were the fuel that ran Rome, from the microcosm of the Roman household, to the macrocosm of the Roman state. The dependence of Rome on the slave during this period simply cannot be overstated. Even Rome became aware of its dependence. Seemingly unable to change course, the city instead attempted to appease its slaves with glimpses of hope in order to keep the wheels of its civilization turning.

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