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The Sexual Agency of Female Slaves in Ancient Rome, with Comparisons to Han China

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Part Two: Han China

Chronology of Roman Emperors

Reign dates and epoch titles following Fik Meijer, with modifications.[1] Timeline concludes with Diocletian's reunification of the Empire and his founding of the Tetrarchy. The Western Roman Empire, however, continued until 476 CE, well beyond the upper chronological limit of this study.

The Julio-Cluaudian Emperors

Augustus	27 BCE–14 CE
Tiberius	14–37 CE
Gaius (Caligula)	37–41 CE
Claudius	41–54 CE
Nero	54–68 CE

The Year of Four Emperors

Galba	June 68–January 69 CE
Otho	January–April 69 CE
Vitellius	April–December 69 CE

The Flavian Emperors

Vespasian	69–79 CE
Titus	79–81 CE
Domitian	81–96 CE

The Antonine Emperors

Nerva	96–98 CE
Trajan	98–117 CE
Hadrian	117–138 CE
Lucius Verus	161–169 CE
Marcus Aurelius	161–180 CE
Commodus	180–192 CE

The Year of Five Emperors

Pertinax	December 192–March 193 CE
Didius Julianus	March–June 193 CE
Pescennius Niger	April 193–May 194 CE
Clodius Albinus	193 CE

The Severan Emperors

Septimius Severus	193–211 CE
Geta	211 CE

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[1] Fik Meijer, *Emperors Don't Die in Bed*, trans. S. J. Leinbach (London: Routledge, 2004).

Caracalla	211–217 CE
Macrinus	217–218 CE
Elagabalus	218–222 CE
Severus Alexander	222–235 CE

The Third Century Crisis

Maximinus Thrax	March 235–June 238 CE
Gordian I	April 238 CE
Gordian II	April 238 CE
Pupienus	April–July 238 CE
Balbinus	April–July 238 CE
Gordian III	July 238–February 244 CE
Philip the Arab	February 244–September 249
Decius	September 249–June 251 CE
Hostillian	June–late 251 CE
Trebonianus Gallus	June 251–August 253 CE
Aemilian	August–October 253 CE
Valerian	October 253–260 CE
Gallienus	October 253–268 CE
Claudius Gothicus	September 268–early 270 CE
Quintillus	early 270 CE
Aurelian	May 270–October 275 CE
Tacitus	December 275–June 276 CE
Florianus	June–September 276 CE
Probus	September 276–September 282 CE
Carus	September 282–summer 283 CE
Numerian	summer 283–November 284 CE
Carinus	spring 283–July 285 CE

Diocletian and the Tetrarchy

Constantius I	293–306 CE
Severus	305–307 CE
Maximian	285–305 CE
Galerius	293–311 CE
Diocletian	284–305 CE

Chinese Dynasties

Chronology and periodisation based on that of Endymion Wilkinson, with minor amendments.[2]

Pre-Qin: The Three Dynasties (*Sandai* 三代)

Xia 夏	ca. 2000 BCE–1600 BCE
Shang 商 (or Yin 殷)	ca. 1600–1045 BCE
Western Zhou 西周	ca. 1045–771 BCE
Eastern Zhou 東周	ca. 1045–256 BCE
Spring and Autumn period (*Chunqiu* 春秋)	770–476 BCE
Warring States period (*Zhanguo* 戰國)	453–221 BCE

Early Imperial China

Qin 秦	221–207 BCE
Western Han 西漢	206 BCE–9 CE
Xin 新 (reign of Wang Mang 王莽)	9–23 CE
Eastern Han 東漢	25–220 CE

Three Kingdoms (*Sanguo* 三國)

Wei 魏 (or Cao Wei 曹魏)	220–265 CE
Han 漢 (or Shu Han 蜀漢)	221–263 CE
Wu 吳 (or Sun Wu 孫吳)	222–280 CE

Six Dynasties (*Liu chao* 六朝)

Western Jin 西晉	265–316 CE
Eastern Jin 東晉	317–420 CE
Sixteen Kingdoms 六十國	304–439 CE

Northern and Southern Dynasties (*Nanbei chao* 南北朝)

Northern Wei 北魏	386–534 CE
Eastern Wei 東魏	534–550 CE
Western Wei 西魏	535–556 CE
Northern Qi 北齊	550–577 CE
Northern Zhou 北周	557–581 CE
Liu Song 劉宋	420–479 CE
Qi 齊	479–502 CE
Liang 梁	502–557 CE
Chen 陳	557–589 CE

Medieval Period

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[2] Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center 2000), 10–12.

Sui 隋	581–618 CE
Tang 唐	618–907 CE

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (*Wudai shiguo* 五代十國)

Five Dynasties 五代 (northern China)	907–960 CE
Ten Kingdoms 十國 (southern China)	902–979 CE

Middle and Late Imperial Period

Northern Song 北宋	960–1126 CE
Southern Song 南宋	1127–1279 CE
Liao 遼	916–1125 CE
Xia 夏 (or Xi Xia 西夏)	1038–1227 CE
Jin 金	1115–1234 CE
Yuan 元 (*Menggu* 蒙古, Mongol)	1279–1368 CE
Ming 明	1368–1644 CE
Qing 清 (*Manzhou* 滿洲, Manchu)	1644–1912 CE

Chronology of Qin and Han Rulers

Personal Name	Dynastic Name	Reign Dates
Qin 秦 Dynasty		
Ying Zheng 嬴政	Shihuangdi 始皇帝	221–210 BCE
Ying Huhai 嬴胡亥	Ershi Huangdi 二世皇帝	210–207 BCE
Zi Ying 子嬰	N/A	October–late 207 BCE
Western Han 西漢 Dynasty		
Liu Bang 劉邦	Gaozu 高祖	206–195 BCE
Liu Ying 劉盈	Emperor Hui 惠帝	195–188 BCE
Lü Zhi 呂雉	Empress Lü 呂后	187–180 BCE
Liu Heng 劉恆	Emperor Wen 文帝	180–157 BCE
Liu Qi 劉啟	Emperor Jing 景帝	157–141 BCE
Liu Che 劉徹	Emperor Wu 武帝	141–87 BCE
Liu Fuling 劉弗陵	Emperor Zhao 昭帝	87–74 BCE
Liu He 劉賀	N/A	July–August 74 BCE
Liu Bingyi 劉病已	Emperor Xuan 宣帝	74–49 BCE
Liu Shi 劉奭	Emperor Yuan 元帝	49–33 BCE
Liu Ao 劉驁	Emperor Cheng 成帝	33–7 BCE
Liu Xin 劉欣	Emperor Ai 哀帝	7–1 BCE
Liu Kan 劉衎	Emperor Ping 平帝	1 BCE–5 CE
Liu Ying 劉嬰	N/A	5–9 CE (as crown prince)
Xin 新 Dynasty		
Wang Mang 王莽	N/A	9–23 CE
Eastern Han 東漢 Dynasty		
Liu Xiu 劉秀	Emperor Guangwu 光武帝	25–57 CE
Liu Zhuang 劉莊	Emperor Ming 明帝	57–75 CE
Liu Da 劉炟	Emperor Zhang 章帝	75–88 CE
Liu Zhao 劉肇	Emperor He 和帝	88–106 CE
Liu Long 劉隆	Emperor Shang 殤帝	February–September 106 CE

Liu Hu 劉祜	Emperor An 安帝	106–125 CE
Liu Yi 劉懿	Emperor Shao 少帝	May–December 125 CE
Liu Bao 劉保	Emperor Shun 順帝	125–144 CE
Liu Bing 劉炳	Emperor Chong 沖帝	144–145 CE
Liu Zuan 劉纘	Emperor Zhi 質帝	145–146 CE
Liu Zhi 劉志	Emperor Huan 桓帝	146–168 CE
Liu Hong 劉宏	Emperor Ling 靈帝	168–189 CE
Liu Bian 劉辯	Emperor Shao 少帝	May–September 189 CE
Liu Xie 劉協	Emperor Xian 獻帝	189–220 CE

Note on Translation, Transcription, and Transliteration

Extended passages (usually given as block quotes) from Latin and Greek, unless otherwise stated, are quoted verbatim or adapted from the Loeb Classical Library series. A full list of the titles consulted can be found in the bibliography. Shorter extracts, as well as individual terms, I have translated personally. Transliterations of Chinese follow the *Hanyu pinyin* 漢語拼音 writing system, without the use of tone indicators. Translations from classical Chinese are, except where noted, my own. Traditional Chinese characters are favoured throughout.

Introduction

The modern cities of Rome and Xi'an 西安 do not invite spontaneous comparison. Few resemblances might be drawn between the fractured face of the Colosseum, rising above the umbrella pines and marigold buildings, and the traffic thrummed Xi'an Bell Tower (*Xi'an zhonglou* 西安鐘樓), situated at the interchange of four arterial roads. True, in the summer months, both monuments play host to flocking swallows who, nesting in the rocky nooks and varicoloured eves, perform balletic flybys in the sultry dusk. And yes, a multilingual chorus descends yearly on the historic heart of each capital, filling the forum and bestriding the battlements, visitors by the million treading the aeonian stones. Yet Rome and Xi'an are inarguably unique, separable in style and atmosphere, divisible by their spires and pagodas. For all their differences, however, both cities share a common imperial past, captaining the formation of two momentous empires, whose cultural codon still permeates the language, literature, and legal systems of Europe and East Asia.

We are of course referring to classical Rome — defined here as roughly the four centuries extending from the mid-Republic (ca. 264 BCE) to the end of the Severan lineage (235 CE) — and China's first enduring dynasties, the Western 西 (206 BCE–9 CE) and Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220 CE).[1] Juxtaposing Rome and Han China has, in recent decades, enjoyed something of a vogue, with abundant historical research endeavouring to bring the two polities into dialogue. Comparative ventures, nonetheless, typically concern themselves with abstractions, gravitating towards philosophy, geopolitics, and the mechanics of rulership.[2] Here I chart a divergent course, leaving behind grandiose talk of culture, empire, and legacy to focus instead on enslaved women and girls, among the most marginalised groups in antiquity. Both Rome and early China served as regional sinkholes for human chattel, assimilating vast numbers of dependent bodies.[3] While variances in the status, treatment, and application of slaves underpin Roman and Chinese society, latent equivalencies and parallelisms remain.

The present study aims to explore one category of agentic behaviour pertinent to female slaves in the Roman world, namely sexual agency. In brief, sexual agency concerns the aptitude of enslaved women to navigate erotic relationships with their master, as well as resist bodily domination and

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[1] Though not listed, Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 8–23 CE) interregnum Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 CE) will also be considered.

[2] For example, see R. A. H. King, ed., *The Good Life and Conceptions of Life in Early China and Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Hyun Kim, *Geopolitics in Late Antiquity: The Fate of Superpowers from China to Rome* (London: Routledge, 2019); Hans Beck and Griet Vankeerberghen, eds., *Rulers and Ruled in Ancient Greece, Rome and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[3] Walter Scheidel estimated around 10% of the Roman Empire's approximately 70 million inhabitants were slaves, see "The Roman Slave Supply," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291–292. In a separate essay, Scheidel calculated slaves accounted for several percent of the total population under the Han dynasty, see "Slavery and Forced Labour in Early China and the Roman World," in *Eurasian Empires in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Hyun Jin Kim, Frederik Juliaan Vervaet and Selim Ferruh Adali (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 137–138. This is higher than Clarence Martin Wilbur's original calculation of 100,000 government slaves and half a million private bonded men and women in the 40s BCE, see *Slavery in China During the Former Han Dynasty* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1943), 74–177. Ning Ke 寧可, in his Encyclopaedia of China entry for slavery during the Qin and Han, places the figure between two and three million, see "Qin-Han nubi 秦漢奴婢," in *Zhongguo da baike quanshu: Zhongguo lishi* 中國大百科全書: 中國歷史 (Beijing: Zhongguo da baike quanshu chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 2, 794. However, none of the above figures should be taken as authoritative, being little more than demographic guesswork.

attempts to curtail their individual subjectivity. As will be demonstrated, sexual agency can be viewed as a trans-historical behaviour, observable in a myriad of heterogeneous societies where slaveholding was prevalent. To evince the intercultural value of sexual agency — as a theoretical framework — I turn to Han China, highlighting kindred expressions of servile faculty in a coincident, though decidedly unique, social environment. Comparison here serves not only to elucidate those features peculiar to ancient Roman and Chinese slavery but underscore how similar historical circumstances engendered like-minded agentic stratagems. Three broad research questions guide my inquiry. Foremost, how might female slaves have capitalised on the venereal interests of their master? Second, in what ways did enslaved women attempt to refute masterly control over their bodies? And finally, how did societal differences influence the exercise of sexual agency? Before proceeding to answer these questions, issues of historiography, source analysis, method, and theory should be duly accounted for.

1. History of Scholarship

Classics (i.e. Ancient History, Altertumswissenschaft), as a discipline, ranks among the oldest branches of the academy, boasting in excess of one million publications engaged with features of ancient Mediterranean culture and society.[4] Scholarly literature devoted to questions of Roman slavery is thus, by extension, a vast subfield, encompassing a dizzying array of research agendas and perspectives. Even surmising general trends in the historiography is a book-length undertaking, competently attempted by Niall McKeown, among others.[5] Here I restrict myself to apprising only a select few bodies of work germane to the impending argument.

Working chronologically, research probing the intersection of women and servitude began in earnest with the historian Sarah B. Pomeroy's monograph *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, first published in 1975. As identified by one contemporaneous reviewer, Pomeroy considered the ancient source material with regard to the critical insights of modern feminism, attempting to reconstruct the lived experiences of women, as opposed to duplicating literary tropes and prejudices.[6] One chapter, in particular, is given over entirely to low-status groups, paying special attention to the labour performed by female slaves (*servae*, more commonly *ancillae*), as well as the permissibility of inter-status marriages.[7] While Pomeroy is, at points, less than critical in her treatment of the evidence, her vivid and accessible overview introduced a generation of classicists to the lifeworlds of female dependants.

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[4] Through sampling entries from *L'Année Philologique* between 1924 and 1992, Walter Scheidel approximated that around 850,000 publications were released by the end of the twentieth century. See "Continuity and Change in Classical Scholarship: A Quantitive Survey 1924–1992," *Ancient Society* 28 (1997), 288. This number has long since been exceeded, with academic output betraying no signs of plateauing.

[5] Niall McKeown, *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* (London: Duckworth, 2007). Though somewhat outdated, see also Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), 11–66.

[6] Daphne Nash, review of *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, by Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Social History* 2, no. 6 (1977), 809. This stands in contrast with the earlier scholarship, which inadvertently reproduced the chauvinism of the ancient source base. See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (1962 repr., New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983); Charles Seltman, *Women in Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1956).

[7] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975 repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 191–193, 196–197.

Susan Treggiari is equally central to the early scholarship, dedicating a series of articles to the examination of subaltern women and slaves. Circulated throughout the 1970s, Treggiari's essays adopted an epigraphic approach, fossicking the tomb inscriptions of the city of Rome for evidence of female employment and familial relationships. From among her more influential writings, comes a dyad of papers investigating domestic servitude in the Julio-Claudian period, with slave professions in the household of Livia (59 BCE–29 CE), wife of Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE), receiving especial consideration.[8] Both texts served to highlight the gendered dimension of Roman work, alongside demonstrating the evident prestige some *servi* derived from their vocation. Many of Treggiari's arguments reached fruition in a later article, exploring the occupations of bonded women during the years of the Principate.[9]

The 1980s oversaw a gradual blossoming in volumes dedicated to the particulars of female enslavement. Regarding the employment of lowborn women and *ancillae*, the books of Natalie B. Kampen and Rosmarie Günther are particularly consequential. Writing from the standpoint of art history, Kampen exemplified the value of material culture in helping catalogue the range of professions staffed by enslaved women.[10] In like fashion, Günther, surveying the literary and epigraphic sources, elucidated the heterogeneity of domestic service roles and, in the process, challenged the earlier assumptions of Treggiari, apropos the emancipatory prospects of household *ancillae*.[11] Quasi-marital unions between slaves (known as *concubinatus*) was yet another subject to pique the curiosity of late-century specialists. Initial contributions by P. R. C. Weaver and Beryl Rawson were developed, once again, by Treggiari, who situated *concubinatus* in the wider social milieu.[12] Taking commemorative inscriptions as her guide, Treggiari deduced that nominal wedlock was most frequently pursued by *Caesaris servi* (imperial slaves), perhaps on account of their relatively stable livelihoods.[13] Concubinage fell under equal scrutiny in a follow-up essay, stressing the habit of Roman masters to keep slave women as paramours or de facto wives.[14]

Specific mention is also owed to Jane Gardner, whose academic energies helped bolster the investigatory vanguard. Unlike her compeers, however, Gardner looked exclusively at Roman law, expounding on the societal treatment of slaves and *libertae* (freedwomen) from the perspective of the jurists. Apace with more traditional discussions of family life and manumission, Gardner addressed the manipulation of servile sexuality for the twofold purposes of breeding and pleasure.[15]

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[8] Susan Treggiari, "Domestic Staff at Rome in the Julio-Claudian period, 27 B.C. to A.D. 68," *Histoire Sociale* 6 (1973), 241–255; Susan Treggiari, "Jobs in the Household of Livia," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975), 48–77.

[9] Susan Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," *American Journal of Ancient History* 1 (1976), 76–104.

[10] Natalie B. Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1981). Of the six Ostain monuments examined by Kampen, only three bear any direct relevance to the study of female slave labour, those being the Via Ostiense and Isola Sacra sarcophagi, as well as the Isola Sacra relief, depicting the birth of a child.

[11] Rosmarie Günther, *Frauenarbeit–Frauenbindung: Untersuchungen zu Unfreien und Freigelassenen Frauen in der Stadtrömischen Inschriften* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), 47–48.

[12] Beryl Rawson, "Roman Concubinage and Other De Facto Marriages," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974), 279–305; P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 112–122.

[13] Susan Treggiari, "Contubernales in CIL 6," *Phoenix* 35, no. 1 (1981), 61.

[14] Susan Treggiari, "Concubinae," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 49 (1981), 65.

[15] Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 206–209, 221–222.

Given its purview, *Women in Roman Law and Society* is rightly considered a foundational text, deftly outlining how legislative agendas contrastingly affected women of different statuses.

Final notice should be given to Matthew J. Perry, his monograph *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman* consolidating many of the arguments of the preceding decades. As the title suggests, Perry appraises the specifics of female enfranchisement, concluding Roman manumission practices were receptive to the lifestyles of *ancillae*, owing to their emphasis on interpersonal relationships.[16] Consideration of patron *libertae* marriages goes someway in accentuating this phenomenon and, as Perry makes clear, evidences a route to freedom wholly unavailable to male slaves. Perry further underscores the gender dimorphism of manumission, delineating how bonded women were required to internalise their function as either mothers or helpmates, prerequisites to matronly status.[17] The primary value of Perry's hypotheses abides in his recognition of gender ideology as a social force, disparately sculpting the realities of slave life.

Coinciding with research initiatives geared towards female enslavement, materialised the burgeoning field of resistance studies. Undeniably, Kieth Bradley has done most to chronicle the rebellious exploits of *servi* in the Roman world. Encouraged by scholarship documenting slave opposition in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americas, Bradley scoured the ancient literary evidence, casting around for servile activities emblematic of defiance or protest. The results of his initial efforts were foregrounded in *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*, interpreting the Servile Wars of the late Republic as an orchestrated reproach of masterly authority.[18] Expanding on his general thesis, Bradley's later work argued for the omnipresence of servile dissent, contending all manner of slave actions might be interpreted as resistive. Fundamentally, Bradley's prodigious output impelled future historians to engage with the agency of enslaved persons, not only in the context of subversion but across multitudinous behavioural arenas.

In the years following Bradley's call to arms, the imaginative capacity of the enslaved to navigate their subjugation has undergone increasing analysis. To take but two recent examples, the study of Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, succeeded by the thematically dissimilar, though tonally comparable, work of Anise Strong, have wholeheartedly engaged with the agentic amplitude of dependent persons. Beginning with the former, Joshel and Petersen, attempting to overcome the "gross structural inequalities" of the archaeological record, spotlight the proficiency of servile actors in manipulating domestic and urban space.[19] Strong, on the other hand, examines the mimesis of slave prostitutes and freed concubines, emphasising their influence at the highest levels of

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[16] Matthew J. Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 66.

[17] Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 43.

[18] This is not to imply slave rebellions in the ancient world were characterised by any formal objectives. As Bradley himself acknowledges, mutinying *servi* "were individualistic, concerned with vengeance and the substitution of personal independence for slavery." See *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1981), 126. More recently, see Peter Morton, *Slavery and Rebellion in Second-Century BC Sicily: From Bellum Servile to Sicilia Capta* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

[19] Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4.

Roman society.[20] All three authors, however, draw attention to the volitional faculty of subaltern groups, be it through evincing the counter knowledge of slaves or describing the implicit authority of nimble-witted courtesans.

Scholarship devoted to questions of sexual agency is expectedly rare, only coming to the fore in the late 2010s. Sarah Levin-Richardson ranks among the most vocal proponents, co-authoring several articles outlining the erotic dexterity of slave prostitutes.[21] Most recently, in another essay co-written with Deborah Kamen, the sexual agency of a female household slave is experimentally reanimated from a Pompeian entryway graffito.[22] An edited volume by Kamen and C. W. Marshall has likewise underlined the subjectivity of enslaved men and women, maintaining ubiquitous objectification did not preclude their capacity to effectuate degrees of sexual autonomy.[23] However, a working definition of sexual agency remains elusive, not to mention a framework for interpreting its performance across sundry historical backdrops.

Conversely, sexuality in the Greco-Roman world has enjoyed nearly half a century of robust debate, in no small part thanks to Michel Foucault. Indeed, two instalments of Foucault's multivolume *History of Sexuality* are devoted exclusively to discussions of carnal knowledge in antiquity. At heart, Foucault, building on the earlier research of Kenneth J. Dover, argued the Greeks and Romans made no distinction between hetero and homosexual activity, and, more controversially, that modern notions of sexuality are extraneous to past civilisations.[24] Subsequent criticism of Foucault's work abounds, generally concentrating on his selective application of the source material, inadequate understanding of ancient Mediterranean society, and near-total disregard for women.[25] I have no wish to summarise the extensive literature circumscribing Foucault's

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[20] In Strong's own words, "Successful concubines and prosperous courtesans who were the long-term mistresses of powerful Roman men had potentially more indirect power than any other non-elite women in Roman society." See *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 64.

[21] Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson, "Revisiting Roman Sexuality: Agency and the Conceptualization of Penetrated Males," in *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and James Robson (London: Routledge, 2015), 449–460; Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson, "Lusty Ladies in the Roman Imaginary," in *Ancient Sex: New Essays*, ed. Ruby Blondell and Kirk Ormand (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015), 231–252.

[22] Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson, "Approaching Emotions and Agency in Greek and Roman Slavery," in *Les lectures contemporaines de l'esclavage: problématiques, méthodologies et analyses depuis les années 1990*, ed. Adam Pałuchowski (Bescançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2022), 34–40.

[23] C. W. Marshall and Deborah Kamen, "Introduction: Mere Sex Objects?," in *Slavery and Sexuality in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Deborah Kamen and C. W. Marshall (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 8.

[24] Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (1978 repr., London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[25] Amy Richlin provides a detailed rundown of the opprobrium levelled against Foucault, see *The Garden of Priapus*: *Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiv–xvii.

argumentation — interested readers are directed towards the appending footnote — purposing only to emphasise the long shadow his work has cast over classical scholarship.[26]

Besides the spectre of Foucault, a number of biases continue to haunt the academic perusal of Roman sexuality. For one, the sex lives of low-status women remain comparatively understudied, with the existing literature disproportionally focused on homosexual relations between men. Moreover, sexual activity among enslaved communities is almost entirely restricted to discussions of prostitution, homogenising the idiosyncrasy of servile erotic behaviours. Relationships between *domini* (masters) and *ancillae*, in particular, have received little to no consideration, bar the handful of epigraphic studies cited above. Likewise, the propensity for enslaved women to instigate romantic attachments is virtually ignored, warranting, at best, troubled acknowledgement. Non-transactional lovemaking between female slaves and freeborn men, or vice versa, is equally absent, though the aforementioned volume of Kamen and Marshall has begun to rectify this imbalance.[27]

As this dissertation engages with the Gefühlswelten of female slaves, momentary reflection on the historical study of emotions is needed. By and large, classicists were dilatory participants in the affective turn, shying away from ventures aimed at reconstructing the emotive palettes of past societies.[28] Attitudes have since been recalibrated, with practitioners now investigating the feelings and expressive vocabularies of ancient populations.[29] David Konstan's trailblazing book, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, adopted a highly linguistic approach, contending the historical voicing of emotions can only be appreciated through the careful analysis of language.[30] In contrast, Ed Sanders has argued purely lexical analyses encourage "too great a dependence" on labels and typologies, acting to obscure those culturally specific nuances of locution.[31] Alternatively, Sanders,

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[26] Useful surveys can be found in Laura K. McClure, "Editor's Introduction," in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, ed. Laura K. McClure (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 6–7; Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Introduction," in *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Lisa Auanger (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 12–18; Kirk Ormand, *Controlling Desires: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 13–17; Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 8–13.

[27] Marshall and Kamen, "Introduction: Mere Sex Objects?," 6.

[28] For methodological approaches to the history of emotions, see Rob Boddice, "The Affective Turn: Historicizing the Emotions," in *Psychology and History: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, ed. Cristian Tileagă and Jovan Byford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 147–165; Thomas Dodman, "Theories and Methods in the History of Emotions," in *Sources for the History of Emotions: A Guide*, ed. Katie Barclay, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Peter N. Stearns (London: Routledge, 2021), 15–25. Informative historiographic conspectuses can be found in Susan J. Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out," *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011), 117–124; Piroska Nagy, "History of Emotions," in *Debating New Approaches to History*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 189–202.

[29] As Angelos Chaniotis and Pierre Ducrey observe, "The question, therefore, clearly cannot be whether ancient historians and classicists should approach emotions but with what questions they should do so." See "Approaching Emotions in Greek and Roman History and Culture: Introduction," in *Unveiling Emotions 2, Emotions in Greece and Rome: Texts, Images, Material Culture*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis and Pierre Ducrey (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 10.

[30] David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 16.

[31] Ed Sanders, *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens: A Socio-Psychological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4–5.

echoing Robert Kaster, favoured the appraisal of "scripts," or rather the various settings and scenarios in which certain emotions recurrently manifest.[32]

Methodology aside, the first wave of scholarship to review emotions in antiquity did so taxonomically, clustering literary representations of feeling — anger, shame, love, etc. — into general subsets. Although deducing ancient sentiments from the papyrological and archaeological record has, in the last decade, proved tenable, socio-historical perspectives remain noticeably lacking.[33] Only one article, to my knowledge, implements a gendered approach to the study of emotions, highlighting the sexual distribution of affective customs.[34] By training their sights on individuals, Jean-Noël Allard and Pascal Montlahuc demonstrate the emotive regimes governing the formation of gender archetypes.[35] Regrettably, no academic work has, thus far, come to grips with the emotional worlds of bonded persons. In this regard, we classicists might benefit from our Atlantic world colleagues, where the fluency of slaves in performing emotions as a means of survival or self-empowerment has been expounded upon.[36]

While recognising the value of sexual and emotional histories, it is not my purpose to write one. Contrariwise, the present study better aligns with the scholarship devoted to slave resistance and agency. Nor do I purpose to rectify every chink in the historiographic armour but rather showcase the influence of gender in determining the agentic capacity of enslaved women. As illustrated above, neoteric developments in the field have resurrected aspects of servile life previously thought unknowable. However modest, I hope my own contribution can, in like manner, augment our understanding of *ancillae* who, no matter the odds, tactfully navigated their subjugation.

2. The Source Material

To study slavery in the ancient world is in part to confront silence. No Roman *servi* left behind, in their own words, a comprehensive description of his or her experiences. From the viewpoint of social history, this is highly problematic, forcing us to exhume the slave voice from a range of delusory and habitually biased accounts. My focus on enslaved women creates something of a double bind, requiring simultaneous negotiation of the elite prejudices and androcentrism of our source base. While *ancillae* are by no means absent from the ancient material, filtration through upper-class presumptions and the male frame of reference doubtlessly colours their portrayal. Nonetheless, the task of eliciting the servile perspective is by no means fruitless, with careful consideration of the evidence yielding meaningful results.

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[32] Robert A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

[33] Chrysi Kotsifou, "Emotions and Papyri: Insights into the Theatre of Human Experience in Antiquity," in *Unveiling Emotions: Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 39–90; Jane Masséglia, "Emotions and Archaeological Sources: A Methodological Introduction," in *Unveiling Emotions: Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 131–150.

[34] Jean-Noël Allard and Pascal Montlahuc, "The Gendered Construction of Emotions in the Greek and Roman Worlds," *Clio* 47 (2018), 23–44.

[35] Allard and Montlahuc, "The Gendered Construction of Emotions in the Greek and Roman Worlds," 39.

[36] For example, see Erin Austin Dwyer, *Mastering Emotions: Feelings, Power, and Slavery in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

This dissertation takes as its foundation literary texts, or, more precisely, material belonging to the performative and fictional genres of the late Republic and Principate. Theatrical dialogues, poetry, satire, epigrams, and romance novels are all relied upon to deepen our understanding of the volitional aptitude of female slaves. However, such a source selection encounters manifold difficulties. Most notably, as Thomas McGinn observes, classical texts tend to prescribe rather than describe the ancient worldview, exaggerating or misrepresenting the historical reality.[37] In addition, since the vast majority of such compositions were intended for the landed male citizenry, literary material represents, what James C. Scott has called, the "public transcript," or rather a description of the culturally mandated interactions between elites and their subordinates.[38] We consequently learn less about the quotidian features of servile life and more about the ideals and attitudes of slaveholders themselves. To be sure, it was not in the interest of ancient writers to set down the truth of enslavement but instead create blueprints of servile behaviour, incorporating popular distortions and rationalising human bondage via caricatures and assumptions.

Beginning with Roman drama, or *fabula palliata*, it is necessary to emphasise the specific advantages and challenges accompanying each source type. The plays of Plautus (d. 184 BCE) and Terrence (b. 195/185 BCE) constitute the only extant histrionic works of the Republican epoch. Both authors were comically minded, intermixing Greek satire and Italian popular theatre (*fabula Atellana*) for the enjoyment of Roman audiences.[39] Although written and performed in Latin, the comedies of Plautus and Terrence were, more often than not, adapted from earlier Greek dramas. However, neither playwright was content with simply translating the originals, but instead took pains to Romanise the environment, plot lines, and jokes of each.[40]

Remarkably, *ancillae* are a salient feature of many Plautine narratives, serving as plot devices or the impetus behind characterial developments.[41] Comedy allowed unfree women and girls to speak their own minds, reflect their perspectives on citizen society, and broach those subjects unique to female enslavement, albeit indirectly via the male-wielded stylus.[42] Among the most spectacular examples comes in Plautus's *Persa*, where Saturio's captive daughter recounts the pain of being trafficked and sold.[43] Such outpourings were likely intended to provoke genuine sympathy,

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[37] Thomas A. J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

[38] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

[39] For the influence of native Italian drama on the writings of Plautus, see Antonis K. Petrides, "Plautus between Greek Comedy and Atellan Farce," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, ed. Michael Fontaine and Adele C. Scafuro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 424–443.

[40] Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 35.

[41] In fact, no surviving Roman comedy is bereft of slaves. The collected works of Plautus, including the fragmentary *Vidularia*, feature a total of forty unfree characters, of which a little under half can be viewed as important. See C. Stace, "The Slaves of Plautus," *Greece & Rome* 15, no. 1 (1968), 65–66. For further comment on the prevalence of enslaved persons in Roman drama, see William Fitzgerald, "Slaves and Roman Comedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Comedy*, ed. Martin T. Dinter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 189.

[42] Sharon L. James, "Domestic Female Slaves in Roman Comedy," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 236.

[43] Plautus, *Persa*, 620–660.

betraying the willingness of Roman scriptwriters to weave serious themes into the comic superstructure of their storylines.[44]

All the same, we would do well to treat the dramaturgical representation of *ancillae* with a measure of caution. Foremost, it is worth remembering that, with the exception of mime, ancient stagecraft was a wholly male affair. In the absence of female actors, dramatists relied on costume, gait, and language to create a kind of visual and lexical shorthand emblematic of wives, prostitutes, and slave girls.[45] Enacted gender was further communicated by, what Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz terms, the "biologism of voice," where lower vocal registers evoked men and higher women.[46] However, as Dorota Dutsch has argued, in order to convincingly fabricate the feminine, playwrights readily drew upon the real-world social performances of women. Therefore, no matter how perverted, the polychromous plot lines of Roman comedy serve to "echo women's words," ossifying everyday modes of female behaviour.[47]

Even if the theatrical presentation of bonded women retains some measure of authenticity, scenarios involving *ancillae* are often hyperbolic and sensationalised for comic effect. This creates a further abstraction, obliging us to query the level of realism surrounding portrayals of servile life. Nevertheless, just as the characterisation of slave women was underpinned by tangible stereotypes, so too are the afflictions of servitude appropriated from the wider Roman milieu. In consequence, the narratology of *fabula palliata*, though tempered by dramatic interests, amounts to something of a cultural barometer which, if used scrupulously, might divulge the attitudes and exploits of slaves in antiquity.

Let us now turn to the evidential value of poetry. Roughly comprising the genres of elegy, satire, and epigram, Latin verse is rightly celebrated for its striking polyphony: enclosing lovelorn supplications, fantastical musings, and incisive observances. For the most part, we shall content ourselves with the Silver Age poets, namely Martial (ca. 40–102 CE) and Juvenal (fl. late first–early second century CE), whose work is uncommonly graphic in its portrayal of the morass and melee of slavery. However, taking the satirists at their word is fraught with risk. The primary difficulty facing historians wishing to utilise Roman verse is the deceptiveness of the first-person voice.[48] Stylistic adoption of the autobiographic perspective creates, often misleadingly, the impression a poet is expressing his opinion or writing from personal experience. Truth be told, in a world where lyricists

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[44] C. W. Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191. Timothy J. Moore makes a similar observation, writing "New Comedy contained not only many sympathetically portrayed slaves, but implicit and explicit rebuttals of the assumption that slaves were by nature inferior." See *The Theater of Plautus: Playing to the Audience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 182.

[45] Succinctly explained by Amy Richlin: "Mask + padding + costume + voice + gait = woman." See *Slave Theater in the Roman Republic: Plautus and Popular Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 300.

[46] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Embodying Tragedy: The Sex of the Actor," *Intertexts* 2, no. 1 (1998), 7.

[47] Dorota M. Dutsch, *Feminine Discourse in Roman Comedy: On Echoes and Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.

[48] Richard Alston, *Aspects of Roman History, AD 14–117* (London: Routledge, 1998), 7.

competed for the patronage of wealthy benefactors, assuming various narrational standpoints was tantamount to merchandising, a strategy attentive to the comic predilections of the master class.[49]

Moreover, as with *fabula palliata*, Roman satire is prone to exaggeration and, most problematically, vitriolic outpourings condemning marginalised groups or socially deviant behaviours. The verbal acridity directed against slaves, transgressive women, and sexual minorities is especially callous.[50] The purpose of such vituperative attacks is, however, far from straightforward. Violence towards enslaved people — a recurrent theme in both Martial and Juvenal — is, for example, not intended to highlight the malfeasance of servile mistreatment but to demonstrate the immoderacy of brutish masters.[51] The rhetorical dimension of ancient satire is well acknowledged, often influencing the general tenor and ambition of sardonic writing.[52] Satire's flaunting of violent masculinity and cultural conservatism reflects, by and large, the sensibilities of the genre's primary audience, elite male citizens.[53] Accordingly, stereotypical and prejudicial views of the enslaved proliferate, tending to favour mockery over literal description.

Seeing beyond the problems of invective poetry is no easy matter, yet the importance of satire to the study of Roman history cannot be ignored. The usefulness of Latin verse is, in fact, best surmised (should we believe it) by Juvenal himself, who describes the inspirational "fodder" (*farrago*) behind his writings as the everyday wishes (*vota*), fears (*timores*), and delights (*voluptates*) of the Roman populace.[54] Reading the *Satires* of Juvenal or *Epigrams* of Martial is, as Victoria Rimell observes, a "crash course" in the Roman Zeitgeist, so vivid and wide-ranging are the included vignettes.[55] However contrived, the stanzas of the satirists — liberally strewn with contemporary references — evince facets of ancient society rarely attested in other, more conventional, literary sources. We might also take some consolation in the fact that wholly inauthentic poetry would have struggled to excite, far less retain, the interests of coetaneous readers. The motley cast of characters populating the pages of Roman verse books, while caricatured, were ultimately drawn from the metropolitan worlds in which poets, like Martial and Juvenal, lived and worked.[56]

Much of what has been said for the application of drama and poetry holds for the ancient novel. The two surviving works of Latin fiction, Petronius's (ca. 27–66 CE) *Satyricon* and the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius (b. 124 CE), are extraordinarily insightful, particularly with regard to slavery. Greek

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[49] William Fitzgerald has argued, rather persuasively, that the central place of slaves in Martial's writings riffs on his personal dependence to illustrious patrons. See *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 129.

[50] Amy Richlin, "Invective against Women in Roman Satire," *Arethusa* 17, no. 1 (1984), 67.

[51] Sandra R. Joshel, "Slavery and Roman Literary Culture," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 225.

[52] Jasper Griffin, "Genre and Real Life in Latin Poetry," *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981), 40.

[53] John Henderson, *Writing Down Rome: Satire, Comedy, and Other Offences in Latin Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 194.

[54] Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.85–86.

[55] Victoria Rimell, *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

[56] J. N. Adams reaches a similar conclusion, writing "invective is not literary, but based, both in language and content, on real life." See *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 11.

language romance novels also betray an unusual realism when it comes to human bondage.[57] Experiences unique to female slaves are often detailed at length, with the omnipresent danger of sexual violation being a recurrent theme.[58] Kyle Harper describes storytelling as a kind of "Rosetta Stone of ancient social ideology," betraying the ideas and attitudes of the literary classes.[59] However, novels also internalise many features of their ambient cultural environment.[60] This is nowhere more obvious than in the *Metamorphoses*, where Apuleius, a member of the provincial North African elite, transposes the temporal atmosphere of his adolescence to the novel's Macedonian setting.[61] Prose writers were thus liable to inadvertently record dimensions of subaltern life otherwise neglected. Both the *Satyricon* and *Metamorphoses* are punctuated with lucid descriptions and embedded narratives, articulating the slave experience with surprising verisimilitude. The copious details embellishing the storylines of Petronius and Apuleius act, on some level, to clothe their fictional worlds in the raiment of realism, legitimising the ancient novel as a viable historical archive.

Even so, in an attempt to balance the prejudices of the literary material, I will call upon other, less adulterated, source types. Epigraphic and papyrological texts constitute one body of evidence thought to preserve the authentic voice of the enslaved. Tombstones, sepulchral inscriptions, bills of sale, magical spells, and curse tablets all provide glimpses into those aspects of slave life muted by the literary tradition. However, the epigraphic and papyrological material is not without issue. Most jarringly, for the study of out-groups, is the so-called "epigraphic bias," that is the tendency for surviving inscriptions to be taken as representative.[62] Although erecting a modest epitaph, or other dedicatory inscription, was relatively inexpensive, it was certainly beyond the reach of the very poorest in society, ensuring the outright exclusion of the bottommost demographic.[63] Equally, the Roman epigraphic habit was highly formulaic, with registers of speech and general phraseology conforming to a set of tacit expressive guidelines.[64] As a result, the range of useful information available from inscriptions is often limited to what was conventionally recorded in stone, with job titles, bromidic lamentations, and age at the time of death being exceptionally common.

Problems of representation similarly affect the papyrological record. Due to favourable climatic conditions, a disproportionate number of papyri texts survive from Roman Egypt, obliging us to interrogate its typicality as a province.[65] Accidents of preservation entail various repercussions, not

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[57] Alain Billault, "Achilles Tatius, Slaves, and Masters," in *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis and Michael Paschalis (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2019), 100, 105.

[58] John Hilton, "The Role of Gender and Sexuality in the Enslavement and Liberation of Female Slaves in the Ancient Greek Romances," in *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis and Michael Paschalis (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2019), 2.

[59] Kyle Harper, "Freedom, Slavery, and Female Sexual Honor in Antiquity," in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 112.

[60] Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8–9.

[61] Fergus Miller, "The World of the Golden Ass," *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981), 64.

[62] John Bodel, "Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian," in *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History From Inscriptions*, ed. John Bodel (London: Routledge, 2001), 46–47.

[63] For sepulchral and burial expenses, see Richard Duncan-Jones, "An Epigraphic Survey of Costs in Roman Italy," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 33 (1965), 198–202.

[64] Inscriptions erected by low-status groups were frequently influenced by the dedicatory habits of the elite. For more on Roman epigraphic conventions, see Francisco Beltrán Lloris, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, ed. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 141–145.

[65] Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

least for the study of slavery. For instance, Egypt is thought to have employed unfree labour in a manner dissimilar to other regions of the empire, hence extant documents featuring enslaved persons are unlikely to reflect the universal servile experience.[66] Likewise, papyri are often harrowed by issues of date and provenance, unearthed from the desert sands with few contextual signposts.[67] We should then avoid generalising the significance of any one document, but instead favour a collaborative approach, wherein sources are utilised conjunctively to produce a more balanced view of the past. In sum, while the use of epigraphic and papyrological sources presents obstacles, they are not to be sidelined, providing us with a unique opportunity to assess, first-hand, the subjectivity of dependent actors.

Finally, it is necessary to affirm that, where relevant, the chronological parameters of this monograph will be conditionally transgressed. As a matter of course, the evidential treasure trove stemming from classical and Hellenistic Greece cannot be entirely disregarded. Centuries of cultural exchange made certain the persistence of Greek attitudes well into the imperial era, particularly with regard to the enslaved. Differences between Greek and Roman slavery aside, pre-conquest Greek sources, it must be acknowledged, generally complement the Latin field of view. Equally, with the rise of Christianity in the fourth and fifth century CE, a plethora of theological and polemically charged writings surged into the historical record, often documenting aspects of slave life and work. The orations, tractates, and letters of the late antique bishops John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) and Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) are extremely valuable, with both authors chronicling features of slavery otherwise unreported. However, application of the Christian sources will be kept to a minimum, employed only where gaps in the classical tradition justify their consultation.

3. Methodological Approach

Our besplatted mixing palette of troublesome sources requires careful engagement. Needless to say, no one evidential bracket can be fully relied upon to impart a veracious description of slavery. Thus, in an effort to disentangle abstraction from actuality, the extant material ought to be collaboratively utilised, allowing for the deficiencies of one source group to be mitigated by another. Contrasting a range of evidence types not only confers variable perspectives on the servile experience but heightens our attentiveness to the intended purpose of any given document or artefact. With regard to literary texts, synergetic analysis has the additional benefit of helping expose character tropes and stereotypes. Representations of the enslaved in papyrological and epigraphic material, for instance, are generally less distorted, providing a counterweight to the highly burlesque sketches found in Roman poetry and drama. Though rarely acknowledged as a method in and of itself, the collaborative application of different source types furnishes us with a partial antidote to the evidential complexities hitherto discussed.

The second methodological keystone underpinning this study is its use of comparison. Comparative history is nothing new, on the contrary, the investigative potential of juxtaposing two or more past

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[66] For the presumed singularity of unfree labour in Roman Egypt, see Matt Gibbs, “Manufacture, Trade, and the Economy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.

[67] Roger S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London: Routledge, 1995), 55.

societies has long been acknowledged.[68] In relation to slavery, a phenomenon occurring in all cultures throughout world history, the prospective gains of comparative research are pushed almost to the point of necessity.[69] By thinking in specific terms about how enslavement functioned in different global contexts, we are better able to identify aspects of the servile experience not obvious from the historical records of a single polity. More generally, comparative history has the advantage of, in Walter Scheidel's words, defamiliarising "the deceptively familiar," forcing us to question the omnipresence of any given historical curiosity.[70] Scheidel echoes the sentiment of the social anthropologist Matei Candea, who argues that comparative methodologies make "the strange familiar and the familiar strange," again inferring that comparison serves to problematise what is often taken to be established fact.[71] All too often historians confine themselves to one speciality, spurring Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin to say that comparison's chief prize is "a way out of parochialism."[72] Ultimately, comparative history aims not only to broaden our understanding of individual civilisations through their prudent collocation, but to contribute to the broader debates concerning historical developments in a worldwide perspective.

A brief word on some of the different approaches to the writing of comparative history is needful. Over forty years ago, the social scientist Victoria Bonnell outlined two possible ways of conducting comparative research.[73] The first, what Bonnell termed the "analytical type," involved treating two equivalent cultures side-by-side, with the purpose of explaining common or contrasting socio-historical events. The second, referred to as the "illustrative" model, takes as its primary aim the comparison of two societies with regard to a central hypothesis. The illustrative approach thus evaluates individual units not in connection with each other, but in relation to a basic theory or concept applicable to both. Following Bonnell, Theda Skocpol and Margret Somers proposed a third logic to comparative history, that of the "contrast-oriented approach."[74] Skocpol and Somers argued that through the apposition of two cultures, with the intention of eliciting their differences, the uniqueness of any given historical society could be fully articulated. Efforts have also been

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[68] For a history of the comparative approach, in addition to the various ways in which it has been applied, see Mikhail Krom, *An Introduction to Historical Comparison*, trans. Elizabeth Guyatt (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

[69] Marc Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople: A Brief Cross-cultural History," in *The Face of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old World and New World Slavery*, ed. Marc Kleijwegt (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 7–8.

[70] Walter Scheidel, "Introduction," in *State Power in Ancient Rome and China*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3. See also Walter Scheidel, "Introduction," in *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6. It should be noted that Scheidel borrows extensively from the earlier work of the American sociologist Barrington Moore, who remarks, "in the effort to understand the history of a specific country a comparative perspective can lead to asking very useful and sometimes new questions" and, subsequently, "comparisons can serve as a rough negative check on accepted historical explanations." See *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966), x.

[71] Matei Candea "Going Full Frontal: Two Modalities of Comparison in Social Anthropology," in *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, ed. Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill and Geoffrey Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 367.

[72] Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the World: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 8.

[73] Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory, Concepts and Comparison in Historical Sociology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980), 164–165.

[74] Theda Skocpol and Margret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980), 191–192.

made to differentiate between "case-oriented" and "variable-oriented" comparative studies. Investigators prioritising a case-orientated approach compare individual societies with an emphasis on empirical detail, often at the expense of uncovering general historical processes.[75] Variable-oriented practitioners, on the other hand, are driven more by theoretical principles than context-specific evidence, hoping to explain macrosocial phenomena across time and space.[76]

More recently, Peter Kolchin has written of the so-called "rigorous" and "soft" approaches to comparison, the former preferencing one society but using case studies as a way of highlighting similarities between two cultures and, the latter, comparing two historical communities more fully, giving equal weight to both.[77] The rigorous approach certainly attempts to avoid the pitfall of biasing one culture over the other or, in Susan Freidman's terms, allowing the known to "operate as a measure of the unknown," thereby creating an epistemological inequality between the subjects of comparison.[78] Postcolonial theorist and literary critic Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan visualises comparison in terms of a Venn diagram, that "brings into relief the comparable overlap between two identities," while allowing their socially or culturally distinct features to remain in focus.[79] Although I would consider the mode of comparison advocated by Radhakrishnan preferable, applied to historical study it is principally an ideal. Technical limitations, notably familiarity with the relevant languages and cultural nuances of a past civilisation, may limit what any given historian can reasonably achieve.[80] Students of the comparative approach must hence engage in a balancing act, striving for equivalency and non-partisanship, while acknowledging the potential limits to the conclusions of collocative research. Comparison, after all, walks a fine line, forever seeking a methodological equanimity between the culturally specific and historically universal.

But why Rome and China? Over the last decade, interest in the two superpowers as "twins at opposite ends of Eurasia" has gained considerable momentum.[81] Most frequently, ancient Rome and China have been approached from the perspective of empire studies, that is the comparative analysis of their respective governmental systems, political culture, and approach to statecraft.[82] The uptick in scholarship focusing on early Chinese and Roman imperialism has led some historians, notably Philip Pomper, to announce an "imperial turn," stressing the importance of the cross-cultural study of empires.[83] Despite the growing enthusiasm for comparative work, no book-

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[75] Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (1987 repr., Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 51–52.

[76] Ragin, *The Comparative Method*, 54–55.

[77] Peter Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 4.

[78] Susan Stanford Freidman, "Why Not Compare?," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 126, no. 3 (2013), 754.

[79] Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Theory in an Uneven World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 75.

[80] Walter Scheidel rightly calls for minimising the importance of ancient language proficiency when it comes to historical comparison: "If Classics is seen as predicated on the mastery of classical philology, 'Comparative Classics' logically ought to entail mastery of two separate philologies. Strictly applied, this premise would either exclude most ordinary mortals from comparative endeavours or latently discredit comparative work undertaken by such lesser beings." See "Comparing Comparisons," in *Ancient Greece and China Compared*, ed. Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd and Jingyi Jenny Zhao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 46.

[81] Scheidel, "Introduction," 5.

[82] For an overview, see Christian Gizewski, "Römische und alte chinesische Geschichte im Vergleich. Zur Möglichkeit eines gemeinsamen Altertumsbegriffs," *Klio* 76 (1994), 271–290.

[83] Philip Pomper, "The History and Theory of Empire," *History & Theory* 44, no. 4 (2005), 1.

length study has, to date, exclusively taken the subaltern classes as its starting point, yet alone attempted to juxtapose Roman and Chinese enslavement. Social history remains conspicuously absent from research between the two fields, a fact somewhat surprising, given classicists have often turned to other slaveholding societies to enrich their investigative outlook.[84]

Practically speaking, classical Rome and Han China are apt candidates for historical comparison. For one, both societies were near contemporaneous, rising to prominence in the centuries astride the turn of the first millennium. What is more, each civilisation produced and left behind a wealth of written and archaeological sources, providing a solid evidential basis for comparative work.[85] In addition, while Rome and China were mutually aware of one another — the Han envoy Gan Ying 甘英 (fl. 97 CE) famously calling Rome *da Qin* 大秦, or "greater Qin" — contact between the two was minimal.[86] Consequently, the job of comparing Roman and Han society is made somewhat easier, as each state developed independently of the other, ensuring the impossibility of intercultural contamination. One obvious criticism of comparing Roman and early Chinese slavery pertains to the highly different social environments in which bonded persons lived and worked. Accurate as this may be, through identifying common denominators in the servile experience, alongside developing a framework for contrasting slave life, the challenges of glaring socio-historical differences can be somewhat overcome. As Orlando Patterson's sociological inquiry into the unitary tenants of enslavement proved — considering evidence from some sixty-six different cultures — comparative history is proficient in synthesising abundant historical data.[87]

Critically then, comparative history is a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is a way of provoking new questions and tentatively proposing answers, a starting point rather than a formula geared towards definite conclusions. In the context of my own research, comparison serves as a port of departure, a process through which we might supplement our understanding of servile agency, not only in the Roman world but for ancient society as a whole. More specifically, comparison with Han China goes someway in highlighting the singularity of Rome, forcing us to question why precise elements of classical Mediterranean slavery manifested as they did. Perhaps most revealing, however, are the like-minded strategies of navigation and resistance employed by slave women, despite the sizeable variances between Chinese and Roman culture. Such resemblances point to a deeper ahistorical phenomenon, that of the human struggle and desire amongst all people to overcome adversity, irrespective of the challenges. While risking presumption, I suspect further comparison between *ancillae* and enslaved women in other world societies would yield near identical results. Without comparison, these narratives cannot be situated in a global dialogue, nor examined collectively to illuminate, what might well be, universal characteristics of the female slave experience.

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[84] The field of ancient history is in fact, as Mark Golden has pointed out, comparative by definition, being concerned with the study of two related, yet distinct, cultural groupings, namely Greece and Rome. See "The use of Cross-Cultural Comparison in Ancient Social History," *Classical Views* 36 (1992), 310.

[85] For the same point, see Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag, "Preface," in *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, ed. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiv.

[86] *Hou Hanshu*, 88.2918. For mentions of China in the Roman source material, see Horace, *Odes*, 55–56; Florus, *Epitomae*, 2.34.

[87] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). In the preface to his work, Patterson qualifies his comparison and recognises its limits, but ultimately stresses the necessity of comparative perspectives to the study of slavery.

4. Theoretical Considerations

Few concepts in the realms of history and sociology have stimulated such intense debate as the idea of agency. The term itself has been rightly decried as "slippery," and a "source of increasing strain and confusion in social thought."[88] Definitions of agency vary between disciplines, though most explanations focus on personal choice and the propensity for actors to meaningfully influence their lived experiences. Individual agency might then be formulated along the lines of the "imaginative capacity for shaping intentions, forming choices, and undertaking actions."[89] While practitioners in all fields have criticised those definitions of agency that over-emphasise personal volition, such formulations continue to predominate the mainstream conception of what it means to possess agentic power.[90]

Controversially, at the heart of many modern-day explanations of agency lie a set of terms saturated with the ideals of nineteenth-century liberalism, values which were themselves devised in philosophical opposition to the conditions of Atlantic slavery.[91] For much of the last forty years, historians have worked hard to re-humanise slaves and other marginalised groups, conclusively demonstrating that bondage did not eradicate individual subjectivity. As such, agency has become synonymous with what it means to be human, interlinked with notions of freedom, autonomy, rationality, and moral authority.[92] However, reducing agency to issues of choice, decision making or observable intention is highly constrictive, diminishing behaviours and actions perceived as illogical or unreasoned. Joan Wallach Scott further speaks out against the libertarian conception of agency, writing that "people are not simply rational, goal-oriented beings, but subjects of unconscious desire," who are not always "mobilised according to purely objective interests."[93] Searching for agency only in rational action, by default, excludes the myriad instances of conscious decision-making not obvious from a logic-orientated vantage point.

Moreover, as Lynn Thomas has pointed out, agency frequently slips from being an instrument of analytic enquiry to a conclusion in and of itself.[94] As aforementioned, many historians have strived to prove that those living under structural oppression still possessed the capacity to act, often in ways aimed at bringing about more equitable circumstances for themselves or their loved ones. Yet, simply contending that historical actors behaved in their own interests is insufficient, underscoring an obvious and inevitable human response. By contrast, agency, as a theoretical apparatus, should assist in uncovering the more complex strategies resorted to by out-groups, focusing on explicit and implicit behavioural motives. Fundamentally then, proving agency cannot serve as the terminus for historical inquiry but should instead be subsumed into our hypotheses and working assumptions.

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[88] Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische "What is Agency?," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998), 962; Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, "Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency," *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 2 (2007), 170.

[89] Kent den Heyer, "Defining Presence as Agents of Social Life and Change," in *Troubling the Canon of Citizenship Education*, ed. George H. Richardson and David W. Blades (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 90.

[90] For example, see Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton, "Agency in Action: Young Women and their Sexual Relationships in a Private School," *Gender and Education* 22, no. 3 (2009), 330–331.

[91] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003), 115.

[92] Bronwyn Davis, "The Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis," *Social Analysis* 30 (1991), 42.

[93] Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 19.

[94] Lynn Thomas, "Historicising Agency," *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (2016), 324.

Of equal importance is to disentangle agency from ideas of remuneration, or rather that individuals are strictly motivated by the twin goals of material and social improvement. Critically, the absence of positive action strategies, if they might be termed such, does not infer a general dearth in personal acumen. For example, a slave woman's decision to commit suicide, or a prisoner's resolve to go on hunger strike, are as much an exercise of choice as those behaviours typically understood as agentic, such as a slave's determination to steal food or avoid work. Scholarly resolve to foreground the personhood of enslaved actors should not, however, disregard the very real societal constraints limiting individual autonomy. To do so would be akin to victim blaming or wrongly implying the existence of consent.[95]

Theoretically speaking, sexual agency has only been explicitly applied to the study of contemporary female sexuality, particularly teenage erotic experiences in the context of modern capitalist societies. From this perspective, sexual agency has been defined as "an individual's feelings of empowerment within the sexual domain," specifically their "right to create and take action, to make sexual choices, and to meet his or her sexual needs."[96] Others, notably the psychologist Laina Bay-Cheng, have examined sexual agency from the perspective of neoliberal discourse, arguing that failure to exercise agency, in sexual relationships or otherwise, invalidates one's status as a "fully-fledged human being."[97] Recent efforts to situate the precise characteristics of sexual agency, though admirable, are limited in their outlook. To warrant admittance into the pantheon of sociological and historical theory, sexual agency should be expanded and more fully amalgamated with existing approaches to social praxis. I hence wish to advance a new framework for exploring sexual agency, practically demonstrating its value as an analytical schema.

As Judith Butler pointed out some three decades ago, bodies are marked by sex, in fact, Butler argues, "without sex there are no bodies at all."[98] Accordingly, any theory involving sexuality must, by default, internalise ideas of the corporeal self. Here the English word "sex" (as with the French "sexe" and Spanish "sexo") has an advantage, over say its German equivalents, in conveying both sexuality (i.e. lovemaking), as well as biological sex (chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, etc.) and thus, by extension, the social habiliment of gender.[99] Subsequently, when we speak of sexual agency we are not merely referring to erotic and copulatory activities, but the modus operandi of gender, that is the social ideologies delimiting modes of masculine and feminine behaviour.

Sexual agency therefore espouses a gendered approach to personal volition, considering how historically specific notions of gender afforded dependent women and girls unique opportunities for action. Moreover, sexual agency is receptive to intersectionality, acknowledging the capacity for individuals to occupy multiple role identities simultaneously. As a result, we are better equipped to deduce the complexities propelling servile action, paying heed to the numerous influences operating

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[95] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Injection: A Gender Perspective on Domestic Slavery," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery Throughout History*, ed. Damian A. Pargas and Juliane Schiel (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 215.

[96] Sharon Horne and Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck, "Female Sexual Subjectivity and Well-Being: Comparing Late Adolescents with Different Sexual Experiences," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 2 (2005), 29.

[97] Laina Y. Bay-Cheng, "The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women's Sexuality," *Sex Roles* 73 (2015), 280.

[98] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 98.

[99] The German language distinguishes between "Sex" (i.e. intercourse) and "Geschlecht" (gender), with supplementary adjectives providing further specificity, e.g. "biologisches Geschlecht" (biological sex) and "soziales Geschlecht" (social gender).

over personal decision-making. Finally, sexual agency attempts to break away from rationalist conceptions of agentic power. Actions need not be logical or motivated by personal gain, rather choices may be taken and strategies pursued for, we must assume, profuse and complex reasons, many of which lie beyond the scope of historical reconstruction. In essence, sexual agency is a looking glass, however kaleidoscopic, through which we might attempt to delineate the shape of a life; a historically sensitive frame of mind receptive to gender-specific modes of action and the intersectional stimuli driving enslaved actors.

To have any hope of measuring sexual agency across time and space, it is necessary to devise criteria responsive to the agentic pathways enabled by gender dimorphism. The following classifications serve as our guide: (1) emotional monopolies, (2) body choices, and (3) termination strategies. Emotional monopolies denote a slave woman's attempts to predominate the affections and attentions of her master. Deliberately cultivating a sexual relationship with one's *dominus*, or seeking to capitalise on his erotic overtures, could result in privileged treatment, going some way in ameliorating the precariousness of slavery. Competition for influence often resulted in violent domestic rivalries, most explicitly between *ancillae*, wives and, in ancient China, the concubines of the imperial harem. Although risking what has been termed the "seduction assumption" — ascribing faculty to bonded women only in the domain of sexuality — it is vital to acknowledge the propensity for enslaved females to regulate liaisons with their owner.[100]

Body choices operate on two levels. In the first instance, it considers the potential gains childbirth afforded subaltern women, particularly in cases where an heirless master was delivered a son. Slave women who conceived by their *dominus* observably manoeuvred themselves into positions of eligibility, where manumission and marriage might be rewarded as a token of gratitude or act of legitimisation. Secondly, body choices outline the somatic decisions female slaves made in resistance to masterly authority or, contrariwise, in the pursuit of individual subjectivity. This extends to the use of contraceptives and abortifacients — for avoiding unwanted pregnancies — as well as embarking on illicit sexual relationships, often with other slaves.

Last of all, termination strategies allude to the possible ways in which female slaves escaped or ended highly asymmetric power dynamics. Such endeavours were frequently bloody, involving absconding, murder, and suicide. Faced with inexorable sufferings, it is understandable that enslaved women sought redress in the extreme, with suicide, in particular, representing something of a final frontier for temporal expressions of self-sovereignty.

5. Chapter Outline

Being a purposefully imbalanced comparison, this dissertation is bifurcated into unequal halves, with chapters one through four devoted to Rome, and chapters five and six engaging with Han China. In order to demonstrate the theoretical effectiveness of sexual agency, I first prove its value for the study of female slaves in the Roman world, before devoting a single chapter to its implementation in the context of the Han empire. As a result, I lift the veil on what is arguably a trans-historical behaviour, underscoring how enslaved women, in two divergent social

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[100] Claire Roberston and Marsha Robinson, "Re-Modeling Slavery as if Women Mattered," in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 269–270.

environments, combated despotism and ventured to disentomb their sexuality from the abuses of the master class.

Chapter one serves to orientate the reader in the matrix of Roman slavery, beginning with a synopsis of the ancient flesh trade and underscoring the gendered composition of unfree labour. The various routes to manumission, especially those uniquely available to female slaves, also undergo deliberation. Chapter two opens with an exploration of the sexual instrumenting and objectification of enslaved women and girls, probing the social mentalities that, in effect, normalised their molestation. This is followed by applying my theory of emotional monopolies to female household slaves, questioning to what degree bonded women were capable of manipulating the sentiments of *domini* to their advantage. Chapter three turns to issues of bodily autonomy. In particular, we shall evaluate the surrogate power female slaves and wet nurses obtained through birthing or rearing their master's child. Servile management of reproductivity (i.e. the use of contraceptives and abortifacients), as well as consensual sex between enslaved persons, receive commensurate analysis. Chapter four engages with the idea of termination strategies which, as noted above, concerns the penchant for slaves to abscond, commit suicide or, in a limited number of cases, murder their owner. Here again I espouse a gendered approach, querying whether or not *ancillae* executed unique resistance strategies.

Each chapter in the first half of this study is prefaced with a fictional epigraph, intended to help reanimate those feelings and experiences of slave women muted by the historical record. Saidiya Hartman is to be credited with popularising this experimental style of history writing, a kind of storytelling grounded in archival material she termed "critical fabulation."[101] In the prologue to her second monograph, Hartman likens the search for enslaved persons in the archive to a mortuary visit, each line item providing "a last glimpse of a person about to disappear into the slave hold."[102] From this perspective, critical fabulation equips historians with a means of re-oxygenating the interior lives of bondspeople, liberating them from the tyranny of silence imposed by elite authors. Lest we forget, shedding light on the circumstances of slavery is as much a business of empathy as it is academic rigour.

Turning eastward, chapter five appraises the slave supply in early imperial China, alongside exploring the work spheres occupied by unfree women. Manumission practices and the institution of concubinage fall under equal scrutiny, with the recruitment of imperial concubines and the organisation of the harem system wrapping up our discussion. Chapter six investigates emotional monopolies from the perspective of female slaves and concubines in the households of the elite. A near identical line of argumentation is then levelled for the women of the imperial harem, where extreme instances of hypergamy are readily observable. Final reflection on both the Roman and Chinese traffic in slaves, not to mention the agentic capacity of bonded women, is reserved for the conclusion. Here we shall posit that sexual agency constituted an effective, if not inevitable, response to the vulnerabilities inherent to slavery in the ancient world.

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[101] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008), 11.

[102] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007 repr., London: Serpent's Tail, 2021), 17.

PART ONE

Ancient Rome

I

Human Flow

From the dawn emerged a ship. Though indistinct at first, it edged closer, as the oarsman cut a course across the sleeping water. Once within easy reach of the shore, the creaking hulk of the galley came to a stop, and orders were given for the anchor to be lowered. Alone in the bay, the ship waited, silent on the golden sea. Around the time our fathers and brothers set out for the fields, we saw a flotilla of smaller boats moving off from the vessel. As they approached the beach the sailors called out to the young boys playing in the surf, instructing them to run back up to the village and bring down their mothers. Onto the sand, the men unloaded amphorae and while they worked shouted the names of their wares, expressing their wish to trade. Word spread quickly among the houses atop the cliffs that merchants had docked, bringing with them a cargo of fine wine and oil. Following closely behind my mother we hurried down to the waterfront, where already a small crowd had gathered. Greek voices sounded over the softly breaking waves and, for a short time, the morning's tranquillity crowned the shimmering cove.

Suddenly, as if a torch had enkindled an invisible pyre, a ferociousness took hold of the merchants. Eyes ablaze they drew their short swords and attempted to encircle us. We were not without resistance. One of our company produced a small dagger from her tunic and frenziedly slashed at her attacker. He recoiled in pain, his hands fumbling the shallow cleft across his stomach. Recognising the danger, his shipmate intervened and cut the woman down. She collapsed face-first on the shoreline, her blood intermixing with the ebbing tide. Anxious of further violence we submitted to the pirate's ropes. They bound our hands tightly and gagged those whose shouts they feared would betray the true nature of their dealings. But no one was listening, our cries went unheard. Forced onto the small boats we were ferried back towards the galley, now looming before us like a floating tomb. Through her wretched sobs, my mother begged our captors to desist, to return us to the beach and ply their sordid trade elsewhere. But they paid her no mind, already the alabaster sails of the ship were unfurled, open to the wind.

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Needless to say, the above vignette is only an approximation, an educated guess at how a young girl living on the coast of Asia Minor may have found herself a slave. Unfortunately, no source from the ancient world records, from the slave's perspective, the various routes to servitude.[1] Despite the absence of personal testimony, the road to enslavement is where we must begin. It is crucial for the forthcoming chapters to understand how women and girls were made slaves, what work they performed, as well as their chances of freedom. Indeed, questions regarding the agency of enslaved women cannot be posed without having first given some insight into the world in which they lived. In the analysis that follows, we will consider the immensity of the Roman slave supply, the labour

[1] However, slave narratives for other historical periods are extant. For the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Atlantic slave trade, see Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave* (1845 repr., Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa the African* (1789 repr., Moscow: Dodo Press, 2007). For nineteenth-century Brazil, see Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*, ed. Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007). For enslavement in the sub-Saharan region during the late nineteenth century, see F. J. G. Mercardier, *L'esclave de Timimoun* (Paris: France-Empire, 1971).

spheres women inhabited, and the social and legal mechanisms governing manumission. As a corollary, I will attempt to highlight the gendered nature of ancient servitude, underscoring how slavery, as an institution, differentially affected men and women. While this survey is by no means exhaustive, it provides the contextual groundwork necessary for appreciating the position of female slaves in classical Roman society.

1. Terminology

Before proceeding to deliberate the origin and application of enslaved persons, a succinct overview of the central Latin terminology is requisite. The word *servus* (older form *servos*), indicating an unfree man, is attested as early as the Law of the Twelve Tables, written around 450 BCE.[2] As with the classical Greek δουλεία, the related noun *servitus* has a variety of meanings, intimating political bondage, economic dependence, or slavery in its narrowest sense.[3] Pluralised *servitutes* is understood to mean "services" more generally. This being so, *servus* traditionally designated both a male slave and a servant. However, from the time of the dramatist Plautus (d. 184 BCE) onwards, *servus* (pl. *servi*) came to almost exclusively refer to a male slave. Likewise, the feminine *serva* primarily betokened a woman or girl of unfree status.

Female slaves were more commonly known by the name *ancillae* (sing. *ancilla*). Sharing a common etymological ancestor with the Greek ἀμφίπολος — the Proto-Indo-European word *$h_2\underline{m}b^hik^w$ *olho-s*, thought to denote cult functionaries and servants — early Latin possessed the feminine noun *anculua*, meaning "handmaid [of the deity]."[4] The diminutive form, *ancilla*, was then used to evoke the second of the root word's dual connotations, that is a female servant. The exact sense of *ancilla* thereafter narrowed, coming solely to refer to an enslaved woman. In the literature of the late Republic and Principate, *ancillae* is normally, though not always, employed to indicate female house slaves. A different etymology for *ancilla* is provided in a gloss of Sextus Pompeius Festus (fl. late second century CE), who professed the noun to be an eponym of Ancus Marcius, the legendary fourth king of Rome.[5] While unquestionably a false derivation, it is revealing to observe that a monarch infamous for taking women captive was believed to have given his name to the word used for female slaves.

2. External Slaving

Empires do not take shape peacefully. In fact, today we might go so far as to say that empires are synonymous with violence and warfare.[6] Rome's territorial holdings were no exception, being

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[2] Stephan Busch, "Sklaventerminologie," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 3, 2699.

[3] Leonhard Schumacher, *Sklaverei in der Antike: Alltag und Schicksal der Unfreien* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 2001), 66.

[4] Helmut Rix, *Die Termini der Unfreiheit in den Sprachen Alt-Italiens* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 31–32.

[5] Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu quae supersunt cum Pauli epitome*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsey (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913), 18.

[6] On the modern-day association of empires and violence, see Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck, "Savage Wars of Peace: Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World," in *Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World*, ed. Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2–3.

principally won through years of intense conflict.[7] Naturally, one of the outcomes of conquest and the annexation of new lands was prisoners of war (*captivi*). No attempt here is made at periodising external modes of slaving, though the overall importance of war captives to the slave supply gradually depreciated after the first century CE.

Undeniably, Rome's armies took vast numbers of prisoners while on campaign. The annalistic sources record nearly innumerable instances of emperors and generals subjecting captives to irons. During the late first century BCE, the Roman army's defeat of the Salassi along Italy's northern border resulted in the commanding general, Aulus Terentius Varro (d. 24 BCE), selling the entire tribe into slavery, with the condition that none should be released for a period of at least twenty years.[8] Julius Caesar's (100–44 BCE) armies reportedly took hundreds of thousands of prisoners throughout the Gallic Wars during the 50s BCE.[9] At the height of the First Jewish War (66–73 CE), myriads of men, women, and children were taken prisoner. The chronicler Josephus (b. 37 CE), himself a Jewish war captive, writes graphically of the stern wave of slaughter and enslavement left by the advancing Roman war machine.[10] Emperor Trajan's (r. 98–117 CE) campaigns against Dacia (101–102, 105–106 CE) resulted in a staggering half a million prisoners, many of whom were made slaves.[11] Septimius Severus (r. 193–211 CE), in the course of his invasion of Mesopotamia (198 CE), sanctioned his troops' plundering of the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon, culminating in the capture of a hundred thousand prisoners.[12] The list is unremitting. While it would be imprudent to take such numbers at face value, they can be relied upon to give some sense of scale.[13]

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[7] For an overview of the wars fought during the Roman Republic and early Principate, see Adrian Goldsworthy, "War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare, Volume 2: Rome from the Late Republic to the Late Empire*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 76–121.

[8] Cassius Dio, 53.25.4; Strabo, 4.6.7; Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 21.2.

[9] Plutarch, *Lives*, "Caesar" 24.3; Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.47.1. In 57 BCE, 53,000 members of the Atuatuci were sold. The following year the entire male population of the Veneti tribe were enslaved. After the defeat of the Alesia in 52 BCE, one prisoner was given to every soldier in the Roman army as booty, perhaps totalling 40,000 captives. See Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum*, 2.33.6, 3.16.4, 7.89.5.

[10] A reported 2,130 women and children were enslaved at Jaffa in 67 CE, with 1,200 more being subjugated at Jotapata. Following an attack on Tarichaea, some 6,000 captives were sent to dig the Corinth Canal, a further 30,400 were sold. Nearly 3,000 women and children were seized attempting to flee Giscala. On the banks of the river Jordan, 2,200 prisoners were taken. That same year, over 1,000 inhabitants of Idumaea were captured. Having overrun the town of Gerasa, Lucius Annius ordered his troops to slay the able-bodied men and took captive their wives and young children. In 68 CE, yet more women and infants were enthralled at Bethel, Ephraim, and the fortress of Machaerus. The siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE resulted in the enslavement of 97,000 prisoners. All those over the age of seventeen were sent to the mines and quarries of Egypt or condemned to the amphitheatre. See Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, 3.304–306, 3.336–337, 3.539–540, 4.115, 4.436, 4.447, 4.487–488, 4.551–552, 6.416, 7.208.

[11] Ioannes Lydus, *On Powers*, 2.28.

[12] Cassius Dio, 76.9.4.

[13] Scheidel, "The Roman Slave Supply," 294–295.

We can be in little doubt then that multitudinous prisoners were enslaved, war captives being the visual embodiment of Rome's martial primacy.[14] So archaic was the Roman practice of turning prisoners into bondspeople, that the etymology behind the term denoting this action, *sub corona vendere* (meaning "to sell under crown"), had already become opaque by the second century BCE. It may well have referred to the captives wearing of wreaths or, more convincingly, their encirclement by a cohort of guards.[15] To take another linguistic example, the noun *servus* is thought to have derived from the verb *servare*, to "protect" or "preserve."[16] According to Hans Volkman, the connection between the two terms is evidence of the early Republican habit of sparing prisoners of war, making them slaves and hence preserving their lives.[17]

Other common expressions for slaves including *mancipium* (pl. *mancipia*), literally "to take in hand," are again etymologically entwined with warfare. The jurist Florentinus (fl. late fourth century CE) explained that *mancipium* stemmed from the Roman practice of capturing slaves by "hand" (*manu*), that is by force of arms in a conflict zone.[18] In point of fact, Roman legionaries were personally equipped for slaving, with Flavian era troops being required to carry a chain (ἅλυσις) each for the purpose of binding prisoners.[19] A marble relief from Miletus (see fig. 1.1) demonstrably shows three captives being led away by a soldier, their necks tightly fastened with a rope or chain.[20] Curiously, the historian Tacitus (ca. 56–120 CE) expressed surprise at other civilisations's unwillingness to make slaves of prisoners, underscoring its normality to his own elite sensibilities.[21] It also appears as though Rome's adversaries expected to be enslaved should they suffer defeat. Among the Germanic tribes, it was not unheard of for women to bare their naked bodies in front of their battle-ready husbands as if to remind them that failure to repel Rome's armies would result in the conquest of both land and flesh.[22]

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[14] For the exhibition of war captives in triumphal processions, see Polybius, *Histories*, 2.31.5–6 (225 BCE); Livy 34.52.8–12 (194 BCE); Diodorus Siculus, 31.8.12 (167 BCE); Appian, *Historia Romana*, 6.98 (132 BCE); Cassius Dio 51.21.8 (29 BCE); Tacitus, *Annales*, 2.41 (17CE); Strabo, 7.1.14 (17 CE); Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, 7.138 (71 CE). For the depiction of prisoners of war in Roman material culture, see Keith Bradley, "On Captives under the Principate," *Phoenix* 58, no. 3/4 (2004), 298–300; Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denotes Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven, CT: Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1963), 51, 56, 72, 83, 111–112, 122, 157, 194–195.

[15] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 6.4.3–5; András Bodor, "The Control of Slaves during the Roman Empire," in *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity*, ed. Toru Yuge and Masaoki Doi (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 398; Karl-Wilhelm Welwei, *Sub corona vendere: Quellenkritische Studien zu Kriegsgefangenschaft und Sklaverei in Rom bis zum Ende des Hannibalkrieges* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 12–14.

[16] For a thorough etymological discussion, see Adrian Pârvulescu, "Lat. *servus*" *Indogermanische Forschungen* 115 (2010), 190–197.

[17] Hans Volkman, *Die Massenversklavungen der Einwohner Eroberter Städte in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit* (1961 repr., Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 13.

[18] Florentinus, *Digest*, 1.5.4.

[19] Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, 3.95. From late antiquity we hear of enchained Sciri captives being marched from the Danube to Constantinople, see Sozomen, 9.5.5.

[20] A column base from Mainz also portrays two war captives encumbered with neck shackles. Comparably, the side panel of a tombstone from Nickenich depicts a Roman soldier overseeing two prisoners, their necks restrained by iron collars and linked with a single chain. See F. H. Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 10, 40.

[21] Tacitus, *Annales*, 14.33.

[22] Tacitus, *Germania*, 8. For additional evidence of rape as a consequence of war, see Livy, 38.24; Tacitus, *Annales*, 14.31.

Figure 1.1. Marble bas relief depicting enslaved prisoners of war. Istanbul Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 2042 (T). Photo credit: Laurie Venters.

The logistics of how prisoners of war made it to the open market is harder to uncover. Merchants could well have trailed behind the Roman army in expectation of victory and the resulting bonanza of cheap bodies.[23] Following the vanquishment of the Nervii in 57 BCE, Caesar ordered the sale of thousands of captives to the slavers following in his wake.[24] Generals sometimes took a direct role in the selling of prisoners, setting up temporary markets beneath the walls of newly fallen cities.[25] Soldiers and naval officers would have had ample opportunity to buy slaves and are on occasion recorded as doing so.[26] Many women and girls under the ownership of servicemen were coerced into providing sexual companionship, while others entered into quasi-marriages with their captors.[27] It is plausible that those wealthier enslaved women would have been quickly ransomed by their desperate fathers or grief-stricken husbands, others may well have lived as slaves close to where

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[23] For merchants following the Roman army, see Moses I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 169; William V. Harris, "Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 36 (1980), 125; Volkman, *Die Massenversklavungen*, 106–109. For the notion that slaves bought along the frontier were cheaper, see Symmachus, *Epistles*, 2.78.

[24] Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum*, 2.33.6.

[25] Cassius Dio, 47.34.5. Roman commanders were equally involved in the division of human booty among the troops, see Polybius, *Histories*, 10.17.6.

[26] For soldiers, see Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.4.11; Livy, 10.17.8. For sailors, see *Fontes* 3.134; *SB* 3.6304.

[27] Plautus, *Epidicus*, 43. See also Sara Elise Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C.–A.D. 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 231–243.

they were subjugated.[28] Those not sold locally were channelled across land and sea routes to urban centres, where they could be purchased from private traders or directly from the quaestors.[29] Attention to women and girls in the source material is no accident, with females being historically the more likely sex to undergo enslavement and deracination in times of war.

Female enslavement as a consequence of warfare has long been acknowledged.[30] For the classical world, battles and sieges often resulted in the erosion of the adult male populace, slain while protecting their lands and womenfolk.[31] With the defenders obliterated, conquering armies were free to exploit the local population, resulting in, what Kathy Gaca terms, the "andrapodising" (derived from the Greek word ἀνδραποδίζω) of women and children. In the carnival of violence following a city's overthrowal, the old and feeble were slaughtered, while the most attractive women and girls were taken as booty.[32] Any remaining captives were divided into lots and sold. Expansionist warmongers seldom overlooked the chance to benefit from newly conquered peoples, viewing spear-won females as both a source of sexual satisfaction and profit.[33] The violation and exchange of detainees further articulated the victor's paramountcy: "the woman's hymen serving as the physical or sexual sign for the limen or wall defining the city's limits."[34] In a tragic attempt to spare their wives and children the ravages of rape and slavery, some men carried out mercy killings, before turning the sword on themselves.[35] It is not hard to imagine columns of captives being led forth from the smouldering ruins of a despoiled city, in Noel Lenski's words, a "macabre parade of agony."[36]

Conquest aside, another external source of slaves was the import of chattel from abroad. Operating at the fringes of Roman territory, mercantile networks funnelled peregrine bodies into the empire. Far to the east, where Rome rubbed shoulders with the Parthian, and later Sasanian empires, dealers sustained a two-way current of enslaved men and women. At the heart of the hinterland slave trade were tribes of desert nomads — described collectively as Saracens — who moved rapidly between the two empires, captive taking in one territory and selling into the next.[37] A small insight into the

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[28] Keith Bradley, "On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," *Slavery & Abolition* 8, no. 1 (1987), 51.

[29] For a rare example of a slave contract explicitly referencing war captives, see *P.Hamb*. 1.63. For prisoners sold under the direction of the quaestors, see Plautus, *Captivi*, 110–118.

[30] Gerda Lerner, "Women and Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition* 4, no. 3 (1983), 174–177.

[31] The consul Publius Cornelius Dolabella (d. 282 BCE) ordered the slaughter of the adult male population of the Senones tribe, before enslaving their women and children. See Appian, *Historia Romana*, 4.11. Gaius Marius (d. 86 BCE), after the siege of Capsa, directed his soldiers to kill the adult males and enslave the city's remaining inhabitants. See Sallust, *Bellum Jugurthinum*, 91.6.

[32] Kathy L. Gaca, "The Andrapodizing of War Captives in Greek Historical Memory," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140, no. 1 (2010), 142.

[33] Kathy L. Gaca, "Girls, Women, and the Significance of Sexual Violence in Ancient Warfare," in *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights*, ed. Elizabeth D. Heineman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 78.

[34] Patricia Klindienst Joblin, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours," in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, ed. Laura K. McClure (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 267. Relatedly, Eve D'Ambra notes that "the virgin's hymen has long been a metaphor for the city walls." See *Private Lives, Imperial Virtues: The Frieze of the Forum Transitorium in Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 85.

[35] Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, 7.380–389.

[36] Noel Lenski, "Violence and the Roman Slave," in *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 279.

[37] Noel Lenski, "Captivity and Slavery Among The Saracens in Late Antiquity (CA. 250 –630 CE)," *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011), 244.

personal effects of the ancient East-West flesh trade can be gained from the epitaph of Julius Mygdonius, a freeborn Parthian who was kidnapped and trafficked into Roman lands.[38] Being ferried in the opposite direction, the protagonist of Chariton's (fl. first century CE) novel, Callirhoe, expresses her anguish at no longer being able to understand the language of those around her, as she is conveyed ever further from her native Greek-speaking Sicily.[39]

On the African continent, extended trade routes winding through the Sahara brought slaves from the interior to the Roman cities along the Mediterranean seaboard. We know very little about the enslavement of Africans in antiquity, though the recurrent presence of dark-skinned *servi* in Roman art confirms their existence.[40] It may well have been the case that the Garamantes people were in some capacity engaged in the subjugation of black Africans, conducting raids against neighbouring states and carrying off prisoners in chariots.[41] Several Roman commanders led military expeditions from Leptis Magna, with Julius Maternus (fl. early first century CE) accompanying the king of the Garamantes on a slave-hunting mission in Agisymba, an unverified territory four months journey south of Fezzan.[42] We might also note Pliny the Elder's (d. 79 CE) reference to Adule, a market town located on the Red Sea coast, supposedly known for its trade in Ethiopian (i.e. black) slaves.[43] Likewise, inscriptional evidence documents the tariffs paid on shipments of Near Eastern brothel slaves, further hinting at the trafficking networks connecting Roman Africa with other provinces.[44]

No region of Rome's territorial holdings was untouched by slaving. Tracing the distribution of Italian and Gallic wine amphora, it has been estimated that, during the late Republic, Gallic *servi* were regularly traded in exchange for Italian wine.[45] Such was the Gallic demand for *vinum*, that Diodorus Siculus (fl. first century BCE) remarked a slave boy could be procured in exchange for a single flask.[46] Even Rome's northern frontiers were permeated by the slave trade, Strabo (63 BCE–23 CE) speaks of live exports from Britain, while Tacitus notes the conveyance of slaves across the Rhine in the age of Domitian (r. 81–96 CE).[47] Rome's hunger for bondspeople occasionally proved detrimental. Diodorus Siculus recalls, with some irony, that during a period of war against the Germanic Cimbri, Rome called on her allies to provide military assistance. The king of Bithynia received the call to arms but was unable to spare any men of fighting age, protesting the Roman slave trade had severely depleted his population.[48]

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[38] *CIL* 11.137.

[39] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 5.1.3.

[40] Michele George, "Images of Black Slaves in the Roman Empire," *Syllecta Classica* 14 (2003), 161–185.

[41] R. C. C. Law, "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise in Classical Times," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967), 190–196; Elizabeth Fentress, "Slavers on Chariots," in *Money, Trade and Trade Routes in Pre-Islamic North Africa*, ed. Amelia Dowler and Elizabeth R. Galvin (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 69; Keith Bradley, *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 170–172.

[42] Ptolemy, *Geography*, 1.8.

[43] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 6.34.173. Though dated to the sixth century CE, a papyrus from Hermopolis records the sale of a twelve-year-old girl described as μαύρα (black). See Friedrich Preisigke, "Ein Sklavenkauf des 6. Jahrhunderts," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 3, no. 3 (1906), 417.

[44] *I.Portes* 67.

[45] Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*, 22.

[46] Diodorus Siculus, 5.26.3.

[47] Strabo, 4.5.2; Tacitus, *Agricola*, 28.3.

[48] Diodorus Siculus, 26.3.2.

We would do well to remind ourselves of the trauma such acts of displacement would have inflicted on those unfortunate enough to have been enslaved. Beyond the deeply felt hardships of kin separation and rootlessness, foreign slaves would have struggled to adapt to new ways of life almost entirely alien to them. For instance, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) recognised the difficulty new arrivals had with learning Latin, while an anecdote by Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–180 CE) hints that captives began picking up the language in the bustling slave markets.[49] Moreover, the shock and awe experienced by some bondspeople as they were driven into Rome, or any other large metropolis, might well be imagined from an excerpt of Strabo, emphasising the scale and grandeur of the capital's monumental architecture.[50] The composition of elite households provides further indication of the racial and geographic diversity of the slave population.[51] Tacitus, in relaying a speech of Gaius Casssius Longinus (d. 42 BCE), states that large elite households were staffed by non-autochthonous groups of slaves.[52] Equally, in his study of columbaria inscriptions, Kinuko Hasegawa identified that roughly three out of every five slave names was distinctive, conceivably pointing to the varied ethnic make-up of the *familia* during the first century CE.[53]

3. Internal Slaving

Within the boundaries of the empire, the capture of freeborn men and women may have amounted to a minor source of enslaved persons. Pliny the Younger (b. 61 CE) reports several mysterious disappearances, including that of the Roman knight Robustus, who went missing along with his attendants while travelling through the hinterland of central Italy.[54] Responding to similar circumstances, Emperor Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE) made a point of curbing the activities of *grassatores*, those robber gangs who captured and sold freeborn Italians into slavery.[55]

A somewhat hackneyed trope of Latin literature was the kidnapping and enslavement of high-born women, though this cannot have been a normal occurrence.[56] Documentary sources better account for the threat of brigandage. One unnamed female slave, belonging to M. Cocceius Firmus, a centurion stationed in Britain during the mid-second century CE, was abducted by foreign bandits and sold to human traffickers.[57] In an extraordinary twist of fate, Cocceius Firmus was able to locate his *ancilla* and pay a ransom price for her release. The late antique Christian bishops Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) and John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) bemoaned the abduction of

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[49] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.12.9; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 4.1.4–6.

[50] Starbo, 5.3.8.

[51] Roman law required vendors to advertise the nationality of slaves, see Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.31.21. In some cases, ethnicity seems to have affected the division of labour. Tacitus insinuates that Greek women often worked as slave nurses, see *Dialogus*, 29.1. The physician Soranus makes a nearly identical comment, see *Gynaeciorum*, 2.19. Varro considered slaves from Gaul to make the best cattle drivers, see *De re rustica*, 2.10.4. A number of servile brothel workers appear to have originated from Syria and Egypt, see Propertius, *Elegiae*, 2.23.21. More generally, New Comedy describes auburn-haired slaves, quite possibly captives taken from the Germanic provinces or Britain, see Plautus, *Asinaria*, 400; *Pseudolus*, 1218; Terence, *Phormio*, 51. Finally, we might note the extravagant sums paid for exotic *servi*, see Juvenal, *Satires*, 5.67–74; Terence, *Eunuchus*, 165–167, 470–471.

[52] Tacitus, *Annales*, 14.44. Varro warned slaveholders to avoid purchasing bondspeople from the same ethnic or racial background, cautioning it could stimulate infighting. See *De re rustica*, 1.17.5.

[53] Kinuko Hasegawa, *The Familia Urbana during the Early Empire: A Study of Columbaria Inscriptions* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005), 75.

[54] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 6.25.1. Alternately, Robustus may have been murdered by his slave entourage.

[55] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 32.

[56] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 4.24; Plautus, *Poenulus*, 1239–1240.

[57] Pomponius, *Digest*, 49.15.6.

free citizens, the latter referring to the luring away of children by slave dealers with sweets and cakes.[58] No parallel to the state-created non-slaving zones of medieval Europe (preventing the enslavement of co-religionists) is observable in the classical Roman world.[59]

For the modern reader, potentially the most shocking source of new slaves was the adoption of abandoned infants. John Boswell, in his seminal study of child abandonment, defines the practice as the "relinquishing of control over children by their natal parents or guardians, whether by leaving them somewhere, selling them, or legally consigning authority to some other person or institution."[60] Unlike abandonment, however, exposure denotes the rejection of a neonate in the first days or weeks after birth, before the child had been formally accepted as part of his or her family.[61] The custom of exposing unwanted children is found in many cultures throughout world history, though not all societies were in the habit of making foundlings slaves. Much has been made of child abandonment in the Roman world, especially in relation to the slave supply.[62] Here I would like only to consider the possible motives for exposure, alongside the increased propensity for infant girls to be discarded.

It should be cautioned that Roman society did not, generally speaking, consider *expositio* (lit. "putting out") akin to infanticide, despite the fact death was an acknowledgeable outcome.[63] Several jurists did, nonetheless, attempt to categorise exposure as a form of infant killing, though social custom and environmental pressures exerted a far greater influence than the rule of law.[64] By and large, it was the poor who exposed healthy and legitimate newborns, crippling poverty being a burden few parents wished to share with their children.[65] Infants born out of wedlock or of an adulterous relationship may have been similarly exposed, the delicacy of the subject matter however makes this a rather mute point in the sources.[66] Roman literature offers some provisional support, depicting unmarried young women relinquishing their babies, possibly reflecting real-world

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[58] Augustine, *Epistles*, 10*.2; John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, 1.7.10. For further evidence of kidnapping in late antiquity, see Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 80–81.

[59] Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era," *Past & Present* 205, no. 1 (2009), 4; Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Historicising Ancient Slavery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 44.

[60] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 24.

[61] Judith Evans Grubbs, "Infant Exposure and Infanticide," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83.

[62] Judith Evans Grubbs, "The Dynamics of Infant Abandonment: Motives, Attitudes and (Unintended) Consequences," in *The Dark Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Katariina Mustakallio and Christian Laes (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 25–26; William V. Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994), 18–19; Ryoji Motomura, "The Practice of Exposing Infants and its Effects on the Development of Slavery in the Ancient World," in *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity*, ed. Toru Yuge and Masaoki Doi (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 410–415.

[63] Keith Bradley, "Aussetzung/Kindesaussetzung," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 1, 320.

[64] Paul, *Digest*, 25.3.4.

[65] Appian, *Bella Civilia*, 1.10; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 497E. See also William V. Harris, *Rome's Imperial Economy: Twelve Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50. However, P. A. Brunt has proposed the exposure of female infants was equally common among the senatorial class wherein, during the reign of Emperor Augustus, men outnumbered women. See "The Roman Mob," *Past & Present* 35 (1966), 8.

[66] Augustus demanded the exposure of his granddaughter Julia's newborn on account of her serial adulteries. See Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 65.3.

practices.[67] Even divorcees are known to have abandoned infants, anxious that their sole income would be insufficient to support both them and their child.[68] The first-century CE grammarian Melissus was, for instance, cast out by his parents following a heated quarrel, presumably in the run-up to their eventual separation.[69] Infants born with a physical deformity were particularly vulnerable to exposure, though other methods of infanticide were equally probable.[70] Visibly disabled neonates could be strangled or drowned shortly after birth, though the violence of such actions surely made exposure the less harrowing option.[71]

Owing to the right of *patria potestats* (power of the father), the male head of any household was, theoretically at least, entitled to decide if a newborn was to be nurtured or exposed. Nevertheless, the physical act of removing the child often fell to women, typically slaves or hired *obstetrices* (midwives). The physician Soranus (fl. late first/early second century CE) provides detailed criteria for assessing the vitality of newborns, inferring midwives (μαῖαι in Greek) were responsible for advising under what circumstances exposure was prudent.[72] Enslaved women likewise disposed of unwanted children, be it their offspring or those born to their mistress. The pastoral novel Δάφνις καὶ Χλόη (*Daphnis and Chloe*) by the Greek writer Longus (fl. second century CE), relates how the hero Daphnis was exposed by his mother's slave woman, Sophrone, not long after birth.[73] Alexander Severus (r. 222–235 CE), responding to a petition authored by a certain Claudius, decreed that slave owners retained the right to take back children exposed by their *ancillae*, as long as they reimbursed the *nutritor* (rearer) the cost of bringing up the infant.[74]

Choices of how and where to discard a neonate look as though they were influenced by whether or not parents hoped their child would survive. Juvenal (fl. late first–early second century CE) speaks of newborns being left alongside "foul pools" (*lacus spurcos*), most likely the sewer outlets of public latrines, buildings that unquestionably received a high number of visitors.[75] Similarly, we can discern that some locations were well-known for being sites of abandonment.[76] The dung heaps on the margins of ancient towns and cities were one such place. From Roman Egypt, we find several wet-nursing contracts specifically mentioning the recovery of children from dunghills.[77] Some babies seem to have been left with a token (γνώρισμα) indicating their family origin, conceivably in

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[67] Ovid, *Heroides*, 11.84. For a detailed analysis of exposure in Roman literature, see Fridolf Kudlien, "Kindesaussetzung im antiken Roman: Ein Thema zwischen Fiktionalität und Lebenswirklichkeit," in *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, ed. Heinz Hofmann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1989), Vol. 2, 25–44.

[68] Scaevola, *Digest*, 40.4.29.

[69] Suetonius, *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*, 2.

[70] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 2.15.2; Seneca, *Controversiae*, 10.4.16.

[71] Livy, 27.37.6; Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 9.7; Seneca, *De Ira*, 1.15.2.

[72] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 2.10.

[73] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 4.21.3. Though her status goes unmentioned, the personal name Σωφροσύνην is attested three times for enslaved women. See Heikki Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom: Ein Namenbuch* (1982 repr., Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 757.

[74] *Codex Justinianeus*, 8.51.1.

[75] Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.602–605.

[76] For instance, excavators of a Romano-British house and outbuildings in the early twentieth century uncovered a stretch of ground "positively littered with babies." In total, the remains of some 97 newborns were recovered. The site, located north of the enclosure wall, was conceivably an established place of abandonment. See Alfred Heneage Cocks, "A Romano-British Homestead in the Hambleden Valley," *Archaeologia* 71 (1921), 150.

[77] *BGU* 4.1058, 1107. See also Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Copronyms and the Exposure of Infants in Egypt," in *Studies in Roman Law in Memory of. A. Arthur Schiller*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall and William V. Harris (Leiden: Brill. 1986), 148–162.

the far-flung hope that they would one day be reunited with their parents.[78] Others were left naked, perhaps a deliberate action intended to hasten the onset of death.[79] Regardless, once abandoned the chances of survival were slim. Wild animals prowled the outskirts of towns, ensuring defenceless *expositi* could have been "torn apart by dogs" (*laniabuntur a canibus*) or dragged off by some other opportunistic scavenger.[80] What little was left of their small cold corpses was picked over by birds.[81]

Those who did not succumb to exposure were taken in as adopted children or *servi*. Slave dealers and private citizens alike were regularly on the lookout for infants whom they could put to work or sell for a profit.[82] A second-century CE slave contract from Dacia records the sale of the six-year-old foundling girl Passia.[83] In all probability, the slave trader Dasius nourished her through infancy until she was old enough to fetch a sizeable price. Ever conscious of the immorality of pagan custom, the Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) warned that fathers, who earlier in life had exposed an infant daughter, could later unknowingly have sex with her in a local brothel.[84] The insinuation that foundling girls were taken in by pimps and raised as prostitutes is clear. Seneca the Elder (ca. 54 BCE–39 CE) records what is arguably the most gruesome use of slave foundlings, writing of boys and girls who were deliberately mutilated and sent out as part of begging gangs, their disfigurements intended to elicit greater sympathy from potential alms givers.[85]

We can tentatively conclude that girls were more often than not the victims of exposure, though archaeological findings have, on occasion, challenged this assumption.[86] Our most compelling evidence comes from Roman Egypt, where the survival of some three hundred census returns enables demographic assessment of the ancient sex ratio. In their exhaustive study of the cache, Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier observed that female slaves in rural villages outnumbered their male counterparts by a factor of six to one.[87] Hypothetically, the skewed sex quotient might be explained by the fact freeborn metropolitan girls were more likely to be abandoned than male children, leaving scope for villagers to pick up unwanted daughters and bring them back to the countryside, where they were raised as slaves.[88] Another Egyptian document, in which a husband instructs his pregnant wife to expose their child if born female, lends further credence to the demographic data.[89] However, we should refrain from concluding such attitudes were typical of all provinces and time

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[78] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 1.3.1, 1.5.3, 4.24.1, 4.35.3.

[79] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Claudius" 27.

[80] Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 7.2.9, 7.2.11; Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1.15.

[81] Ovid, *Heroides*, 11.83–84.

[82] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 31.4. *P.Grenf*. 2.75; *P.Kellis* 1.8

[83] *CIL* 3, "Instrumenta Dacia," 937.

[84] Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, 3.3.22. Justine Martyr makes a near identical comment, see *Apologia*, 1.27.

[85] Seneca, *Controversiae*, 10.4.2.

[86] For the exposure of infant girls in literature, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.675–679; Terrence, *Heauton Timorumenos*, 626. For the excavation of a sewer under the Roman bathhouse at Ashkelon, see Patricia Smith and Gila Kahila, "Identification of Infanticide in Archaeological Sites," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 19, no. 6 (1992), 667–675. Of the nineteen neonatal skeletons recovered from the dig site, fourteen were male and only five female.

[87] Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 158.

[88] Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, 159. See also Roger S. Bagnall, "Missing Females in Roman Egypt," *Scripta Chzssica Israelica* 16 (1997), 126.

[89] *P.Oxy*. 4.744.

periods. Be that as it may, it is clear abandonment was endemic in much of the Roman world, with some estimates calculating that half of all mothers would have exposed at least one child during their lifetime.[90] That many *expositi* would have found themselves enslaved was a tragic inevitability.

For those not wishing to abandon their child to fate, direct exchange into slavery was always a possibility. In the early Republic, it seems as though fathers (*patres*) had the right to sell their sons and daughters with impunity.[91] By the time of Cicero (106–43 BCE), however, the authority of the *pater* had been curtailed, and the legal provisioning for the sale of children was supposed a relic of a bygone custom.[92] Nonetheless, the fact that Roman law was careful never to discipline parents who attempted to pawn their children is indicative of the practice's continuance.[93] The reasons for the wilful sale of one's children boiled down to an admixture of poverty and tax burdens.[94] Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE) indicates that parents in dire straights may have handed their child over to a pimp for the "purposes of fornication" (*liberos ad stuprum*).[95] In like manner, the stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus (fl. mid-first century CE) knew of a father who sold his handsome son into a life of infamy.[96] An interesting case from Hermopolis, preserved on a late fourth-century CE papyrus, documents the trial of a murdered brothel slave, who was sold in adolescence by her destitute mother.[97] Comparably, daughters in the Greek world, both in Hellenistic and Roman times, were liable to be sold off as concubines or slave-wives.[98]

As a further point, we might briefly mention those adults who voluntarily traded liberty for servitude.[99] Plautus insinuates that in Rome's Tuscan quarter, located between the Forum and Velabrum, was hosted a market where freeborn citizens regularly sold themselves.[100] Roman jurisprudence likewise betrays the existence of contractual slavery, with Marcian (fl. mid-third century CE) exclaiming that anyone over the age of twenty might exchange his or her freedom in return for a share of their body price.[101] Ruminating on the motivations for self-sale, Dio Chrysostom considered it to be a strategy for combating impoverishment.[102] After all, eking out a living as a provincial farmer was unlikely to ever result in societal elevation, whereas service in a

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[90] Walter Scheidel, "Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997), 164.

[91] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.132, 4.79.

[92] Cicero, *Pro Caecina*, 34; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 2.26.4.

[93] Paul, *Pauli Sententiae*, 5.1.1; *Codex Justinianus*, 7.16.1. For an exception, see Julian, *Digest*, 21.2.39.3.

[94] Ville Vuolanto, "Selling a Freeborn Child: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Roman World," *Ancient Society* 33 (2003), 175, 181.

[95] Seneca, *Epistles*, 101.15.

[96] Musonius Rufus, *Lectures*, 16.

[97] *BGU* 4.1024. For a partial translation and discussion of this text, see Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 196–198.

[98] Sophocles, *Tereus*, fragment 583. See also Morris Silver, *Slave-Wives, Single Women and Bastards in the Ancient Greek World: Law and Economics Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018), 83–89.

[99] Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 80–85; Alice Rio "Self-sale and Voluntary Entry into Unfreedom, 300–1100," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 3 (2012), 663–666. For arguments in favour of the prevalence of self-sale, see S. Scott Bartchy, *First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21* (1973 repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 46–50.

[100] Plautus, *Curculio*, 482; Morris Silver, "Places for Self-Selling in Ulpian, Plautus and Horace: The Role of Vertumnus," *Mnemosyne* 67, no. 4 (2014), 580.

[101] Marcian, *Digest*, 1.5.5.1. For a detailed examination, see Morris Silver, "Contractual Slavery in the Roman Economy," *Ancient History Bulletin* 25 (2011), 73–132.

[102] Dio Chrystom, *Discourses*, 15.23.

rich household at least gave the illusion upward mobility was possible. This being said, it is improbable that self-sale ever made up a significant contribution to the Roman slave supply.

By far the most obvious source of new slaves were those born to servile parents. The jurists were explicit: children born to a slave mother were ipso facto slaves, and this was most likely the case even in areas of the empire where Roman law did not operate fully.[103] Well into late antiquity, lawgivers followed the earlier legal position that the children of slaves inherited their mother's servile status.[104] In cases where children were fathered by freeborn men, the mother's condition determined the status of the child.[105]

Slaves born into the household of their owner were known as *vernae* (sing. *verna*). The precise etymological origins of *verna* are unclear, though in imperial times, as Elizabeth Herrmann-Otto has expertly shown, the term, in noun form, applied to young slaves, while as an adjective was used in the sense of "native" or "born at home."[106] Generally speaking, *vernae* constituted a special class of enslaved persons and were often imbued with greater prestige than those transplanted into the household from outside.[107] The enriched pedigree of *vernae* was, as Cornelius Nepos (ca. 100–27 BCE) implies, a consequence of their heightened receptiveness to their master's instruction.[108] Many Latin texts portray the comfort slave owners drew from being surrounded by their home-born slaves. The poet Horace (65–8 BCE) paints a nostalgic picture of rural life on the eve of the Terminalia, speaking fondly of his *vernae* hurrying home from the fields in expectation of the coming feast.[109]

The degree to which homebred slaves replenished the unfree population has come under considerable scrutiny. Walter Scheidel, using demographic models, argues that natural reproduction made a greater contribution to the slave supply than any other source of bonded labour.[110] John Madden reaches a similar conclusion, hypothesising that the majority of *servi* were born to their status, but refrains from arguing the slave body was self-perpetuating.[111] Assuming for a moment this was the case, *ancillae* would then have been of central importance to the continuation of Roman slavery. Under such circumstances, *domini* might well have encouraged slave breeding or

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[103] Marcian, *Digest*, 1.5.5.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 15.3.

[104] *Codex Justinianeus*, 4.8.7.

[105] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.82.

[106] Elizabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Ex Ancilla Natus: Untersuchungen zu den hausgeborenen Sklaven und Sklavinnen im Westen des rômischen Kaiserreiches* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 10. It is worth remarking that the noun *vernae* in military inscriptions took on the meaning of "born in Rome," as in the commemorated soldier was a native of the city.

[107] Beryl Rawson, "Degrees of Freedom: Vernae and Junian Latins in the Roman Familia," in *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture,* ed. Véronique Dasen and Thomas Späth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196, 203.

[108] Cornelius Nepos, *Atticus*, 13.4.

[109] Horace, *Epodes*, 2.61–66. We might also cite Tibullus, who's idealised portrait of rural life depicts his mistress playing with the home-born slave children on her lap, see *Elegies*, 1.5.25.

[110] Scheidel, "Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire," 158–167. For a rebuttal of Scheidel's argument, see William V. Harris, "Demography, Geography, and the Sources of Roman Slaves," *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999), 62–75.

[111] John Madden, "Slavery in the Roman Empire Numbers and Origins," *Classics Ireland* 3 (1996), 115. Willem Jongman reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that while natural reproduction was the largest source of new slaves, imports were necessary to offset the drain from manumission and death. See "Slavery and the Growth of Rome: The Transformation of Italy in the Second and First centuries BCE," in *Rome the Cosmopoli*s, ed. Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118.

taken a personal hand in enlarging the *familia* through sexual relations with their *ancillae*. However, when squared with the epigraphic data for manumission (see below), we find that young female slaves were among the most likely to be freed. This somewhat undermines the idea of *ancillae* as conduits for the procreation of *vernae*, and is rather more suggestive of the view that offspring were regarded as a favourable by-product of slaveholding.[112] A comment of Ulpain's writing further supports this reading of the evidence: "slave girls are not acquired purely as breeding stock."[113]

Onomastic surveys additionally contradict the demographic position. Examining the *cognomina* of slaves and freedmen in epitaphs from the city of Rome, Heikki Solin estimated that *vernae* were more likely to receive a Latin name compared with those *servi* imported from abroad.[114] Yet, when looking at slave-authored inscriptions as a whole, Latin *cognomina* feature noticeably less than their Greek or barbarian equivalents.[115] Consequently, it might be extrapolated that *vernae* were only a minority division of the total slave population. The truth is, as ever, likely somewhere in-between, with natural reproduction complementing other internal sources of enslaved people.

When in the fifth century CE Saint Augustine wrote of those who had been dragged off "in columns like an endless river" (*perpetno quasi fluvio*), he unwittingly portrayed the magnitude of Roman slaving during the late Republic and early Principate.[116] That enslavement reached a historic zenith in the Roman period is largely unquestionable, with perhaps 100,000 bodies being traded annually in the late first century BCE.[117] To put this figure in perspective, at the height of the Atlantic slave trade (1776–1800), an estimated 83,000 slaves were being shipped to the New World annually.[118] While efforts to numerically categorise the Roman slave system are, for the most part, unproductive, there can be no denying the sheer immensity of the ancient commerce in flesh. With such voluminous numbers to contend with, it is easy to overlook the suffering of individual men, women, and children. Enslavement precipitated the erasure of one's ethnic and cultural heritage, the unfree being cut off from their natal and social worlds, encumbered with the "stigma of alienness."[119] Moreover, the routes to slavery were sudden and frequently violent and, with the exception of self-sale, wholly coercive. For many, the barbarity of enslavement must have cast a long psychological shadow, one we are sorely hamstrung from recreating due to the dearth of primary evidence.

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[112] Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, "Hausgeburt/Sklavengeburt," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 2, 1322.

[113] Ulpian, *Digest*, 5.3.27. *Non temere ancillae eius rei causa comparantur ut pariant*.

[114] Heikki Solin, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der griechischen Personnenamen in Rom I* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1971), 156–157.

[115] Christer Bruun, "Greek or Latin? The Owner's Choice of Names for *vernae* in Rome," in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 33–34; Heikki Solin, "Griechische und römische Sklavennamen: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung," in *Fünfzig Jahre Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei an der Mainzer Akademie 1950–2000: Miscellanea zum Jubiläum*, ed. Heinz Bellen and Heinz Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 309.

[116] Augustine, *Epistles*, 10*.7.

[117] Bradley, "On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 42. Walter Scheidel has highlighted the almost insurmountable problem of estimating the annual demand for slaves. For instance, rough calculations for Roman Italy in 25 BCE range from 7,500 to 47,500. See "The Slave Population in Roman Italy: Speculation and Constraints," *Topoi* 9, no. 1 (1999), 138.

[118] Between the years 1776 and 1800 an estimated 2,008,670 slaves were exported to the Americas. Dividing this figure by the 24 years of the sample period returns an annual average of 83,694. For the numbers in question, see Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 764.

[119] Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 42–43.

4. Penal Servitude

For completeness sake, one additional form of subjugation remains to be discussed. Status transformation needn't only have resulted from external and internal slaving but was meted out as a punishment for the conviction of serious crimes. Under Roman law, grave offences could be disciplined with a term of penal servitude, reducing freeborn men and women to slave status. Individuals found guilty of capital charges were stripped of their civil rights and made *servi poenae* (slaves of the penalty).[120] Ordinarily, offenders reduced to servile status were sentenced to some form of hard labour, often in the notoriously dangerous mines and quarries (*metalla*).[121] Felonies warranting enslavement varied considerably and, as Miriam Groen-Vallinga and Laurens Tacoma have highlighted, often came down to the discretion of the judges.[122] Typical infringements punished by way of the mines may have included cattle rustling and forgery.[123] Penal servitude was also allotted for those subjects unfortunate enough to incur the emperor's displeasure.[124]

The few extant accounts of life in the *metalla* liken it to a protracted death sentence. The ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus writes of ragged prisoners bent ceaselessly in the breaking of rocks under the watchful eyes of their whip-wielding guards.[125] Polybius (ca. 200–118 BCE), via Strabo, evokes a similar intensity, reporting that some 40,000 miners at New Carthage perpetually crushed, sifted, and washed rocks in search of silver ore.[126] Those set to work mining gold toiled under lamp light, spending months in the subterranean shafts without cessation.[127] Lethal gases, claustrophobic conditions, and the risk of tunnels collapsing further hint at the perilous nature of the work.[128]

A modicum of evidence indicates labour punishments differentiated between the sexes. Fergus Miller has raised the possibility, on the basis of Ulpian's (fl. late second century CE) comments, that female convicts were condemned exclusively *in ministerium metallicorum*, suggestive of their ancillary or service function.[129] Conversely, the legal scholar Olivia Robinson has interpreted Ulpian to mean female detainees were a kind of sex slave, obligated to carnally please their male

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120 Ulpian, *Digest*, 48.19.2.

121 Callistratus, quoting a rescript of Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE), declared sentencing to the quarries was temporary, whereas condemnation to the mines was for life, see *Digest*, 48.19.28.6. Ulpian, however, remarked that the only underlying difference between the two penalties was in the weight of the chains worn by inmates, a lighter set being fitted to those working in the quarries. See *Digest*, 48.19.8.6.

122 Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga and Laurens E. Tacoma, "Contextualising Condemnation to Hard Labour in the Roman Empire," in *Global Convict Labour*, ed. Christian Giuseppe De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 58.

123 Ulpian, *Digest*, 47.14.1; Pliny, *Epistulae*, 10.58.

124 Augustus ordered the enslavement and sale of a Roman knight who had deliberately cut off two of his son's fingers in order to make him ineligible for military service, see Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 24. Likewise, Titus rounded up and sold all the city of Rome's denouncers (*delatores*), see *De vita Caesarum*, "Titus" 8; Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum*, 4.

125 Diodorus Siculus, 3.13.3.

126 Strabo, 3.2.10.

127 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia,* 33.70.

128 Strabo 12.3.4 mentions a sulphur mine where mortality rates were so dismal new workers were in constant demand.

129 Ulpian, *Digest*, 48.19.8.8; Fergus Miller, "Condemnation to Hard Labour in the Roman Empire," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 52 (1984), 139.

workmates and prison officers.[130] This seems highly unlikely. Not only do we have evidence for women taking up the pickaxe and shovel, but entitling convicts to erotic diversions surely ran contrary to the ethos of punishment.[131] More plausibly, female prisoners were reserved for the lighter work of camp upkeep, as opposed to the business of excavation and tunnelling.

The Roman state also utilised a second, less severe, form of penal labour. Unlike working in the mines, however, the sentence of *opus publicum* was seldom lifelong.[132] Convict labour employed in the maintenance of public works and civic infrastructure is suggested by a number of ancient authors. While governor of Bithynia, the younger Pliny discovered a gang of convicts among the public slaves responsible for the construction of new roads and cleaning of the sewer system.[133] Similarly, the civil engineer Frontinus (d. 103 CE) mentions that bonded persons were used to scrub and unblock the sewers and aqueducts of Rome, though these slaves were more likely *servi publici* than convict labourers.[134] Prisoners condemned to death for other crimes were also put to task while awaiting execution.[135] It appears as if women were equally liable to be punished with stints of quasi-enslavement. During the fourth century CE, female convicts could be employed in the imperial wool and linen mills (*gynaecea* and *linyphia*), where they were expected to spin cloth or dye fabrics.[136] It remains open to question whether factory girls were penal slaves or free employees tied to their occupation. The early Christian author Lactantius (ca. 250–325 CE) implies the former, claiming even ladies of noble birth could be sent down to the milling floor.[137]

Although convict labour in the Roman world was not utilised on the same scale as in other ancient societies, most notably Han China, it was, nonetheless, a well-entrenched legal instrument for the punishment of serious offences.[138] While *servi poenae* likely made up only a fraction of the total unfree population, they were surely among the most wretched, ranking lowest in the value table of slave occupations. Even the hardships of domestic or agricultural labour pale in comparison to the brutality of the *metalla*.[139]

5. Bodies for Sale

Having now addressed the main entry points into slavery, it remains to consider how *servi* were purchased. That the Roman jurist Papinian (142–212 CE) could write so dispassionately of the

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130 Olivia F. Robinson, *Penal Practice and Penal Policy in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 125.

131 For the use of female slave labour in the saltworks, see Pomponius, *Digest*, 49.15.6. For the conscription of bonded women in the emerald mines of Egypt, see *O.Did*. 376.

132 The jurist Paul seems to infer that convicts could be condemned to *opus publicum* either permanently or for a fixed term, see *Digest*. 47.18.2. Equally, Ulpian states that those prisoners who made a break for freedom while serving a public labour sentence risked lengthening their punishment, see *Digest*, 48.19.8.7. On balance, we can assume that *opus publicum* sentences could vary in duration and need not have been for life.

133 Pliny, *Epistulae*, 10.31–32; Groen-Vallinga and Tacoma, "Contextualising Condemnation to Hard Labour," 61–62.

134 Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu*, 2.118–119.

135 Ulpian, *Digest*, 28.3.6.6.

136 Miller, "Condemnation to Hard Labour in the Roman Empire," 144–145.

137 Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 21.4.

138 For a discussion of the differences between the early Chinese and Roman use of forced labour, see Scheidel, "Slavery and Forced Labour in Early China and the Roman World," 144–146.

139 The slave Tyndarus in lines 999–1000 of Plautus's *Captivi* reflects, "truly there's no underworld that can match the place I was, in the quarries" (*uerum enim uero nulla adaeque est Accheruns atque ubi ego fui, in lapicidinis*).

"regular daily traffic of slaves," infers the banality of their acquisition and sale.[140] The majority of privately owned bonded men and women were brought on the open market, necessitating a vast network of purveyors and vendors. One well-known epitaph, commemorating the Thracian slave trader Aulus Capreilius Timotheus, remarkably himself a freedman, is unusual for depicting a dozen chained slaves (eight men, two women, and two children) in the lower register of the gravestone.[141] The middle portion of the stele portrays men carrying caldrons and amphora, quite possibly representing the goods Aulus typically bartered in return for his human merchandise.[142] Some dealers catered for the specialist market, with the future emperor Vespasian (r. 69–79 CE) peddling eunuchs to repair his ruined credit.[143] Not dissimilarly, a sarcophagus panel from Rome boasts that its occupant, one Marcus Sempronius Nicocrates, made his fortune from the commerce of beautiful women and girls.[144]

Slave traders — known as *mercatores*, *venaliciarii*, or *mangones* in Latin — transported chattel overland or via the sea lanes connecting the Mediterranean. Once docked, slaves conveyed by ship were disembarked and marched on towards urban marketplaces.[145] The comic hero of Petronius's (ca. 27–66 CE) novel, the freedman Trimalchio, is depicted in a prosopographical entranceway mural being driven into Rome, fortuitously led by the god Mercury.[146] The living conditions of those slaves in transit can only be guessed at, though chaining, malnutrition, and disease are all to be suspected.[147] A range of different sized markets would have periodically sold slaves, but only large-scale emporiums located at trade nexus points or in the empire's major cities were consistently stocked.[148]

How exactly these markets looked is difficult to ascertain. From Acmonia we hear of a certain C. Sornatius, possibly a legate of Lucullus, who built a market and alter, feasibly intending to use it as

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[140] Papinian, *Digest*, 41.3.44. *adsiduam et cottidianam comparationem servorum*.

[141] The grave monument and accompanying inscription were first published by Jacques Rogers following their excavation in May 1939, see "Inscriptions de la Région du Strymon," *Archéologique* 24 (1945), 49–51. Badly damaged in the course of the Second World War, and having spent much of the ensuing decades mouldering in the courtyard of the Kavala Archaeological Museum, the surviving relief panels are now in an abysmal state of repair, with the upper part of the inscription being entirely lost. For photographs of the epitaph prior to its deterioration, see Duchêne Hervé, "Sur la Stèle d'Aulus Caprilius Timotheos, Sômatemporos," *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 110, no. 1 (1986), 515–517. For additional comment, see John Bodel "Caveat emptor: Towards a Study of Roman Slave-traders," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005), 189; Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity*, 162–176; Schumacher, *Sklaverei in der Antike*, 60; Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*, 233.

[142] Michele George, "Slavery and Roman Material Culture," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 392.

[143] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Vespasian" 4.3.

[144] *IGUR* 3.1326; F. H. Marshall, *The Collection of Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum, Part IV: Supplementary and Miscellaneous Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), 215. The inscription is flanked by a pair of relief panels detailing a man, presumably the deceased Marcus, receiving instruction or poetic inspiration from two young women.

[145] For a short examination of the evidence for the traffic of slaves by ship, see Wayne Edward Boese, "A Study of the Slave Trade and the Sources of Slaves in the Roman Republic and the Early Roman Empire," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1973), 177–180.

[146] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 29.

[147] Bradley, "On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 48.

[148] For an outline of the range of markets likely to have sold enslaved people, see Harris, "Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade," 125–126.

a venue for selling war captives.[149] The structure itself could well have been purpose-built for the sale and auction of prisoners, including pens for holding enslaved men and women, a platform for their display, and a room for the assembly of potential buyers.[150] More famously, the Agora of the Italians on the island of Delos exhibits architectural features purportedly reminiscent of a slave market. The hermetic demarcation of the inner courtyard, fitting of iron grilles over the niches of the surrounding colonnade, and general utilitarian design (a simple bathing area, dirt floors etc.), indeed hint at the agora's privileging of security and functionality.[151] However, as Monika Trümper has recently pointed out, no archaeological site can be conclusively identified as a slave market.[152] As such, we must refrain from drawing conclusions on their precise appearance and layout.

In preparation for the auction block, dealers pruned and primed their slaves with an eye to enhancing their prospective value. Ointments and oils were rubbed into bondspeople's skin leaving a healthy sheen, while other concoctions supposedly increased appetite to aid in the replenishment of body fat lost on the journey to market.[153] Even Galen (b. 129 CE), physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180 CE), wrote of the use of artificial fattening creams designed to promote weight gain.[154] In some cases, puberty-retarding agents were applied in an attempt to delay the onset of adolescent development.[155] In all likelihood, young and attractive boys were the main recipients of such treatments, though we cannot rule out their use on girls altogether. Others may have been craftily painted to give the appearance of developed muscles, where in reality there was only "useless fat" (*inani sagina*).[156] When auction day dawned, slaves were first divided into lots, being lumped up with those of similar skills or ethnic backgrounds.[157] New arrivals were marked with chalked feet, and those slaves whom the seller would offer no quality assurances wore a small cap known as a *pilleum*.[158] As a matter of legal necessity, placards (*tituli*) advertising a slave's country of origin, state of health, and possible defects were hung around their necks.[159]

Any slave called up to the platform was an object of intense scrutiny. In the satirist Lucian's (ca. 125–180 CE) parody Βίων πράσις (*Creeds for Sale*) — imagining the auction of various philosophers and thinkers — those on offer were asked what country they came from, what skills they possessed, and even their dietary preferences, quite possibly reflecting the real-life inquiries made by buyers.[160] Additionally, slaves were required to prove their agility, being forced to "leap in

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[149] *AE* 1999, 572.

[150] Bodel, "Caveat emptor," 184; Monika Trümper, *Greco-Roman Slave Markets: Fact or Fiction?* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 20–21.

[151] For the reasoning against the slave market hypothesis, see Monika Trümper, *Die Agora des Italiens in Delos: Baugeschichte, Architektur, Ausstattung und Funktion einer späthellenistischen Porticus-Anlage* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2008), Vol. 1, 93–99.

[152] Trümper, *Greco-Roman Slave Markets*, 75.

[153] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 24.35–36.

[154] Galen, *De alimentorum facultatibus*, 2.19.

[155] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 30.41; Galen, *De methodo medendi*, 14.16. Slaves themselves, it should be noted, applied ointments in an effort to hasten the onset of puberty, see Petronius, *Satyricon*, 75.11. For males at least, this was presumably done in an attempt to extinguish the sexual appeal of their boyish features.

[156] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 2.15.25–26.

[157] Seneca, *Epistles*, 47.9.

[158] Aulius Gallius, *Noctes Atticae*, 6.4.2–3; Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.111; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 35.199.

[159] Aulius Gallius, *Noctes Atticae*, 4.2.1; Cicero, *De Officiis*, 3.16; Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.1.1.

[160] Lucian, *Vitarum Auctio*, 2–3; Keith Bradley, "The Regular, Daily Traffic in Slaves: Roman History and Contemporary History," *The Classical Journal* 87, no. 2 (1991), 126–128.

the marketplace" (*medio cum saluere foro*) so that onlookers could appreciate their athleticism.[161] Moreover, vendees may have smelt a slave's breath or body odour in an attempt to determine their state of health.[162] Closer bodily inspections were also performed, *servi* being stripped naked so that no physical imperfection was overlooked.[163] A bas-relief decorating the tombstone of the freedman Attilius Regulus, now only preserved in a rather crude seventeenth-century drawing by the archaeologist Alexander Wiltheim, shows an auctioneer's assistant lifting the back of a slave's loincloth to reveal his buttocks, while the salesman himself raises his hand as if to draw attention to the slave's muscular physique.[164]

Figure 1.2. Wall painting of a slave sale. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 9067. Photo credit: Laurie Venters.

Likewise, the elder Seneca writes of a girl captured by pirates and sold "naked on the shore to meet the buyer's sneers."[165] The custom of denuding female slaves was so common that Mark Antony (83 BCE–30 CE) could accuse Octavian of behaving like a pimp when he ordered the undressing

[161] Propertius, *Elegiae*, 4.5.49–52.

[162] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.12.4.

[163] Seneca, *Epistles*, 80.9–10.

[164] For a reproduction of the original drawing, see Jerzy Kolendo, "Elements pour une enquete sur l'iconographie de esclaves dans l'art Hellenistique et Romain," in *Schiavitù, manomissione e classi dipendenti nel mondo antico*, ed. Maria Capozza (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1979), 164–165, fig. 4. For the inscription, see *CIL* 13.3986.

[165] Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.2.3. *Nuda in litore stetit ad fastidium emptoris*.

and examination of matrons and virgins.[166] Even an auctioneer might assault a slave woman, coercing her into kissing him as if to show off her sexual malleability.[167] One wall painting (see fig. 1.2) from the House of Julia Felix (Regio II.4.3) in Pompeii, depicts what has been interpreted as the sale of a young *ancilla*.[168] This view is principally supported by the artist's inclusion of a *titulus* hung around the girl's neck, to which a saleswoman points with her right hand. Two men sit on a bench opposite the girl, perhaps debating whether or not to submit a bid.

A host of rules and regulations oversaw the sale of *servi*, intending to protect the buyer against faulty merchandise. As aforementioned, vendors were required to advertise clearly whether bondspeople were marred by any shortcomings. This referred to both physical malformations and perceived character faults. Papyri contracts are littered with stock phrases delineating a slave's moral qualities, health, and criminal record (namely if they were known escapees or truants).[169] The Roman jurists went to great lengths to define what amounted to a defect, with some rulings applying exclusively to women. In relation to childbirth, a female slave was considered defective if she suffered from cephalopelvic disproportion, her periods came too frequently, or she consistently gave birth to stillborns.[170] Slaves could also be sold under restrictive covenants, placing some limitations on their future use or treatment. The classical law recognised four types of restrictive covenant: *ut manumittatur*, *ne manumittatur*, *ut exportetur*, and *ne serva prostituatur*. The first two accords provided for and against manumission, with the third allowing for a dangerous slave to be peacefully removed from their master's household, and the final covenant prohibiting a slave from being worked as a prostitute.[171] If the covenant was broken it did not void the sale but returned property rights to the original owner.

To close, a brief word on slave prices and those factors influencing cost is needed. Estimating the worth of slaves for the entirety of the late Republic and Principate encounters obvious challenges. Documents of sale constitute the major evidential base, yet their predominance from Roman Egypt limits their applicability to all provinces of the empire.[172] The problem is compounded when we consider the multiple currencies in use across the ancient Mediterranean, as well as economic factors locally aggravating or depressing prices. Scheidel's notion of converting monetary values to the relative cost of wheat overcomes some of these difficulties and remains the best means we have of approximating general trends. For the high imperial period, Scheidel gives a mean price for a healthy slave in the prime of life at the equivalent value of 3,750 kilograms of wheat, or about 2.7

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166 Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 69. Caligula was similarly accused of inspecting women in the manner of a slave dealer, see *De vita Caesarum*, "Caligula" 36.

167 Martial, *Epigrams*, 6.66.

168 Robert Étienne, *La vie quotidienne à Pompéi* (Paris: Hachette, 1966), 223.

169 For example, both *Tab.Herc*. 62 and *T.Sulpicii* 43 contain the phrase "not a fugitive or a truant" (*fugitivom erronem non esse*).

170 Aulius Gallius, *Noctes Atticae*, 4.2.9–10; Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.14.7.

171 McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, 289.

172 *P.Turner* 22, written out in 142 CE, 280 denarii were paid for a ten-year-old slave girl. *BGU* 3.887, drawn up in 151 CE, 350 denarii were paid for a twelve-year-old δούλη (female slave). *SB* 3.6304, also dating to ca. 151 CE, 625 denarii were paid for an enslaved women. *SB* 3.6016, dated March 154 CE, 1400 denarii were paid for a boy. *SB* 5.8007, most likely drafted in the 330s or 340s CE, 2000 denarii were paid for a twenty-year-old δούλη. *P.Kellis* 1.8, dating from 362 CE, 2 solidi were paid for a young slave woman. In total, approximately sixty contracts are preserved on papyri and other writing materials. For a detailed examination of the sale documents from Roman Egypt, see Jean A. Straus, *L'Achat et la vente des esclaves dans l'Égypte romaine: Contribution papyrologique à l'étude de l'esclavage dans une province orientale de l'empire romain* (München: K. G. Saur, 2004).

years' worth of income for a rural labourer.[173] For late antiquity, Kyle Harper has estimated young and physically fit slaves ranged, depending on skill, in equivalent value from 3,000 to 6,000 kilograms of wheat.[174] The key point here is that slaves were expensive, though not solely a luxury item.

More telling are those factors governing value. Age and expertise were the paramount determiners, with male slaves consistently being priced above their female counterparts, except in the age bracket of eight to sixteen, where their costs overlapped.[175] That prepubescent and teenage *ancillae* were priced equivalently to boys, could well indicate that reproductive potential was highly desirable, with women experiencing their greatest fertility in early adulthood. There is some indication that virginity likewise enhanced the value of slave women.[176] Seneca the Younger wrote of brothel goers who considered maidenhood an added allurement.[177] Physical attractiveness influenced the going rate of adolescent slaves irrespective of biological sex. Julius Caesar, for example, was disposed to pay well above the market value for especially beautiful *servi*.[178] The fact male slaves were generally more costly might be taken as evidence that Roman *domini* esteemed manual labour, typically performed by men, over the prestige attached to contingents of domestic slaves, more likely to include higher numbers of *ancillae*.

6. Gendering Labour

Up until now, we have only partially engaged with the idea that gender influenced the treatment of slaves. While sexual differences almost certainly affected individual experiences of trafficking, purchase, and sale, its overall impact is far harder to determine. This is not the case when we speak of slave labour, that is the jobs performed by *servi* and the work spheres they inhabited.

Enslaved men and women in ancient Rome were frequently directed into separable lines of work.[179] The gendered division of the unfree workforce is most simply illustrated by the male/outdoor and female/indoor paradigm. This is not to imply that slave labour was altogether segregational, with

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[173] Walter Scheidel, "Real Slave Prices and the Relative Cost of Slave Labour," *Ancient Society* 35 (2005), 5.

[174] Kyle Harper, "Slave Prices in Late Antiquity (and in the Very Long Term)," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 59, no. 2 (2010), 230.

[175] Harper, "Slave Prices in Late Antiquity," 219.

[176] Ulpian, *Digest*, 19.1.11.5. Elsewhere in the *Digest* it is stated that *virgo immatura* was grounds for damages. See Ulpian, *Digest*, 47.10.25; Matthew J. Perry, "Sexual Damage to Slaves in Roman Law," *Journal of Ancient History* 3, no. 1 (2015), 69.

[177] Seneca, *Controversiae*, 1.2.2. The reasons why certain men preferred virgin brothel slaves can only be guessed at. For some, the thrill of violation might have justified the added cost. Others perhaps deemed virginity a mark of good character. See Jennifer A. Glancy, "Slavery and the Rise of Christianity," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 467; Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 226.

[178] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Julius Caesar" 47. For the papyrological evidence, see William L. Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1955), 100.

[179] Richard P. Saller, "Women, Slaves, and the Economy of the Roman Household," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 201.

productive industries in the urban market economy betraying a degree of gender overlap.[180] Social attitudes, along with biological and supposed intellectual differences, did nonetheless produce real-world variations in the application of slave men and women. As was common in many premodern societies, elite Roman households were a predominant consumer of female slave labour.[181] Critically, the subsumption of *ancillae* into domestic milieus provided unique opportunities for resistance and status advancement. As Joseph C. Miller has convincingly demonstrated, slave women were often fast-tracked to the centre of their master's household or community by the nature of the work they performed.[182] Orlando Patterson makes a kindred observation, noting that the "mode of acquisition" and intended job for a slave routinely influenced the parameters of their future condition.[183] Indeed, one of the keystones on which the forthcoming chapters are predicated revolves around the notion that the proximity of female slaves to their *dominus* or *domina* was highly consequential.

Throughout the ancient Mediterranean, an extensive range of slave occupations can be found within the households of the elite. Not unexpectedly, *ancillae* worked primarily in roles that stressed personal attendance over material production. A high degree of specialisation characterised the work of female domestics, the epigraphic record being peppered with references to specific job titles.[184] Catering to their mistress's individual needs was frequently the work of slave women. Maidservants cut hair, held up mirrors, helped their matron dress, and tended to her clothes.[185] Some *ancillae* likely took on multiple roles, hairdressers, for example, not only styled hair but oversaw all aspects of their mistress's toilette.[186] In public, wealthy Roman *domina* were accompanied by a bevvy of ladies-in-waiting, who carried her sandals while she rode in a litter, or shaded her from the sun with a parasol.[187] Childcare also fell to female slaves, who served as

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[180] Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, "Desperate Housewives? The Adaptive Family Economy and Female Participation in the Roman Urban Labour Market," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, ed. Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 295–312; Richard P. Saller, "Household and Gender," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris and Richard P. Saller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 102–107.

[181] Joseph C. Miller, "Slaving as Historical Process: Examples from the Ancient Mediterranean and the Modern Atlantic," in *Slave Systems Ancient and Modern*, ed. Enrico Dal Lago and Constantine Katsari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

[182] Miller writes "The purpose of acquiring women and children was not to exclude them but rather to include them in families, lineages, palace retinues, temple communities, and other domiciliary collectives — notionally households — that made up what I will call societies or polities that were composite in character." See "Domiciled and Dominated," in *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 288.

[183] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 174.

[184] However, compared to male employment the level of specialisation is minimal. For instance, 89% of all Statilian job titles are male. Similarly, approximately 90% of discernible roles for the households of the Volusii and Livia belonged to men. See Hasegawa, *The Familia Urbana during the Early Empire*, 32.

[185] *CIL* 6.6368, "hair dresser" (*ornatrix*); Petronius, *Satyricon*, 128; *CIL* 6.9901, "dresser" (*vestiplica*). Kampen notes, of the forty-four inscriptions attesting *ornatrices* and *tonstrices* in *CIL* 6, twenty are for slaves and eleven for freedwomen. Epigraphic sources hence corroborate literary depictions of wealthy women surrounded by their servants. See *Image and Status*, 119.

[186] Günther, *Frauenarbeit–Frauenbindung*, 46. For late antiquity, John Chrysostom writes of slave women helping their mistress dress, concocting perfumes, and assisting with her makeup, see *Ad Stelechium de compunctione*, 2.1.

[187] Female attendants were known as "foot-followers" (*pedisequa*), see *CIL* 6.4355. For slave women carrying their mistress's sandals, see Plautus, *Trinummus*, 250. For servants holding parasols, see Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 2.209. As Günther notes, *pedisequa* was not a uniquely female job title, the household of Livia employed both men and women in this role. See *Frauenarbeit–Frauenbindung*, 60.

midwives (*obstetrices*), wet nurses (*nutrices*), and cradle rockers (*cunariae*).[188] In some cases, elderly domestics would have been charged with the primary education of their master's daughters, as was the case with Saint Augustine's mother, Monica.[189] The omnipresence of slaves extended to the most intimate areas of the house, with some women being almost perpetually at their owner's side: sleeping on mattresses outside their bedroom door or in a nearby antechamber.[190] It is little wonder that *ancillae* were on hand to assist their master or mistress with the most sensitive of tasks. We find several mentions of female attendants being roped into their master's love affairs, relaying messages, delivering letters, or acting as accomplices in illicit liaisons.[191] Further duties necessary for the upkeep of the *domus* were also performed by slave women, with the drudgery of cooking, cleaning, and washing down latrines often falling to *ancillae*.[192]

In urban settings beyond the household, female slaves most commonly appear in the service and entertainment industries. Prostitution was an inescapable destination for many enslaved women, who plied their trade in brothels, taverns, and bathhouses.[193] In a similar vein, erotic dancing girls were recurrently a mainstay of elite leisure. The performance of one cadre of dancers from Cadiz was said to be so arousing as to prompt the epigramist Martial (ca. 40–102 CE) to joke that, upon watching their routine, even the famously chaste god Hippolytus would be spurred to masturbate.[194] Slave girls destined for the spotlight were trained from a young age. One epitaph, dedicated to the fourteen-year-old slave actress Eucharis, was most probably under the pupilship of her patron, herself an ex-actress and freedwoman once in the service of the Licinii family.[195] The richest in society could afford their own private contingent of female entertainers. The younger Pliny's friend, the elderly lady Ummidia Quadratilla, kept a personal troop of mime actors and actresses, whom her grandson was cautioned against watching.[196]

Female slaves were also tasked with making clothes for their *domina* and her family.[197] Juristic discourse routinely associated spinning with enslaved women.[198] For the *libertae* (freedwomen) Iulia Soteris the wool-weigher (*lanipenda*), Mecia Flora the wool-comber (*tonstrix*), Hedone the spinner (*quasillaria*), and Italia the weaver (*textrix*), the skills they honed in slavery furnished them with a livelihood in middle age.[199] Some *ancillae* were intermittently hired out by their master. The slave girl Achillas was loaned for one year to a local weaver, in return for a monthly wage paid to

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[188] *AE* 1980, 936 (*obstetrix*); *CIL* 6.5939 (*nutrix*); *CIL* 6.27134 (*cunaria*).

[189] Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.8.17.

[190] The *pedisequa* Galatea, dedicated in a tombstone inscription from the city of Rome (*CIL* 6.9776), may have been one such *ancilla*. A slave bed is located outside the guest quarters in Milo's house, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.15. The chief eunuch Euphrates kept a παιδάριον (slave boy) in the room next door to his own, see Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, 8.12. Another *servus* of pubescent age is reported to have slept at his master's feet, see Maecianus, *Digest*, 29.5.14. See also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 78.

[191] Horace, *Satires*, 1.2.127–131; Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos*, 300–301.

[192] Plautus, *Stichus*, 679; Plautus, *Curculio*, 580.

[193] Ulpian, *Digest*, 3.2.4.2.

[194] Martial, *Epigrams*, 14.203.

[195] *ILLRP* 2.803.

[196] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 7.24.

[197] For example, see *CIL* 6.5206.

[198] *Digest*, 7.8.12.6, 24.1.31.1, 33.7.16.2.

[199] *CIL* 6.9498 (*lanipenda*); *CIL* 6.9493 (*tonstrix*); *CIL* 6.6341 (*quasillaria*); *CIL* 6.6362 (*textrix*).

her owner.[200] Achillas was to be given eight days of annual holiday and expected to perform her usual duties in addition to working full-time in the weaver's workshop. If she was needed to make bread for her master, it was stipulated she would do it at night after her day's work had been completed, a gruelling schedule by any metric.

There is no question that slaves were heavily involved in agricultural production, though the sources are profoundly quiet on the place of women on the *villa rustica*. In the agronomic commentaries, male slaves significantly outnumber their female workmates, yet relative textual invisibility is not proof of absence.[201] The agricultural writer Cato (234–149 BCE) lists some of the responsibilities expected of the overseer's wife, the *vilica*: cleaning the house, keeping the pantry larders well-stocked, tending to the chickens, picking fruit, making jams, grinding flour, and baking bread.[202] A line of Juvenal's writing supplements the above tally with the duties of spinning and the gathering of wild herbs.[203] In addition to echoing Cato's comments, Varro (116–27 BCE) recommended that slave women accompany herdsmen while out grazing sheep on the lowland pastures, foremost to satisfy their helpmate's sexual needs, but also to assist in the building of shelters and meal preparation.[204]

During the late summer, enslaved women may have also been called upon to help bring in the harvest. The novelist Longus depicts Chloe and other female slaves participating in the vintage, while a *dominus* in a play of Terence's (b. 195/185 BCE) oeuvre threatens a rebellious *ancilla* with gleaning corn in the midday heat until her skin is as "burnt and black as charcoal" (*atque atram quam carbost*).[205] Moreover, in Plautus's play *Mercator*, a newly bought slave protests she had never carried heavy loads, tended cattle, or nursed babies, perhaps indicating that these were common jobs for women on rural estates.[206] For a handful of landowners, the construction of a roadside inn along a well-travelled highway might have presented another opportunity to benefit from their *ancillae*.[207] The juristic association of taverns with sex work hints at the possibility of enslaved women being prostituted to men wayfaring across the Italian countryside.[208]

7. Manumission

We now come to the final stage of the enslaved life cycle, the routes to freedom. Roman society prescribed fixed trajectories to manumission. From the master's perspective, manumission amounted to the deliberate liquidation of one's assets and was, from the time of Augustus onwards, pursued for two reasons: profit and sentiment.[209] Three general procedures were historically

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[200] *P.Wisc*. 1.5. For a translation of this document, see Werner Eck and Johannes Heinrichs, *Sklaven und Freigelassene in der Gesellschaft der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 86.

[201] Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 44; For a survey of the evidence for women in the agricultural workforce, see Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in The Ancient World (II)," *Greece & Rome* 43, no. 1 (1996), 1–10.

[202] Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 143.

[203] Juvenal, *Satires*, 11.68–69.

[204] Varro, *De re rustica*, 2.10.6.

[205] Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, 2.1.3, 2.2.1; Terence, *Adelphoe*, 847–848.

[206] Plautus, *Mercator*, 509.

[207] Varro, *De re rustica*, 1.2.23.

[208] The jurist Ulpian make clear that property owned by "respectable men" (*honestorum virorum*) was sometimes used for hosting brothels. See *Digest*, 5.3.27.1.

[209] Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 53.

developed to enable the transformation of slaves into *liberti* (freedmen): *manumissio vindicta*, *censu*, and *testamento*.[210] *Censu*, perhaps the oldest method for manumitting a slave, involved the incorporation of freedmen into the census list, allowing them to participate in the Republican voting system.[211] Of comparable antiquity was manumission *vindicta*, describing the formal process of a master freeing his slave in the presence of the magistrates.[212] Both Ovid (b. 43 BCE) and Plautus refer to slaves being freed "by the rod" (*vindicta*), or rather their ceremonial anointing with a staff.[213] Manumission *testamento* allowed slave owners to provide for the freedom of their slaves in a will.[214] Freedom by testament was also valid in cases where *domini* called upon their heirs to manumit a *servus* or *ancilla* in the event of their death.[215] Testamentary manumission was severely curtailed after the passing of the Fufia Caninia law in 2 BCE, where limits were introduced on the number of slaves any given master could free.[216]

Assuming a slave was of age (see below), each of the aforelisted manumission directives provided *servi* with full citizenship rights (*civitas*) and were, in practice, a form of adrogation. Becoming a freedman was, after all, contingent on joining one's former master's *gens* (family) — whose name and religious obligations were adopted — before community integration could be achieved.[217] A host of legal benefits accompanied manumission and citizenry standing.[218] To name but two examples, *liberti* attained the right to a formal marriage, any resultant children of which enjoyed free status, and were permitted to draw up a bequest.[219] That private individuals (i.e. slave owners) were invested with the legal authority to bestow citizenship is unparalleled and singularly Roman.[220] However, freedmen were not without obligations. Following manumission, an ex-slave was required to behave with *pietas* (devotion) towards their patron, largely demonstrated through the performance of *opera*. Best styled as a kind of part-time enforceable work, *opera* compelled freedmen to give over a specified number of days per week to enterprises benefiting their former *dominus*.[221] At heart, *opera* was a mechanism enabling patrons to recoup a measure of their ex-slave's value.

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[210] Egidio Incelli, "Le rapport maître-esclave et les modalités de manumission dans l'empire romain," in *Esclaves et maîtres dans le monde romain: Expressions épigraphiques de leurs relations*, ed. Monique Dondin-Payre and Nicolas Tran (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2016), 31; Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11–12.

[211] Andrew Lewis, "Slavery, Family, and Status" in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Law*, ed. David Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 154.

[212] Livy, 2.5.

[213] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.611–615; Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, 962.

[214] Tryphoninus, *Digest*, 1.5.15.

[215] Scaevola, *Digest*, 31.88.12.

[216] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.43.

[217] Claude Nicolet, *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 23; Jane F. Gardner, *Being a Roman Citizen* (London: Routledge, 1993), 11.

[218] It should be noted, however, that the status of *liberti* was not on par with freeborn citizens. For instance, restrictions were in place circumscribing an ex-slave's involvement with matters of public or constitutional law, such as limiting voting rights and preventing them from standing for elected offices.

[219] A praetor's edict (*edictum praetoris*) of the mid-Republic allowed patrons to inherit from their *liberti* in the event their estate was bequeathed to an adopted child or a wife *in manu*. The *lex Papia Poppaea* (9 CE) further debased the inheritance rights of freedmen, granting patrons a division of their ex-slave's property unless he had fathered three or more children. See Gaius, *Institutes*, 3.41–42.

[220] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric, attempted to defend Roman liberality in awarding citizenship. See *Antiquitates Romanae*, 4.24.6–7.

[221] The entirety of *Digest* 38.1 is devoted to outlining the meaning and practical fulfilment of *operae*.

Other forms of manumission awarded freedom but without the privileges of citizenship, namely *manumissio per epistulam* and *manumissio inter amicos*. Freedom via *per epistulam* simply referred to the manumission of a slave through a letter written by his or her *domini*. Manumission *inter amicos*, on the other hand, referenced the freeing of slaves in the company of their master's friends.[222] The latter possessed no concrete legal foundation, and was rather seen as an expression of the master's wish to free his slave in the near future. Following the promulgation of the Aelia Sentia law in 4 CE, *manumissio inter amicos* was the only means by which a slave could be freed before their thirtieth birthday.

During the early Principate, the Junia Norbana law of 19 CE reformed the practice of informal manumission by creating a new legal category, that of Junian Latins (*Latini Iuniani*). Treading water somewhere between slavery and freedom, Junian Latins enjoyed no citizenship rights but could hope to achieve *civitas* by fulfilling certain requirements set by the *lex Iunia Norbana*. One such route to citizenship, known as *anniculi probatio*, required a *liberta* to produce a freeborn child. Couples of Junin Latin status wishing to benefit from the *anniculi probatio* rule were additionally compelled to be married in front of seven witnesses and, one year after the birth of their first child, return to the magistrates to prove they had met the conditions of the law.[223] Slaves freed as a result of a broken covenant (see above) were also made *Latini Iuniani*. Junian Latins did nonetheless adopt the *tria nomina*, that is the three names forming the nomenclature of Roman citizens.[224]

In general, slaves freed under the age of thirty lacked full citizenship rights. The *lex Aelia Sentia* did however provide a way for *domini* to manumit young slaves with *civitas*. Doing so required an application to be submitted before the *consilium principis*, a legislative body that convened only sporadically in the city of Rome, and once annually in the provinces.[225] Such provisions were not intended to dilute the emancipatory power of masters, but to restrict the awarding of citizenry status to mature *servi*.

The regularity of manumission is a subject of considerable debate. Beginning with the German language tradition, Géza Alföldy proffered that manumission for urban slaves was an expected and frequent occurrence.[226] His argument substantially relied upon the age information of *servi* and *liberti* preserved in epitaphs from the city of Rome, Italy, Spain, and the Danube countries. From a total sample of 600 slaves and 1,200 freedmen, Alföldy judged that the relative absence of *servi* in the age bracket of thirty to forty infers the generality of household slaves were freed by middle adulthood.[227] Alföldy's belief in the near certainty of manumission for hardworking *servi*

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[222] For both manumission by letter and among friends, see Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.44.

[223] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.29; Ulpian, *Tituli ex corpore Ulpian*, 3.3. It should be noted that Gaius attributed this procedure to the *lex Aelia Sentia*, whereas Ulpian considered it to have originated with the *lex Iunia Norbana*.

[224] Rawson, "Degrees of Freedom," 201.

[225] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.18.

[226] Alföldy's thesis was first set out in an article published in 1972, but reissued with minor emendations as part of his collected essays on Roman society in 1986. The latter version of the text is cited here. For the original article, see "Die Freilassung von Sklaven und die Struktur der Sklaverei in der römischen Kaiserzeit," *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità* 2 (1972), 97–129.

[227] Géza Alföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft: ausgewählte Beiträge* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986), 300–304.

dovetailed, to a limited extent, with previous research, though no scholar ventured to emphasise, as Alföldy did, the universality of release from slavery.[228]

Anglophone scholarship was quick to problematise Alföldy's "fallacious" interpretation of the evidence, with William V. Harris underscoring the fact that *servi* commemorated in tombstone inscriptions were a privileged minority, and hence unrepresentative of slave demographics more broadly.[229] Thomas E. J. Wiedemann likewise rejected Alföldy's position, arguing that the manumission of diligent *servi* was principally an ideal, one not always in league with masterly self-interest.[230] Most recently, Henrik Mouritsen has definitively undermined Alföldy's "barely credible" theory, concluding that the manumission of urban slaves during the Principate, while not abnormal, was highly selective.[231]

In the opposite fashion, virtual consensus exists regarding the limited manumission prospects of agricultural *servi*. A fragmentary inscription from northern Italy, set up by the landowner C. Castricius, promised manumission to industrious and loyal slaves.[232] However, the moralising tone of the epigraph is conducive to the master's point of view, and hence doubtfully realistic. In a society privileging close emotional ties between *servi* and *domini*, slaves on the *villa rustica* were noticeably disadvantaged when it came to manumission.[233] As a case in point, Seneca the Younger, writing of a visit to his rural estate, recalled a chance encounter with his former slave playmate Felicio, now decrepit with old age.[234] Despite having befriended his master as a child, Felicio's insignificance to the adult Seneca likely contributed to his permanent enslavement.

Slaves themselves could purchase their manumission from savings they had privately accrued.[235] The most common source of income available to *servi* was their *peculium*, an allotment of property their master had permitted them to manage. Richard P. Saller explains that *peculia* could be used to mitigate the "proprietary incapacity" of dependents — namely slaves and children — and was intended to be utilised for economic ventures or public affairs.[236] Male slaves might well have engaged in and profited from a business undertaking of their master's or, in rural contexts, managed a few hectares of their owner's land.[237] Slave women were likewise authorised to keep a *peculium*,

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[228] For example, see P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225 B.C.–A.D. 14* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 121–122; James Harper, "Slaves and Freedmen in Imperial Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 93 (1972), 342.

[229] Harris, "Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade," 134.

[230] Thomas E. J. Wiedemann, "The Regularity of Manumission at Rome," *The Classical Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1985), 162–175.

[231] Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 137, 141. See also Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople: A Brief Cross-cultural History," 19.

[232] *CIL* 11.600; Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 44.

[233] Stefan Knoch, "Alltag," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 1, 85.

[234] Seneca, *Epistles*, 12.3.

[235] Ulpian, *Digest*, 1.12.1.1.

[236] Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119.

[237] For an explanation of what a slave's *peculia* could entail, see Ulpian, *Digest*, 15.1.7.4–7. Young-Gil Cha has suggested that there were two groups of slaves in Roman agriculture, those who were allotted a plot of land to personally cultivate and those who worked collectively on their master's estate. See "The Function of *Peculium* in Roman Slavery during the First Two Centuries A.D.," in *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity*, ed. Toru Yuge and Masaoki Doi (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 434.

generating income from sewing or weaving.[238] Prostitution was a means of moneymaking for those slaves unlucky enough not to have been furnished with an allowance. In one of Plautus's plays, the slave boy Paegnium, having sold erotic favours, goads his workmate Sagaristio: "I'm confident I'll be free and you can never hope to be so."[239] Near identically, the nubile *ancilla* Stephanium charged her fellow slaves Stichus and Sangarinus for sex. They jokingly retort that paying for a night with her will result in their perpetual unfreedom, the duo having failed to save enough to purchase their own manumission.[240]

Since *ancillae* had, on the whole, fewer opportunities to accumulate capital, they must have relied more heavily upon interpersonal relationships to improve their odds of manumission.[241] Associating sexually or romantically with one's *dominus* could result in freedom. Numerous tombstones memorialise the release of enslaved women for the purpose of wedlock. Alföldy found that *libertae* substantially outnumbered freedmen in the age bracket of 15 to 30, a fact he attributed to the prevalence of master-slave marriages.[242] While, as noted above, inscriptions should not be taken as demographically paradigmatic, the increased manumission of young female household slaves is nonetheless remarkable.[243]

Another route to freedom unique to women was giving birth to multiple children. The agriculturalist Columella (b. 4 CE) declared he would manumit any *ancilla* who raised three or more infants and would lessen the workload for those who had one or two.[244] Roman juristic writings further hint at the ubiquity of this practice, with Tryphoninus (fl. 200 CE) recording the case of a slave mother who bore triplets, after which she was freed.[245] Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether giving birth to a predetermined number of children enjoyed any real legal backing, with manumission ultimately coming down to the generosity of the slave owner.[246]

From this concise overview, a handful of tentative conclusions might be drawn. First of all, it is clear that manumission did not rid *liberti* of the stain of slavery. Mouritsen is surely correct when he writes that freedom only served to redefine a slave's relationship with his master, recasting it in the mould of client and patron.[247] While *liberti* were not subject to legal ownership, the social force of

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[238] Gaius, *Digest*, 15.1.27.

[239] Plautus, *Persa*, 286. *Nam ego me confido liberum fore, tu te numquam speras*.

[240] Plautus, *Stichus*, 750–753. For another insinuation of enslaved women prostituting themselves, see Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.32.

[241] As Susan Treggiari makes clear, slave owners were more likely to reward those *ancillae* who provided personal care and support. See "Questions on Women Domestics in the Roman West," in *Schiavitù, manomissione e classi dipendenti nel mondo antico*, ed. Maria Capozza (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1979), 191–192. Precisely the reverse conclusion is drawn by Lyudmila P. Marinovich, who argues that, on the basis of the higher release prices for enslaved women in the Delphic manumission inscriptions, male slaves had fewer opportunities to earn money. See "ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΗ в дельфийских манумиссиях римского времени," *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 4 (1971), 32.

[242] Alföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft*, 301.

[243] For the problematisation of the epigraphic dataset and the regularity of manumission for young enslaved women, see Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 190–193; Scheidel, "Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire," 166–167.

[244] Columella, *De re rustica*, 1.8.19.

[245] Tryphoninus, *Digest*, 1.5.15.

[246] Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 209.

[247] Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 36.

patronage ensured masters retained a certain authority over their ex-slaves.[248] No matter the wealth or prestige freedmen acquired, they were never fully able to live down their servile past. As the poet Horace brutally exclaimed: "fortune does not alter breeding" (*fortuna non mutat genus*).[249] The ongoing levels of dependency experienced by *liberti* served to delimit the transformative effects of manumission. Next, *ancillae* benefited from routes to freedom largely inaccessible to men, namely sexual relations with their master and childbirth. This phenomenon has led some scholars to argue that the demographic most likely to benefit from *manumissio* were attractive women of childbearing age.[250] The epigraphic record certainly allows for this possibility. Finally, *servi* who cultivated a personal relationship with their *dominus* were better placed to win their manumission. In this sense, urban household slaves were considerably advantaged, often working in the vicinity of their master.

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[248] Rose Maclean, *Freed Slaves and Roman Imperial Culture: Social Integration and the Transformation of Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

[249] Horace, *Epodes*, 4.

[250] Harris, "Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade," 120.

II

Emotional Monopolies

Upright behind my mistress's wicker chair, I watched the flitter of my hands in the rounded mirror: blending her dark ringlets with the hairpiece, forming a garland of pendant curls. Sun seeped down the painted walls, glinting in the perfume vials, and the muted plash of fountains carried in from the garden. That morning there were only three of us. Theophila passed rouges and powders, while I moved to colour our lady's face. In truth, Aemilia's absence weighed heavy on me.

Some nights past she had returned to our quarters late, the remnants of a smile lingering at the margins of her red mouth. One hand was firmly clenched, her fingers like fronds of virgin grass. We rose and sat adjacent to her on the low bed. Slowly she loosened her grip, revealing in her palm two gold pendants hung with pearls. "A gift from the master," she whispered. That Aemilia enjoyed special favour was a thinning secret, unravelling through the household like a thorn-caught thread.

An hour after sunrise we attended our *matrona* as was customary. She sat flint-faced awaiting us, erect in her wicker chair, today as a hundred times before. Greeting her I unpacked the makeup boxes, laying out pearlescent ampoules, blushers and brushes. Aemilia brought forward a basin of warmed water and bent down to wash her feet. Our ladyship's body tightened, those serpents of suspicion so long harboured in her unquiet heart sprung forth with untempered hate. She kicked Aemilia in the throat and, snatching an ivory hairpin, attempted to gouge out her eyes. On the floor, they writhed about — a frenzy of nails, teeth, spittle and screams. Theophila fled from the room, calling for help. Desperately I tried to pull Aemilia away, but like tidewater drawn by a sanguine moon, she lunged forward, breaking against the rocks of our mistress's anger.

Hearing the commotion, a bevvy of other slaves burst in and, at length, succeeded in tearing the scrimmage apart. They led the breathless Aemilia away, her cheeks a landscape of gory estuaries and swollen hillocks. Come nightfall, a great deal of shouting could be heard from the master's rooms. Voices raged well past the second watch. Though straining to hear, we knew well the conclusion. By dawn, Aemilia was gone, bloodstained to the agora.

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"Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women."[1] So wrote Harriet Jacobs in her moving autobiographic description of slave life in the Antebellum South. Jacobs's words were rooted in experience, having lived through a maelstrom of mistreatment, including verbal abuse, bludgeoning, and rape.[2] One timeless feature of Jacob's testimony is the interminable threat of sexual violence and forced concubinage. Indeed, as Orlando Patterson underlines, no known slaveholding society ever outlawed the prerogative of the master to sexually exploit those

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[1] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861 repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 100.

[2] It should be noted, as Sharon Block points out, that Jacobs herself never characterised her sexual assaults as rape, see *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 24.

bondspeople under his control.[3] Molestation and rape amounted to a "hidden injury" for countless slave women, a deep and invisible wound inflicting lifelong psychological trauma.[4]

While sexual assault and other acts of cruelty against *servi* are well evidenced in the Roman world, we must resist the temptation, however pressing, to describe ancient slavery in the binary terms of abuser and abused. Such formulations not only grossly simplify the myriad complexities of human relations, but decentralise the individual experiences of slavery's victims, homogenising them as a helpless whole. In order to avoid committing historical glossectomy against unfree women and girls, we must approach their lifeworlds with sensitivity, ever mindful of our capacity to distort the realities of enslavement.

Not wishing to mistake empathy for analysis however, this chapter begins with an examination of the cultural logic underpinning the sexual abuse of enslaved women, a topic of discussion so often glossed over in a few lines or relegated to an unimpassioned footnote. In the following section, we shall reflect upon how female slaves potentially manipulated elite Roman customs and habits, leveraging to their advantage the social terrain of the master class. Once the inevitability of sexual unions between *domini* and *ancillae* has been properly emphasised, it remains to question whether such relationships can be understood as sincerely affectionate. The agency of slave women in cultivating intimacy, feigning love, and generally orchestrating their master's sentiments will then be evaluated. Penultimately, I delve into the jealousies an *ancilla* might have stirred in her master's wife, with the aim of understanding domestic rivalries as further evidence for sexual agency. To close, a number of lesser-known strategies employed by dependent women to help balance asymmetrical relationships shall be explored, specifically the writing of love spells and curses.

1. Slaves as Sex Objects

The philosopher and social ethics theorist Martha Nussbaum provides a series of illuminating criteria for gauging the objectification of human beings. The objectified, Nussbaum writes, are treated as tools to be manipulated, as bodies without boundaries, as individuals of negligible emotional worth, free to be purchased and sold.[5] Enslaved persons in Roman antiquity were unquestionably objectified by the standards of Nussbaum's definition. Despite the focus of this chapter being the subjectivity of female slaves, it is paramount to begin with an excursus on their dehumanisation and sexual objectification.

Roman masters were at liberty to sexually exploit the men and women under their ownership. The Latin language recognised no distinct category of sex slave since any *servus* or *ancilla* functioned as a legitimate sexual partner.[6] Unlike freeborn citizens, slaves had no protection against rape or similar acts of physical violation. Whereas the aristocrat P. Maenius (fl. late second century BCE) was permitted to execute a *libertus* for merely kissing his daughter on the cheek, no law upheld the corporal integrity of *servi*.[7] The Augustan era anti-adultery statutes did not apply to intercourse with

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[3] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 173.

[4] The phrase "hidden injury" was originally applied to describe the socio-economic injustices experienced by white working-class families in the twentieth-century United States, but appropriately characterises the psychological reverberations of sexual abuse. See Richard Sennett and Johnathon Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972 repr., London: Verso, 2023).

[5] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995), 257.

[6] C. W. Marshall, "Domestic Sexual Labor in Plautus," *Helios* 42, no. 1 (2015), 125.

[7] Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 6.1.4.

slaves, consensual or otherwise.[8] Rather, the molestation of *servi* was taken for granted, if not outrightly encouraged, considered a kind of "social safety valve," a means through which elite men could indulge their personal lasciviousness.[9]

Differences in the age at the time of marriage between men (late twenties or early thirties) and women (late teens or early twenties) contributed to the sexual abuse of female slaves.[10] Unmarried for approximately a decade, citizen *viri* (men) were urged to satisfy their copulatory yearnings with dependent women. Cicero (106–43 BCE) surely had *ancillae* and *meretrices* (prostitutes) in mind when he tacitly endorsed male promiscuity.[11] The sexual accessibility of low-status women directed the carnal energies of men away from elite wives and daughters, who, unlike female slaves, were expected to cultivate the virtues of *pudicitia* (sexual modesty) and *honestas* (social respectability).[12] In essence, the cultural safeguards designed to protect the chastity of *mulieres* (women) did not pertain to *ancillae*.[13] Female slaves were then envisaged, to borrow Carola Reinsberg's term, as "Ersatzfrau," or substitute-women, body doubles for their highborn sisters.[14]

In classical Roman society, no distinction was made between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Coitus was instead formulated in terms of bodies to be penetrated and bodies that penetrate. Not surprisingly for so phallocentric an ideology, elite male citizens were designated the operative partners in sexual acts, empowered to penetrate vaginally, anally, or orally those ranked lower in the social hierarchy.[15] Sexual behaviour was hence differentiated not along lines of gender, but status. Put another way, "l'important est d'être le sabreur: peu importe le sexe de la victime."[16] In a recent article, Deborah Kamen and Sarah Levin-Richardson have shown that Latin verbs frequently emphasise the grammatical subject's submissiveness during intercourse. To take but one example, a graffito from Pompeii reads, "Lucius Habonius wounds, face-fucks Caesus Felix."[17] As Kamen and

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[8] Papinian, *Digest*, 48.5.6.1. Defined as the penetration of an individual to gratify one's lust, *stuprum* could be committed with a virgin, a widow, or a divorcee. The law was presumably non-applicable to slaves because their sole purpose was to be used. Even a freedwoman was not considered a victim of *stuprum* if committed by her patron. This suggests that *libertae* never regained full control over their bodies. See Diana C. Moses, "Livy's Lucretia and the Validity of Coerced Consent in Roman Law," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 45–49; Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 27.

[9] John R. Clarke, "Sexuality and Visual Representations," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. Thomas K. Hubbard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 529.

[10] Wim Broekaert, "Between Coercion and Compulsion? The Impact of Occupations and Economic Interests on the Relational Status of Slaves and Freedmen," in *The Single Life in the Roman and Later Roman World*, ed. Sabine R. Huebner and Christian Laes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 91.

[11] Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 39. See also Cato's remark, quoted by Horace in *Satires* 1.2.30–35.

[12] Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 41; Perry, "Sexual Damage to Slaves in Roman Law," 57.

[13] Carolyn Osiek, "Female Slaves, *Porneia*, and the Limits of Obedience," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 256.

[14] Carola Reinsberg, *Ehe, Hetärentum und Knabenliebe im antiken Griechenland* (München: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1989), 87.

[15] Holt N. Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 48–49.

[16] Paul Veyne, "L'homosexualité à Rome," *Communications* 35 (1982), 28.

[17] *CIL* 4.10232a. *L(ucius) Habonius sauciat / irrumat Caesum / Felic(e)m*.

Levin-Richardson make clear, the verb *saucio* (wound) coupled with *irrumo* (colloquially translated as "face-fuck"), amplifies the violence directed towards the phallus's recipient.[18]

Male slaves were therefore equally vulnerable to the casual sexual demands of their owner. Handsome adolescent boys — known as *pueri delicati* — were especially coveted.[19] While it has been argued that *pueri*, not *ancillae*, were the bedmates of choice for elite men, the balance of evidence is generally inconclusive.[20] A fragment of Quintus Novius's (fl. 30 BCE), now lost, play *Exodium* takes for granted the superiority of boys.[21] Though not explicitly in reference to slaves, Clitophon, the protagonist of Achilles Tatius's (fl. second century CE) novel, reaches the opposite conclusion, favouring the kisses and caresses of women.[22]

Female slaves could be purchased expressly for sex. A second-century CE oracle fragment from Roman Egypt records one man's dilemma over whether to buy a παιδίσκην (slave girl) for his continued sexual enjoyment.[23] Somewhat comparably, in a dream interpretation of Artemidorus (fl. second century CE), slave women are equated with duvets and quilts, underscoring their cultural conception as living bed warmers.[24] Elsewhere in the Ονειροκριτικά (*The Interpretation of Dreams*), female slaves are portrayed as objects well suited to relieving sexual frustration.[25] Household *ancillae* were also commanded to satisfy their master's guests, as in Plautus's (d. 184 BCE) drama *Mercator*, where the slave girl Pasicompsa is bidden to accompany the antihero Charinus to bed.[26]

Sexual jeopardy was viewed by some *ancillae* as inevitable. One enslaved woman in Plautus's *Persa* tellingly remarks to her new owner: "Slavery has forbidden me to be surprised by any misfortune of mine."[27] The second-century CE Greek romance Λευκίππη και Κλειτοφών (*Leucippe and Clitophon*), contains numerous episodes typifying the vulnerability of female slaves. Near the story's climax, Thersander attempts to psychologically pressure the captive Leucippe into a sexual relationship. Leucippe's refusal is met with outrage. She is decried as a "wretched slave" (κακόδαιμον ἀνδράποδον) and a "miserable love-sick" (ἀληθῶς ἐρωτιῶν) girl, expected to be grateful, or at least passively acceptant of her master's overtures.[28] When bullying and physical threats fail, Thersander resorts to violence, declaring "since you won't accept me as your lover, you

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[18] Kamen and Levin-Richardson, "Revisiting Roman Sexuality," 450.

[19] For the sexual desirability of slave boys, see Werner Krenkel, "Pueri meritorii" *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock* 28 (1979), 179–189; Saara Lilja, *Homosexuality in Republican and Augustan Rome* (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1983), 16–20; John Pollini, "Slave-boys for Sexual and Religious Service: Images of Pleasure and Devotion," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 150–159.

[20] For example, see René Martin, "La vie sexuelle des esclaves, d'aprés les Dialogues Rustiques de Varron," in *Varron: Grammaire Antique et Stylistique Latine*, ed. Christian Bruel (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), 124.

[21] Jane M. Cody, "The *Senex Amator* in Plautus' Casina," *Hermes* 104, no. 4 (1976), 475.

[22] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.37.7–8.

[23] *P.Oxy.* 74.5019; C. W. Marshall and Pauline Ripat, "Enjoying a Slave Woman in *P.Oxy*. LXXIV 5019," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 191 (2014), 231–232.

[24] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 1.74; Arthur J. Pomeroy, "Status and Status-Concern in the Greco-Roman Dream-Books," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991), 69.

[25] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 1.78.

[26] Plautus, *Mercator*, 99–102.

[27] Plautus, *Persa*, 620–621. *Servitus mea mi interdixit ne quid mirer meum malum*.

[28] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 6.20.1–2; Harper, "Freedom, Slavery, and Female Sexual Honor in Antiquity," 110.

will experience me as your master."[29] Even prepubescent girls were targets of molestation. In Petronius's (ca. 27–66 CE) novel the *Satyricon*, a seven-year-old *ancilla* claims to have already been raped.[30] No source reflects how young girls felt about such heinous maltreatment, though the monologue of a *puer* in Plautus's *Pseudolus* complains that pederastic sex hurt.[31]

Abuse and objectification were thus endemic to Roman slavery. Chronic dehumanisation and legal oversight do not, however, adequately explain the quotidian nature of sexual exploitation. Proximity must have also been a contributing factor. Horace (65–8 BCE) writes vulgarly of the convenience of slaves:

> *Tument tibi cum inguina, num, si ancilla aut verna est praesto puer, impetus in quem continuo fiat, malis tentigine rumpi? non ego: namque parabilem amo Venerem facilemque*.
>
> When your loins swell, surely you do not prefer to be burst apart by your erection, if a home-born slave girl or boy — someone whom you could take right then and there — is present? Not I, for I love sex that is easily attainable.[32]

Horace's graphic description of a householder consumed by furious desire (*tentigine*) makes for uncomfortable reading. The adjective *continuo* (immediately; without delay) betrays the instantaneous nature of slave rape, while *parabilem* (accessible) and *facilemque* (without difficulty) underscore the ease with which masters could indulge their prurience. Likewise, the repetition of the interrogative particle *num*, here and in the previous line (see below), creates a sense of urgency, as if Horace wished to enlighten his readers concerning the exploitability of slaves.[33] Located midway through a tirade against adultery, the extract further promotes the functionality of *ancillae* and *pueri* as sex objects. Why, Horace queries, need immoderate libido be channelled towards married women and cloistered daughters when servile bodies can provide such prompt relief?

Besides this, Horace expounds that, unlike freeborn women, pursuing *servi* came with comparatively few risks.[34] No third party was likely to break up liaisons between master and *ancilla*, nor did the law, as noted above, consider such behaviour adulterous. In short, sex with slaves had no repercussions, ridding elite men of unwanted run-ins with protective husbands and the social stigma occasioned by clandestine affairs. Horace's feelings can be condensed to an anecdote of his own writing (the preceding line of the above-quoted verse), asking "do you need gold cups when thirst burns your throat?"[35] Martial (ca. 40–102 CE) additionally propagates the idea that slave girls were sexual surrogates, bodies to be lustfully embraced when freeborn women were unavailable.

> *Ingenuam malo, sed si tamen illa negetur, libertina mihi proxima condicio est. extremo est ancilla loco; sed vincet utramque si facie, nobis haec erit ingenua*.

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[29] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 6.20.3. Ἀλλ᾽ ἐπειδὴ μὴ θέλεις ἐραστοῦ μου πεῖραν λαβεῖν, πειράσῃ δεσπότου. See also Billault, "Achilles Tatius, Slaves, and Masters," 103.

[30] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 25.

[31] Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 786–787; Richlin, *Slave Theater in the Roman Republic*, 112.

[32] Horace, *Satires*, 1.2.116–119; trans. Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 14.

[33] Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 32.

[34] Horace, *Satires*, 1.2.57–63.

[35] Horace, *Satires*, 1.2.114–115. *Num, tibi cum fauces urit sitis, aurea quaeris pocula*.

> I prefer a freeborn girl, but if none is available my second choice is a freedwoman. A slave girl is last in line, but if she is better to look at than either, so far as I am concerned she'll be free to me.[36]

As with his poetic predecessor, Martial emphasises the convenience of servile bedmates. While freeborn women might be unwilling to sleep around, *libertae* and *ancillae* are assumed to be incapable of protest, sexually equivocated with low-hanging fruit. Despite the crux of the joke hinging on the fact appearance (*facies*) routinely trumped status, the epigram ultimately intends to devalue the sexuality of female slaves. Martial's near metonymic use of *ingenua* — the poem's opening and closing word — cements the idea that, to his mind, freeborn girls topped the venereal league table.

Having the appearance of a *puella ingenua* (freeborn girl) was, however, considered to increase the general attractiveness of *ancillae*. Plautine drama repeatedly exploits the liminality of appearance as a plot device.[37] As previously identified by Amy Richlin, the attractiveness of slave girls in New Comedy often "stems partly from the titillating fact that they might be respectable women."[38] What exactly constituted the look of a freeborn girl is hard to ascertain, though the tropes reoccurrence in the literary sources perhaps indicates some tangible differences. As a further example of the sexual hierarchy between slaves and freedwomen, we may look to an unusual story preserved in the declamations of pseudo-Quintilian. The anecdote runs as follows. An elderly man invited his younger friend to dinner, with an eye to introducing him to his unmarried daughter. In the course of the banquet, after much drinking and merriment, the older gentleman requested that his daughter be escorted into the dining room. Captivated by her good looks, the younger man endeavours to seduce the girl and, when the chance presents itself, viciously rapes her. In the trial that followed, the defendant argues the woman's free status provoked in him a "fastidious desire" (*delicatas cupiditates*), lust unlike that induced by a slave.[39] Much could be drawn from pseudo-Quintilian's description, but here we need only highlight how, ideologically speaking, *ingenuae* were deemed more sexually appealing than *ancillae*.

However contradictory the Roman attitudes may initially appear, they were, in fact, entirely compatible. Most simply, the wife/mistress paradigm envisioned sexual partnerships on an axis of status, demarcating some women as befitting of marriage and others for casual lovemaking. Whereas *ancillae* provided instantaneous sexual release, *uxores* (wives) furnished a man with legitimate children and social prestige. To paraphrase Susan Treggiari, a wife was for *dignitas* not for sex.[40] The elite presentation of freeborn women as more desirable bespeaks an imagined societal ideal. Any female slave could, in reality, find herself the object of equal sexual or romantic fixation. Legal entitlement, objectification, and simple accessibility converged to stereotype enslaved women as valid erotic playthings, responsible for "collecting the effluent of surplus sexual desire."[41]

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[36] Martial, *Epigrams*, 3.33. See also Ovid, *Amores*, 2.7.21–22.

[37] For example, see Plautus, *Epidicus*, 43–44, 106–108.

[38] Richlin, *Slave Theater in the Roman Republic*, 257.

[39] Pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamationes Minores*, 301.7.

[40] Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 314.

[41] James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London: Fontana Press, 1998), 83.

2. Cultural Openings

On the basis of the above summary, it would be entirely reasonable to conclude that *servi* had little to no agency when it came to sex. The overwhelming evidence for the sexual exploitation of female slaves has resulted in a general reluctance among scholars to explore "the issue of agency in ancient sexuality."[42] Nevertheless, the prevailing view of *ancillae* as passive victims should not, as C. W. Marshall makes plain, detract from their identity as sovereign agents.[43] Even in our own time, sexual encounters for women are comprised of fundamental contradictions: pleasure and danger.[44] For enslaved women in the ancient world, the contrast was all the starker, weighted heavily in favour of the latter. However, the notion that adversity and victimhood render individuals helpless is largely misguided. On the contrary, trauma can be seen as a cause for action, grounds for personal change, or a means through which to challenge the status quo.

The sociologist Ann Swidler puts forward the idea of culture as a "toolkit," an entity to be subjectively exploited, occasioning a range of circumstantial strategies of action.[45] Applying Swidler's thinking to the position of female slaves in the ancient world yields interesting results. While sexual availability was perhaps the overriding prelude to master-slave relationships, other sociocultural factors doubtlessly helped slave women transform misfortune into an opportunity for action. Turning our minds back to the opening chapter, we might recall how the gendered nature of slave labour typically directed women and girls towards the heart of the household. Domestic work and personal service would have provided sufficient latitude for *ancillae* to become on more intimate terms with their master.[46] Other cultural phenomena were, I believe, equally influential in creating leeway for slaves to manipulate hostile environments to their advantage. Two significant cultural openings are immediately obvious from the ancient evidence: the breakdown of elite marriages and the presence of *ancillae* in specific areas of their master's life.

Unhappy marriages were always a possibility among Rome's ruling families.[47] The aristocratic propensity to control the nuptial process was, in part, responsible for the creation of marital discord. Customarily, parents oversaw their son or daughter's choice of spouse, with breeding, virtue, and wealth constituting the basic criteria.[48] As the French classicist Pierre Grimal has argued, elite unions were seldom the result of a personal, romantically motivated decision.[49]

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[42] Kamen and Levin-Richardson, "Revisiting Roman Sexuality," 449. See also Edward E. Cohen, "Sexual Abuse and Sexual Rights: Slaves' Erotic Experience at Athens and Rome," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. Thomas K. Hubbard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 184.

[43] C. W. Marshall, "Sex Slaves in New Comedy," in *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama*, ed. Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 175.

[44] Deborah L. Tolman, *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk about Sexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 80.

[45] Ann Swidler "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986), 277.

[46] Needless to say, proximity was a double edged sword, also increasing the chances of abuse. Serena S. Witzke points out that while most Roman women were safest at home, slave girls were vulnerable to torture, rape, or even death inside the *domus*. See "Violence against Women in Ancient Rome," in *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 264.

[47] For an overview of unhappy marriages in the Roman world, see Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 209–223.

[48] For arranged marriages between elite families, see Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 83–122.

[49] Pierre Grimal, *Love in Ancient Rome*, trans. Arthur Train Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 70–71.

Struggles over the suitability of various girlfriends appear regularly in literature. Terence's (b. 195/185 BCE) *Heauton Timorumenos*, for instance, takes as its central theme fatherly disapproval. Both the noblemen Menedemus and Chremes are reproachful of their respective sons' choice of partner: Clinia being infatuated with a destitute weaving girl, and Clitipho enthralled with a local courtesan. Revealingly, by the end of the play, Clitipho has been pressured by Chremes to give up his low-status *amica*, and is tasked with finding a legitimate wife. He agrees, but insists against his mother's proposal of the bride-to-be, resolving to take his own pick from the narrow range of girls befitting his rank.[50]

The businesslike nature of marriage among the elite was principally conceived as a means to consolidate socio-political influence and wealth. Marrying for love, on the other hand, threatened to undermine the control of property and the exercise of power.[51] Affection between husband and wife was merely a byproduct, expected to be quietly cultivated after the wedding had taken place.[52] More often than not, newlyweds would have had little opportunity to meet before marriage, let alone lay down the foundations of friendship. Pliny the Younger (b. 61 CE), writing to congratulate Julius Servianus (45–136 CE) on his choice of son-in-law, remarked only on the happy prospect of grandchildren, who would continue Servianus's bloodline and secure the smooth transfer of property from one generation to the next.[53] Tellingly, Servianus's daughter's feelings go entirely unmentioned, being of almost no importance.

In light of the fact marriage was centred on the production of heirs, sexual enjoyment often risked falling by the wayside. The physician Soranus (fl. late first/early second century CE) remarked that women were generally married for the sake of children and succession, rarely for ἡδυπαθείας (pleasure).[54] As Peter Brown has pointed out, the marriage bed was subject to a strict coital order, with conception taking precedence over sexual gratification.[55] Sex with slaves might then have liberated men from the decorum of nuptial lovemaking, heralding a more fulfilling or physically tantalising experience.[56] All things considered, arranged marriages, in which mutual sentiment was a subsidiary concern, could well have led to domestic disharmony and, quite possibly, the search for amatory and sexual satisfaction elsewhere.[57] In the large households of the ruling elite, employing tens, if not hundreds of *ancillae*, it is not improbable that unhappily married men would have taken a fancy to one of the women in their service.[58]

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[50] Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos*, 1059–1066.

[51] Keith Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," *Réflexions Historiques* 14, no. 1 (1987), 36.

[52] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 4.19.

[53] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 6.26.

[54] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.9.34.

[55] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 20.

[56] de Wet, *Preaching Bondage*, 230.

[57] Charles Lindholm, "Love and Structure," *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 3/4 (1998), 252.

[58] Romantic and long-term sexual relationships between aristocratic and low-status women are by no means unique to Rome. In sixteenth-century Venice, endogamic marriage practices sanctioned only one son per generation to marry, with the aim of limiting the pool of legitimate children through which to transmit power and property. Consequently, many young noblemen were denied a wife and hence looked for female companionship among the dependent classes. Throughout the Renaissance, Venetian aristocrats conducted affairs with serving girls, prostitutes, and working women. Some entanglements might even be viewed as a form of clientelism, with demimonde females providing erotic services in return for financial aid. See Laura J. McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease that Came to Stay* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 34.

Although largely unprovable, slave women were no doubt familiar with the cultural habit of the elite to arrange marriages. Consequently, in the event that such unions broke down, female dependents may have looked to fill the resulting emotional vacuum.[59] Such a proposition must be taken with caution, though the numerous accounts of disaffected husbands pursuing romantic fulfilment with slaves and prostitutes are undeniably significant. Young and unhappily married men are a mainstay of New Comedy. Pamphilus, the lead character of Terence's *Hecyra*, begrudgingly consents to an arranged marriage but keeps up his long-term relationship with a courtesan alongside.[60] In several Plautine comedies, the audience's sympathies are overtly steered towards unfaithful and dissatisfied husbands.[61] The protagonist of the *Menaechmi*, after rebuking his nagging wife, directly appeals to the adulterers in the crowd.[62] We should then be mindful of the likelihood that discontented husbands sought sexual, or even romantic, consummation in women other than their wife.

Scholarship on the topic has long acknowledged the interconnection of sex and patronage. Even if coerced into a relationship with her *dominus*, an *ancilla* might find his attention translated to a certain degree of influence.[63] At a minimum, an enslaved woman could expect a closer interpersonal bond with her master, a favourable prerequisite to manumission.[64] Ingomar Weiler determined that sexual intimacies were an "entscheidenden Schritt" towards freedom.[65] Many slaves must have, however resentfully, come to accept their owner's sexual interest in them. Keith Bradley wonders if some *ancillae* even welcomed this fact, seeing it as an opportunity to win favour or approval.[66] Despite the general historiographic consensus that sexual involvement resulted in favouritism, the agency of female slaves in seizing opportunities to be noticed is frequently overlooked or downplayed.

Situations entailing the relaxation of social norms were particularly apt for catching the eye of one's master. Aristocratic families are well known to have thrown extravagant parties, always involving

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[59] To take a comparative example from early modern England, Bernard Capp writes that "servants sometimes took the initiative in such liaisons, flirting with their masters, or seducing them, in the hope of commensurate rewards. Such rewards could be psychological as well as material, for an ill-treated maid might well take satisfaction in displacing her master's wife in his affections. A maid might even dream of marriage, if her master was single or had an ailing spouse." See *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.

[60] Terence, *Hecyra*, 294–295.

[61] Moore, *The Theater of Plautus*, 141.

[62] Plautus, *Menaechmi*, 128–129; Annalisa Rei, "Villains, Wives, and Slaves in the Comedies of Plautus," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 95.

[63] Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 51.

[64] Hans Klees, *Sklavenleben im Klassischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 310.

[65] Ingomar Weiler, "Eine Sklavin wird frei: Zur Rolle des Geschlechts bei der Freilassung," in *Fünfzig Jahre Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei an der Mainzer Akademie 1950–2000: Miscellanea zum Jubiläum*, ed. Heinz Bellen and Heinz Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2001), 121.

[66] Keith Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Bruxelles: Latomus Revue D'Etudes Latines, 1984), 118.

large numbers of slaves.[67] Whether hosting formal banquets (*epulae*) or casual dinner parties (*convivia*), the wealthy relied on *servi* to facilitate their "convivial comforts."[68] The comic banqueting scene from Petronius's novel includes clear descriptions of enslaved waiters, cup-bearers, carvers, cooks, acrobats, and entertainers.[69] High-class prostitutes and beautiful *ancillae* would have also been in attendance at Roman feasts, serving as living adornments for the enjoyment of guests. In a display of opulence, Emperor Tiberius (r. 17–37 CE) had one of his banquets staffed entirely by naked slave women.[70] Equally, John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) spoke out vehemently against those who arranged sex parties or invited prostitutes to wedding feasts.[71] The atmosphere of *epulae* and *convivia* was sexually charged, with *ancillae* deliberately exhibited to stimulate the banqueters.

Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen have outlined the complex orchestration of banquets, arguing for the ability of *servi* to exploit gaps in the choreography of elite festivities.[72] Household slaves might have found a quiet moment to shirk in an empty hallway or escape notice by secluding themselves in an area of the house far removed from the hubbub of the dining hall. Slaves posted in the kitchen meanwhile could have helped themselves to leftovers brought back from the *triclinium*, or pilfered a little food from the chef's table as he worked.[73] Speculative as it may be, such behaviours evidence a different knowledge of elite space, one running in tandem with the official programme of events.

Even if preoccupied with entertaining their master's guests, *ancillae* surely broke script in other ways. Banquets and drinking parties provided an opportunity for slave women to pique the curiosity of their owner or his friends. Engaging in lively conversation, dancing gracefully, or simply exhibiting their good looks could all ignite amatory feelings. The beautiful *ancilla* Photis (see below) rouses the attention of a young diner while serving food, the pair making flirtatious eye contact.[74] An epigram of Martial's writing describes the story of an *ancilla* who was sold and later repurchased by her master.[75] Having watched her perform at his friend's residence, the man regretted his earlier decision and was spurred to buy the girl back, this time as the mistress of his house (*dominam*). Presenting oneself as a demur seductress, capable of fulfilling every fantasy, doubtlessly left some partygoers desiring.[76] In Richlin's words, "to be pursued, one has to look like

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[67] While private gatherings cannot be understood as sites of total disbandment, they did nonetheless incite minor inversions in the established social order. Matthew B. Roller notes one such instance, describing the paradox of posture at the banquet, with the master and his guests reclining at a lower level than the standing slaves. Roller goes on to say that such arrangements must have necessitated a "different hierarchical principle," one focused on the "poised tension" of slaves versus the relaxed posture of the *dominus* and his guests. See *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 20.

[68] John H. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman Convivia," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 171.

[69] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 31, 34, 36, 49, 53. For a detailed look at the various classifications of slaves involved in banqueting, see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 150–156.

[70] Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Tiberius" 42.2.

[71] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians*, 12.4; de Wet, *Preaching Bondage*, 254–255.

[72] Joshel and Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*, 62–63.

[73] Hannah Platts, *Multisensory Living in Ancient Rome: Power and Space in Roman Houses* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 197.

[74] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.11.

[75] Martial, *Epigrams*, 6.71.

[76] Stirring desire might well be seen as an exhibition of agency in its own right.

a vulnerable, shimmering creature."[77] Sharon James takes up a similar line of argument for free courtesans, locating the banquet as a key space in which women could manipulate the competing sexual interests of men.[78] While *ancillae* are by no means an equivalent case — being largely powerless to repel unwanted advances — they exhibit the same capacity to manoeuvre within the dominant narrative, playing upon their sexualisation for personal advantage.

Hyper visibility could have also been achieved at the *comissatio*, a form of after-dinner entertainment for elite men. Nightlong revelries of this kind typically centred on bacchanal debauchery with slave girls or prostitutes.[79] *Comissationes* were hosted in both urban residences and on country estates.[80] Alternately, evenings of heavy drinking might culminate with a visit to a brothel and the hiring out of *meretrices*.[81] Ever patriarchal, Roman society deemed the *comissatio* a singularly male environment, wine-swilling and lustfulness being incompatible with the matronly ideal.[82] Plutarch (ca. 46–119 CE) writes approvingly of husbands who endeavoured to shield their wives from licentious parties and other disreputable behaviour.[83] Far from feeling sidelined, *uxores* were advised to understand their husband's actions as benevolent, an exhibition of his care for their modesty and sensitivity. The existence of certain social arenas where *domini*, intoxicated and free from wifely interference, mixed with low-status women, provided openings for *ancillae* to cultivate or solidify the attention of their master.[84] Gift-giving, drunken declarations of love, and assurances of manumission are all highly imaginable under such circumstances.[85] As Martial reminds us, however, a master's promise, extorted when drunk and inflamed, was not always reliable.[86]

Appreciably, elite cultural practices furnished slaves with opportunities to take the initiative, seize chances circumstantially created, and exercise agency in situations otherwise wholly exploitive. Be it through proximity, taking advantage of marital discord, or manipulating social space, *ancillae* were on the lookout for moments to expedite their private interests. Although we should not be so naïve as to presume that fluttering eyelashes and cajoling were exclusively transformative, they were often prerequisites for the cultivation of more meaningful relationships. Genuine feelings of tenderness between master and slave are often hard to accept, with steep power imbalances never entirely ruling out the possibility of coercion. Nevertheless, based on the available evidence, we cannot outrightly deny the forging of asymmetrically affective bonds.

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[77] Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus*, 44.

[78] Sharon L. James, "A Courtesan's Choreography: Female Liberty and Male Anxiety at the Roman Dinner Party," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 232–237.

[79] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 140B.

[80] Cicero implies that Gaius Verres, while governor of Sicily, hosted parties in remote farmhouses. See *In Verrem*, 2.3.12.

[81] Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 92.

[82] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 10.23.1; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 6.3.9.

[83] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 144C–D.

[84] Laura K. McClure writes of the Greek συμπόσιον in much the same terms, likening it to "a kind of carnival setting where hierarchical rank is temporarily suspended," and drinking facilitated licensed release. See "Subversive Laughter: The Sayings of Courtesans in Book 13 of Athenaeus' Deipnosophistae," *The American Journal of Philology* 124, no. 2 (2003), 262.

[85] The legal sources record gifts being given to prostitutes and other low-status women. See Ulpian, *Digest*, 38.5.5.

[86] Martial, *Epigrams*, 11.58; Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram*, 124.

3. Beyond Lust

Interpreting the emotional topography of master-slave relationships proves difficult, not least when it comes to judging whether *domini* valued *ancillae* much beyond the point of concupiscence. The Latin language, as with English, distinguished between *amicitia* (friendship) and *amor* (love), the latter of which incorporated both committed affection and erotic passion.[87] One possible way of deducing the more-than-sexual feelings masters harboured for their slaves, is to examine those instances where *amor* is used in connection with *ancillae*.

The fourth poem of Horace's second book of odes directly confronts love between a *dominus* and his *ancilla*. Xanthias, a friend of the author and the poem's addressee, is consoled "not to be ashamed of your love for a slave girl" (*ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori*). In an attempt to further encourage Xanthias, the poet lists a range of Homeric heroes who were amorously involved with their slaves, noting even Achilles was roused by the "snow-white skin" (*niveo colore*) and kind-heartedness of the war captive Briseis.[88] Among his other consolations, Horace reassures Xanthias with the words, "you may be sure that your beloved does not come from the criminal classes" (*crede non illam tibi de scelesta plebe dilectam*), bespeaking his view that unfree status need not equate disreputable character.[89] Distilling his judgement, Horace then advances Phyllis's meritorious qualities: her faithfulness (*fidelem*), reluctance to exploit Xanthias's wealth, flaxen (*flavae*) hair, and "shapely legs" (*teretesque suras*). Thus, in praising Phyllis, the poem self-consciously inverts the ridiculing tone traditionally adopted by elegists when discussing lovers of unequal rank.[90] Through combining mythic parallels and unconventional laudations, Horace, in effect, lays out a moral argument in defence of masters enamoured with beautiful *ancillae*.

Independent of the Latin poetic tradition, the dream chronicler Artemidorus wrote positively of relationships between master and slave, noting that a householder might even fall in love with his θεράπαινα (serving girl).

> Λεκάνη οἰκέτην σημαίνει καὶ θεράπαιναν πιστούς. πίνειν δὲ ἐκ λεκάνης ἐρασθήναι θεραπαίνης σημαίνει, τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ εἴ τις ἐσθίοι ἐν λεκάνῃ. λεκάνην χρυσέαν ἢ ἀργυρέαν ἔχειν ἤτοι θεράπαιναν ἀπελευθερώσαντα γῆμαι σημαίνει ἢ ἀπηλευθερωμένῃ συνοικῆσαι.
>
> A dish signifies a faithful household slave and serving girl. And to drink from a dish signifies falling in love with one's serving girl and it is the same, too, if someone should eat from a dish. To have a gold or silver dish signifies either that one will marry a freed serving girl or dwell with a freed serving girl.[91]

Artemidorus's explanation concerning the symbolism and materiality of the dream object is revealing. Just as a dish (λεκάνη) or any other item of kitchenware could be found in a typical household, so might female slaves, hence their equation. The aorist verb ἐρασθήναι, conjugated

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[87] David Konstan, *In the Orbit of Love: Affection in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

[88] Horace, *Odes*, 2.4.3–4. Ovid also draws parallels with the Greek heroes Agamemnon and Achilles when trying to justify his sexual relationship with his girlfriend's maidservant. See *Amores*, 2.8.11–14.

[89] Horace, *Odes*, 2.4.17–18.

[90] For example, see Catullus, 6; Propertius, *Elegiae*, 1.9.

[91] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 3.30. trans. Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 275.

from ἔραμαι (to love; desire passionately), unambiguously signifies the dreamer's intermixed romantic and sexual feelings towards his θεράπαινα. A gold or silver dish, moreover, is said to foreshadow marriage or cohabitation with an enslaved woman. Considered as a whole, the dream interpretation maps out, albeit in laconic terms, the formation of a long-term relationship between a master and his female slave. Artemidorus's usefulness as a source for Roman social history is well established, suggesting that the events described may indeed be realistic.[92]

The most extraordinary historical attestation to a master infatuated with a female slave reaches us via Diodorus Siculus's (fl. first century BCE) Βιβλιοθήκη Ἱστορική (*Library of History*). In 104 BCE a Roman knight (*eques*) by the name of Titus Vettius chanced to fall in love with a beautiful (κάλλος) enslaved woman belonging to another man. Having surreptitiously had sex with her — the verb used here is συμπλέκω, literally "to twine" — Titus Vettius found himself consumed by an "incredible love" (ἔρωτα παράδοξον).[93] Owing to his father's immense wealth, he then solicited the woman's owner, pledging to buy her for seven Attic talents, an impossibly high sum. Having failed to pay, Titus Vettius resolved to take his sweetheart by force, equipping four hundred of his οἰκέται (household slaves) with panoplies and weapons before encouraging them to revolt. So began a minor slave rebellion in Campania, waged in the pursuit of a love bordering on insanity.

Material culture also leaves traces of the emotional ties between master and slave. Among the best-known examples is a gold bracelet excavated from Pompeii, remarkably found still attached to the arm of its former owner.[94] Thinly cast and fashioned to resemble a snake, complete with engraved scales and glass eyes, the bracelet exhibits exceptional craftsmanship (see fig. 2.1). On the inner side of the band is inscribed: "The master, to his very own slave girl" (*dominus ancillae sua*). Studies of the woman's skeletal remains have estimated she would have been in her late twenties or early thirties at the time of death.[95] Whether the bracelet represents a lover's gift or a patronising reminder of sexual helplessness is a matter of considerable debate. Michele George tactfully cuts a middle path, describing the bracelet as evidence of the "complex interplay of emotional attachment and coercion" in slavery.[96]

The bracelet was not the only item of jewellery to be found with the skeleton. Clasped tightly in the woman's hands, archaeologists discovered a small purse containing two more bracelets, an anklet, and a long ornamental chain. The additional jewellery has been interpreted as part of the slave woman's *peculium*, the few items she managed to gather in the chaos following Vesuvius's

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92 Pomeroy regards Artemidorus as a "most valuable source for popular ideas and ideals" in the Severan age. See "Status and Status-Concern in the Greco-Roman Dream-Books," 52. Peter Thonemann, moreover, considers the *Oneirocritica* "an exceptionally important source for the mentalities of both slave-owners and slaves in the high Roman imperial period." See *An Ancient Dream Manual: Artemidorus' The Interpretation of Dreams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 181.

93 Diodorus Siculus, 36.2.

94 For the inscription, see *AE* 2001, 803.

95 F. Costabile, "Contra meretricium ancillae domini," *Ostraka* 12, no. 2 (2003), 259; Pier Giovanni Guzzo and Vincenzo Scarano Ussani, "La schiava di Moregine," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 113, no. 2 (2001), 981.

96 George, "Slavery and Roman Material Culture," 397.

eruption.[97] With this in mind, it appears significant that the woman was wearing the bracelet when she died, indicating it was of deep personal importance. Similarly, Jennifer Baird has noted that the inscription, not visible from the outside, was likely to have been intended for the wearer's eyes only, further suggestive of its highly personal nature.[98] We will never know for certain the identity of the bracelet's owner, but there remains a distinct possibility it was the cherished possession of an *ancilla*, worn right up to the moment she was engulfed by the pyroclastic flow.

Figure 2.1. Gold bracelet with engraved inscription. Archaeological Park of Pompeii, inv. no. 81580. Photo credit: Luigi Spina.

To quote Peter Hunt, "true love did not need to wait upon the law."[99] If a Roman slave owner wished to marry his *ancilla*, he was free to do so. Legal marriages did however require manumission. The Augustan era marital legislation purposed to lessen the stigma of marrying a slave, with the *lex Papia Poppaea* decreeing unions with freedwomen entirely legitimate.[100] Any *liberta* was, theoretically at least, capable of becoming a *mater familias*.[101] The law did nonetheless impose limits on who could wed a freedwoman. Senators and their children, for example, were

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[97] Guzzo and Ussani, "La schiava di Moregine," 990–991. Gold and silver artefacts throughout Pompeii are often excavated next to skeletons in the street rather than inside buildings, denoting that the town's inhabitants seized their most valuable possessions before attempting to escape. See Joanne Berry, "Household Artefacts: Towards a Re-interpretation of Roman Domestic Space," in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, ed. Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 186.

[98] Jennifer Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," *Helios* 42, no. 1 (2015), 168.

[99] Peter Hunt, *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 110.

[100] Celsus, *Digest*, 23.2.23; Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 43.

[101] Ulpian, *Digest*, 50.16.46.

outrightly prohibited from marrying *libertae*.[102] Patrons could not dragoon their freedwomen into marriage unless they had been manumitted expressly for wifehood (see below). Correspondingly, a *liberta* married to her ex-master had no recourse to separation.[103] Such a law was likely engineered to reduce the odds of an *ancilla* feigning love in expectation of manumission, before absconding or petitioning for a divorce.

Marriages between *patroni* and *libertae* are best evidenced by the inscriptional record. Matthew Perry discovered eighty-two epitaphs from the city of Rome commemorating spouses who were both *patronus* and *maritus*.[104] Considering funerary monuments from elsewhere in the Roman world returns an approximate total of three hundred attestations to freed wives and patron husbands.[105] The so-called Longidien stele provides a textbook example of a female slave manumitted to become her patron's wife.[106] Longidienus, a shipbuilder (*faber navalis*) from the eastern Italian town of Ravenna — the ancient city of Classis — proudly declares on his tombstone both his marital and citizen status. The epitaph itself is divided into three registers, with the topmost portion depicting Longidienus alongside his freed-wife Stactinia.[107] The stonemason responsible for carving the stele rendered the married couple in the *toga* and *stola* respectively, signifying their fulfilment of the marital ideal. Other headstones are far more evocative of the shared intimacy between *patroni* and *libertae*, such as the below-quoted inscription, dedicated to the memory of the freedwoman Petronia Thallusa.

> *Liberta et coniunx Petronia cara patrono / Thallusa hoc tumulo condita luce caret / quae bis vicenos complerat lucibus annos / erepta est subito coniugis e gremio / hanc sic adsidue delet Petronius ut iam deficiant oculos lumina cara suos / desine per terras infernas tendere ad arces / fata animam dederant fata eademq(ue) negant*
>
> The freedwoman and wife, Petronia Thallusa, dear to her patron, having been buried in this tomb, lacks the light of life. She, who filled up forty years with her brightness, was suddenly snatched from the lap of her husband. And so Petronius mourns her constantly with the result that precious sight is no longer available to his eyes. Finish pressing on through the lower regions to the heavens. The same fates that had given life, have also ended it.[108]

The first line of the epitaph makes clear Thallusa's status as a *liberta*, describing her with the phrase *cara patrono* (dear to her patron). After forty years of marriage, Petronius was understandably bereft at the death of his wife. Written in elegiac couplets, the tombstone poetically contrasts his

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[102] Paul, *Digest*, 23.2.44.

[103] Ulpian, *Digest*, 24.2.11. A freedwomen married to her patron was also prohibited from bringing legal action for the recovery of her dowry. See Ulpian, *Digest*, 38.11.1.1.

[104] Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 118.

[105] As Katharine P. D. Huemoeller makes clear, this is a conservative estimate, only accounting for definite mentions. See "Freedom in Marriage? Manumission for Marriage in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Studies* 110 (2020), 4.

[106] *CIL* 11.139. For further discussion of the Longidien stele, see John R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 118–120; Lauren Hackworth Petersen, "Arte Plebea and Non-elite Roman Art," in *A Companion to Roman Art*, ed. Barbara Borg (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 225–227.

[107] The middle segment of the monument portrays two *liberti*, while the lower register shows Longidienus carving a hull rib with his adze. For the work performed by Longidienus, see Roger B. Ulrich, "Representations of Technical Processes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Engineering and Technology in the Classical World*, ed. John Peter Oleson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51.

[108] *CIL* 6.24049; trans. Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 123.

abiding grief with the lost irradiance of Thallusa's presence. Inscriptions of this kind, while somewhat formulaic, once again point to the genesis of sincerely loving relationships between *domini* and their ex-slaves. As Henrik Mouritsen underlines, it is a paradox of Roman society that intimate relationships between *patroni* and *libertae* were not subject to the usual opprobrium levelled at couples of unequal rank.[109]

Recognition as a legitimate wife carried with it a host of social benefits, markedly distant from the precariousness of slavery. Freedwomen not only attained citizenship but secured the liberty of their future children and the right to inherit property. However, manumission for marriage was not always benignant. Katharine Huemoeller argues a master's decision to wed his slave amounted to little more than a "rational family strategy," wherein sexual fidelity, companionship, and procreation were all but guaranteed.[110] Furthermore, unlike marriages between couples of equal standing, a *dominus* did not require *consensus* (agreement) from his *ancilla*, ensuring that matrimony could be forcibly imposed.[111] Slave women, it might then be concluded (wrongly in my view), were preferred solely because of the increased control the law afforded to patron husbands.[112]

Finally, it is necessary to consider the protective feelings some masters demonstrated towards enslaved women. In a scene of the *Satyricon*, one of Tramalcio's wealthy guests declares he bought the freedom of his wife so that "no one could wipe his hands in her hair" (*ne quis in illius capillis manus tergeret*).[113] The solicitous quality of the partygoer's comment indicates his wish to shield the *ancilla* from future degradation. Loving sentiments may have even prevented a master from exercising his right to rape or molest a slave woman. A demonstrative example can be found in the Athenian playwright Menander's (342–291 BCE) fragmentary Μισουμενος (*The Hated Man*), a comedy with no Plautine successor. The passage in question depicts the lead character Thrasonides, a mercenary soldier, wondering why he refrains from taking advantage of the war captive Krateia, she having been recently assimilated into his household.

> Ἐξὸν καθεύδειν τήν τ᾽ ἐρωμένην ἔχειν. παρ᾽ ἐμοὶ γάρ ἐστιν ἔνδον, ἔξεστίν τέ μοι καὶ βούλομαι τοῦθ᾽ ὡς ἂν ἐμμανέστατα ἐρῶν τις, οὐ ποιῶ δ᾽. ὑπαιθρίῳ δέ μοι χειμ[ῶνος ὄ]ντος ἐστὶν αἱρετώτερον ἑστη[κέναι] τρέμοντι καὶ λαλοῦντί σοι.
>
> It's almost midnight, and I could be in bed and in possession of the girl I love. For she's in my house, and I have the right, and I want this as passionately as any raving lover — and yet I don't do it. I prefer to stand outside, in the winter air shivering with cold and talking to the night![114]

In the first line, the participle ἐρωμένην, derived from the verb ἐράω (to love; to desire), unequivocally positions Krateia as the object of Thrasonides's longing. Styled as a frantic and raving lover, Thrasonides's yearning is only arrested at the thought of non-consensually possessing

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[109] Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World*, 42–43.

[110] Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage?," 6–7.

[111] Marcian, *Digest*, 23.2.28; Ulpian, *Digest*, 23.2.29.

[112] Marc Kleijwegt, "Deciphering Freedwomen in the Roman Empire," in *Free At Last!: The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire*, ed. Sinclair Bell and Teresa Ramsby (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 117.

[113] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 57.6.

[114] Menander, *Misoumenos*, 9–14; trans. Norma Miller, *Menander: Plays and Fragments* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 161.

Krateia. The protagonist's attempts to rationalise his sexual prerogative — described as ἔξεστίν (permissible; allowed) — are sharply juxtaposed by his overwrought behaviour. Although only a third of the Μισουμενος survives, it is clear that Thrasonides is besotted with Krateia, having showered her with gifts and promised her manumission.[115] Similar expressions of restraint are found in Greek literature of the Roman imperial period. The elderly slave woman Plangon in Chariton's (fl. first century CE) novel, for instance, claims her master withholds from raping Callirhoe on account of his love for her.[116]

To conclude, across a variety of source types, we observe sentiments not wholly explained away by lust but characteristic of deeper, more profound feelings of love. Literary and epigraphic manifestations of intimacy and care, ultimately point to the existence of heartfelt master-slave relationships. It is within this context that the echoes of sexual agency can be meaningfully deciphered.

4. *Ancillae* as Agents

Any slave woman pursued by her master was in a unique though hazardous position. A favoured *ancilla* could maintain a long-term relationship with her *dominus*, even negotiating her freedom. Conversely, she could find herself the victim of passing fancy, having been groomed, sexually exploited, and then discarded. Here we shall focus on those instances where female slaves visibly capitalised on their master's sentiments, particularly through the monopolisation of his emotional and sexual attention.

Let us begin with an examination of the *servitium amoris* (enslaved lover), so recurrent a trope in Latin literature. Eloquently surmised by Frank Olin Copley, the *servitium amoris* constituted "an expression of the lover's humility and abasement," of his willingness "to undergo punishments and to undertake duties which in real life were felt to be peculiar to the slave."[117] While chiefly an archetype of Roman elegy, the playboy turned enthralled gallant is similarly observable in prose writing. The second and third books of Apuleius's (b. 124 CE) novel the *Metamorphoses*, repeatedly describe Lucius's passion for the *ancilla* Photis in the language of slavery.

> *Tuis istis micantibus oculis et rubentibus bucculis et renidentibus crinibus et hiantibus osculis et fraglantibus papillis in servilem modum addictum atque mancipatum teneas volentem* […] *nocte ista nihil antepono*.
>
> You, with your flashing eyes and reddening cheeks and glistening hair and parted lips and fragrant breasts, have taken possession of me, bought and bound over like a willing slave […] nothing is more important than spending a night with you.[118]

The protagonist's metaphorical subjugation to the charms of Photis creates the impression of a young woman in full command of her sexual faculties. Her darting eyes (*micantibus oculis*), partially opened mouth (*hiantibus osculis*), and perfumed body, all serve to enrapture the doting Lucius, who at length declares himself a "willing slave" (*servilem addictum*). Through emphasising

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[115] Menander, *Misoumenos*, 37–39.

[116] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 1.10.1.

[117] Frank Olin Copley, "*Servitium amoris* in the Roman Elegists," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947), 285.

[118] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.19.

her physical beauty, Apuleius underscores that Lucius's erotic shackling results entirely from Photis's sultry charisma. The servile motif is further embellished in the proceeding lines, where Lucius entreats Photis to forever consider him "your (i.e. her) slave" (*tuumque mancipium*).[119]

Photis's power over Lucius is not only evidenced lexically but in the stark reversal of their social roles. As Judith Hindermann explains, Photis's behaviour verges on domineering, ordering Lucius around and instructing him to prepare for their nightly trysts.[120] Even in the midst of lovemaking, Photis maintains her ascendancy, commanding Lucius to "fight vigorously" (*fortiter proeliare*) and "move assiduously" (*grassare naviter*), putting her own pleasure ahead of her lovers.[121] Choice of sex position is also evocative of Photis's assertiveness, with her adoption of the *Venus pendula* (lit. "swinging Venus") — equated with the *mulier equitans* (woman riding horseback) — or what we would contemporarily term "cowgirl."[122] All the more remarkably, it is Photis, not Lucius, who instigates their courtship, escorting him to bed and flirtatiously wishing him goodnight.[123] To quote Carl C. Schlam, Photis is "no passive instrument" but a sovereign agent, who engages on equal terms with Lucius irrespective of his status.[124]

An approximate example of a female slave commandeering an elite man's heart can be found in Heliodorus's (fl. third century CE) novel Αἰθιοπικά (*An Ethiopian Story*). Despite the narrative's historical backdrop — the action taking place in a dramatised late fifth or early sixth century BCE — Heliodorus surely took inspiration from his own life when devising the plot, as evidenced by the text's numerous anachronisms. In one of the book's many embedded narratives, we learn of Knemon's romantic interest in his stepmother's handmaid Thisbe. Having initially rebuffed his advances, Thisbe is directed by her mistress to seduce Knemon. This she undertakes with ease, captivating Knemon with provocative looks (βλέμματα), gestures (νεύματα), and other signals (συνθήματα).[125] Thisbe's sway over her Knemon is, while non-permanent, absolute, her sexual power upending conventional social and gender hierarchies.[126]

The Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) likewise acknowledged the capacity of enslaved women to seduce their master. One passage from his treatise Περὶ τοῦ πάντα σπουδαῖον ἐλεύθερον εἶναι (*Every Good Man is Free*), relates how a παιδισκάριον (young slave girl) might come to dominate her owner's sentiments via her beauty and elegance.[127] Philo's use of the verb πορθέω (to ravage; to plunder) in connection with the behaviour of female slaves points to the conscious weaponisation of their sexuality, almost as a form of resistance.[128] The language of warfare is

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[119] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.22.

[120] Judith Hindermann, "The Elegiac Ass: The Concept of *Servitium Amoris* in Apuleius' Metamorphoses," *Ramus* 38, no. 1 (2009), 76; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.10.

[121] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.17.

[122] Regine May, "Photis," in *Characterisation in Apuleius' Metamorphoses: Nine Studies*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 64.

[123] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.6.

[124] Carl C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 71.

[125] Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, 1.11.

[126] J. R. Morgan and Ian Repath, "Mistresses and Servant-women, and the Slavery and Mastery of Love in Heliodoros," in *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis and Michael Paschalis (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2019). 143.

[127] Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 38.

[128] Keith Bradley, "Sexualität," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 3, 2586.

augmented in the following line, with sexual charisma and wheedling words being equated with μηχανήματα (siege engines), liable to overrun the emotional defences of the master.

Some enslaved women cultivated the interests of multiple admirers. A tombstone erected for the freedwoman Allia Postestas appears to celebrate a successful and harmonious love triangle.[129] Etched into a sizeable block of marble, the plaque is thought to have once accompanied a funerary monument, most likely dating to the late second century CE.[130] The inscription itself is split between two columns, each totalling twenty-five verses, alongside a closing couplet warning the reader not to vandalise the gravesite. Linguistically, the epigraph is unique not only for its poetic originality but indifference to conventional formulae.[131] The headstone is also remarkable for uniting "the opposed stereotypes of whore and wife in a single character," commemorating equally Allia's matronly and sexual virtues.[132] For instance, the lefthand column begins with an appraisal of Allia's wifely hallmarks, describing her as a venerable (*sancta*), blameless (*insons*), and compliant (*obsequium*) homebody, who seldom set aside her wool-work (*lana*). Yet the poem is concomitantly suffused with erotic overtones, waxing lyrical in relation to Allia's ivory breasts (*pectore niveo*), smooth limbs (*levia membra*), and golden hair (*aurata capillis*). The eulogising style of the inscription likens Allia to a keystone, her presence being integral to the polyamorous trio's completeness. Under her tutelage, Allia's "two young lovers" (*iuvenes amantes*) lived peaceably, forming "one house…and one spirit" (*una domus…unusque et spiritus*), approximating the legendary friendship of Orestes and Pylades.

Surprisingly, nowhere in the extensive bibliography discussing the inscription has the role Allia played in fixing her patrons' affections been considered. To my mind, the tombstone can be interpreted as an exhibition of agency, recording the story of a slave woman who not only won her freedom but secured the devotion of two wealthy *patroni*. Proof of the indelible impression Allia left on at least one of her patrons, might be substantiated from the author's admission he wore a gold armband (*auro lacerto*) engraved with her *nomen*. The dedicatee further alludes to an effigy (*effigiem*) representative of Allia — perhaps a portrait or statuette — which he treated with the utmost reverence, garlanding with wreaths (*sertaque*) and carrying to her tomb. Valerie Hope outlines the importance of mementoes or keepsakes in the course of private lamentation, helping guide remembrance and assuage grief.[133] As Hope herself acknowledges, the *effigiem* of Allia was clearly intended for personal use, an object of profound significance to the bereaved, amalgamating her earthly memory and departed spirit.[134] All things considered, the epitaph's unorthodox nature connotes the lifelong esteem in which Allia was held, in no small part thanks to the careful deployment of her desirability.

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[129] *CIL* 6.37965.

[130] Dating the inscription has proved somewhat controversial owing to the author's deliberate use of archaisms. Estimates range from the late Augustan period to the fourth century CE. For a palaeographic overview, see Nicholas Horsfall, "CIL VI 37965 = CLE 1988 (Epitaph of Allia Potestas): A Commentary," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 61 (1985), 252–254.

[131] The elegiac inspiration behind much of the inscription's phraseology is well known. Ovid's *Tristia* is quoted verbatim, while the repeated allusions to Greek myth imply Aulus Allius was decidedly cultured. For further comment, see Emanuel Mayer, *The Ancient Middle Classes: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire 100 BCE–250 CE* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 151.

[132] Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, 54.

[133] Valerie Hope, "Remembering to Mourn: Personal Mementos of the Dead in Ancient Rome," in *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death*, ed. Valerie Hope and Janet Huskinson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 177–178.

[134] Hope, "Remembering to Mourn," 180.

For many enslaved women, the holy grail of intimate relations with their *dominus* was manumission. Freedom need not have been obediently awaited, however, but was determinedly pursued. Masters were even bated by their servile lovers into awarding *manumissio*, considered a demonstration of their romantic fidelity. Plautus's *Curculio* provides an approximate example, the brothel slave Planesium requesting her suitor Phaedromus to buy her from a pimp in order to guarantee her release.

> PHAE: *siquidem hercle mihi regnum detur, numquam id potius persequar. quando ego te uidebo*?
> PLA: *em istoc uerbo uindictam para: si amas, eme, ne rogites, facito ut pretio peruincas tuo. bene uale*.
>
> PHAE: If in fact I was offered a kingdom, I'd never take it in preference to you. When will I see you?
> PLA: There you go! Because of what you've just said secure my freedom if you love me, buy me and don't just ask for me, but make sure you win with the highest bid.[135]

In an attempt at flattery, Phaedromus gloats he would choose Planesium in preference to a kingdom (*regnum*). Rather than accept his compliment as hollow praise, she demands Phaedromus secure her manumission (*uindictam*). Her entreaty is ultimately successful, with Phaedromus promising to purchase and enfranchise her.[136] Naturally, the representativeness of Planesium's situation might be questioned, her manumission primarily serving to advance the theatrical interests of the storyline. After all, Planesium is a freeborn citizen who suffers enslavement, but through the careful preservation of her chastity, is fortuitously rewarded. Planesium's character development is hence in accord with dramatic stereotypes, fulfilling the expectations of Roman theatre-goers. What is more, Planesium enjoys the unusual good fortune of having been spared the ravages of bonded sex work, with the pimp Cappadox affirming her virginity.[137] The realities of ancient prostitution were not so soft-edged. Nevertheless, the manumission of brothel slaves does find corroboration outside the Plautine tradition, lending the episode a semblance of believability.[138]

Patronage could also be obtained through affected expressions of intimacy. Feigning love in the hope of manumission was surely fraught with risk, though a number of sources appear to demonstrate equivalent tactics. The slave Philematium, for example, claimed to have manipulated her master into freeing her with sweet nothings and sham displays of affection.[139] Comparably, a set of fascinating inscriptions dating from the first century CE, originally standing on the Via Flaminia in Rome, relate two episodes from the life of the freedwoman Acte. Chiselled into the outward-

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[135] Plautus, *Curculio*, 211–213.

[136] Plautus, *Curculio*, 208–209.

[137] Plautus, *Curculio*, 57. Cappadox's decision to shield Planesium is unusual, deviating from the typical behaviours associated with pimps in Plautine drama. See T. H. M. Gellar-Goad, "Plautus' *Curculio* and the Case of the Pious Pimp," in *Roman Drama and its Contexts*, ed. Stavros Frangoulidis, Stephen J. Harrison and Gesine Manuwald (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 243.

[138] A Delphic manumission inscription from 173 BCE records the provisional freeing of the slave prostitute Leaina by her lover Philon. The terms of her release were hardly compassionate, with Leaina's continued service assured through threats of violence and the prospect of re-enslavement. See *GDI* 1801; Deborah Kamen, "Slave-Prostitutes and εργασια in the Delphic Manumission Inscriptions," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 188 (2014), 151.

[139] Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 221.

facing side of the alter can be read a conventional oration, memorialising the death of the eight-year-old girl Junia Procula, depicted in the upper frieze. Two later alterations to the monument betray its deeper significance. The mother's name appears to have been deliberately erased from the primary inscription, in a style highly reminiscent of *damnatio memoriae*. On the reverse of the epitaph (see fig. 2.2) was etched a malediction, likely explaining the obliteration of Acte's name.

> *Hic stigmata aeterna Acte libertae scripta sunt vene- / nariae et perfidae dolosae duri pectoris clavom et restem / sparteam ut sibi collum alliget et picem candentem / pectus malum commurat suum manumissa grati(i)s / secuta adulterum patronum circum scripsit et / ministros ancillam et puerum lecto iacenti / patrono abduxit ut animo desponderet solus / relictus spoliatus senex e(t) Hymno ⌜e⌝ade(m) sti(g)m(a)ta / secutis / Zosimum*
>
> Here are written the eternal marks of disgrace of the freedwoman Acte, sorceress, faithless, deceitful, hard-hearted. A nail and a hemp rope to hang her neck and boiling pitch to burn up her evil heart. Manumitted for free, following an adulterer, she cheated her patron and she abducted his attendants — an enslaved girl and boy — from her patron while he lay in bed, so that he, alone, despaired, an old man abandoned and despoiled. And the same curse for Hymnus and those who followed Zosimus.[140]

The established interpretation of the two inscriptions, best outlined by Judith Evans Grubbs, can be surmised as follows.[141] Acte was the former slave of Euphrosynus. In the years preceding Junia Procula's birth, Acte was manumitted, most likely at no financial cost to herself, if the word *gratiis* is to be read adverbially.[142] One month shy of her ninth birthday, the couple's daughter tragically died. At an unspecified future time, Acte absconded from her patron husband, perhaps with the intention of rendezvousing with her lover Zosimus.[143] Incensed and heartbroken at her flight, Euphrosynus or his heirs returned to the epitaph of Junia Procula, ordering a curse to be inscribed on its reverse, willing Acte's agonising and violent murder.

For the above reading to make sense, it is necessary to assume that the Acte of the curse was Junia Procula's mother, whose name is effaced in the alter's front inscription. Let us suppose for a moment that the funerary epigraph and later malediction are unconnected. First of all, the availability of an uninscribed surface alongside a major roadway would have proved a tempting location for writing an execration. Curse tablets (*defixiones*) were also commonly deposited in sepulchral loci, with the gravesites of those who had died a violent or untimely death being particularly favoured. An onomastic comparison of the two inscriptions, however, suggests their interrelation. Of the approximately ten letters erased from Junia Procula's mother's name, only an -E carved in square majuscules remains definitely legible. Fritz Graf has proposed to fill the lacuna with IVNIAE M. L. ACTE, reflecting the habit of freedwomen to adopt the *tria nomina* of their

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140 *CIL* 6.20905; trans. Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage?," 4.

141 Judith Evans Grubbs, "*Stigmamta Aeterna*: A Husband's Curse," in *Vertis in usum: Studies in Honor of Edward Courtney*, ed. John F. Miller, Cynthia Damon and K. Sara Myers (Müchen: K. G. Saur, 2002), 230–232.

142 Our primary evidence for the time of Acte's manumission comes from her daughter's adoption of Euphrosynus's *nomen*, confirming she was freeborn. See Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Imperial Funerary Altars with Portraits* (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1986), 134.

143 In his editorial comments accompanying the inscription's publication, the epigrapher Wilhelm Henzen proposed Hymnus was a slave boy, and Zosimus Acte's clandestine lover.

patron.[144] Prior to manumission, *libertae* were known to their master by their *nomen*, in this case, Acte. Taking into account Heikki Solin's compendium of Greek personal names, we find a total of twenty-one *ancillae* and *libertae* with the designation Acte.[145] This not only supports the likelihood of Acte being the *nomen* of Junia Procula's mother but implies that the freedwoman of the curse was indeed Euphrosynus's wife.

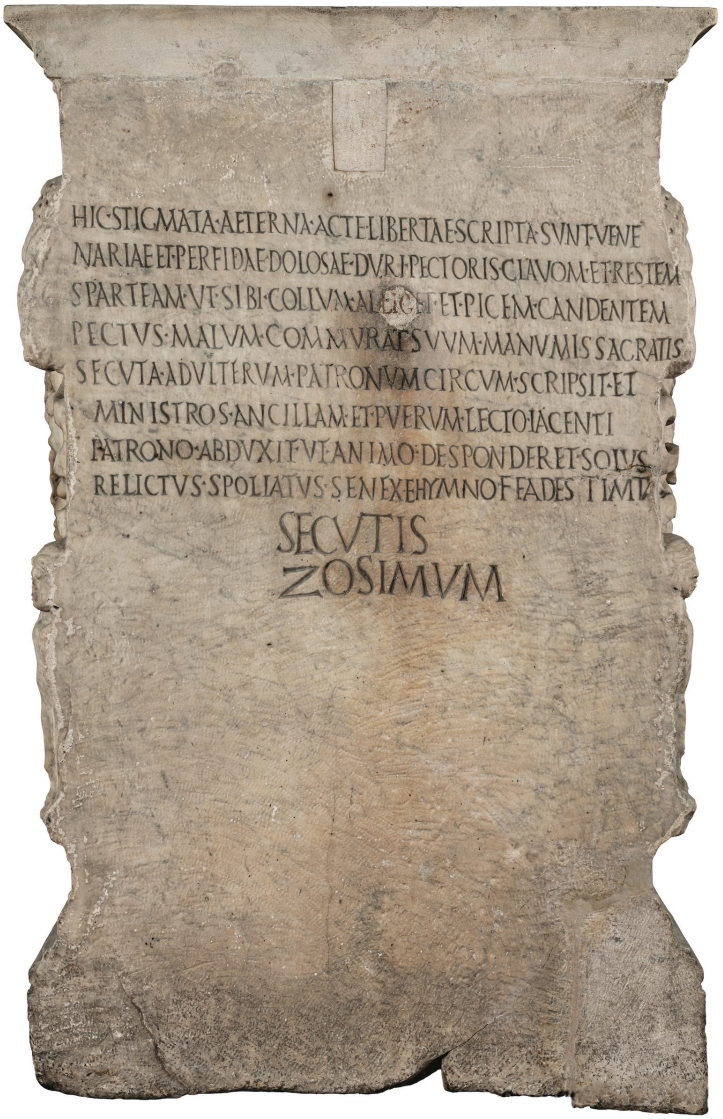

Figure 2.2. Curse inscribed on the reverse of Junia Procula's tombstone. Uffizi Gallery, inv. no. 1914, 950.

The opening line of the malediction describes Acte with the referent *venenaria*, a polysemous word not easily decipherable. Generally translated as "poison," *venenum* could also be used to indicate pharmacological drugs, herbal juices, or magical potions. The feminine suffix *-aria* meanwhile is indicative of a woman who dealt in or used something, meaning *venenaria* can be glossed as "poisoner" or "sorceress." Whether a concoction brewed or spell cast by Acte was responsible for

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[144] Fritz Graf, "Victimology or: How to Deal with Untimely Death," in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, ed. Kimberly B. Stratton and Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 414, note 70.

[145] Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom*, 616–617.

Euphrosynus's bedridden state hinges on our interpretation of the participle *iacens* (from the verb *iaceo*, "to lie prostrate"). Magic working by female slaves (see below) against their master is not unknown, suggesting that Acte may well have poisoned or cursed Euphrosynus, his incapacitation providing her with an opportune moment to escape.

While the anguish occasioned by Junia Procula's death could have destabilised their marriage, it is equally imaginable that Acte was never truly enamoured with Euphrosynus, living as his freed wife out of convenience alone. The arrival of Zosimus — most likely of slave status himself, judging from his single Greek *nomen* — was perhaps the catalyst in ending their relationship, the pair having fallen in love during the tumultuous years following Junia Procula's death. Whatever the case, the malediction unmistakably characterises Acte as an adulterer (*adulterum*). With divorce an impossibility, Acte resolved to abscond, taking with her a slave boy and girl of indeterminable identity. Acte's volition in masterminding her exit strategy, not to mention feigning devotion towards her patron-husband, no doubt constitutes a micro-historical example of sexual agency.

Even if we adopt a highly cynical view of master-slave relationships, one entirely distrustful of genuine care and affection, the argument for sexual agency persists. Enslaved women facing routine sexual violence would have deployed survival strategies and acquiescent means through which to endure their mistreatment. Ruth Scodel, in her fascinating study of captive women in Euripidean tragedy, draws attention to the trauma bonds existent between victim and victimiser. Unfree women in the ancient world, Scodel argues, would have necessarily formed attachments to their abusers in an attempt to improve their chances of survival.[146]

Marshall identifies comparable behaviour in Roman drama, in what he terms "the pragmatic language" of the survivor.[147] To illustrate his point, Marshall juxtaposes graffiti scrawled on the walls of a modern-day Cambodian brothel with declarations of love between *domini* and *ancillae* in Plautine comedy. He questions if the crudely drawn wounded hearts and cacographic love notes adorning the walls of contemporary brothels can be understood as a record of what child prostitutes heard from their abuser or rather as an "adaptive response," evidencing their determination to survive.[148] Near identical expressions are found in the *Mostellaria*, where the wealthy merchant's son Philolaches divulges his feelings for the sex slave Philematium.[149] We might also note the acknowledgement of love between a soldier and an *ancilla* whom he brought on campaign, recorded in *Epidicus*.[150] Crucially, female slaves who resigned themselves to sexual relationships with their master did so defensively, out of rational consideration for their wretched circumstances.

To synthesise my argument, it is crucial to recognise the agentic power of bonded women in navigating the volatility of slavery. Be it through provoking desire, manipulating sentiments, or feigning love, female slaves exercised agency in the domain of sexual relations. As we have seen, highly successful enslaved women might have hoped to dominate their master's affection, establishing an emotional monopoly that could lead to manumission or, at the very least, short-term patronage. Paradoxically, sex, as a weapon of resistance, required female slaves to court the very object of their oppression. The dangers inherent to intimate relations with the master cannot be

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146 Ruth Scodel, "The Captive's Dilemma: Sexual Acquiescence in Euripides Hecuba and Troades," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998), 140.

147 Marshall, "Sex Slaves in New Comedy," 194.

148 Marshall, "Sex Slaves in New Comedy," 195–196.

149 Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 305.

150 Plautus, *Epidicus*, 66.

overstated, but nor should they prevent us from accepting the possibility that, for some enslaved women, they presented a rare opportunity for social metamorphosis.

5. Matrons and Maidservants

As illustrated by the opening epigraph, sexual relations between master and slave gave rise to tensions in the household. For legitimate wives, the siphoning of their husband's affection was more than simply a cause for personal jealousy. Affairs with *ancillae* acted to destabilise the hierarchisation of the family, challenging their rightful place at the top of the domestic pecking order. Rivals were not to be suffered gladly, resulting in intense competition between wives and slaves, an emotional tug of war for the heart of the patriarch. Patterson puts it succinctly: "hell has no fury like a wife scorned in favour of a slave."[151]

Regrettably, the androcentric bias of our source base leaves next to no record of marital jealousy from the perspective of women themselves. The singular exception, known to me at least, being a handful of elegiac couplets attributed to Rome's only extant female poet, Sulpicia (fl. mid-first century CE). One stanza in particular is well worth quoting in full.

> *Sit tibi curae togae potio pressumque quasillo / scortum quam Servi filia Sulpicia: / solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa dolori est / ne cedam ignoto maxima causa, toro.*
>
> A toga-flaunting streetwalker, weighed down by her wool basket, may be more important to you than Sulpicia the daughter of Servius, but there are those who care for me, and their greatest worry is that I might lose out to the bed of a nobody.[152]

Although writing from the viewpoint of an aristocratic *puella* spurned in favour of an *ancilla*, Sulpicia's feelings are likely evocative of matronly jealousy more generally. Most striking is the sense of injustice felt by Sulpicia, as well as the critical stance she takes against her lover Cerinthus's promiscuity.[153] She addresses her rival derisively as a *scortum togata* (toga-wearing harlot), in contrast to her own status as the daughter (*filia*) of a prestigious family.[154] Lyrically speaking, *togae* chimes alliteratively with *toro* (bed), the poem's final word, signifying her own sexual involvement with Cerinthus.[155] The motif of the wool basket (*quasillum*) might also be scrutinised, articulating the gulf in status between the matron who spins wool and the working girl who carries it to market.

Feuds between *matronae* and *ancillae* were recurrently utilised by Plautus as a narrative device. A procuress in his *Cistellaria* lampoons the contempt in which slaves and prostitutes were held by

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151 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 175.

152 Tibullus, *Corpus Tibullianum*, 3.16; trans. Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, 109–110.

153 Andrew Dalby makes the point that Sulpicia's anger may have, in part, arisen from her wounded pride, loosing out to a lower status woman was seemingly hard to take. See *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 264–265.

154 Sulpicia's grandfather was the illustrious jurist and onetime consul Servius Sulpicius Rufus. Her uncle and, following her father's death, legal guardian, Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus also served as consul in 31 BCE.

155 Judith P. Hallett, "The Eleven Elegies of the Augustan Poet Sulpicia," in *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe, Volume 1*, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown and Jane E. Jeffrey (New York: Routledge, 2002), 48.

women of the master class, citing sexual rivalries as among the principal causes for adversity.[156] Cleostrata, the wife of Lysidamus, bemoans her husband's wish to marry an *ancilla* to his slave overseer, with the implicit intention of having sex with her himself.[157] Predictably, husbands often exacerbated the situation by covertly introducing beautiful slave women into the *familia*, a fact that did not always go unnoticed. Female slaves of exceptional beauty and sexual magnetism posed the greatest threat to *matronae*. There is some evidence suggesting that wives actively avoided procuring *ancillae* of special comeliness. In Plautus's *Mercator*, the householder Demipho argues Pasicompsa's beauty would offend his wife's modesty, attracting the unwanted attention of male onlookers. He describes an ideal *ancilla* not in terms of beauty but robustness: able to grind grain, finish the wool quota, and sustain a beating.[158] Likewise, Ovid exhorts matrons not to purchase too pretty an *ancilla*, lest her husband be ensnared by the girl's natural good looks.[159]

Masters were often caught between discordant wives and slaves. Though the patriarchal slant of Roman gender discourse advised *matronae* to turn a blind eye to their husband's salaciousness, such entreaties cannot have been particularly effective. Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE) recognised the hypocrisy of wifely fidelity in light of male unfaithfulness but implored wives to remain chaste regardless.[160] In like fashion, Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) superficially acknowledged the double standard with respect to male and female sexuality but insisted adultery committed by the husband was not the same as disloyalty on the part of the wife.[161] Contrariwise, the secret to a harmonious relationship was commonly equated with allowing husbands to indulge in extramarital sex.[162] Martial satirised that the ideal *uxor* would command a slave woman to gratify her husband's sexual appetite.[163] Livia (59 BCE–29 CE), the third wife of Emperor Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE), reportedly took an active role in procuring slave girls for her husband's bedroom.[164] Another of the Julio-Claudian empresses, Messalina (20–48 CE), third wife of Claudius (r. 41–54 CE), was equally deft in providing her husband with slave bedmates.[165]

More often than not, sexual jealousies must have progressed from private misgivings to outbursts of violence. Nothing prevented female slaveholders from inflicting pain and humiliation on the women under their control.[166] The Greek romance Ἐφεσιακά (*An Ephesian Tale*) depicts the jealous matron

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156 Plautus, *Cistellaria*, 31–38.

157 Plautus, *Casina*, 194–195. Jealousies were equally liable to arise between male slaves and their master if, like Lysidamus, they conducted affairs with their slave's life partner. See Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*, 51.

158 Plautus, *Mercator*, 416–417.

159 Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.665–666.

160 Seneca, *Epistles*, 94.26.

161 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 5.11.34. Rebecca Langlands has suggested that women having sex with anyone other than their husbands may have been as abhorrent to elite Roman sensibilities as pedophilia is to us today. See *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47.

162 Though dating from the Hellenistic period, a remarkable letter addressed to a wife, whose husband was consorting with a ἑταίρα, recommended she turn a blind eye to his promiscuity, with the words, "as they say, fires burn out if they are ignored" (ὡς τὸ πῦρ ἡσυχίᾳ φαςὶ σβέννυσθαι). See Holger Thesleff, *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1965), 199.

163 Martial, *Epigrams*, 11.23.

164 Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Augustus" 71.1. When someone asked Livia how she was able to exert such a commanding influence over Augustus, she replied that she made no attempt to meddle in his affairs with other women. See Cassius Dio, 58.2.5.

165 Cassius Dio, 60.18.3.

166 Anne Feltovich, "Social Networking among Women in Greek and Roman Comedy," *Classical World* 113, no. 3 (2020), 254.

Rhenaea ordering the slave Anthia to be fastened with ropes, beaten, and then shaved.[167] Not yet satisfied, Rhenaea then instructs her overseer to sell Anthia to a brothel keeper. Ovid writes similarly of a vicious *domina* who clawed at her slave maid's face and stabbed her with needles, leaving the girl bloodstained and weeping.[168] The tyrannical behaviour of highborn wives is most vividly portrayed by Juvenal (fl. late first–early second century CE).

> *Quid faciant agitentque die. si nocte maritus auersus iacuit, periit libraria, ponunt cosmetae tunicas, tarde venisse Liburnus dicitur et poenas alieni pendere somni cogitur, hic frangit ferulas, rubet ille flagello, hic scutica; sunt quae tortoribus annua praestent.*
>
> If her husband slept with his back turned last night, the wool-girl has had it, the hairdressers must remove their tunics, and the Liburnian slave is told he is late and has to pay for someone else's sleep. One breaks the canes, another reddens under the whip, another under the strap. There are women who pay their torturers an annual wage.[169]

Before analysing this complex and linguistically demanding passage, we would do well to contextualise its appearance in Juvenal's sixth satire as a whole. The composition is, in effect, a hyperbolic treatise, attempting to dissuade Postumus, the poem's addressee, from desiring a wife. Usually entitled *Against Women*, the satire is infamous for its overtly prejudicial and routinely offensive tone, prompting Edward Courtney to acknowledge Juvenal's "genuine personal misogyny."[170] Almost every aspect of female behaviour falls foul of the poet's stylus, in a volcanic denouncement of Roman womanhood. The extract in question comes towards the end of Juvenal's broadside, amidst a scathing description of a lady's daily toilette.

Commentators have traditionally understood the vignette as a caricature of female irrationality and anger. The fictional *mater familias*, having the previous evening been refused sex (*auersus iacuit*), takes out her frustration on the slaves, ordering them beaten and whipped by a professional torturer (*tortores*), enlisted so often as to justify his yearly salary. A subplot emerges however when we consider analytically the given chain of events. Acknowledgement of the husband's sexual disinterest is followed immediately by an interjection of fear by a *libraria*, the verb *periit* (to perish) commonly exclaimed by slaves — in the sense of "I am done for" — on the brink of punishment. Treggiari describes *librariae* as enslaved women who performed secretarial duties in large households.[171] A late fourth-century CE scholium encourages a different reading, suggesting that the *libraria* of Juvenal's poem was, in fact, a *lanipendia*, a female slave responsible for measuring out the daily wool quoter (*pensum*). Generally falling under the direct supervision of the *mater familias*, the wool-weigher's closeness to her mistress may have resulted in her being whipped first, ahead of the hairdressers (*cosmetae*) and litter bearer.[172] Alternatively, Juvenal perhaps sought to create an implicit association between the husband's low libido and the unnamed *libraria*, thereby expounding upon wifely jealousy in concert with feminine hysteria.

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[167] Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*, 5.5.4.

[168] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.235–241.

[169] Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.475–480.

[170] Edward Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (1980 repr., Berkeley: California Classical Studies, 2013), 217.

[171] Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," 77.

[172] The Liburnian slave was probably employed as a litter bearer. See Chiara Sulprizio, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome: Satire 2 and Satire 6* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 142.

Satire undeniably entails the conscious distortion of reality, favouring exaggeration over authenticity. Nevertheless, the capricious treatment of *ancillae* was far from fictional.[173] The physician Galen (b. 129 CE) recalled how his mother, when overcome by rage, would lash out and bite the enslaved women sent to attend her.[174] Seneca the Younger, in an essay addressed to Marcia, daughter of the historian Aulus Cremutius Cordus (d. 25 CE), compared the whims of fortune to the angry mistreatment some *ancillae* underwent at the hands of their mistress.[175] An edict of Emperor Hadrian's (r. 117–138 CE) records the five-year banishment of a certain Umbricia who, for "trifling reasons" (*levissimis causis*), subjected her female slaves to atrocious cruelty.[176] The rescript, quoted in a discussion of the immoderate treatment of *servi*, evidences the willingness of lawmakers to punish *matronae*. Yet the singularity of Umbricia's case — no comparable ruling is found elsewhere in the *Digest* — infers it was never regarded as precedential.[177] Nor is Juvenal alone in portraying the intemperate consequences of mistress-slave rivalries. In an especially brutal scene of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, a wife, suspecting her husband of keeping a concubine, stabs a "white-hot firebrand" (*titione candenti*) between her rival's thighs.[178] Even if such actions represent only the apex of domestic antagonisms, they are by no means unthinkable.

If open violence was not an option, wives may have resorted to the dark arts to do away with a competitor. One Republican-era curse tablet, found buried outside the city walls of Cartagena, documents a spouse's jealousy of an *ancilla* who, on the face of it, had pleased her master all too well. The malediction reads:

> *Danae ancilla no(v)icia / Capitonis hanc (h)ostiam / acceptam habeas / et consumas Danae / ne(n) habes Eutychiam / Soterichi uxorem*.
>
> Danae, the new maidservant of Capito. Accept this offering and destroy Danae. You have cursed Eutychia, the wife of Soterichus.[179]

Eutychia clearly had no qualms about enlisting the help of the supernatural, purposing to destroy the slave woman responsible for threatening her marriage. More diplomatically, matrons might have entreated their husband to auction off or expel an unwelcome rival. Beautiful slave women sold at the behest of their resentful mistress appear frequently in Greek novels. The slave dealer Theron in Chariton's romance, falsely explains that Callirhoe was sold to him on account of her former mistress's jealousy of her otherworldly prettiness.[180] A fragment of Caecilius Statius's (d. 168/167 BCE) *Plocium* (*The Necklace*), quoted by Aulus Gellius, records the complaint of a householder who had been driven to sell his *ancilla* to quell his wife's suspicions.[181] In the opposite manner,

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[173] For the reliability of Juvenal's depiction of matronly violence, see Pat Watson, "A *Matrona* Makes Up: Fantasy and Reality in Juvenal, Sat. 6.457–507," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 150, no. 3/4 (2007), 387–389.

[174] Galen, *Passions*, 8.

[175] Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Marciam*, 10.6.

[176] Ulpian, *Digest*, 1.6.2.

[177] Kaius Tuori, *The Emperor of Law: The Emergence of Roman Imperial Adjudication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 211.

[178] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10.24.

[179] *ILLRP* 2.1145; trans. Elaine Fantham *et al.*, *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 268.

[180] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 2.1.3.

[181] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 2.23.10

Terence imagines a conversation between two elderly gentlemen, one of whom declares his intention to keep his adored enslaved songstress, despite his wife's objections.[182]

Hostilities towards enslaved women were even integrated into the Roman festival calendar. The Matralia, celebrated every year on the 11th of June, honoured the goddess Mater Matuta, protector of all citizen mothers. On the festival day, highborn women gathered at the goddesses's temple to offer sacrifice, thanking the deity for her protection and securing future safety in childbirth. Low-status women were deliberately warned to keep away, being ritually whipped if they dared breach the temple's threshold. It is thought that the ritual beating of female slaves during the festival embodied the danger they posed to legitimate wives.[183] Christopher Smith argues the ceremony served to culturally reinforce the threat of bastard children (those sired by a *dominus* with his *ancilla*) to the inheritance rights of freeborn sons and daughters.[184] Whatever its exact purpose, the Matralia graphically exteriorises the widespread conception of slave women as a genuine menace to conjugal life, one to be resisted at all costs.

Sexual competition between *matronae* and *ancillae* arose naturally in a society where slaveholding permeated all areas of domestic and public life. Critically, the infighting between matrons and female slaves points to a reaction against the latter's sexual agency. The fact Roman society embraced, both culturally and legally, the transformation of *ancillae* into legitimate *uxores* was a cause for alarm among many freeborn women. While adopting a nonchalant attitude to their husband's dalliance was promoted by some, for the vast majority of wives active resistance was preferable to casual acceptance. Any slave woman embarking on a sexual relationship with her master, consensually or not, would have been well aware of the backlash she was likely to endure from her *matrona*. It is notable that some female slaves opted to run the gauntlet, facing down the quandary of pleasing their master or placating their mistress. To do both was all but impossible, leaving *ancillae* to make a choice. Not unexpectedly for a patriarchal society, the rewards accompanying male favour typically outstripped the benefits of female solidarity.

6. Spells and Curses

If beauty and charm waned, female slaves could turn to the supernatural. A great deal of evidence suggests Roman women not only imagined magical solutions to erotic problems but engaged in occult practices to solve them.[185] Whether attempting to preserve their master's love or sabotaging the advances of a sexual competitor, the enlistment of the occult to assuage temporal anxieties can be understood as a form of agency, a means through which subaltern women could regain a measure of control over their volatile lives.

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[182] Terence, *Adelphoe*, 745–748.

[183] Stewart, *Plautus and Roman Slavery*, 85–86. Amy Richlin argues that the festival of the Mater Matuta may have also purposed to strengthen class boundaries, see "Carrying Water in a Sieve: Class and the Body in Roman Women's Religion," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today*, ed. Karen L. King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 356–357.

[184] Christopher Smith, "Worshipping Mater Matuta: Ritual and Context," in *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy: Evidence and Experience*, ed. Edward Bispham and Christopher Smith (New York: Routledge, 2000), 151.

[185] Radcliffe G. Edmonds, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered: Erotic Magic in the Graeco-Roman World," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. Thomas K. Hubbard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 286.

Regardless of where we look for magic in the ancient world, women are typically overrepresented.[186] Nowhere is the "systematic misrepresentation" of women and the preternatural more strongly felt than in the case of erotic spellwork.[187] The elegiac poets are particularly guilty of distorting our understanding of the occult arts, depicting women as the primary users of magic. Ovid's rendition of Medea, for instance, bears all the hallmarks of the archetypal sorceress: barefoot and clad in flowing robes, she evokes the powers of Hecate under the fall moon.[188] Horace's Canidia likewise resorts to spell books and incantations to enchant her lover Versus.[189] Apuleius offers an equally stereotypical account of female sorcery, describing Pamphile's laboratory as being filled with bones, teeth, mutilated animal corpses, and the other apparatus necessary for the brewing of love potions.[190] Male anxiety surrounding diviners, healers, and sorceresses may partially account for this general biasing.[191] As Pauline Ripat explains, elite authors were not interested in accurately portraying female magic but in discrediting the social and religious power women achieved through enchantments.[192] Fritz Graf considers the disproportionate equation of women with the occult in ancient literature as deflective, designed to mask the fact that magic working was, in reality, the preserve of men.[193] The extant spell books concur with Graf's assertion, presenting males as the predominant users of magical recipes.

Notwithstanding the representational disparity, it is clear that women, as well as men, used charms and spells to further their romantic endeavours. Of the surviving recipes contained in the magical papyri, at least a quarter are love spells, with the majority of these pertaining to heterosexual relations.[194] Generally speaking, love charms consisted of two parts, written out on scraps of papyri, thin sheets of metal or, in a smaller number of cases, shards of amphora.[195] Typically, spells open with an appeal or address to a chthonic god or demon, usually in the second or third person singular,

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[186] This is especially true when it comes to accusations of the use of magic, witchcraft so often being a target of attack. See Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001), 86.

[187] Matthew W. Dickie, "Who Practised Love-Magic in Classical Antiquity and in the Late Roman World?," *The Classical Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2000), 563.

[188] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7.179–195.

[189] Horace, *Epodes*, 17.4–6.

[190] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.17.

[191] For the distrust of diviners, see Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 5.4; Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 1.58. Also Columella, *De re rustica*, 6.22, who follows Cato in warning against allowing soothsayers onto the *villa rustica*. For scepticism of magical healers, see Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 2.63. Athanasius also warns that inviting a wise woman to assist in the curative process might backfire, see *De Amuletis*.

[192] Pauline Ripat, "Roman Women, Wise Women, and Witches," *Phoenix* 7, no. 1/2 (2016), 105. Richard Gordon notes that magical rituals, as portrayed in Augustan poetry, do not relate empirical experiences, but conform to generalised ideas of what magic was. See "Magic as a Topos in Augustan Poetry: Discourse, Reality and Distance," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 11, no. 1 (2009), 213.

[193] Graf stakes his argument on the fact that resorting to magic in the pursuit of love might have been considered unmanly, see *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 187–189. Apuleius successfully defended himself against charges of sorcery through his appeal to logic and reason, see *Apologia*, 90.

[194] A handful of spells deal with homosexual love, including one definite lesbian recipe, see *PGM* 32.1–19. Other charms are gender neutral or ambiguous enough to have been used on either a man or a woman, see *PGM* 4.1716–1870, 12.62–66; *PDM* 61.95–99.

[195] For papyri love spells, see *PGM* 4.2959–2966, 9c.1–19, 12.474–479, 36.69–77, 109.1–8. For love charms inscribed on metal lamella, see *PGM* 7.459–461, 462–466, 78.1–14. For pottery fragments, see *PGM* 36.187–210. Interestingly, erotic spells were likewise written out on reed or flax leaves, see *PDM* 14.1070–1077; *PGM* 19b.1–3. Charms engraved on gemstones have also been found though, as Campbell Bonner underscores, papyrus was the preferred material. See *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 115.

followed by an invocation for the god to assist in the performance of a magical act.[196] Other recipes required the user to carry out a specific action in order for the spell to take effect. Examples include whispering an incantation over a cup from which the supplicant's lover might drink or passionately kissing the target while mentally reciting certain magical words.[197] Similarly, charms might first be written out on papyrus before being dissolved in a liquid for the victim to drink, often wine or some other aromatic beverage.[198] A handful of love spells required something belonging to the victim in order to enhance their potency, most commonly strands of hair.[199] As aforementioned, the majority of recipes in the extant spell books were intended to assist men in the seduction of women, though a handful of spells connote explicit female use.[200] One relatively well-known example concerns Capitolina's attempt to bind her lover Nilos.

> Ἵνα κατα δήςωςι Νῖλον τὸν καὶ Ἀγαθὸν Δαίμονα, ὃν ἔτεκε, ὃν ἔτεκε Δημήτρια, κακοῖς μεγάλοις, οὐδὲ θεῶν οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων εὑρήςω καθαρὰν λύςιν, ἀλλὰ φιλήςη ἐμέ, Καπιτωλίναν, ἣν ἔτεκε Πεπεροῦς, θεῖον ἔρωτα καὶ ἔςῃ μοι κατὰ πάντα ἀκόλουθος, ἕως ἂν ἔτι βούλωμαι, ἵνα μοι ποιήςῃ, ἃ ἐγὼ θέλω, καὶ μηδενὶ ἄλλη, καὶ μηδενὸς ἀκούςῃ, εἰ μὴ ἐμοῦ μόνης, Καπιτωλίνας, ἐπιλήῃ γονέων, τέκνων, φίλων. προcεξορκίζω ὑμᾶς, δαίμονες, τοὺς ἐν τῷ τόπῳ (magical words).
>
> I will bind you, Nilos alias Agathos Daimon, whom Demetria bore, with great evils. Nor shall I discover from the gods a pure way out for you! On the contrary, you are going to love me, Capitolina, whom Peperous bore, with a divine passion, and you will be for me in everything a follower, as long as I wish, in order that you may do for me what I want and nothing for anyone else; that you may obey only me, Capitolina; that you might forget your parents, your children, and your friends. Oh divinities, I summon you by my oath, all you who dwell in this place (magical words).[201]

The language of the spell is noticeably violent, with Capitolina desiring Nilos not only to be a devoted lover but fiendishly enslaved to her, foregoing all other emotional bonds.[202] Surprisingly for a spell so charged with jealousy, there is no mention of Nilos's wife, indicating he might have been a widower. This is all the more likely when we consider Capitolina's call for the deity to have

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196 John Petropoulos, "The Erotic Magical Papyri," in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. Basil G. Mandilaras (Athens: Greek Papyrological Society, 1988), 217.

197 For erotic cup spells, see *PGM* 7.385–389, 623–626, 643–651. For kissing, see *PGM* 7.405–406, 661–663.

198 *PGM* 7.969–972, 973–980.

199 For example *PDM* 14.1063–1069; *PGM* 16.1–75. As D. R. Jordon divulges, the archival report accompanying *PGM* 16 records that some hair was found wrapped inside the papyrus, see "A New Reading of a Papyrus Love Charm in the Louvre," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 74 (1988), 232. It is also worth mentioning that Pamphile asks her slave Photis to gather some hair trimmings of the handsome Boeotian boy she is trying to seduce, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.16.

200 However, use of the masculine grammatical gender is often purely conventional, allowing for the possibility that spells could be used on either sex. See Dickie, "Who practised love-magic in Classical Antiquity," 567.

201 *PGM* 15.1–8; trans. Jane Rowlandson, ed., *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 360. The "magical words" noted in parenthesis have not been transcribed, being entirely incomprehensible. The inscription's use of the lunate sigma has been persevered for accuracy. For another love spell denoting female use, see *PGM* 68.1–20.

202 As David M. Halperin points out, the Greek concept of ἔρως was not so much about romantic love as it was frenzied passion and overwhelming lust. See "Platonic *Erôs* and What Men Call Love," *Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1985), 162.

Nilos forget his, we may presume, legitimate children.[203] Conjecturally, Capitolina might have been the mistress or slave concubine of Nilos, perhaps even the mother of his lovechild, and hence trying to secure both her and her infant's long-term security.

As well as bringing couples together, magic could be employed to tear unions apart. Curse tablets, or *defixiones*, were the primary means through which magic users could jeopardise sexual or romantic relationships. By and large, *defixiones*, like love charms, were comprised of incantations or occult formulas etched into thin sheets of metal, "intended to influence, by supernatural means, the actions or welfare" of the victim.[204] Most curse tablets are found rolled up into scrolls or folded into small packets in tombs, chthonic sanctuaries, or in what were once underground bodies of water. As with the magical recipes, roughly one-quarter of surviving *defixiones* deal with, what John Gager terms, "matters of the heart."[205] One representative example concerns Phila, who adjures with the powers of the underworld to impede Dionysophon from marrying anyone other than herself.

> [Θετί]μας καὶ Διονυσοφῶντος τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸν γάμον καταγράφω καὶ τᾶν ἀλλᾶν πασᾶν γυ- / [ναικ]ῶν καὶ χηρᾶν καὶ παρθένων, μάλιστα δὲ Θετίμας, καὶ παρκαττίθεμαι Μάκρωνι καὶ / [τοῖς] δαίμοσι· καὶ ὀπόκα ἐγὼ ταῦτα διελέξαιμι καὶ ἀναγνοίην πάλιν ἀνορόξασα, / [τόκα] γᾶμαι Διονυσοφῶντα, πρότερον δὲ μή· μὴ γὰρ λάβοι ἄλλαν γυναῖκα ἀλλ᾽ ἢ ἐμέ, / [ἐμὲ δ]ὲ συνκαταγηρᾶσαι Διονυσοφῶντι καὶ μηδεμίαν ἄλλαν· ἱκέτις ὑμῶ⟨ν⟩ γίνο- / [μαι· Φίλ?]αν οἰκτίρετε δαίμονες φίλ[ο]ι, ΔΑΓΙΝΑΓΑΡΙΜΕ φίλων πάντων καὶ ἐρήμα· ἀλλὰ / [- - -]α φυλάσσετε ἐμὶν ὅ[π]ως μὴ γίνηται τα[ῦ]τα καὶ κακὰ κακῶς Θετίμα ἀπόληται. / [. . . .]. ΑΛ [- - -].ΥΝΜ..ΕΣΠΛΗΝ ἐμός, ἐμὲ δὲ [ε]ὐδαίμονα καὶ μακαρίαν γενέσται. / [- - -]ΤΟ[.].[- - -]. [. .] . . Ε.ΕΩ[]Α.[.] Ε . . ΜΕΓΕ[- - -]
>
> Of Thetima and Dionysophon the ritual wedding and the marriage I bind by a written spell, as well as [the marriage] of all other women to him, both widows and maidens, but above all of Thetima; and I entrust [this spell] to Macron and to the demons. And were I ever to unfold and read these words again after digging [the tablet up], only then should Dionysophon marry, not before; may he indeed not take another beside myself, but let me alone grow old by the side of Dionysophon and no one else. I implore you: have pity on [Phila?], dear demons, [for I am indeed bereft?] of all by loved ones and abandoned. But please keep this [piece of writing] for my sake so that these events do not happen and evil Thetima perishes miserably; but let me become happy and blessed.[206]

Engraved into a lead scroll and composed in a distinct Doric idiom, the fourth-century BCE tablet from Pella yields many thought-provoking details. The motive of the inscription is apparent from the opening sentence, with the *defigens* (i.e. the one performing the curse) endeavouring to prevent the marriage of a certain Thetima to her partner Dionysophon. As Emmanuel Voutiras observes, the

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[203] Loss of memory is a key theme in love spells and *defixiones*, most likely as memory was seen as the locus of social ties between communities and individuals. Interfering with memory was deemed capable of altering the course of a romantic relationship. See John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 79.

[204] D. R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985), 151.

[205] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 78.

[206] *SEG* 43.434; trans. Emmanuel Voutiras, *Dionysophōntos Gamoi: Marital Life and Magic in Fourth Century Pella* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998), 15–16. The translation has been adapted ever so slightly and the lacuna smoothed for ease of reading.

Pella curse can be described as a "love charm only in the very wide sense of the term," dealing primarily with conjugal life as opposed to erotic repudiation.[207] This is especially clear from the terminal line, where the author implores the demons to blight her rival, thereby ensuring her continued happiness. Unfortunately, the name of the supplicant is almost entirely lost, with only the final letters being wholly legible. The reconstruction Φίλαν is hence purely speculative, little more than a period-appropriate female name comfortably filling the lacuna. The tablet's addressee, Macron, was almost certainly the owner of the grave in which the *defixio* was deposited, possibly having been inserted between his clenched fingers.[208] Nothing of Marcon's life is known, though he was conceivably of slave or freed status, owing to his austere burial — interned without grave goods or a coffin — and etymologically ethnic name.[209]

One intricacy of the Pella tablet is the *defigens* apparent disregard for common formulas, not to mention the highly emotive style in which she writes.[210] Against this backdrop, the curse reads as a revenge prayer, an outpouring suggestive of the dedicatee's genuine personal agony. Invocations for the deity to pity (οἰκτίρετε) her lonely (ἐρήμα) condition smack of desperation, still heartrending even from the distance of nearly two and a half millennia. Radcliffe Edmonds has argued that the curse might represent a concubine's frenzied attempt to retain her patron, who had otherwise resolved to wed Thetima.[211] I find Edmonds's theory convincing, though the supplicant's emphasis on her personal abandonment and natal isolation may even infer enslaved status. Either way, we can be in little doubt that Phila, if that was indeed her name, was somehow dependent on Dionysophon, wishing to secure his ongoing love and support.

Historiography has traditionally recognised bewitchment practices as a tool of the weak, habitually resorted to by enslaved persons to navigate conflicts with their master.[212] Revisionist scholarship has challenged this hypothesis, noting that only a fraction of extant curse tablets can be definitively attributed to slaves. Antón Alvar Nuño, in his survey of *defixiones* from the Western Roman Empire, found sixteen curse inscriptions of unfree authorship, of which only two directly reflect vertical tensions between master and slave.[213]

Dating from the late third or early fourth century CE and deposited in a grave near the Via Latina in Rome, one lead curse prayer betrays the subterfuge of a female slave named Politoria.[214] Written in

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[207] Voutiras, *Dionysophōntos Gamoi*, 37.

[208] Archaeologists found the tablet lying lengthways approximately 15 cm from the righthand thigh of the skeleton. However, excavation data indicates some degree of repositioning, suggesting the tablet could well have moved downwards overtime.

[209] Μάκρων may well derive from Μάκρωες, denoting the tribes who once populated northeastern Asia Minor.

[210] Esther Eidinow observes, "The tablet differs considerably in its use of language from the large majority of simpler and often quite uncouth texts of Classical date. The mixture of very personal language and stock formulae suggests that Phila had sufficient education to write the text herself, although perhaps with expert advice." See *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 215.

[211] Radcliffe G. Edmonds, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 98.

[212] For example, see Franz Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), Vol. 3, 977–978, 983–984.

[213] Antón Alvar Nuño, "Le malheur de Politoria: sur la malédiction d'une esclave contre sa matrone," in *Esclaves et maîtres dans le monde romain: Expressions épigraphiques de leurs relations*, ed. Monique Dondin-Payre and Nicolas Tran (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2016), 104.

[214] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 169–171.

unadorned Greek, the inscription entreats a deity to restrain Clodia Valeria Sophrone, preventing her from sending the *defigens* to a textile workshop or brothel. Our uncertainty as to where Politoria feared being confined arises from the word ἐργαστήριον. R. Wünsch, who first published the curse, understood the term in the sense of a prison or workhouse and interpreted Clodia Valeria Sophrone in the role of an overseer.[215] Nuňo has cast doubt on this reading, noting that *ergastula* were abolished by Hadrian in the second century CE, while large and family-run workshops were typically supervised by men.[216] As such, he proposes that Clodia Valeria Sophrone was in fact a brothel keeper, a job not uncommonly held by freedwomen. If the latter explanation is to be accepted, Politoria may well have resorted to bewitchment in an effort to circumvent "the lifeless destiny" (ἀψυχία) of bonded sex work.

Various other surviving curse inscriptions were authored by low-status women. A lead *defixio* from fourth-century BCE Attica targeted a certain Aristokudes, whom the client hoped to forbid from ever marrying.[217] Sexual jealousy also explains a curse tablet from Boeotia, the *defigens* singling out a skilled musician, dancer, and eroticist named Zois, wife of Kabeira.[218] Zois was most likely the supplicant's rival, conceivably a former prostitute, owing to the careful description of her sexual and performative qualities.

Tabella defixionis were not uniformly devoted to sabotaging relationships, some, like the love spells discussed above, sought to detain a paramour. A lead sheet from the North African city of Hadrumentum records the evocation of Domitiana, who, with the help of the god of Israel, hoped to bring Urbanus to her "frantic and sleepless with love and desire" (μαινόμενον ἀγρυπνοῦντα ἐπὶ τῇ φιλίᾳ καὶ ἐπιθυμίᾳ).[219] Domitiana's ultimate goal appears to have been to make Urbanus her husband, thus insuring herself against a future jilting.[220] Domitiana was, in the view of Gager, most likely an ex-slave, presumably on account of her single *praenomen*.[221] As already indicated, we have no reason to doubt that female slaves did not resort to *defixiones* when it came to matters of love and sex.

Spells and curse tablets perhaps had another, more therapeutic function. John Winkler has argued that erotic charms were projectional, acting as a means through which the *defigens* could redirect his or her emotional distress towards the victim.[222] In conjuring an image of torment, the supplicant was not only able to vocalise their own anguish but to confer upset on the source of their suffering,

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[215] R. Wünsch, "Deisidaimoniaka," *Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft* 12 (1909), 40.

[216] Nuňo, "Le malheur de Politoria," 106.

[217] *DTA* 78. We can safely assume the supplicant was a woman, perhaps Aristokudes's lover or fiancée.

[218] *DT* 86. There is some debate around whether πυγίον refers to Zois's "small buttocks" or a dance she was proficient in performing. Gager translates the former, but states the latter is equally probable. See *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 85–86. Moreover, L. Prauscello has argued that κιθάρισμα might be a sexual metaphor denoting a kind of foreplay and not a reference to Zois's kithara playing. See "A Note on *Tabula Defixionis* 22(A).5–7 Ziebarth," *The Classical Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2004), 339. Kevin Solez has nevertheless challenged Prauscello on this point, arguing that magic users would not have resorted to metaphor when trying to specifically identify their target. See "Zois the Eretrian, wife of Kabeiras (22 Ziebarth)," *Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* 5 (2015), 87.

[219] *DT* 271; trans. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 113.

[220] John Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 97.

[221] Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), 280; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, (1992), 112.

[222] Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 87–88.

exposing them to the same intensity of feeling. If Winkler is correct, then love charms can be understood as a form of self-help, a way in which men and women in the ancient world came to terms with heartbreak, romantic longing, and erotic envy. Taking Winkler's hypothesis as a starting point, we might add that curse prayers would have been particularly attractive for those in a position of relative powerlessness. In addition, magical solutions were of comparatively low risk and easily performed in secret, providing enslaved women with a covert means of resistance. Even if the spirits did not deign to help the supplicant, the ritual act of writing out the incantation could have alleviated feelings of trepidation and helplessness.

Finally, we come to love potions.[223] Unlike spells and *defixiones*, philtres required the user to directly confront their intended target, either through administering the concoction themselves or persuading the victim to drink.[224] Elite Roman attitudes were generally wary of love potions, with the jurist Paul warning that the application of an erotic concoction was punishable.[225] Likewise, Plutarch attempted to dissuade women from offering philtres to their lover, cautioning it could result in a loss of mental faculty.[226] Caligula was said to have been driven mad by a love potion given to him by his wife Caesonia.[227]

Concubines and brothel slaves who feared losing sway with an advantageous patron are recorded using love potions.[228] The Greek sophist Alciphron (fl. second century CE) quotes a letter penned by the prostitute Myrrhina, who claimed to have procured a φίλτρον (love charm) to give her favourite client, intended to prevent him from straying from her bed and to quell his drunken temper.[229] Myrrhina recognised her actions as a last resort, but faced with fierce competition, was left with no other choice. Utilising love potions in an attempt to lessen domestic violence is also evidenced by Quintilian, who alludes to a wife's administration of a concoction to her husband in the hope he'd stop beating her.[230] Lucian's (ca. 125–180 CE) Ἑταιρικοὶ διάλογοι (*Dialogues of the Courtesans*) vividly portrays ἑταῖραι obtaining philtres with the intention of ensnaring clients. Bacchis, for example, directs her colleague Melitta to a local witch, who was said to require sulphur and salt, along with an item of clothing belonging to the target, in order to successfully brew a φίλτρον.[231] We might deduce from Juvenal that love potions could also be acquired from suppliers of magical wares.[232] Lacking professional help, a woman might prepare her own concoctions, using whatever ingredients she had to hand.[233]

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223 The use of love potions in Roman society was likely ancient in origin, with the Latin word *venenum* — perhaps derived from Venus — initially referring to philtres. See David B. Kaufman, "Poisons and Poisoning among the Romans," *Classical Philology* 27, no. 2 (1932), 156.

224 Though typically drunk, love potions could be administered in other ways. Deianeira mistakenly killed Heracles by soaking his tunic in a potent concoction. See Diodorus Siculus, 4.36.

225 Paul, *Digets*, 48.19.38.5.

226 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 139A.

227 Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Caligula" 50.

228 Brothel slaves were not alone in using love potions. Pseudo-Quintilian hypothesised that pimps might also spike the drinks of visiting clients, see *Declamationes minores,* 385.5.

229 Alciphron, *Epistles*, 4.10.3.

230 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 7.8.2.

231 Lucian, *Dialogi Meretricii*, 4.4.

232 Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.610–611. Potions are also presented as easily acquired by Apuleius, who describes a wife buying a poisonous concoction to murder her step-son. See *Metamorphoses*, 10.4.

233 For a hyperbolic example, see Horace, *Epodes*, 5.40–41.

To conclude, the use of spells, curses, and potions by female slaves can be understood as a form of sexual agency, sustaining emotional monopolies when beauty and charm wore thin. Although the evidence is somewhat circumstantial, spellwork and bewitchment offer us a rare insight into the "sexual appetites, anxieties, and fantasies" of women in the classical Roman world.[234] Indeed, female magic working does not subscribe to the topos of sexual passivity and social seclusion found elsewhere in the ancient source material. Within the realm of the preternatural, enslaved women found a means of empowerment and expression, voicing their personal desires and reclaiming a measure of autonomy over their sexual identity, if not erotic destiny.

[234] Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 80.

III

Body Choices

The latch fell with a hushed chink, and so inchmeal we descended, my feet kissing each ill-lit step. Meter by meter the black heart of the sleeping house grew up around us, until flagstone stairs gave way to cold mosaics. Seeing with my heels, I imagined what pictures the tiles produced, and what colours the small squares conspired to paint. “Hold this,” he said, groping for my wrists and handing me a half-spent candle. “Bring it closer.” I positioned the wick. The singing flints sent up a flurry of white sparks, and after four or five strikes the glim ignited. “And now the lamp,” he directed. From my satchel, I produced a terracotta *lucerna*, along with a vile of pale oil. After filling the well and dredging the taper, we coaxed the flame to life, our faces outlined in its supple glow.

As my eyes imbibed the light before us emerged a gloomy chamber, the arched ceiling supported by four ornate papyrus columns. Fringed by travertine walls, an oval pool sat at the centre of the room, residual steam furling upwards like an exorcised ghost. Hand in outstretched hand we approached the lip of the bath, our little lantern flickering on the surface of the shadowed water. Lowering our legs into the *therma*, I felt his touch brush my naked thigh, a deliberate caress inviting desire. In the outer glimmer of our lone torch his gaze scintillated like delicate stars, his fingers, now impressed against the hot wax of my waist, drew me closer. Entwined as one, our melding heartbeats and cantillating blood raged against the velvet dark.

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Sociologists have long acknowledged the interconnection of personal volition and the body. For many, Chris Shilling included, the body takes on a foundational quality, acting as the very “basis for the exercise of agency and the lived experience of social actors.”[1] Somatic choices, whether resisting or complying with societal pressures, are key to understanding individual expressions of agentic power.[2] As such, no assessment of sexual agency can neglect body choices, defined here as the decisions female slaves made with and over their corporeal selves.

We take as our starting point what was, for many enslaved women, the end result of sexual attachments with their master, namely children. Bearing a son was especially consequential, often leading to manumission or, in specific cases, heirship to their master’s estate. The benefits accrued through male progeny were such as to speculate whether *ancillae* attempted to influence the conceptive process, improving their chances of conceiving a son. Wet nurses similarly benefited from their close relationship with their master’s children. While doubtlessly exploited, complex inter-dependencies between *nutrix* and nurseling afforded milk-mothers a unique status within the *familia*. Alternately, *ancillae* might have resorted to contraceptives and abortifacients in an effort to deliberately avoid childrearing. The use of pregnancy preventives can be understood as an act of resistance, a means through which slave women retook control of their bodies. Finally, we will reflect on consensual lovemaking within the slave community, attempting to formulate erotic activity as a genuinely subversive behaviour.

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[1] Chris Shilling, *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 68.

[2] For the manipulation of bodies, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 91.

1. The Power of Sons

Dating from the late first century BCE, two inscriptions, recovered from the ancient sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, carry faint traces of the remarkable life trajectory of the slave woman Eisias.[3] Whether captured in war or born to her status, Eisias found herself under the ownership of the Athenian householder Kleomantis. The first epigraph records her partial manumission, or παραμονή, a privilege she purchased for the cost of two *minae*.[4] Eisias's conditional freedom came with the proviso that she was to serve Kleomantis for the remainder of his life, "following all orders like a slave" (ἐπιτασσόμενον πᾶν ὡς δούλα). Failure to comply would result in a beating, chaining or, worse still, her wholesale re-subjugation. Nothing in the first inscription is particularly exceptional, with numerous sacral manumission stones from Delphi recording similar details.[5] However, several priesthoods later, a second dedication was erected, seemingly documenting Kleomantis's dramatic change of heart. As well as awarding Eisias her freedom, this time in full, Kleomantis reimbursed the money she had paid for her manumission years earlier. What is more, Eisias's son, Nikostratos, born in the interim, was emancipated, along with being listed as Kleomantis's heir, second only to his legitimate wife. The inscription further documents the renaming of Eisias's child, the boy having acquired his father's name. Both acts are highly suggestive of the younger Kleomantis's formal adoption and assumption into the citizen body.[6]

We may assume, with reasonable confidence, that the relationship between Kleomantis and Eisias was one of master and slave concubine.[7] Beyond this, the precise dynamics of their association are almost imperceptible, with the inscriptions providing more questions than answers. Perhaps Kleomantis was initially reluctant to manumit Eisias through fear he would lose out on his right to sexually exploit her.[8] If so, Eisias's παραμονή acted as a form of sexual duress, safeguarding Kleomantis's entitlement to her erotic services. Alternatively, it is probable that Eisias only became amorously involved with Kleomantis sometime after her conditional release. Regardless, the catalyst for Kleomantis's reversal of feeling was surely the delivery of Eisias's son. Faced with his legitimate wife's barrenness, Kleomantis would have surely welcomed the birth of an heir, albeit to his concubine. In recognition of his gratitude, Kleomantis likely promoted Eisias to citizen status

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[3] The two inscriptions in question are *FD* 3.3.329 and *FD* 3.3.333.

[4] Unlike in Rome, slaves in the Greek world could be awarded a provisory freedom, known as παραμονή. While under παραμονή, freedmen were subject to a host of social and legal disabilities conditioning their status as ex-slaves. These included: labour coercion, restrictions on free movement, the absence of bodily integrity, and continued non-citizen status. In short, παραμονή service was a kind of carrot and stick method through which to incentivise the loyalty of ex-slaves. Hard work could be rewarded with emancipation in full, while misbehaviour would be punished with a return to bondage. For more details, see Deborah Kamen, *Status in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 32–42.

[5] Sacral manumission entailed the selling or dedication of chattel slaves to a deity, in this case, Apollo. The fictive sale of bonded persons to the gods was, in reality, an emancipatory action, owing to the fact the demiurge was not expected to exercise his or her right of ownership. See Deborah Kamen, "Conceptualizing Manumission in Ancient Greece," (PhD diss., University of California, 2005), 83–85.

[6] Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, *Not Wholly Free: The Concept of Manumission and the Status of Manumitted Slaves in the Ancient Greek World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 169.

[7] C. Wayne Tucker, "Women in the Manumission Inscriptions at Delphi," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 112 (1982), 231.

[8] Davidson has suggested that some householders might have been reluctant to free enslaved women, as manumission in effect put an end to their right to demand sex. See *Courtesans & Fishcakes*, 99–101. For the Roman world, the jurist Callistratus ruled that any master who had previously prostituted his freedwoman would not be entitled to sexual *operae*, see *Digest*, 38.1.38.

and provided for the manumission of Nikostratos, thereby legitimising his inheritance rights.[9] In many respects, Eisias's story typifies what we might term procreational influence, or rather the benefits female slaves were able to accrue through mothering their master's child.

It appears some enslaved women were well aware of what they stood to gain from having children with their master. The story of Callirhoe, the heroine and namesake of Chariton's novel, provides a rare, albeit imaginary, example. Written sometime between the first century BCE and the second century CE, the narrative follows the freeborn girl Callirhoe who, after being kidnapped by pirates, is sold to Dionysius, a leading citizen of the Anatolian town of Miletus.[10] Rather predictably, Dionysius, after a felicitous meeting in the shrine of Aphrodite, falls deliriously in love with Callirhoe, herself already married to the Syracusan dreamboat Chaereas. Much to her distress, Callirhoe realises she is with child, and hence occupies the unusual position of a pregnant freeborn woman newly enslaved.[11] Following the discovery, Callirhoe deliberates between procuring an abortion or sleeping with Dionysius, thereby enabling her to pass off the child as his own.[12] At the instigation of the elderly servant Plangon — who behaves rather more like Callirhoe's handmaid — Callirhoe and Dionysius are married, not only resulting in her manumission but providing a pretext for the child's birth.[13]

But how are we to approach Callirhoe's resourcefulness? Foremost, we must acknowledge her agency in deciding whether to keep or abort the child. Although terminating her pregnancy would spare the unborn infant a life of servitude and ridicule, she rationalises the arguments in favour of its preservation.[14] To what extent Chariton's description of female psychological turmoil can be relied upon is open to debate, though certain authorial embellishments suggest a veneer of realism. Callirhoe's fear her child will be presumed the outcome of rape by her pirate kidnappers is, for instance, a conceivable scenario. Equally, as Nikoletta Kanavou has identified, Callirhoe's resolution to give birth stems partly from her hope she will deliver a son, male children affording their mothers greater prestige and protection.[15] Secondly, it is essential to recognise Callirhoe's marriage to Dionysius as the result of "servile cunning" (πανουργίας δουλικῆς).[16] Indeed, both Plangon and Callirhoe conspire to hoodwink Dionysius, exploiting their gynaecological knowledge in the pragmatic awareness it is the only way they can guarantee the unborn child's free status.[17] Plangon, for her part, exhibits a sensitive understanding of, what Saundra Schwartz calls, the

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[9] A child born to a woman in παραμονή was often directed to be free. For further examples from Delphi, see *GDI* 2225; *FD* 3.3.280, 296, 303, 307, 318, 439; *FD* 3.4.496, 3.6.13, 33, 43, 48. Keith Hopkins calculated that 58% of those freed slaves of known origin — some 357 individuals — were home-born. See *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 140.

[10] For an extensive discussion regarding the date of composition, see Stefan Tilg, *Chariton of Aphrodisias and the Invention of the Greek Love Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36–78.

[11] Enslaved women must have occasionally found themselves in such circumstances. The jurist Marcian remarked that an *ancillae* who conceived while free but gave birth as a slave could still expect the child to inherit her former status. See *Digest*, 1.5.5.2.

[12] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 2.9.1–2.

[13] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 3.1.2.

[14] It might be argued that Chaereas's nocturnal visitation at 2.9.6 circumscribes Callirhoe's agency, his fantastical approval being the catalyst for her final decision. I think however that Chaereas's apparition serves rather as a literary device, rubber stamping her decision for the benefit of the bourgeois male readership.

[15] Nikoletta Kanavou, "A Husband is More Important Than a Child," *Mnemosyne* 68, no. 6 (2015), 941–942.

[16] Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 2.10.7.

[17] Hilton, "The Role of Gender and Sexuality in the Enslavement and Liberation of Female Slaves in the Ancient Greek Romances," 8.

"seven-month rule," denoting the Roman habit of accrediting legitimacy to children born at less than full-term.[18] Fortuitously, Callirhoe is wedded to Dionysius after only two months of gestation, ensuring her master had little reason to question the lawfulness of his son and heir. Ergo, it is thanks to Plangon's dexterity that Callirhoe is able to capitalise on her pregnancy, screening from blemish her maidenly virtue and the future honour of her child.

Elsewhere in the Roman world, we find evidence of slave owners having sex with their *ancillae* solely for the production of children. Scholars have suggested that a master's decision to sleep with his enslaved women might have been economically motivated.[19] Indeed, any children resulting from the relationship would have served to grow the *familia*, effectively enriching his estate. Martial (ca. 40–102 CE) humorously remarked that one *pater familias* considered fathering *vernae* a top priority.

> *Uxorem habendam non putat Quirinalis, cum velit habere filios, et invenit quo possit istud more: futuit ancillas domumque et agros implet equitibus vernis. pater familiae verus est Quirinalis.*
>
> Quirinalis doesn't think he should have a wife, though he wants to have sons, and has found a way to achieve this: he fucks his slave girls and fills his town house and country estate with home-born knights. Quirinalis is a true *pater familias*.[20]

Evidently, Martial took issue with Quirinalis's substitution of a legitimate wife with *ancillae*, not so much on account of his moral prudishness, but because "home-born knights" (*equitibus vernis*) were non-equatable with citizen children.[21] Both Quirinalis's house (*domum*) and farmlands (*agros*) are hyperbolically described as *implet* (full), conjuring images of a man surrounded by his misbegotten heirs. However, the poem's acuity lies chiefly in the double meaning of *pater familiae*. In the most straightforward sense, *pater* was understood as "father" but was also used to refer to the authoritative head of the household, while *familiae* commonly indicated the domestic slaves.[22] Quirinalis is hence a true (*verus*) *pater familias*, unwittingly fulfilling the noun's dual connotations. Even the name Quirinalis appears satirically selected, evoking the god Quirinus — the name under which Romulus was worshipped — contrasting Rome's mythic glory and present-day degeneracy.

Despite the epigrammatist's comic exaggeration, the desire for sons among the Roman elite was keenly felt. There remains a strong possibility that householders would have relied upon slave fertility to produce an heir, especially in cases where their legitimate wives were either sterile or deceased. That *ancillae* were kept "to breed their master's bastards" is best evidenced, in the opinion of Laura Betzig, by the emotional and financial support certain slave owners provided for their *vernae*.[23] The opulence enjoyed by a select few home-born slaves certainly suggests preferable

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[18] Saundra Schwartz, "Callirhoe's Choice: Biological vs Legal Paternity," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40 (1999), 42.

[19] Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 48–49; Perry, *Gender, Manumission and the Roman Freedwoman*, 51. Marcel Morabito comments, "Reproduction et plaisir, telles sont les fonctions de l'exploitation sexuelle des esclaves." See "Droit romain et réalités sociales de la sexualité servile," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 12 (1986), 372.

[20] Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.84.

[21] J. P. Sullivan, *Martial: The Unexpected Classic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 166.

[22] Richard P. Saller, "*Familia*, *Domus*, and the Roman Conception of the Family," *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 343.

[23] Laura Betzig "Roman Polygyny," *Ethology and Sociobiology* 13 (1992), 323–324.

treatment. Herodian (d. 240 CE) describes the fashion of the aristocracy to bedizen their *vernae* in gold jewellery and costly gemstones, allowing them to play freely in the halls and corridors of their master's spacious villa. Commodus (r. 176–192 CE) favoured one such boy, suitably named Philocommodus, whom he shared a bed with and treated with the utmost tenderness.[24] Perhaps conclusive proof that *vernae*, fathered by their master, were singled out as heirs comes from the legal record. As Beryl Rawson identifies, the "force of natural family relations" spurred many slave owners to free their spurious children.[25] Several passages in the *Digest* attest to the manumission of slave offspring.[26] A lucky few *servi* were even named beneficiaries in their master's will. To take but one example, the slave Stichus was bequeathed a twelfth of his patron's estate in recognition of his status as an illegitimate son.[27]

As aforementioned, slave women, like Eisias, who successfully birthed a son could be awarded freedom, in addition to their newfound standing as the mother of their patron's successor. Several epitaphs from Rome commemorate *libertae* who begot their master's child. For instance, Claudia Helpis raised two boys with her benefactor Claudius Damas.[28] More common are tombstones commissioned by freedwoman for their *patronus*. Baebia Trophime praised her "well-deserving patron" (*patrono suo bene merenti*) Lucius Baebius Pistus, with whom she bore three children.[29] Although these inscriptions tell us nothing of the quality of life enjoyed by *libertae*, they do at least highlight the interconnection between heirship and manumission. The inscriptional evidence might also point to the Roman habit of formulating master-slave relations in the respectable language of marriage, further strengthening the inheritance rights of any resulting children.[30] Either way, in the words of Betzig, "rich Romans may have used a few of their slave women as rich men in other empires used their concubines — as bearers of contingency heirs."[31]

It is hence not unimaginable that an *ancilla* already subject to her master's overtures might have hoped to conceive. Moreover, female slaves under the ownership of childless *domini* perhaps even yearned to bear a son, who could, if manumitted, act as their patron's heir. This begs the question, did Roman slave women ever attempt to influence the sex of their unborn child? Sex determination is well evidenced throughout the history of the classical occidental and oriental world, with mothers venturing to affect the gender of their developing embryo.[32] A handful of Roman authors clearly acknowledged the possibility for women to manipulate the biological process, endeavouring to

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[24] Herodian, 1.17.3.

[25] Beryl Rawson, "*Spurii* and the Roman View of Illegitimacy," *Antichthon* 23 (1989), 23.

[26] Scaevola, *Digest*, 31.1.88.12; Ulpian, *Digest*, 40.12.3.

[27] Scaevola, *Digest*, 36.1.80.2. See also Julian, *Digest*, 42.8.17.1.

[28] *CIL* 6.14991.

[29] *CIL* 6.13498.

[30] For a detailed examination of *vernae* fathered by their master in the epigraphic record, see Beryl Rawson, "Children in the Roman *Familia*," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 170–200.

[31] Betzig, "Roman Polygyny," 339.

[32] For the Greco-Roman evidence, with limited comparison to similar practices in the Near East, see Eugene S. McCartney, "Sex Determination and Sex Control in Antiquity," *The American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 1 (1922), 62–70. In a process known as foetal instruction (*taijiao* 胎教), mothers in early imperial China not only attempted to influence the sex of their unborn child but also his or her physiognomy and moral character. For foetal instruction in ancient China, see Anne Behnke Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 164–167. In later centuries, foetal instruction seemingly fell into disfavour, see Charlotte Furth, "Concepts of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infancy in Ch'ing Dynasty China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (1987), 13–14.

determine the sex of their foetus.[33] Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) documented numerous recipes — most taking as their base ingredients wild herbs and other botanicals — suitable for cultivating the genesis of male or female offspring.[34] Two examples suffice to highlight the general format of such prescriptions:

> *Arsenogonon et thelygonon herbae sunt habentes uvas floribus oleae similes, pallidiores tamen, semen album papaveris modo. thelygoni potu feminam concipi narrant; arsenogonon ab ea semine oleae, nec alio distat; huius potu mares generari, si credimus.*
>
> Arsenogonon and thelygonon are plants bearing clusters like the flowers of the olive, but paler, and a white seed like that of the poppy. It is said that thelygonon, taken in drink, causes the conception of a female; arsenogonon differs from it in having a seed like that of the olive, but in no other way; taken in drink this plant is said to cause the generation of males, if we care to believe it.[35]
>
> *Cynosorchim aliqui orchim vocant, foliis oleae, mollibus, ternis per semipedem longitudinis in terra stratis, radice bulbosa, oblonga, duplici ordine, superiore quae durior est, inferiore quae mollior. eduntur ut bulbi coctae, in vineis fere inventae. ex his radicibus si maiorem edant viri, mares generari dicunt, si minorem feminae, alterum sexum.*
>
> Cynosorchis, called by some orchis, has leaves like olive leaves, soft, three in number and lying on the ground to the length of half a foot. The root is bulbous, longish, and in two parts, the upper being harder and the lower softer. Found generally in vineyards these are boiled and eaten as are bulbs. If men eat the larger of these roots, male children are said to be conceived, but female if the smaller is eaten by women.[36]

While only the first recipe is specifically directed at women, both presume female participation in influencing the conceptive process. A similar prescription is given by the pharmacologist Dioscorides (ca. 40–90 CE), who advised that smearing the vagina with pestled dog's mercury leaves would aid in the conception of a son.[37] Pseudo-Galen likewise advised that a woman who lathered her body two days before lovemaking with a mixture of goose fat and the resin of the terebinth tree would bear a male child.[38] As discussed below, *ancillae* are well known to have

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[33] The ancient Greeks also developed methods by which to ascertain the biological gender of a foetus in utero. Aristotle reports that directional and climatic forces played a role in governing the sex of an unborn child. See Jessica Gelber, "Females in Aristotle's Embryology," in *Aristotle's Generation of Animals*, ed. Andrea Falcon and David Lefebvre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 171–187. However, this knowledge was seemingly considered most when a mother was debating whether to carry her pregnancy to full term. See Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Infanticide in Hellenistic Greece," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (London: Routledge, 1993), 207.

[34] A smaller number of Pliny's recipes contain animal ingredients. For example, one formula instructs a woman to eat the testes of a rooster following intercourse if she wished to conceive a son, see *Naturalis Historia*, 30.123.

[35] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 26.162. It is not entirely clear what plant Pliny is referring to, though it was likely a herb belonging to the Euphorbiaceae family. Dog's mercury (*mercurialis perennis*) is a possible contender, found in woodlands across Europe and North Africa, though this plant is well known to be poisonous. Pliny himself recognised the harm *thelygonon* could cause if ingested but noted it was used by the Greeks as an aphrodisiac, see *Naturalis Historia*, 26.99.

[36] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 27.65.

[37] Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, 4.189.

[38] Pseudo-Galen, *De Remediis Parabilibus*, 14.476.

resorted to herbal and botanical remedies when it came to contraceptives and abortifacients, feasibly inferring embryonic development could be similarly controlled. Appreciably, sex determination can be understood as a form of agency, a way in which slave women attempted to harness the potential of childbirth. Some readers may well find such a hypothesis unconvincing and, admittedly, the evidence is extremely tenuous. Yet the Roman preoccupation with fertility — discernible from uterine magic, votive offerings, and gynaecology manuals — does not discount the possibility that *ancillae*, sexually favoured by their master, might have tried to stimulate their chances of conceiving a son.[39]

2. Wet Nurses

The power of sons could be experienced in more ways than one. Slave and freed wet nurses (*nutrices*) also benefited from their ties to their patron's children. By and large, wet nurses served in the households of the Roman elite, the poorest in society, predictably, making do without.[40] Keith Bradley concluded that almost half of all funerary inscriptions set up by *nutrices* were in remembrance of senatorial or equestrian nurselings.[41] In concurrence, the *familia* of Livia (59 BCE–29 CE), wife of Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE), contained numerous slave wet nurses and midwives, on hand to assist those highborn ladies of the household with childbirth and postnatal care.[42] Some *nutrices* looked after multiple infants simultaneously, known as *collactanei*.[43] In Apuleius's (b. 124 CE) novel the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius's mother and aunt are, for example, recognised as having been breastfed by the same nurse.[44] The *Digest* makes out some privileged infants were attended by more than one *nutrix*, though the servants in question were more likely nursery maids.[45]

In spite of the near ubiquity of wet nurses among elite households, numerous Roman authors objected to their employment. The philosopher Favorinus (ca. 80–160 CE), quoted by Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–180 CE), advocated that turning over an infant to a *nutrix* served to lessen affections between mother and child.[46] Tacitus (ca. 56– 120 CE) berated parents who deposited newborns with Greek slave nurses, arguing that the intellectual development of highborn children could be hampered through their exposure to the commonalty.[47] Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) expressed similar concerns for the socialisation of young boys, principally in respect to their oratorical training.[48] There are valid reasons however why high-status ladies might have relied upon *nutrices* to help raise their children. Foremost, the arduous nature of childbirth, coupled with inadequate postpartum care, may have left some women too weak to nurse a newborn. Alternately, a mother already breastfeeding might have opted to enlist a wet nurse in order to avoid weaning her child

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[39] For uterine magic, see Jean-Jacques Aubert, "Threatened Wombs: Aspects of Ancient Uterine Magic," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30 (1989), 421–449. For reproduction and anatomical votives, see Rebecca Flemming, "Wombs for the gods," in *Bodies of Evidence: Ancient Anatomical Votives Past, Present and Future*, ed. Jane Draycott (London: Routledge, 2017), 112–129.

[40] Juvenal writes that lower status women braved the dangers of childbirth alone, see *Satires*, 6.592. Tacitus makes a similar observation, see *Germania*, 20.1.

[41] Keith Bradley "Wet-nursing at Rome: a Study in Social Relations," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 203.

[42] Hasegawa, *The Familia Urbana during the Early Empire*, 38.

[43] Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," 57.

[44] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.3.

[45] Scaevola, *Digest*, 33.2.34.18.

[46] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.1.21.

[47] Tacitus, *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, 29.1–2.

[48] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.4.4–11.

prematurely. More superficially, if Aulus Gellius is to be credited, *matronae* perhaps wished to conserve their physical beauty, shunning breastfeeding in the hope of quickly recovering a taut figure.[49] There also remains the possibility that, in a world of high infant mortality, new mothers resorted to wet nurses in order to limit their emotional attachment to neonates.[50]

Wet nurses were typically recruited from the lower stratum of Roman society, experiencing strong levels of asymmetric dependency in relation to their master, patron, or employer. Sandra Joshel is surely correct in her assessment that *nutrices*, lacking skills and connections, were forced to allow others to utilise their body.[51] As indicated above, enslaved women were the likely candidates for wet nursing among the elite, who had at their disposal numerous *ancillae*. As well as parenting their master's children, *nutrices* in the service of wealthy families likely took charge of infants born to slaves.[52] Elizabeth Hermann-Otto has drawn attention to the fact some *vernae* were raised by foster mothers, that is servile wet nurses.[53] A slave *nutrix* might even be sold along with her nurselings, as was the case with Giddenis in Plautus's (d. 184 BCE) *Poenulus*.[54] What is more, any lactating *ancillae* was liable to be hired out as a *nutrix* to another slave owner for a monthly charge.

Wet nursing contracts from Roman Egypt provide an invaluable insight into such arrangements. To cite but one example, the matron Philotera agreed to set up her slave as a wet nurse for an infant girl her son, Sillis, had rescued from exposure.[55] In return for her slave's services, Philotera was to be reimbursed 12 drachmas a month for a period of two years, totalling 288 cash, a sum Sillis paid upfront.[56] Interestingly, if the foundling was to die under her charge, Philotera's nurse was to personally find another child to nourish, presumably from a comparable site of infant abandonment.

While the wealthy could rely on their own slaves to care for newborns, the less well-off might only hire a wet nurse for a stipulated period. The open market was seemingly populated not by slaves but free *nutrices*. Judging from the extant papyri contracts, freed and freeborn wet nurses outnumbered their servile counterparts by a ratio of almost two to one.[57] Demonstrably, one document records an agreement between the wet nurse Didyme and her employer Isidora. Didyme pledged to care for a foundling belonging to Isidora for an interval of sixteen months. In return, she was to receive a monthly salary of 10 drachmas and approximately half a litre of olive oil.[58] Payment seems in some ways to have been influenced by the status of the nurseling, with *nutrices* responsible for freeborn children receiving higher wages. A remarkable letter written by a certain Valeria to her friend

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[49] All three motives are given by Günther, see *Frauenarbeit–Frauenbindung*, 78. For women employing wet nurses to accelerate the reclamation of their pre-pregnancy bodies, see Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.1.8.

[50] Bradley, "Wet-nursing at Rome," 220.

[51] Sandra R. Joshel, "Nurturing the Master's Child: Slavery and the Roman Child-Nurse," *Signs* 12, no. 1 (1986), 6.

[52] In a misogynistic rant denouncing the cupidity of wives, the elderly householder Periplectomenus insinuates home-born slaves were fed by a wet nurse. See Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, 698.

[53] Herrmann-Otto, *Ex Ancilla Natus*, 41.

[54] Plautus, *Poenulus*, 899. It should be noted that the sisters Adelphasium and Anterastilis were originally freeborn, but kidnaped and sold alongside their nurse Giddenis as children.

[55] *BGU* 4.1058. For full translation of this document, see Rowlandson and Bagnall, *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, 275.

[56] Other receipts detail slave owners being compensated with clothing for the nurse as well as money and oil, see *P.Oxy*. 1.91.

[57] Keith Bradley, "Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt," *Klio* 62, no. 2 (1980), 321.

[58] *BGU* 4.1107.

Thermoution, attempts to persuade the latter that working as a wet nurse would be in her best interest, especially since the prospective child was freeborn (ἐλεύθερον), entitling Thermoution to higher pay.[59] Regardless of the possibility for appreciable earnings, Walter Scheidel has estimated that a full-time *nutrix* would have only obtained about one-third of the wages paid to a male day labourer.[60]

Irrespective of status, a nurse's chief responsibility was to feed and care for her charge until the infant was old enough to be entrusted to a personal tutor, known as a *paedagogus*.[61] A carved relief from the Via Ostiense sarcophagus depicts several nurses washing an infant in an *alveus* (basin).[62] Likewise, a grave monument from Cologne portrays a *nutrix* laying down her swaddled baby in a manger and, in the opposite panel, breastfeeding the infant.[63] Both reliefs likely capture tasks familiar to all wet nurses. Ulpian (fl. late second century CE) decreed that the duties of a nurse customarily extended until the child was weaned, a period lasting between two and three years.[64] However, the philosopher Lucretius (ca. 99–55 BCE) cryptically infers that a *nutrix* might also be involved in the early education of her nurseling.[65]

As breastfeeding naturally entails lactation, the majority of Roman *nutrices* must have had an infant of their own, whom they raised alongside their master's child. It was not uncommon for elite children to be suckled together with slaves in the *familia*. The jurist Scaevola (fl. second century CE) ruled that the *collactanei* Tita and Seia, matron and freedwoman respectively, were akin to sisters.[66] Some newborns almost inevitably suffered as a result of milk competition, with highborn nurselings taking priority.[67]

Moreover, the vast majority of *nutrices* would have been expected to conform to a strict code of conduct, impacting all areas of their life. The physician Soranus (fl. late first/early second century CE) remains our best source for the ideal credentials of the wet nurse, his Γυναικολογία (*Gynaecology*) detailing everything from model physiology to temperament. Soranus devoted an entire chapter to the selection of a wet nurse — in Greek known as τιτθὴν, etymologically related to the English noun "tit" — the opening paragraph of which reads as follows:

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[59] *P.Mich*. 3.202.

[60] Walter Scheidel "Real Wages in Early Economies: Evidence for Living Standards from 1800 BCE to 1300 CE," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 3 (2008), 7.

[61] Most teachers were male, accompanying their charge to and from school, as well as assisting with their homework. Stanley Bonner suggests the political instability of the late Republic made *paedagogi* essential for the security of elite children. See *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 44. As a corollary, Günther reasons women were unlikely to have been considered suitable for the job in such turbulent times. Only when society stabilised did the role of *paedagogi* shift from protection to education. See *Frauenarbeit–Frauenbindung*, 76.

[62] Kampen, *Image and Status*, 34–35.

[63] For photographs, see Ursula Rothe, "Der Grabstein der Severina Nutrix aus Köln," *Germania* 89 (2011), 192. Commemorating the wet nurse Severina, Maureen Carroll has argued the grave monument plays upon the "illusion of maternal love," symbolically elevating the deceased to the status of a Roman matron. See *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 230–231.

[64] Ulpian, *Digest*, 50.13.1.14.

[65] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 5.229–230.

[66] Scaevola, *Digest*, 34.4.30.1. Juvenal also mentions mixed status *collactanei*, see *Satires*, 6.307.

[67] Some nurses gave preferential treatment to their own children. After her infant ward died, the wet nurse Saraeus nourished her own son while continuing to accept her salary. See *P.Oxy*. 1.37.

> Ἐκλεκτέον δὲ τὴν τιτθὴν οὔτε νεωτέραν ἐτῶν εἴκοσιν οὔτε πρεσβυτέραν ἐτῶν τεσσαράκοντα, προκεκυηκυῖαν δὶς ἢ τρίς, ἄνοσον, εὐεκτοῦσαν, εὐμεγέθη τῷ σώματι καὶ εὐχρουστέραν, μαστοὺς ἔχονταν σνμμέτρονς, χαύνους μαλακοὺς ἀρρυσώτος, καὶ θηλὰς μήτε μεγάλας μήτε μικροτέραι καὶ μήτε πυκνοτέρας μήτε ἄγαν σηραγγώδεις καὶ ἀθροῦν ἀφιείσας τὸ γάλα, σώφρονα, ενμπαθῆ καὶ ἀόργιστον, Ελληνίδα, καθάριον.
>
> One should choose a wet nurse not younger than twenty not older than forty years who has already given birth twice or thrice, who is healthy, of good habits, of large frame, and a good colour. Her breasts should be of medium size, lax, soft and wrinkled, the nipples neither big nor too small and neither too compact nor too porous and discharging milk overabundantly. She should be self-controlled, sympathetic and not ill-tempered, a Greek, and tidy.[68]

Much could be made of Soranus's comments, his medical logic mixing rational observation with elite mores. His advice against choosing a teenage or elderly nurse is sensical enough, striking a balance between milk quality and experience. Correspondingly, bodily health (ἄνοσον) and a strong build (εὐμεγέθη) were no doubt preferable in what was a physically demanding profession. Emphasis on breast and nipple size, however, reads rather more like a sexual ideal than a gynaecological judgement. Nevertheless, Soranus argues small breasts were insufficient for feeding, whereas larger mammaries risked endangering the infant, both through their excessive milk production and weight. Interspersed with his reflections on the physical attributes of the archetypal nurse, Soranus employs the standard moralising language of Greek philosophy. Wet nurses were expected to be self-controlled (σώφρων), sympathetic (συμπαθής), even-tempered (ἀόργιστος), and tidy (καθάριος). Intriguingly, Soranus also echoes Tacitus's above-mentioned opinion in regard to the preferred ethnicity of wet nurses.[69] A Hellenic τιτθὴν was said to have given their nurseling a head start when it came to learning the Greek language, a skill in which elite children were required to be proficient.

Additionally, Soranus advocated that a wet nurse should refrain from drinking alcohol, having sex, and indulging in general lewdness.[70] Other sources bear a striking resemblance to the advice of the gynaecology manuals, indicating the pervasiveness of such beliefs. From early Republican Rome, the Pythagorean philosopher Myia, in correspondence with a woman named Phyllis, recommended hiring a wet nurse who was modest and neither disposed to drink nor drowsiness.[71] Similarly, the wet nurse Didyme (see above) was required to cease all sexual relations or risk breaching the terms of her contract. The penalty clause, if broken, obligated Didyme to repay her earnings in full, along with a 500 drachma fine. Prohibitions on sexual intercourse were likely motivated out of fear a

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[68] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 2.19; trans. Owsei Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 90–91.

[69] The late antique Greek medical writer Oreibasios of Pergamon (ca. 320–400 CE) put forward a different opinion, recommending that Thracian and Egyptian women made the best wet nurses. See Balbina Babler, *Fleissige Thrakerinnen und wehrhafte Skythen* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1998), 37.

[70] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 2.19; trans. Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, 90–91.

[71] Thesleff, *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period*, 123–124.

nutrix might conceive and stop lactating, thus endangering her nurseling's health.[72] Nonetheless, any check on sexual relations would have had severe implications on a nurse's personal life, especially since most *nutrices* appear to have been married.[73] Perhaps, as Gale Yee suggests, a nurse might have circumnavigated the restraints imposed on her sex life by engaging only in anal, oral, or mutual masturbation with her partner.[74]

Despite coercive working conditions, sincere affection between a nurse and her nurseling seems to have, on occasion, given rise. Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE) remarked aristocratic children were better known to their *nutrix* than their biological parents.[75] By the same token, Fronto (ca. 100–170 CE) implies a wet nurse might be upset or even angered at the loss of her charge, as he exchanged her arms for the playground and classroom.[76] Many *nutrices* appear to have stayed in contact with their former nurselings well into adulthood. Most famously, the disgraced Emperor Nero's (r. 54–68 CE) ashes were deposited by his wet nurses Egloge and Alexandria.[77] The epigraphic record also preserves traces of the lifelong relationships between nurses and their wards. A funerary monument erected for Caius Julius Helenus praises both his parents and *nutrix*, whom he was in contact with until his death.[78] Other epitaphs hint at the fondness *nutrices* harboured for their one-time nurselings. Adjectives such as "sweet" (*dulcissimus*), used to describe the five-year-old boy Argaeus in a monument set up by his nurse, or "holy" (*sancta*), "pious" (*pia*), and "most loving" (*amantissima*), recounting the *nutrix* Supurinia, appear genuinely endearing.[79] Significantly, *nutrices* were among the most frequently commemorated female workers in the city of Rome, demonstrating, on some level, the esteem in which they were held by their master or patron.[80]

Nevertheless, Joshel rightly questions the extent to which intimate relations between *nutrix* and nurseling were mutually felt.[81] Here we must consider the complex inter-dependencies linking the subaltern *nutrix* with her helpless, though highborn, ward. While the wet nurse regulated essential elements of her charge's welfare — food, warmth, and emotional care — she herself was dependent on the child's parents, who furnished her livelihood either by way of wages or board and lodgings. According to Orlando Paterson, the mutual dependence between master and servant was often "camouflaged" by various "ideological strategies," in this case paternalism.[82] In framing relations between *nutrix* and nurseling along lines of love and mutual affection, the Roman master class not only disguised the oppressive forces directing her labour but the nurse's capacity to exploit her

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[72] This runs contrary to our modern understanding of breastfeeding as a potential contraceptive. New mothers typically experience a brief period of postpartum infertility before menstruation and ovulation are restored. See Tim Parkin, "The Demography of Infancy and Early Childhood in the Ancient World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56. However, proscriptions on sexual activity are not unique to ancient wet-nursing contracts. As George D. Sussman has shown, efforts to curb the sex lives of nurses were also undertaken in early modern France, see *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-nursing Business in France, 1715–1914* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 3.

[73] Bradley, "Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt," 322.

[74] Gale Yee, "Take this Child and Suckle it for Me: Wet Nurses and Resistance in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39, no. 4 (2009), 184.

[75] Seneca, *Epistulae*, 99.15.

[76] Fronto, *Epistulae*, 2.120.

[77] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, "Nero" 50.

[78] *CIL* 6.20042.

[79] *CIL* 6.12299, 7290.

[80] *CIL* 6 contains seventy-five definite or highly probable epitaphs dedicated to or erected by wet nurses.

[81] Joshel, "Nurturing the Master's Child," 4.

[82] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 337.

suckling's powerlessness. In reality, mutual dependence afforded *nutrices* a certain leeway, after all, they were frequently entrusted with their master's most precious asset: his heir.

We have little reason to doubt that *nutrices* were not unaware of their bargaining power within the social hierarchy. Even if a wet nurse privately resented her subordinate status, she might tactically maintain the appearance of a dutiful caregiver in order to elicit more favourable treatment. As has been shown for domestic servants in the nineteenth-century United States, wet nurses frequently threatened to withdraw their services unless provided with more comfortable living quarters or an improved diet.[83] Enslaved black wet nurses in the Antebellum South even bolstered such demands by visibly cultivating a motherly relationship with their nurseling.[84]

While direct comparison should be avoided, Roman *nutrices* almost certainly worked under similar circumstances and hence were capable of playing upon their charge's affections for personal advantage. Cicero (106–43 BCE) was explicit in his belief that wet nurses were among those slaves who enjoyed the largest share of their master's goodwill.[85] Upon reaching maturity, a citizen man might recompense his former nurse out of gratitude for her years of dedicated service. Pliny the Younger (b. 61 CE) went so far as to gift his *nutrix* a small farm, taking pains to ensure that the land was economically productive.[86] In a similar case, the former wet nurses Sempronia and Maevia were permitted to live on their patron's estate, free to enjoy any revenue the farm generated for the rest of their lives.[87] Enslaved wet nurses were also liable to be manumitted by their former wards, the jurists Scaevola specifically recommending freedom for loyal *nutrices*.[88]

Although ancient wet nursing doubtlessly embodies a gross manipulation of motherhood, in which enslaved women were forced to surrender their milk for the sustenance of their master's child, it also provided opportunities. Mutual dependency, characterising virtually all *nutrix* and nurseling relationships, afforded wet nurses the possibility to reshape their terms of service in both the short and long term. Equally, through fashioning quasi-parental relationships with their nurselings, *nutrices* were able to benefit from future patronage, either in the form of material compensation or, for servile nurses, freedom. Like *ancillae* who bore their master's child, *nutrices* profited from the intimate relationships they shared with their nurseling. Whether a wet nurse's feelings of affection for her charge were sincere is highly debatable, though it was almost certainly in her interests to maintain an outward appearance of heartfelt constancy.

3. Contraceptives

Sexual jeopardy, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a fact of life for many female slaves. While some *ancillae* benefited from intimate relations with their master, perhaps even bearing him a son and heir, many others would have sought to resist. In a world where bodily integrity was seldom

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[83] Janet Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Brest to Bottle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62.

[84] Similarly, Harriet Jacobs's grandmother attempted to dissuade her former nurseling-*cum*-master from punishing her granddaughter, appealing to the years of affection she had shown him as a child. See Emily West and R. J. Knight, "Mothers' Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (2017), 57.

[85] Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 20.74.

[86] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 6.3.1.

[87] Scaevola, *Digest*, 33.2.34.1.

[88] Scaevola, *Digest*, 34.1.20.

guaranteed, slave women and girls looked to more covert methods to push back against sexual exploitation. Preventing conception by way of drugs and amuletic recipes should, I argue, be considered a means through which enslaved women regained control over their bodies. The use of contraceptives not only stifled the fruits of rape (viz. illegitimate children) but resisted slavery as an institution, through frustrating attempts to enlarge the *familia*. Administration of contraceptives can, moreover, be understood as an act of subversion unique to slave women, an agentic rebuke of the patriarchal forces dominating their lives.

First of all, we must ascertain what exactly the ancients understood by contraception. Even a cursory look at the documentary evidence reveals the comparative dearth of reliable information. Keith Hopkins, in an early study of ancient contraceptives, found that less than half of the extant medical texts paid any attention to prenatal birth control.[89] The relative poverty of the evidential base might be taken as a sign that family planning was widely practised, hence few classical authors thought to record, in any detail, the preparation and application of contraceptives.[90] Alternately, knowledge of pregnancy preventives may have been transmitted only among networks of women, and consequently overlooked by the medical writers, the majority of whom were male.[91] Indeed, many ancient contraceptive techniques would have been suitable for oral conveyance, passed down from one generation to the next as part of wider folk customs.[92] What is more, there appears to have been a great deal of confusion with respect to the difference between contraceptives and abortifacients.[93] Ancient physicians, for example, frequently blurred the lines between preventing fertilisation and inducing abortion.[94] Quite possibly, the Latin language's absence of a specific word for contraception was, in part, responsible for these recurrent misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, we are equipped enough to outline the general approach to contraception in the classical Roman world, as well as catalogue a multitude of oral, pessary, and magical prescriptions used to help prevent impregnation. Beginning with the medical manuals, we might first cite Soranus, who was unusual in explicitly demarcating contraceptives from abortifacients.

> Ἀτόκιον δὲ φθορίου διαφέρει, τὸ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἐᾷ γενέσθαι σύλληψιν, τὸ δὲ φθείρει τὸ συλληφθέν εἴπωμεν σὖν ἄλλο φθόριον καὶ ἄλλο ἀτόκιον.
>
> A contraceptive differs from an abortive, for the first does not let conception take place, while the latter destroys what has been conceived. Let us therefore call one "abortive" and the other "contraceptive."[95]

Soranus himself recommended a number of suppository recipes suitable for preventing fertilisation. These included lathering the vagina before sex with old olive oil, honey, cedar resin, or the sap of

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89 Keith Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8, no. 1 (1965), 132.

90 Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient Society* 11/12 (1981/1982), 8.

91 John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 16.

92 John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 19–20.

93 On this issue more generally, see Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," 136–142.

94 Dioscorides, for instance, considered pepper an abortifacient unless applied after coitus, in which case it was a contraceptive. See *De Materia Medica*, 2.159.3.

95 Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.60; trans. Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, 62–63.

the balsam tree.[96] At least five of the suppository prescriptions listed by Soranus took as their foundational ingredient pomegranate peel or rind.[97] As John Riddle explains, modern studies conducted on rats and guinea pigs have revealed pomegranates to produce anti-fertility effects, suggesting Soranus's recipes might have inhibited conception.[98] Writing a generation earlier, Dioscorides also provided a long list of herbal and botanical recipes that, he believed, offset the risk of pregnancy. Ground cabbage flowers, the roots of the barrenwort, and the leaves of the heliotrope were all considered capable of hampering fertilisation.[99] The imperial physician Galen (b. 129 CE) recorded a further three oral contraceptive recipes. One of Galen's prescriptions also mentions barrenwort, while another claimed the active ingredient to be juniper.[100] Although enslaved women and girls presumably had limited access to medical treatises, it is worth drawing attention to the fact ancient physicians drew no distinction between servile and freeborn patients.[101] Similar methods of birth control were then likely to have been practised by all women, regardless of their social standing.

Apace with more rational approaches to contraception, we find that a myriad of preternatural recipes were also in circulation. Preparing a contraceptive amulet was, for instance, believed highly effective in controlling fertility. The elder Pliny records several amuletic prescriptions, the most bizarre of which required women to obtain a certain species of hairy spider and cut open its abdomen, which was said to contain two small worms.[102] Once removed, the worms were to be tied up in deerskin and hung around the neck in the hours before sunrise. The physician Aëtius of Amida (fl. late fifth century CE), on the other hand, recommended a cat's liver stopled in a phial and secured around the left ankle as a foolproof way to prevent conception.[103] Non-fauna related amuletic recipes are preserved in the papyri spell books from Roman Egypt. Carried along with a lodestone, one formula claimed a line of Homeric verse, written out on a fresh strip of papyrus and tied up with mules hair, would be effective in warding off pregnancy.[104] Another more elaborate spell, required the user to gather bitter vetch seeds and cow mucus, binding them together in mule hide to form a wearable pendant.[105] Comparably, several types of beans, pierced and linked together with string, were deemed suitable as contraceptive charms.[106] Even Dioscorides was prone to record

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[96] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.61.

[97] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.62.

[98] Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, 26.

[99] Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, 2.140, 4.19, 190.

[100] Galen, *De Simplicium Medicamentorum Temperamentis ac Facultatibus*, 6.4.16, 7.10.16.

[101] Nancy Demand argues that freeborn and slave women in the Hippocratic corpus were treated identically, see "Women and Slaves as Hippocratic Patients," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge, 1998), 76–78.

[102] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 29.85.

[103] Aëtius, 16.17. Though writing during the Byzantine Empire, Aëtius drew heavily from earlier medical treatises.

[104] *PGM* 22a.11–14. John Scarborough proffers that the apotropaic properties of the amulet did not derive from the verse but the lodestone, see "The Pharmacology of Sacred Plants, Herbs and Roots," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 158–159.

[105] *PGM* 36.320–332. The number of seeds was said to correlate with the number of years a woman wished to remain infertile.

[106] *PGM* 63.26–28. Interestingly, *PGM* 63.24–25 recommended using beans containing small bugs. Ingrid I. de Haas has proposed that the use of legumes as contraceptive amulets is not surprising, especially in light of the Roman belief that beans could house the souls of the dead who, under certain circumstances, might help the living. See "Female Slave Resistance in the Roman Empire: First–Fourth Centuries CE," (PhD diss., University of California Riverside, 2011), 273.

semi-magical recipes, claiming miltwaste, uprooted on a moonless night and worn around the neck, could suppress fertility.[107]

From the perspective of the Roman literary imagination, contraception was solely the preserve of wealthy ladies devoted to childlessness.[108] However, we have every reason to believe that women outside the master class, specifically slaves, made equal use of birth control. Musonius Rufus (ca. 30–101 CE) assumed the use of contraceptives to have been endemic, responsible for the low birthrate during the reign of Augustus.[109] More precisely, the *Digest* records the theoretical case of a master who forcibly administered contraceptives to his *ancilla*.[110] Turning to late antiquity, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542 CE) was adamant maidservants, as well as matrons, proactively controlled their fertility.[111] Ever polemical, John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) condemned the supposed popularity of contraceptives among prostitutes, suggesting brothel slaves may have also managed reproductivity.[112] The notable absence of pregnant and nursing *meretrices* in the literary sources perhaps hints at the widespread application of contraceptives in the sex trade.[113] Concubines were also likely to have utilised birth control, with Augustine (354–430 CE) admitting to having used contraceptives with his concubine throughout the thirteen years of their relationship.[114]

Our most compelling evidence for servile family planning, however, comes not from the Roman or Christian tradition, but the Jewish Talmud. Rabbi Abaye (d. 337 CE), in the tractate *Yevamot* יבמות, relates that slave girls on the verge of manumission attempted to avoid falling pregnant by way of contraceptives.[115] Strikingly, a parallel passage from the *Ketubot* כְּתוּבּוֹת recognises the fact that newly enslaved women — namely war captives — might practice fertility control until a time of greater personal stability.[116] In many ways, the servile use of contraceptives amounted to what

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[107] Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, 3.134.

[108] Juvenal claimed women who slept in gilded beds seldom gave birth, suggesting wealthy matrons might have used contraceptives, see *Satires*, 6.594–597. Seneca also hints that upper class wives took precautionary measures to avoid impregnation, see *De Consolatione ad Helviam*, 16.3–5. This is hardly surprising since, as Pomeroy notes, contraceptives were a vastly preferable means of managing fertility compared with abortion and infanticide. See *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, 166–167. We even have evidence insinuating matrons practised birth control in their sexual liaisons with male slaves, see Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 9.12.25.

[109] Musonius Rufus, fragment 15a. For the interpretive difficulties surrounding this passage, see Keith Hopkins, "A Textual Emendation in a Fragment of Musonius Rufus," *The Classical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1965), 72–74.

[110] Ulpian, *Digest*, 40.7.3.16. I see no reason to second-guess such arrangements. There could have been any number of explanations as to why slave owners wished to stop their *ancillae* from falling pregnant. Perhaps contraceptives were prescribed in an attempt to conserve a slave woman's good looks or to prevent knowledge of a sexual relationship from being exposed (a secret any love child would have so easily betrayed). Alternately, if manumission was to be awarded after the birth of a set number of children, a master might rely on contraceptives to cheat his *ancilla* out of her freedom.

[111] Caesarius, *Sermons*, 40.2.

[112] John Chrysostom, *In Epistolam ad Romanos*, 24. According to Chrysostom, the preservation of physical beauty was, for many sex workers, the principal motivation behind their use of contraceptives. However, economic factors likely played a greater role in their decision-making process.

[113] For a rare example, see Seneca, *Controversiae*, 2.4.1. See also Noonan, *Contraception*, 20

[114] Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.2. The fact Augustine's concubine produced only one son during this period suggests their use of contraceptives was largely effective.

[115] *Babylonian Talmud*, "Yebamoth" 35a.

[116] *Babylonian Talmud*, "Kethuboth" 37a. For translations of both passages, see Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1935–1952).

Darlene Hine has called, in the context of the plantation South, a "female conspiracy," or rather a furtive, extensively practised move towards self-reclamation.[117]

Having established that *ancillae* attempted to control their reproductivity, we might consider the availability of those plants, oils, and ointments earmarked by the medical texts for hindering conception. Many of the recipes discussed above could have been easily prepared by slaves in the service of elite households, with well-stocked larders and kitchen gardens supplying the majority of ingredients. Failing this, an *ancilla* could scour the woodlands and hedgerows for the necessary flowers, leaves, or roots for making contraceptive pastes and pessaries. The Greek biologist Theophrastus (ca. 371–287 BCE) explicitly records the habit of slaves harvesting useful plants and herbs.[118] Leucippe, the enslaved heroine of Achilles Tatius's (fl. second century CE) novel, is also depicted searching for herbs on her mistress's country estate.[119] Females slaves on the *villa rustica* might have been, in this regard, at a distinct advantage over their urban workmates who, confined to townhouses, had few opportunities to forage. Amuletic prescriptions were similarly accessible, often requiring ingredients slaves could have feasibly scavenged. In all probability, the surviving contraceptive recipes make up only a fraction of what was a thriving gynaecological folk knowledge, largely imperceptible through the androcentrism of our source base.[120]

A final point should be made in regard to the effectiveness of ancient contraceptives. Although many preventives likely had little to no effect on fertility, others were almost certainly impactful.[121] To dwell on the scientific merits of Roman contraceptives (or lack thereof), however, overlooks the sincere belief among countless women that pregnancy was avoidable. Contraceptives afforded women and girls of all statuses a kind of agency, including the possibility to limit family size and forgo the dangers of childbirth. For *ancillae*, contraception took on a meaning beyond birth control. The precariousness of servile life offered few opportunities for unfree women to exercise authority over their bodies. Accordingly, contraceptives provided female slaves with a means to resist. Even if sexual abuse was inescapable, the master's intention to father bastard heirs or grow the servile *familia* could be thwarted. In short, managing fertility can be interpreted as a lesson in the art of subtle defiance.

4. Abortifacients

Much of what has been said for contraceptives holds true for abortifacients. Just as *ancillae* could resist their subjugation through the use of pregnancy preventives, so too did abortion provide an opportunity for bondswomen to undermine their master's authority. Concrete evidence for servile aborticide is, however, slight. Nonetheless, women in ancient society doubtlessly had recourse to abortifacients. Roman authors routinely "constructed abortion as a feminine misdemeanour," a

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[117] Darlene C. Hine, "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 2 (1979), 125.

[118] Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, 9.15.6.

[119] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5.22.7.

[120] Lesley Dean-Jones writes that ancient gynaecology likely incorporated a larger number of folk practices than any other branch of ancient medicine. See *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 30.

[121] For the effectiveness of ancient contraceptives, see John M. Riddle, "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Past & Present* 132 (1991), 3–32; Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, 56.

practice believed to have originated with the second sex.[122] The poet Ovid (b. 43 BCE) vividly recounts his lover Corinna's attempted abortion, castigating her efforts to expel the living foetus.[123] A host of other elite authors describe abortion as the work of "selfish society women," designed to spite their husbands, conceal an adulterous affair, or simply preserve their physical beauty.[124] Unlike contraceptives, lawmakers took a keen interest in the administration of abortifacients, going so far as to punish freeborn married women for terminating pregnancies.[125] Legal prohibitions against abortion might have stretched back to the time of Romulus (fl. eighth century BCE), though can only be definitively dated from the reign of Septimius Severus (r. 193–211 CE) onwards.[126] In any case, abortion was thought prevalent enough to constitute, in the eyes of the jurists, a threat to state stability and family life.

We can roughly differentiate between early-term and late-stage abortifacients, with the latter posing a greater threat to the mother's health. Soranus advised that women wishing to terminate a pregnancy within thirty days of conception should adopt a routine of aerobics, wine drinking, and hot baths.[127] The bath water itself was to be mixed with a decoction of linseed, fenugreek, marshmallow, and artemisia, intended to induce menstruation. Failing this, Soranus proffered a different approach, including protracted baths, fasting, mild vaginal suppositories, and abstinence from wine.[128] Bleeding was also recommended, well known to bring about miscarriage if sufficient quantities of blood were drawn. Many ancient contraceptive recipes were thought equally appropriate for instigating abortion. Ferula, more commonly known as giant fennel, was popular throughout antiquity for its medicinal qualities and, possibly, listed by Soranus as an effective abortifacient.[129] Likewise, the shrub rue was believed to possess abortive properties and advocated, not only by the medical authors but Pliny, who thought it suitable for encouraging miscarriage.[130] Gargilius Martialis, the third-century CE soldier and botanist, further warned of the capacity for rue to exterminate an embryo, confirming its abortive potential.[131]

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[122] Julian Barr, *Tertullian and the Unborn Child: Christian and Pagan Attitudes in Historical Perspective Medicine and the Body in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2017), 153. Pliny was convinced women invented abortion, see *Naturalis Historia*, 10.172.

[123] Ovid, *Amores*, 2.13.1–6, 14.5–10.

[124] Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 61. Cicero alleged that one woman was bribed by her husband's illegitimate heir to procure an abortion. See *Pro Cluentio*, 11.32. Nero accused his wife Octavia of terminating her pregnancy to disguise her infidelity, see Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.63. Both Seneca and Favorinus thought women might seek out abortifacients to maintain their good looks, see *De Consolatione ad Helviam*, 16.3; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12.1.8.

[125] Marcian, *Digest*, 47.11.4. Ulpian confirmed this ruling in the third century CE, see *Digest* 48.8.8.

[126] For Romulus's law, see Plutarch, *Lives*, "Romulus" 22.3. Eyben notes that the Severan legislation was likely aimed at protecting the husband's right to children, see "Family Planning in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," 28–29.

[127] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.64. The exercise in question included walking about energetically or being shaken around in a cart pulled by draught animals.

[128] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.65. These gentler suppositories were said to be made from pestled myrtle, wallflower seed, and bitter lupines.

[129] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.63. The two plants given by Soranus are *silphion* and *opopana*, thought by Riddle to be species of fennel, see "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages," 7–8. The former is now extinct and was even hard to come by in Pliny's day, see *Naturalis Historia*, 19.39–41. There is good reason to believe that *silphion* was harvested into extinction due to its popularity as either a contraceptive or early-term abortifacient.

[130] Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 1.63; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 20.139.

[131] Ruth Melicent Trapper, "The Materia Medica of Gargilius Martialis," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1980), 26.

On the whole, oral drugs were likely considered safer than pessaries or surgical attempts to remove a foetus, liable to provoke adverse dermatological effects.[132] Both Dioscorides and Soranus listed a variety of plants known for their abortive qualities, many of which could be administered orally.[133] Pliny professed to believe that water mint, when eaten, was capable of inducing abortion.[134] Recipes for oral pills generally contained a mix of ingredients, some very common — such as cyclamen — and others far rarer.[135] Dioscorides also mentions a kind of abortive wine, produced from the grapes of a vine growing in the vicinity of hellborne, squirting cucumber, and scammony.[136] Riddle argues the imprecision of Dioscorides's recipe infers he was not writing from experience, but simply copying the explanation given by vendors selling similar abortive tonics.[137] A legal embargo on the sale of abortifacients might evince the fact specialist merchants stocked abortive draughts, though this remains highly speculative.[138] We are on more certain ground when it comes to the adverse effects cocktails of abortive drugs almost invariably produced. A rare, but imaginable, insight into the lethal aftereffects of abortifacients is preserved by Hippocrates (ca. 460–370 BCE).

> Τῇ Σίμου τὸ τριηκοσταῖον ἀπόφθαρμα πιούσῃ τι ἢ αὐτόματον· ξυνέβη πόνος, ἔμετος χολωδέων πολλῶν ὠχρῶν, πρασοειδέων, μελάνων, ὅτε πίοι. τριταίῃ, σπασμός· τὴν γλῶσσαν κατεμασᾶτο. πρὸς τεταρταίην εἰσῆλθεν· ἡ γλῶσσα μέλαινα, μεγάλη· τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τὰ λευκὰ ἐρυθρά· ἄγρυπνος· τεταρταίη ἀπέθανεν ἐς νύκτα.
>
> Simus's wife had an abortion on the thirtieth day, from drinking something, or spontaneously. She had pain, vomiting of much bilious material, yellow, leek-coloured, black, whenever she drank. On the third day convulsion. She kept biting her tongue. Towards the fourth day it invaded that: her tongue was black, swollen. The whites of her eyes were red. Sleepless. She died towards night on the fourth day.[139]

Pessaries were an alternative to oral medicines, though generally more potent. The Hippocratic corpus — popular well into Roman times — provided a near-endless list of proscriptions noted for their emmenagogic effects. To name but a few examples, myrrh, black hellebore, and red wine, kneaded together to form a suppository, could be inserted into the uterus to expel an embryo.[140] Analogous results were expected of a pestled mix of coriander roots, sodium carbonate, and the oil of bitter almonds.[141] Another recipe suggested a blend of white ivy berries and cedar sawdust.[142] Pseudo-Galen vouched for the abortive qualities of opopanax when applied to the walls of the vaginal orifice.[143] Soapwort and honey, pressed together to form small pellets, were also reported to

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132 Konstantinos A. Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth, 2002), 19.

133 Of these plants around fifteen are listed by both authors. Riddle concludes, on the basis Soranus didn't borrow from Dioscorides, that by the late first century CE some sort of consensus had been reached in regards to herbal and botanical abortifacients. See *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, 56.

134 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 20.248.

135 Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, 12.

136 Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, 5.67.

137 Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, 55.

138 Paul, *Digest*, 48.19.38.5.

139 Hippocrates, *Epidemics*, 7.74.

140 Hippocrates, *De Morbis Mulierum*, 1.78.52.

141 Hippocrates, *De Morbis Mulierum*, 1.78.50.

142 Hippocrates, *De Morbis Mulierum*, 1.78.43.

143 Pseudo-Galen, *De Remediis Parabilibus*, 14.481.

induce abortion when taken during the second month of pregnancy.[144] The sheer variety of pessary proscriptions suggests women made do with whatever ingredients they had available, individual formulas being adapted to suit different localities.

As with contraceptives, it is necessary to survey the evidence for the use of abortifacients by enslaved women. We might again cite the dilemma of Callirhoe, discussed above, unique in Greek literature for describing the quagmire of servile pregnancy. Subjugated in a faraway land, Callirhoe was understandably distraught at the prospect of bringing up a child alone in a hostile environment.[145] While abortion was risky, it not only rid female slaves of the hardships of motherhood but spared their unborn children the indignity of servitude. Similarly, Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–115 CE) noted slave women secured abortifacients primarily to avoid passing on their debased status.[146] From the Byzantine chronicler Zonaras, commenting on a fourth-century CE letter of Basil of Ceasera (330–379 CE), we learn that some enslaved women resorted to abortifacients out of fear of their master.[147] Prostitutes were equally disposed to foeticide. Both Hippocrates and Augustine — some seven hundred years apart — recognised the proficiency of *meretrices* in terminating pregnancies.[148] As Konstantinos Kapparis underlines, whether a brothel slave or high-class escort, sex labourers could seldom afford to lose their "figure and firmness."[149]

Moreover, we have good reason to believe enslaved women were adept at recognising the early signs of pregnancy. One Hippocratic passage relates the story of a slave flute girl who, in addition to performing at parties, was expected to provide sexual favours as part of her entertainment services. The flautist's procuress carefully instructed her to be on the lookout for the telltale signs of pregnancy, as well as offering some token advice on how to abort an unwanted foetus.[150] Among her recommendations was to jump up and down after having intercourse with a client, presumably in an effort to expel seamen. Awareness of conception was surely advantageous when it came to administering the, generally safer, early-term abortifacients.

Access to those ingredients suitable for producing abortive medicines was equally consequential. Once again, much of what has been argued for contraceptives carries over to the preparation of abortifacients. We might only emphasise the appeal of oral drugs, easily mixed and ingested without the involvement of third parties. Enslaved women could have feasibly collected herbs from their master's garden or, money permitting, purchased ingredients from a local marketplace. The ability to induce an abortion in private was, no doubt, a pressing concern for many female slaves, especially in light of Zonaras's comments (see above). Conceivably, enslaved women might have first resorted to an oral abortifacient before trying more aggressive suppositories. As with oral prescriptions, pessaries could have been blended and applied in secret, providing bondswomen with a measure of confidentiality. Nonetheless, a great deal of abortions must have ended tragically,

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144 Pseudo-Galen, *De Remediis Parabilibus*, 14.481.

145 Chariton, *Callirhoe*, 2.8.7.

146 Dio Chrysostom, *Discoures*, 15.8.

147 Zonaras, *Syntagma ton Theion kai Hieron Kanonon*, ed. Giorgios A. Ralles and Michael Potles (Athens: G. Chartophylakos, 1854), Vol. 4, 96. The justifications for such fearfulness can only be guessed at. Hypothetically, a female slave sexually favoured by her master, though pregnant by another man, might have hoped to procure an abortion in order to disguise her affair, and thus avoid her owner's displeasure.

148 Hippocrates, *De Carnibus*, 19; Augustine, *Sermons*, 10.4.

149 Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, 109.

150 Hippocrates, *De Natura Pueri*, 490. Those signs the slave girl was said to watch out for might have included a missed period, swollen breasts, and perhaps even recurring bouts of nausea.

either in the mother's death or with permanent damage to her vital organs. That female slaves would have pursued such a treacherous course of action, not only bespeaks their desperation but determination to resist.

5. Illicit Love

Sex between persons of enslaved status is a topic rarely broached. While much ink has been expelled outlining the dynamics of servile marriage (*contubernium*), non-spousal intimacy remains comparatively neglected.[151] However, throughout Roman antiquity, casual sex within slave communities was almost certainly a fact of life. Seeking to understand consensual lovemaking has the potential to illuminate a shadow world of agentic behaviour. For *ancillae*, the choice of erotic partner, as well as their capacity to instigate and maintain romantic liaisons, strays beyond simple agency into the territory of resistance.

As with other areas of servile life, sex was controlled. Legally speaking, intercourse with a slave was akin to the use of property: providing the owner consented, it was in no way reprehensible. If a master disapproved or was somehow unaware of the relationship, then the encounter was deemed illicit, with the offending party being required to pay damages.[152] Any free person who persuaded a slave to become their lover, or embark on a sexual relationship, could be held liable for corruption.[153] Engaging in an illicit affair was, in the opinion of the jurists, seen to erode the slave's value, thereby entitling the plaintiff to compensation.[154] Roman jurisprudence did not, however, make any distinction between cases of rape and consensual sex, implying the feelings of *ancillae* were of negligible importance.[155]

Toleration of sexual relationships between *servi* fell within the *dominica potestas* (power of the master), who could withdraw his approval at any time.[156] The agronomists offered strict advice on how to manage the libido of slaves. Cato, fearing untampered sexual desire could lead to misbehaviour, charged his male slaves a fixed price for consorting with their female workmates.[157] Columella was similarly wary of neglecting the passions of his male slaves, rewarding hardworking farmhands with a mate. The *villicus* (overseer) was given special priority, being permitted to keep a *contubernalis* (helpmate) whose expressed purpose was to attenuate his carnal yearnings.[158] Columella further advised against superintendents pursuing intimate relations with any other members of the household.[159] Varro (116–27 BCE) stipulated *pastores* (shepherds) were also to be given a female companion, someone to accompany them on their long stints away from the *villa rustica*.[160] Presenting a *servus* with a wife had the added benefit of emotionally anchoring him to

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[151] For a general overview, see Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*, 48–52. For the epigraphic evidence, see Beryl Rawson, "Family Life among the Lower Classes at Rome in the First Two Centuries of the Empire," *Classical Philology* 61, no. 2 (1966), 71–83; Treggiari, "Contubernales in CIL 6," 45–47; Weaver, *Familia Caesaris*, 112–122.

[152] Matthew J. Perry, "Sexual Damage to Slaves in Roman Law," 57.

[153] Ulpian, *Digest*, 11.3.1.5. See also Ulpian, *Digest*, 47.1.2.5.

[154] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.23.

[155] Perry, *Gender, Manumission and the Roman Freedwoman*, 26.

[156] Marcel Simonis, "Ehe," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 1, 768.

[157] Plutarch, *Lives*, "Cato" 21.2.

[158] Columella, *De re rustica*, 12.1.2.

[159] Columella, *De re rustica*, 11.1.13.

[160] Varro, *De re rustica*, 2.10.6.

the *familia*.[161] Any slave with a life partner and child was, after all, far less likely to abscond. As Joshel points out, stable family relations strengthened the master's authority, providing him with a means to further coerce his slaves into loyal service.[162]

We might describe the control of servile sexuality as a positive containment strategy, positive in the sense that it ostensibly benefited slaves, while in reality contributing to their domination. Stephanie Camp, in her seminal study of servile resistance in the Antebellum South, underscores the sophisticated mechanisms employed to help manage slave behaviour. Central to Camp's hypothesis is the idea of "geographies of containment," or rather those laws, customs, and ideals legitimising some forms of movement and punishing others.[163] Camp argues slave activity, while outwardly choreographed, could be manipulated from within, creating "rival geographies," spaces that conflicted with the ideals and demands of the master class.[164] Taking Camp's theoretical approach as a starting point, I suggest slaves were equally proficient in staking out rival emotional geographies, that is the pursuit of intimate relationships beyond proscribed boundaries.[165] For *ancillae*, so often passed around to satisfy the needs of others, consensual lovemaking was not only agentic but subversive, challenging the forces set upon mandating their sexuality. Consensual sex between enslaved persons can hence be understood as an act of resistance, a way in which *ancillae* reclaimed jurisdiction over their bodies.

Roman literature provides us with a few tantalising glimpses into the amorous lives of slaves. Unfortunately, the female perspective is often lacking, with expressions of desire falling largely to men. One notable exception can be found in Plautus's *Persa*, relating Sophoclidisca's flirtatious exchange with her fellow slave Paegnium.[166] We might also cite the *Satyricon*, where Trimalchio is informed of an affair between his freedwomen and a servile bath attendant.[167] However, the male viewpoint can also provide clues regarding the sex lives of *ancillae*. A remarkable passage from the late Roman drama *Querolus*, describes the erotic activity between slaves in the twilight of a vacant bathhouse, parodied in the opening epigraph.

> *Lavamus autem cum pedisequis et puellis: nonne haec est vita libera. Luminis autem vel splendoris illud subornatur, quod sufficiat, non quod publicet. Ego nudam teneo quam domino vestitam vix videre licet. Ego latera lustro, ego effusa capillorum metior volumina, adsideo amplector foveo foveor. Cuinam dominorum hoc licet?*
>
> We bathe with the slave girls and boys — ain't that the life of the free? Not everything is visible in the glowing light — but enough is. I hold a slave girl in the flesh whom the master

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[161] Varro, *De re rustica*, 1.17.5.

[162] Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, Identity and Legal Status: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 45. Intriguingly, Pliny styles the household as a *res publica*, arguing masters should foster attachment to the *familia* among their slaves, see *Epistulae*, 8.16.2.

[163] Stephanie M. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 12.

[164] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 7. As Camp notes, the term "rival geographies" was first coined by Edward Said to describe resistance to colonial occupation.

[165] Borrowing from Elizabeth Elbourne, who states the control of sexuality was a critical element to the "emotional geography" of slavery. See "Introduction: Key Themes and Perspectives," in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 26.

[166] Plautus, *Persa*, 227; Richlin, *Slave Theater in the Roman Republic*, 280.

[167] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 53.10.

> barely gets to see with her clothes on. I explore her front and back, I handle her flowing hair, I embrace her by my side, and we caress one another. What master is allowed to do that?[168]

Although fictitious, the value of Pantomalus's vignette in evoking the "counter-world of slaves" should not be understated.[169] The *Querolus* not only treats us to an image of servile life absented from masterly interference but purports to celebrate the felicities of love within the slave community. Indeed, the narrative's portrayal of an *ancilla* consensually — if we are to trust the narrator's account — sharing her body is unprecedented, a far cry from the portraits of abuse and degradation so predominate in other literary works. Of particular interest is Pantomalus's pride in embracing his lover's nakedness, effectively one-upping his master, who is scarcely able to steal a glance (*videre licet*) at her, even fully clothed. Moreover, in sharing herself only with Pantomalus, the unnamed *ancilla* exercises sexual volition — evidenced by their mutual caressing (*foveo*) — pursuing love for little more than personal gratification.

Be this as it may, the excerpt is not without its complications. For starters, the fifth century CE date of composition, well beyond our time period, warrants us asking to what extent the *Querolus* is representative of earlier centuries. In response, it is consequential to recognise the work's Plautine influences, especially when it comes to characterisation and language.[170] As such, the story is not necessarily anchored to its late antique radix, but historically fluid, a continuation of the playwriting tradition of the late Republic and early Principate. One key divergence, however, concerns the comparatively reduced role slaves play in the narrative as a whole. This makes the author's inclusion of the above scene all the more remarkable, betraying some semblance of originality and creative forethought. While narratological innovation is by no means proof of historical trustworthiness, there must have been some underlying comic relatability to the episode, thereby justifying its incorporation.

Covert partnerships between slaves within the same household are likewise attested in Greek fiction. Xenophon of Ephesus (fl. late second century CE) portrays the slaves Rhode and Leucon as being romantically involved, describing the couple as having a mutually felt bond of love (ἔρωτος).[171] The protagonist Clitophon's δούλος (male slave), Satyrus, in Achilles Tatius's novel also maintains a relationship, declaring that the chambermaid Kleio has "paired up with me (i.e. him)" (κεκοινώνηκέ μοι).[172] Later in the story, Kleio resolves to escape from her mistress, both to avoid a vicious punishment and to be with her lover Satyrus.[173]

With the growth of Christianity in the third century CE, the chastity of one's *servi* became a topic of increasing concern. Reading against the grain, early Christian sermons reveal the prevalence of illicit affairs among household slaves, as well as the lengths masters went to extinguish romantic trysts. Frightfully cruel *domini* might have punished promiscuity with fetters, disallowing *ancillae*

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168 Gunnar Ranstrand, *Querolus, sive Aulularia: incerti auctoris comoedia una cum indice verborum* (Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerber, 1951), 41–42; trans. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, 250–251. For a full translation of the *Querolus*, see George E. Duckworth, *The Complete Roman Drama: All the Extant Comedies of Plautus and Terence, and the Tragedies of Seneca, in a Variety of Translations: Volume 2* (New York: Random House, 1942), 896–949.

169 Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, 251.

170 Rolando Ferri, "The Reception of Plautus in Antiquity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy*, ed. Michael Fontaine and Adele C. Scafuro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 780.

171 Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*, 2.3.6.

172 Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.4.2.

173 Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.26.2–3.

to leave the house until they had internalised the virtue of modesty.[174] John Chrysostom suggested persistent offenders were flogged, casually equating the disciplining of the soul with the whipping of unchaste slave girls.[175] Such references, however doctrinal, indicate both masterly opposition to unlicensed sexuality and the inherent pervasiveness of erotic encounters between slaves.

Successfully consummating an illicit love affair must have often come down to chance. Returning to the *villa rustica*, Varro makes out farmhands cultivated friendships, as well as rivalries, with slaves on neighbouring estates, suggesting romantic relationships were equally probable.[176] Cato infers householders were particularly keen on reducing contact between adjacent farmsteads, instructing the *vilica* to refuse visits from enslaved women outside the *familia*.[177] As might be expected, such rules were regularly transgressed. A story told by the ex-slave Niceros, in attendance at Trimalchio's banquet, relates his opportunistic seizure of a lapse in security to visit his lover, living on a nearby estate.[178] Seneca similarly acknowledged that, in their master's absence, *servi* would have been at greater liberty to set their own agenda.[179] Owing to the fact Roman villas were often erected in the same locality, slaves were surely able to comfortably traverse between different homesteads. Taking the late Republican villa Settefinestre as an example, we might note that two other estates were situated within easy walking distance — Le Colonne and Le Provinca — at least allowing for the possibility *ancillae* maintained relationships outside of their household.[180]

Material culture may also reveal something of the potential for liaisons between slaves. As noted in the previous chapter, enslaved persons were capable of manipulating time and space. This being so, it is not improbable that *ancillae* would have exploited gaps in their work routine to further an amorous relationship. Conjecturally, slaves might have accomplished sexual escapades in secluded areas of the *domus*, unbeknown to their master or workmates. Excavations have revealed many Pompeian homes to contain large subterranean vaults. The House of Lucius Caecilius Jucundus (Regio V.1.26), for example, possessed a sprawling underground room at the rear of the peristyle, while the House of the Labyrinth (Regio VI.11.9–10) boasted a similar chamber almost directly below the service areas.[181] Whether used as wine cellars or storage basements remains unclear, though *ancillae* could well have utilised such locales for romantic rendezvouses.

An enslaved man or woman's individual quarters might have proved equally suitable. The literary evidence for such accommodation is, however, confusingly mixed. Horace (65–8 BCE) alludes to a kind of slave bedroom known as an *angusta*, likely a narrow cell designed to house a single person.[182] Pliny the Younger writes of a *paedagogium* (a training school for slave boys) where a

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[174] John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, 2.124.
[175] John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 42.3.
[176] Varro, *De re rustica*, 1.15.
[177] Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 143.1.
[178] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 62.2. Niceros recounts, "I seized my chance" (*nactus ego occasionem*) when his owner departed for Capua. The master's absence from the estate must have been viewed by many slaves as a period of respite, a time to bend the rules or further their own interests.
[179] Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 107.1.
[180] For a short overview of the villa Settefinestre, see Annalisa Marzano, *Roman Villas in Central Italy: A Social and Economic History* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 655–657.
[181] Joshel and Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*, 72.
[182] Horace, *Satires*, 1.8.8.

puer billeted together with several other *servi* in a windowed room.[183] Apuleius imagines two enslaved brothers sharing a private lodging in the vicinity of their master's residence.[184]

Domestic architectural remains provide a more tangible view of slave accommodation. In the city of Rome, an aristocratic house excavated on the northern slope of the Palatine — between the Arch of Titus, the Via Sacra, and the House of the Vestals — revealed around thirty cells, each measuring approximately 1.2 by 1.5 metres and furnished with masonry beds.[185] Located nearby, between the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina and the Temple of Romulus, was unearthed a narrow corridor flanked on either side by three small rooms, originally situated below street level.[186] These basement *cellae* were initially estimated to be the remnants of a prison but, as Michele George has determined, were more likely the slave quarters of a luxurious residence formally occupying the site.[187] Masterly preference for servile accommodation to be hidden away in underground chambers, may have been an enabling factor when it came to proscribed relationships.

Elite housing layouts at Pompeii exhibit a similar tendency to confine slave quarters to far-removed areas of the *domus*. A set of austerely decorated northward-facing rooms in the outermost wing of The House of Menander (Regio I.10.4) likely accommodated enslaved persons.[188] Rooms adjacent to work areas were also occupied by *servi*, such as those clustered around the kitchen in a house (Regio VI.5.14) on the Vicolo di Mercurio.[189] Recent excavations at the Civita Giuliana villa, 0.6 kilometres north of Pompeii, have likewise uncovered two rooms thought to have once been used by slaves.[190] Measuring about 16 square metres in size, one of the spaces contained three primitive wooden beds, along with amphorae and a pair of makeshift suitcases for keeping personal items. However cramped, sleeping quarters of this kind would have provided enslaved men and women with a measure of privacy, allowing illicit dalliances to go undetected.

From the farmstead to the townhouse, the available evidence indicates that *ancillae* risked pursuing consensual illicit sexual relationships with other slaves. Erotic desires were surely acted upon whenever chance permitted, be it clandestine visits to neighbouring villas, or amorous encounters in gloomy vaults. Rival emotional geographies speak of an enslaved sexuality unconnected to the abuses of the master class. In choosing who to share themselves with, *ancillae* both refuted their objectification and reasserted their claim to bodily integrity. Consensual sex acts can thus be understood within the rubric of resistance, in many senses the epitome of bodily choice.

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183 Pliny, *Epistulae*, 7.27.12.

184 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10.13.

185 Andrea Carandini, *Schiavi in Italia: gli strumenti pensanti dei Romani fra tarda Repubblica e medio Impero* (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1988), 361–363.

186 For a photograph, see Ernest Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Tübingen: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1961), Vol. 1, 209.

187 Michele George, "*Servus* and *domus*: The Slave in the Roman House," in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, ed. Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 17.

188 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Houses and Households: Sampling Pompeii and Herculaneum," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 222.

189 James E. Packer, "Middle and Lower Class Housing in Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Preliminary Survey," in *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji und den anderen vom Vesuvausbruch 79 n. Chr. verschütteten Städten*, ed. Bernard Andreae and Helmut Kyrieleis (Recklinghausen: Verlag Aurel Bongers, 1975), 136.

190 Gabriel Zuchtriegel, "Pompei, una città densamente popolata? Nuove scoperte e analisi GIS," *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani* 33 (2022), 166.

IV

Termination Strategies

Barking dogs splintered the mute night air, like glassware broken on a marble floor. I edged further into the tangled tree line, concealing myself from the closely burning cressets. Swallowing my breath and tuning my ears I awaited the returning silence. Reassured by the stridulating crickets I pushed on through the copse, sidling away from the villa walls and towards the moon-washed *arurae*. At the field's boundary, the even ground gradually steepened, with vine trellises replacing the maturing crop rows. Passing between the grape canopies I climbed the blue hillside, my slipshod shoes disturbing their dusty rootstocks. Atop the ridge I glanced back, the denticulate chimneys and flat-roved farm buildings of the homestead below, once so familiar, now stood alien to me. Truly, the eyes of the exile are tinged with severance.

Knowing to avoid the roads I headed cross-country, half-guessing my way along sunken droveways and bramble-thronged tracks. Those weeks of deliberation and nervousness faded with every footfall, and my mind was swathed in a palliating calm. Tomorrow's bed and next week's food could wait, now, in the hour of my exodus, dreams of plenty allayed thoughts of misery. Reaching a break in the hedgerow I saw what looked to be a junction and, gauging the thoroughfare empty, hastened to read the weathered *miliarium*. Considerable distance still separated me from the nearest town, though unperturbed, I returned to the path, judging rest incautious while darkness still masked my furtive getaway. "One more mile," I assured my aching legs, shambling through the shadows, my back to the highway. With the greying light, I scaled a final knoll, submitting to fatigue amongst a diadem of fledgling cypresses. Collapsing bone-tired, I watched the dawn tide climb the broad beach of the eastern sky, extolling the morning of my release.

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Servile opposition to the authority of the master class is observable throughout the ancient world.[1] Loosely defined, resistance is a category of analysis used by historians to demarcate those behaviours obliquely or directly contesting the slave owner's prerogative.[2] As discussed in the previous chapter, manipulation of reproductivity and clandestine lovemaking can be understood as exhibitions of defiance. More generally, bonded persons engaged in low-level subversive acts — often termed "day-to-day resistance" — such as shirking work, damaging tools, and feigning illness.[3] However, for some *servi*, the brutalities of enslavement galvanised more radical expressions of dissent. Termination strategies, or rather those initiatives aimed at ending

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[1] As a point of comparison, see Laurie Venters, "Lightening Bonds: Servile Resistance in Early Imperial China," *The Historian* 84, no. 2 (2022), 262–289.

[2] Keith Bradley, "Resisting Slavery at Rome," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 363.

[3] The concept of everyday resistance was pioneered by historians of plantation slavery in the United States. For example, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 598. For cloak-and-dagger resistance in the Roman world, see Sandra R. Joshel, "Geographies of Slave Containment and Movement," in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 107–108.

dependency relations, represent an extreme manifestation of resistance.[4] Slaves looking to permanently escape the power matrix could either abscond, commit suicide, or take their master's life. Violent rebuttals of masterly dominance are widely attested in the Roman source material, though only those *servi* "subject to the most despotic authority" resorted to lethal force.[5]

Here we must ask to what extent servile termination strategies — running away, self-killing, and homicide — can be understood in terms of gender. Modes of resistance, I will argue, were heavily influenced by sex roles, generally inhibiting, though occasionally facilitating, a slave woman's capacity to rebel. This chapter serves as a rough negative check on female participation in those resistive behaviours traditionally ascribed to slaves. Rather than detracting from the agency of enslaved women, however, such a conclusion underscores the validity of this monograph's central argument, that is the propensity for *ancillae* to capitalise on intimate relationships with their master.

We begin with escape, premeditated and opportunistically seized, examining the motivations for flight, those tactics employed to avoid capture, as well as the gendered experience of desertion. Next, we shall turn to suicide, attempting to formulate self-killing as a desperate expression of personal sovereignty. As a corollary, it is necessary to ask whether or not a slave mother's decision to put to death her child can be conceptualised as a form of surrogate euthanasia. Finally, we will consider the murder of *domini* at the hands of their slaves, venturing to locate the how and why of homicide, in addition to speculating whether *ancillae* violently resisted their master.

1. Escape Motives

Listed among the accomplishments of Augustus's (r. 27 BCE–14 CE) *Res Gestae* was the capture and return of 30,000 runaway slaves (*servi fugitivi*).[6] Memorialised in stone and erected in cities throughout the empire, the inscription sent a clear message: with the establishment of the Principate came the restoration of societal order. Fugitive slaves, from the perspective of the Roman elite, embodied a gross inversion of the status quo. Left unchecked, runaways not only inflicted economic harm but undermined the hierarchical organisation of society at large.[7] As such, the movement of chattel outside prescribed social and geographic limits constituted a perpetual anxiety for slaveholders and lawmakers alike.

In an effort to prevent slaves from illegally obtaining freedom, Roman masters took pains to ensure escape was extremely difficult. A complex network of interlinking preventive and punitive strategies were marshalled against runaways, designed both to deter flight and streamline the capture and return of fugitives. Bondspeople could be fitted with chains or kept under guard,

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[4] Richard M. Emerson outlined two main strategies for dependent parties to readdress power imbalances: "cost reduction" and "balancing operations." While the former largely involves side-stepping the demands of the powerful, the latter seeks to alter power asymmetries to the advantage of the weaker actor. See "Power-Dependent Relations," *American Sociological Review* 27, no. 1 (1962), 34–35. Termination strategies takes Emerson's concept of balancing operations a step further, arguing dependency relations can be permanently discontinued through the weaker agent's application of violence.

[5] James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 71.

[6] *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 25.1.

[7] Fugitive slaves blurred the line between enslavement and freedom, see John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 35.3.

thereby forestalling escape attempts.[8] Particularly unruly *servi* might be locked away in an *ergastulum*, a kind of underground prison for the custodial management of slaves.[9] Those who successfully absconded were relentlessly chased down. As Christopher Fuhrmann has identified, the pursuit of runaways provoked an unusually high level of cooperation between landowners, policing authorities, and provincial and local governments.[10] Wanted posters detailing a slave's appearance and last known whereabouts were disseminated throughout ancient cities, promising rewards to whoever informed on escapees.[11] Professional slave-catchers (*fugitivari*) could also be relied upon, specialising in the tracking and capture of runaways.[12] Those slaves unlucky enough to be caught were cruelly punished, either with facial tattoos or, during the later empire, the fitting of iron collars.[13] Considering the extensive measures taken to inhibit desertion, we might question why slaves were determined to escape in the first instance.

Abscondence in the Roman world was measured on a spectrum ranging from "true escape" to temporary respite.[14] The jurist Ulpian (fl. late second century CE) distinguished between a *fugitivus*, a slave who ran away with no intention of coming back, and an *erro*, who could prove he or she intended to return to their master's household, albeit later than expected.[15] However, lawmakers were in broad disagreement over the necessity of intent, with some jurists favouring attitude of mind over actions taken and others, the reverse.[16] Irrespective of the legal ambiguities, here we are only concerned with *servi fugitivi*, or rather those slaves who absconded with no thought of rejoining their master's service.

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[8] Suetonius mentions that slave doorkeepers were purposefully chained to hinder escape, see *De Rhetoribus*, 27. The numerous attestations to chinking fetters in Latin verse might hint at the widespread practice of enchaining slaves. See Juvenal, *Satires*, 11.80, 14.23; Lucan, *De Bello Civili*, 7.402; Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.22.4; Ovid, *Tristia*, 4.1.5; *Epistulae ex Ponto*, 1.6.31; Tibullus, *Elegies*, 2.6.26. On the *villa rustica* the overseer was responsible for the surveillance of enslaved workers, leading them to and from the fields each day and locking them up in their quarters at night. See Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 5.5; Columella, *De re rustica*, 11.1.18.

[9] Columella, *De re rustica*, 1.5–6.

[10] Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–43.

[11] Several wanted posters from Roman Egypt survive, see *P.Oxy*. 51.3616, 3617. Literary sources also allude to the posting of runaway notices, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 6.7; Lucian, *The Runaways*, 27. Most advertisements broadcasted those distinguishing features of the escapee, such as scars or manner of speech.

[12] For *fugitivari*, see *P.Oxy*. 14.1643; Ulpian, *Digest*, 19.518; Varro, *De re rustica*, 3.14.2. See also Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.29a.3–10, where the poet imagines himself as a runaway slave, pursued by *fugitivari* in the form of cupids.

[13] For facial tattooing as a punishment for runaway slaves, see Ausonius, *Epigrams*, 36; Libanius, *Declamations*, 1.147; Lucian, *Timon*, 17; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.19; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 103; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 7.4.14. According to Galen, the legs of fugitives might also be tattooed, being the part of the body facilitating the slave's escape, see *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 6. The literary evidence for slave collars is thin. For a rare example, see Lucilius, *Satires*, 29.917–918. Archaeological findings however, prove iron collars were commonly fitted to runaway slaves. For overviews, see David L. Thurmond, "Some Roman Slave Collars in CIL," *Athenaeum* 82 (1994), 459–493; Jennifer Trimble, "The Zoninus Collar and the Archaeology of Roman Slavery," *American Journal of Archaeology* 120, no. 3 (2016), 447–472.

[14] Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, 260.

[15] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.14.

[16] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.1–3.

Servile motivations for running away are expectedly multifarious. A close reading of the source material, however, reveals a plethora of common reasons why slaves opted to abscond.[17] Physical violence ranks among the most prevalent justifications for flight. The fable of "Androcles and the Lion," recorded by Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–180 CE), epitomises the interconnection between corporeal mistreatment and escape. Enslaved to the proconsul of Africa, Androcles confessed that his "undeserved and daily floggings" (*iniquis eius et cotidianis verberibus*) strengthened his determination to flee.[18] Tellingly, Androcles considered starvation in the deserts of Egypt preferable to returning to his cruel *dominus*. Likewise, the *ancilla* Photis debates running away following a beating at the hands of her mistress.[19] Papyri fragments dating from the Ptolemaic period further suggest violence was a root cause for escape. In a letter to Zenon (fl. third century BCE), private secretary to the finance minister of the pharaoh, an unnamed maidservant admitted that slaves wronged by their owner were more inclined to turn loose.[20] Correspondingly, John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) warned that masters who too flagrantly abused their slaves ran the risk of inspiring mass decampments.[21] By nature of their debased status, we might presume slaves expected to encounter some degree of physical maltreatment. However, if gestures of violence surpassed tolerable limits, flight was an effective countermeasure.[22]

By the same token, sexual molestation conceivably spurred some enslaved women to abscond. From the late antique theologian Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393–458 CE), we learn of a young female slave who, subject to repeated attempted rapes, felt compelled to flee to a nearby convent in the hope of escaping her owner's violent lust.[23] On learning of her desertion, the anonymous master had the slave girl's mother strung up and whipped until she disclosed the hiding place of her daughter. Female slaves were also at risk of sexual assault by their workmates. A scene from Achilles Tatius's (fl. second century CE) novel depicts the runaway heroine Leucippe wretched and bloody, she having just escaped the clutches of the slave bailiff Sosthenes, who had purposed to rape her.[24] Fear of physical violation likely drove many *ancillae* to flight, though the paucity of the ancient evidence prohibits definite conclusions.

Impending punishment was equally liable to provoke escape attempts. Cicero (106–43 BCE), writing to his friend Publius Sulpicius (124–88 BCE), bemoaned the disappearance of his slave Dionysius who, having stolen some valuable books, decided to abscond.[25] Reading between the

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[17] Ingomar Weiler is confident the extant sources are sufficient for estimating the impetus behind a slave's decision to cut and run. See *Die Beendigung des Sklavenstatus im Altertum: ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Sozialgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 151.

[18] Aulius Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 5.14.17.

[19] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.16.

[20] *PSI*. 6.667. References to runaway slaves appear elsewhere in the Zenon papyri. The author of *P.Cair.Zen*. 4.59537, perhaps a subordinate of Zenon, notes that bonded persons recently sold to the addressee had been inhumanly treated by their former master. Interestingly, Stephen R. Llewelyn has suggested that these lines refer to the same fugitives as mentioned in *P.Cair.Zen*. 5.59804, another letter to Zenon. If so, we are looking at further evidence for slave flight in the aftermath of maltreatment. See *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity, Volume 8: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1984–85* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 37.

[21] John Chrysostom, *In Acta apostolorum*, 12.

[22] Heinz Bellen notes, "Wenn her Herr bed Behandlung des Sklaven gewisse Grenzen überschritt, so führte dies automatisch zur Mobilisierung des Ressentiments in der Brust des Sklaven." See *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1971), 129.

[23] Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, 9.12.

[24] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5.17.3–5.

[25] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares*, 13.77.3.

lines, Dionysius's fear of physical chastisement surely hastened his resolve to flee. In like fashion, a Campanian fugitive by the name of Spendius, afraid of being crucified by his master, opted to defect to the Carthaginian side during the First Punic War (264–241 BCE).[26] The early Christian bishop Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–235 CE), recounts the story of Callistus, a household slave belonging to a certain Carpophorus. Entrusted with a sizeable amount of money, Callistus was ordered to invest the sum with the aim of growing his master's initial outlay. Having squandered the funds and fearing retribution, Callistus endeavoured to abscond, boarding an outbound ship at Portus.[27] Unfortunately, Callistus's plan was foiled, resulting in his arrest on the harbour side. For a great many enslaved persons, the risks associated with flight paled in comparison to the threat of a heavy beating or whipping.[28]

Poor working conditions seemingly rivalled violence as a motive for escape. In one Aesopic parable, a fugitive slave explains his stingy food rations were among the chief reasons why he absconded.[29] Similarly, Diodorus Siculus (fl. first century BCE) records that slave shepherds, working the pastures of Sicily, were so meagrely clothed and fed they were forced into brigandage, going rogue for months at a time.[30] The jurists were equally attuned to the possibility slaves might run away in response to improper treatment.[31] In a rescript of Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 CE) to Alfus Julius, the emperor made clear that slaves were entitled to sufficient food and living arrangements, warning failure to provide such could lead to the large-scale breakdown of public order.[32] Evidently, the imperial authorities wished to curtail the creation of runaways by encouraging masters to provide for their *servi*, thus dampening their desire for freedom.

A minority of fugitives may have been persuaded to escape by a rival master. In a letter written to the στρατηγός (district governor) of Oxyrhychite, the matron Aurelia Sarapias outlined the disappearance of her favourite slave, a manservant she had inherited from her father.[33] Priding herself on the careful management of her δοῦλοι and δοῦλαι (male and female slaves), Aurelia expressed disbelief at her slave's decampment, concluding he must have been press ganged into escape by a neighbouring landowner. Another item of novel evidence, a curse tablet recovered from the Greek island of Amorgos, implores the spirits to punish a man named Epaphroditus, who had corrupted the supplicant's slaves, prompting them to abscond. The opening lines of the malediction read as follows:

> Κυρία Δημήτηρ, Βασίλισσα, ἱκέτης σου, προσπίπτω δὲ ὁ δοῦλός σου· τοὺ(ς) ἐμοὺς δούλους ὑπεδέξατο, του(ς) κακοδιδασκάλησε, ἐγνωμοδότησε, συνεβούλευσε, ὑπενόθευσε, κατέχαρε, ἀνεπτέρωσε ἀγοράσαι, ἐγνωμοδότησε ϕυγῖν τις Ἐϕαϕρόδ[ει]τ[ος], συνεπέθελγε τὸ παιδίσκην αὐτός, ἵνα, ἐμοῦ μὴ θέλοντος, ἔχειν αὐτὸν γυναῖκα αὐτήν. δι'ἐκήνην τὴν αἰτίαν δὲ αὐτὴν πεϕευγέναι σὺν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις.

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[26] Polybius, 1.69.5.

[27] Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 9.12.2–5.

[28] For violent masters, see *Collatio legum Romanarum et Mosaicarum*, 3.4.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 10.9.

[29] Phaedrus, *Fables*, "Perotti's Appendix" 20.6.

[30] Diodorus Siculus, 34.2.27, 32, 36.

[31] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.3.

[32] *Collatio legum Romanarum et Mosaicarum*, 3.3.5.

[33] *P.Turner* 41.

> Mistress Demeter, O queen, I, your suppliant, throw myself before you, your servant. A certain Epaphroditus, has inveigled my slaves, he has taught them evil, he has counselled them, he has hatched conspiracies, he has corrupted them, he has rejoiced over them, he has incited them to run about, he has counselled them to run away. He has bewitched a slave girl, without my permission, so that he can have her as his. For that reason she fled with the other runaways.[34]

Dating from sometime between the late Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, several points of curiosity are immediately obvious from the lead *defixio*.[35] The curse has been variously categorised as a revenge prayer or quasi-erotic spell, owing to the supplicant's preoccupation with his escaped maidservant (παιδίσκην). Either way, it is clear the malison was etched out in response to, what Christopher Faraone has termed "a minor slave rebellion," allegedly brought about by a rival householder.[36] Most interesting is the accusation that Epaphroditus — a fanciful name meaning something like "Mr Charming" — had bewitched (συνεπέθελγε) one of the slave girls, desiring to possess her for himself. The text, abound with jealousy and anger, further suggests the dedicant was sexually involved with the runaway παιδίσκην, aggravating his sense of loss and humiliation.[37] Philological examination reveals Epaphroditus may have used magic to steal away the girl in the first place, the verb συναποθέλγεσθαι being commonly found in Greek incantations.[38]

Fortune-telling guides, popular throughout antiquity, further betray the impetus behind servile decampment. The *Sortes Astrampsychi* contains several passages specifically directed at slaves. One prediction warns the supplicant that he or she will not be manumitted, while another claims certain disagreements between master and slave will go unresolved.[39] Failure to award manumission was a known cause for escape. At least one *ancilla* absconded after her master revoked his promise of freedom (see below). Interestingly, Columella (b. 4 CE), following Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE), recommended farm bailiffs prohibit soothsayers from practising on the *villa rustica*, elaborating that such individuals "disturb ignorant minds" (*rudes animos infestant*) and encouraged superstition among slaves.[40] Although Columella does not explicitly connect divinatory activities with escape, it is conceivable some slave owners anticipated bondspeople to flee on the basis of prophecies they received from a soothsayer.

Newly captured slaves (*servi novicii*), along with chattel imported from abroad, appear to have absconded with regard to their yearning for home. Hegio, the protagonist of Plautus's (d. 184 BCE)

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[34] *SGD* 60; trans. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks*, 420.

[35] For the uncertain date of composition, see H. W. Pleket, "Religious History as the History of Mentality: The 'Believer' as Servant of the Deity in the Greek World," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. Henk Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 189.

[36] Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 87.

[37] Angelos Chaniotis, "Moving Stones: The Study of Emotions in Greek Inscriptions," in *Unveiling Emotions: Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 101.

[38] Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks*, 350.

[39] Questions 32 and 46 in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* concern manumission and master-slave reconciliation. In response to question 32, answer 6 in decade 4 reads: "You won't be freed just yet. Don't expect it." Likewise, answer 2 in decade 5, replying to question 46, professes: "You won't come to terms with your masters now." For a full translation of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, see William Hansen, *Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 291–324.

[40] Cato, *De Agri Cultura*, 5.4; Columella, *De re rustica*, 6.22.

Captivi, remarks that *servi* fresh off the auction block were especially prone to flight.[41] At the empire's margins, a range of literary and documentary sources allude to fugitives escaping into barbarian territory, often on the pretext of rejoining their former kinsmen. Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–400) claimed diminishing Roman influence along the Danube during the late fourth century CE, allowed a great number of runaways to slip over the border, returning to their native country.[42] Slaves escaping across the frontiers were enough of a problem for Constantine (r. 306–337 CE) to pass laws dictating any fugitive caught in the borderlands would be mutilated and condemned to the mines.[43] Garrison soldiers stationed at the fringes of Roman territory occasionally arrested runaways venturing to cross the frontiers. A fragment of papyrus recovered from the ancient settlement of Bu Njem, records the apprehension of a *servus fugitivus* attempting to flee Roman Libya.[44] The younger Pliny (b. 61 CE) relates an approximate story in a letter to Emperor Trajan (r. 98–117 CE).[45] The details are somewhat obscure, though it appears a fugitive named Callidromus had been detained by soldiers in Nicomedia, having recently fled his master, a local baker. However, Callidromus claimed to have been a native of Dacia, captured and enslaved by the Roman legionnaire Susagus. Following his subjugation, Callidromus was gifted to King Pacorus of Parthia, but some years later escaped to Nicomedia. It is conceivable that by the time Callidromus was seized by Pliny's men, he was attempting to make his way back to Dacia. Although exceptional, the three-time runaway Callidromus likely shared a longing for freedom experienced by many foreign slaves living under Roman rule.

Surprisingly, there is little evidence to demonstrate slaves in the Roman world ran away intending to reunite with family or friends.[46] This resulted largely from the fact *servi* seldom maintained relationships beyond their own *familia* and the surrounding community.[47] While Ulpian hypothesised enslaved persons might seek temporary asylum with relatives or their birth mother, such individuals were not considered fugitives.[48]

A partial exception might be found among the writings of Saint Jerome (d. 420 CE), namely the biography of the monk Malchus.[49] Growing up on a farmstead near the city of Nisibis, located on the Turkish-Syrian border, Malchus resolved early in life to pursue a spiritual calling. After spurning his parents's wish for him to marry, the adolescent Malchus entered a monastic commune on the steppe between Imma and Beroea, modern-day Yenişehir and Aleppo. Years later, on learning of his mother's widowhood, Malchus set out to return to his hometown in order to settle his inheritance. Regrettably, while journeying to Nisibis, Malchus, along with his travelling companions, was taken captive by Saracen raiders and enslaved. However, in recognition of his general obedience, Malchus was soon entrusted with the care of a herd of goats, as well as being

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41 Plautus, *Captivi*, 115–118.

42 Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.6.5.

43 *Codex Justinianus*, 6.1.3.

44 *O.BuNjem* 71.

45 Pliny, *Epistulae*, 10.74.

46 This stands in stark contrast with other slaveholding societies, particularly the Antebellum South, where absconding to rejoin family members was relatively common. For example, see Mary J. Gallant, "Slave Runaways in Colonial Virginia: Accounts and Status Passage as Collective Process," *Symbolic Interaction* 15, no. 4 (1992), 393.

47 Marleen Boudreau Flory, "Family in *Familia*: A Study of Social Relations in Slavery," (PhD diss., Yale University, 1975), 17–47.

48 Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.5.

49 The full account can be found in Jerome, *Vita Malchi monachi captivi*, 3–9. For a short summery of Malchus's life and experience of slavery, see Lenski, "Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens," 237–238.

permitted to live in wedlock with a fellow slave woman. Although considering their situation tolerable, Malchus and his partner decided to abscond, desiring, above all, to live in ascetic devotion to God, something their slavery naturally prohibited. Together they formulated an escape plan and, when chance presented itself, fled across the desert sands. Managing to evade capture — in no small part thanks to the miraculous intercession of a lioness — both Malchus and his wife returned to Syria, taking up the religious life in the wilderness of Chalkis. Quite obviously, Malchus's decision to flee bondage emanated from his aspirations to rejoin the Christian community.[50]

It is abundantly clear that *servi* did occasionally flee as a group. A remarkable letter from Roman Egypt records the collective escape of five slave weavers.[51] At least one of the fugitives in question is described as being home-born, indicating his upbringing as part of his master's *familia*. Owing to the deteriorated nature of the papyrus, the term home-born can be interpreted in two ways.[52] On the one hand, if the neuter plural is favoured, then οἰκογενῆ would infer that several of the runaways had been born into the same household. Alternately, if the masculine singular is assumed, then οἰκογενής would suggest only one of the slaves had been raised under his master's roof. To my mind, if the latter interpretation is taken, a degree of familial association or friendship can be assumed among the five runaways. Similarly, a household register from the Lower Egyptian town of Tebtynis, dated August 189 CE, hints at the decampment of a slave mother and her two adult daughters.[53] The relationship between the three women is, however, largely contingent on their age differential, twenty years separating the eldest from the youngest absconder. At least one other instance of collective flight can be gleaned from the sources. Apuleius (b. 124 CE), in his novel *Metamorphoses*, depicts an entire fraternity of agricultural slaves packing up their lives and escaping.[54]

Finally are those slaves who ran away purely on opportunistic grounds. Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE) insinuates masters preoccupied with business matters involuntarily afforded their *servi* chances of escape.[55] Correspondingly, lapses in security could be rapidly exploited, with the enslaved Leucippe slipping away while left briefly unattended.[56] An inscription engraved on an iron choker likewise hints that the slave Asellus fled through a hole in the garden wall.[57] In extreme cases, such as the murder of Larcius Macedo (see below), a whole domestic staff made a collective break for freedom.[58] Periods of widespread instability were also seized by slaves looking to abscond. The servile revolt led by Spartacus in the first century BCE triggered the decampment of thousands of enslaved persons.[59] Moreover, a break in the fighting during Alaric's siege of Rome (410 CE), resulted in the mass desertion of urban slaves, shirking their obligations and opting to join the ranks

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[50] Religious reasons for absconding might also be sensed from Saint Paul's account of the runaway Onesimus. See *Philemon*, 1.10–20 (*Novum Testamentum Graece*, 655–656).

[51] *P.Corn.* 127.

[52] For a full discussion, see Ryan E. McConnell, "P.Corn. inv. 127: Letter Seeking Capture and Rendition of Runaway ταρσικάριοι," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 50 (2013), 159.

[53] *P.Berl.Leihg*. 1.15; Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, 278.

[54] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 8.15.

[55] Seneca, *Epistulae*, 107.1.

[56] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 7.13.1–2.

[57] *CIL* 15.7172

[58] Pliny, *Epistulae*, 3.14.4.

[59] Florus, *Epitome*, 2.8.20.

of the barbarian invaders.[60] Near identically, in the wake of the Vandal conquest of North Africa (early fifth century CE), numerous slaves hastened to enlist in the marauding army, betraying their masters in the process.[61]

From this condensed overview, we might reflect on some general trends in the data. Foremost, the vast majority of *servi fugitivi* fall into one of two categories: household slaves or those whose job entailed a high degree of autonomy, such as shepherds. Needless to say, *servi* who benefited from greater mobility had increased scope to hatch and execute escape plans. Secondly, while a desire for freedom motivated all runaways, slaves subject to draconian violence were particularly disposed to flight. In like manner, poor working conditions and longings for alternate ways of life spurred many slaves to quit their master's authority. Amply clear is the gender imbalance of the sources, with men being recorded absconding far more regularly than women. This is not to say female slaves did not attempt escape — as we saw with Malchus's wife and the anonymous maidservant described by Theodoret — rather it was more infrequent. Child rearing conceivably minimised ideas of abscondence or simply complicated the logistics of flight.[62] Familial obligation, as well as marriage, may have further limited a bondswoman's volition when it came to running away. The extant evidence all but confirms this, virtually all female *fugitivi* being unmarried or childless. However, legitimate routes to freedom, namely manumission, also played a role in discouraging escape among *ancillae*. As extensively discussed in previous chapters, amorous involvement with their master or childbirth provided slave women with emancipatory strategies largely unavailable to men. On balance, flight was the preserve of single males who, unburdened with family life and marriage, were at greater liberty to risk the dangers of decampment.

2. Evading Capture

Enslaved persons who successfully absconded often did so as the result of careful preparations. The agency of slaves in formulating escape plans, procuring supplies, and psychologically readying themselves for a life on the run, was highly consequential. For many *servi*, the buildup to escape must have been characterised by a torturous inner debate, where the pros and cons of desertion were carefully weighed up. Questions of where to run, not to mention how to avoid capture, almost certainly gnawed away at bonded men and women contemplating flight.[63] No Roman author attempted to capture the anxieties afflicting slaves on the eve of their escape. Only a semi-comic passage from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* hints at the dilemmas facing runaways. In the excerpt below, the novel's hero Lucius, having been transformed into a donkey and captured by a band of robbers, considers the risks of absconding.

> *Nec me tamen mediocris carpebat scrupulus contemplatione comminatae mihi mortis. Et ipse mecum: "Quid stas, Luci, vel quid iam novissimum exspectas?" [...] Quin igitur masculum tandem sumis animum tuaeque saluti, dum licet, consulis? Habes summam opportunitatem*

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[60] Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 5.42.3. See also Procopius, *Bellum Gothicum*, 7.16.19.

[61] Augustine, *Sermons*, 345.3

[62] Writing of the Antebellum South, Deborah Gray White argues women would have absconded more often but were inhibited by their children, who not only made escape more difficult but increased the chances of recapture. See *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985 repr., New York: Norton & Company, 1999), 71. Michael D. Naragon adds that women relied more on support networks within the servile community, as opposed to resorting to extreme demonstrations of resistance, such as flight. See "Communities in Motion: Drapetomania, Work and the Development of African-American Slave Cultures," *Slavery & Abolition* 15, no. 3 (1994), 75.

[63] Bradley, "Resisting Slavery at Rome," 369–370.

> *fugae, dum latrones absunt. An custodiam anus semimortuae formidabis, quam licet claudi pedis tui calce unica finire poteris? Sed quo gentium capessetur fuga, vel hospitium quis dabit?*
>
> I was racked by considerable anxiety as I contemplated the threat of death that hung over me. I thought to myself, "What are you standing around for, Lucius? Why are you waiting for the final act?" […] Well then, why not now display courage like a man and seek your safety while you can? You have an excellent chance of escape while the robbers are away. Or are you afraid of that half-dead old hag guarding you? You can finish her off with just one kick of your foot, even if it is lame. But whither in the world shall your flight be directed? And who will provide sanctuary for you?[64]

Commentators have frequently drawn parallels between Lucius the ass and slaves. Not only were pack animals and bondspeople similarly maltreated, but Lucius himself likens his transformation to a kind of servitude.[65] In fact, the *Metamorphoses* might be read as a "paradigmatic illustration of the animalisation" of slaves in Roman society, detailing their daily abuses and tribulations.[66] As such, Lucius's asinine cerebrations can be interpreted to reflect the real-life thought processes of *servi*. While the threat (*comminatae*) of death temporarily immobilises Lucius, he is not without resistance, contemplating whether to kick (*calce*) his decrepit guard and abscond. However, escape was accompanied by equal risks. Who, Lucius wonders, would shelter (*hospitium*, lit. "offer hospitality") a donkey and where was he to flee (*fuga*).

In an attempt to offset the likelihood of capture, *servi* might have sought consolation in the supernatural. Artemidorus's (fl. second century CE) book of dream interpretations, contains several passages appearing to favour runaways. Dreaming of cuttlefish was, for instance, considered an especially good sign for fugitives, cephalopod ink being synonymous with escape.[67] Widespread belief in the prophetic quality of dreams infers favourable omens might have influenced a slave's decision to flee.[68] Bondspeople also equipped themselves with magical amulets, purportedly in an attempt to ward off their pursuer. One recipe involved inscribing a line of Homeric verse on an iron lamella, promising whoever wore the pendant would evade discovery.[69] Another magical formula instructed users to make a paste from owl eyes, dung balls, and the oil of unripe olives, assuring that, when smeared over the body while uttering an incantation, the mixture would grant temporary invisibility.[70] As the formulas presented in magical handbooks were intended for mass circulation, there is little reason to doubt they were not used by slaves.

Practically speaking, enslaved persons worked hard to lay the groundwork for their escape. Securing sufficient food for the road was of the utmost importance. Turning again to the story of Malchus, it is revealed he and his wife slaughtered two he-goats prior to absconding, making water

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[64] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 6.26.

[65] Stefan Tilg, "Lucius as Ass," in *Characterisation in Apuleius' Metamorphoses: Nine Studies*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 27.

[66] Keith Bradley, "Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction," *Journal of Roman Studies* 90, (2000), 113. See also William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 99–102.

[67] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 2.14.

[68] For ancient attitudes concerning the nature of dreams, see S. R. F. Price, "The Future of Dreams: From Freud to Artemidorus," *Past & Present* 113 (1986), 16.

[69] *PGM* 4.2145–2155.

[70] *PGM* 1.222–231.

skins from their hide and preparing dried meat from their flesh.[71] Likewise, the philosopher Epictetus (ca. 50–135 CE) records that *servi* typically stole a little food or money in preparation for flight.[72] Once their supplies had been exhausted, it was not uncommon for fugitives to turn to theft.[73] Buying the silence of potential informers was similarly critical. Ulpian infers runaways paid off whoever threatened to disclose their whereabouts to the authorities.[74]

Fugitive slaves may have also attempted to disguise their appearance or adopted pseudonyms to frustrate recapture efforts.[75] Enslaved men and women marked with brands or tattoos were especially vulnerable to capture, owing to their identifiability. Accordingly, facial tattoos were concealed under long hair or covered with bandages, while *stigmata* elsewhere on the body were hidden under tight wrappings.[76] Escapees looking to prolong freedom sought the help of doctors, who claimed to be able to remove penal tattoos.[77] Chains and manacles were equally problematic, necessitating swift unfastening. Some fugitives soaked their fetters in a nearby river or stream, softening the iron before breaking the rivet off with a stone.[78] Others filed down a weak link in their chains in order to free their hands or feet.[79] A lucky few runaways might have been helped out of their bonds by sympathetic onlookers, though such actions were harshly punished.[80] Picking an opportune moment to abscond was equally important. Some *servi fugitivi* awaited the waxing of a full moon, the lucent sky easing their getaway.[81] Alternately, runaways might locate stopgap hiding places, sequestering themselves temporarily before fleeing further afield.[82]

A phenomenon almost unique to *ancillae* was absconding in the company of young children. The jurist Africanus (d. 169/175 CE) makes plain that bondswomen who escaped with newborns or toddlers were liable for theft.[83] From the perspective of lawmakers, female slaves who deserted with their offspring, or those *vernae* entrusted to their care, acted to intentionally deprive their master of his property. The dramatic twist in Plautus's *Captivi*, revolves around Hegio's slave Stalagmus who, on deciding to flee, seizes one of his master's two sons.[84] Having successfully escaped, the fugitive proceeds to sell the boy under the pretence it is his own child.

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[71] Jerome, *Vita Malchi monachi captivi*, 8.

[72] Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.26.1–2.

[73] Celsus, *Digest*, 47.2.68.4.

[74] Ulpian, *Digest*, 12.5.4.4.

[75] While I am unaware of any explicit instances of runaway slaves disguising themselves, hiding one's true identity is well attested. See Petronius, *Satyricon*, 103; Plutarch, *Lives*, "Antony" 29; "Caesar" 38; Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.25; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 9.8.2. For *servi fugitivi* changing their name, see John Chrysostom, *De mutatione nominum*, 3.3.

[76] Martial, *Epigrams*, 2.29.9; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 105.2; Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae*, 14.

[77] Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, 2.175.2; Galen, *De Simplicium Medicamentorum Temperamentis ac Facultatibus*, 6.2.5; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 25.173.

[78] John Chrysostom, *Ad populum Antiochenum*, 9.3.

[79] Plautus, *Menaechmi*, 85–86.

[80] Ulpian, *Digest*, 4.3.7.7.

[81] Rudolf Riedinger, *Pseudo-Kaisarios* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), 90.

[82] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.4.

[83] Africanus, *Digest*, 47.2.61.

[84] Plautus, *Captivi*, 7–9, 972.

While the Plautine example is clearly imaginary, a real-life case of child snatching can be observed in a draft petition addressed to the prefect of Alexandria.[85] The document recounts the flight of the servile wet nurse Prima, who had absconded with her mistress's child, Tathreiphis, after learning her manumission date had been postponed. Prima clearly took advantage of her nurseling's incapacity, making off with the child in retaliation to her owner's broken promise. Unfortunately, a male slave informed on Prima, disclosing her hiding place to their master and thus, we may presume, facilitating her arrest. As Ingrid de Haas has argued, the petition evidences a gender-specific form of resistance, namely in that Prima's job as a wet nurse enabled her kidnapping of Tathreiphis.[86] Though conjectural, stolen children may have acted as a kind of bargaining chip, either to be used in arranging the runaway's safe return or as leverage for negotiating their permanent freedom. Whether Prima absconded purely out of spite, or with such strategies in mind, remains speculative.

All runaways knew well the fragile freedom escape afforded them. Indeed, there were few, if any, safe havens for fugitives, and no geographic area of the empire where slavery was outlawed.[87] Evading capture was no mean feat and, for many runaways, absconding resulted in their swift apprehension.[88] However, certain escape strategies bolstered the chances of slaves attaining a more permanent degree of freedom. Most obviously, runaways could hope to put significant distance between themselves and their pursuer. One slave fled from Jerusalem to Antioch, a journey of roughly 477 miles, while another fugitive escaped from his master in Cyrene, finding new employment in Alexandria, some 587 miles away.[89]

Rather than travel overground, fugitives might attempt to jump ship, stowing away on one of the numerous galleys traversing the ancient Mediterranean. Cicero records the flight trajectory of the slave Licinus, who smuggled himself aboard a ship from Athens to Asia Minor, before making his way down the coast to Ephesus.[90] Similarly, the aforementioned Callistus attempted to board a vessel docked in the harbour at Portus, with little concern for where the ship might be headed.[91] The fact harbourmasters (*limenarchae*) were instructed to keep an eye out for fugitives suggests absconding by sea was relatively common.[92] Nevertheless, the vast patronage networks maintained by aristocratic slave owners ensured flight, even to distant localities, was by no means a failsafe. Cicero could rely on friends and associates to chase down his slave librarian Dionysius (see above), despite his wandering into the wilds of Dalmatia.[93]

Particularly daring *servi fugitivi* are known to have posed as free day labourers, attempting to hire themselves out in return for wages.[94] In times of economic crisis, such strategies were imaginably effective. The manpower shortages crippling Italy in the wake of the Antonine plague (ca. 165–180

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[85] *BGU* 4.1139. For a detailed overview, see Orsolina Montevecchi, "BGU IV 1139: Paramone e Trophitis," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 22, no. 1/4 (1985), 231–241.

[86] de Haas, "Female Slave Resistance in the Roman Empire," 202.

[87] Keith Bradley, "The Bitter Chain of Slavery," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 41, no. 1 (2015), 166.

[88] The Christian ascetic Palladius wrote that the respite enjoyed by runaways was short-lived, see *Historia Lausiaca*, 35. Equally, the Greek bishop Synesius, writing from the perspective of fugitive slaves, insinuates escape attempts were often foiled, see *Catastasis*, 2.5.

[89] Jerome, *Epistulae*, 5.3; Synesius, *Epistulae*, 145.

[90] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Quintum*, 1.2.14.

[91] Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 9.12.3.

[92] Paul, *Digest*, 11.4.4.

[93] Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares*, 13.77.3. Similarly, Diodorus reports that he asked friends to help him recover his runaway slaves, see Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.10.1–2.

[94] Callistratus, *Digest*, 48.15.6.1; *Codex Justinianeus*, 6.1.4.

CE), for example, resulted in a labour deficit many landowners would have been eager to fill.[95] During the later empire, the ranks of the *coloni* — serf-like agricultural workers — may have also contained large numbers of runaways, owing to the ease with which fugitives could blend in among the rural poor.[96] Cases of absconding are similarly reported from the imperial weaving factories, well-known for their application of penal labour.[97] Quite possibly, escapees from the *gynaecea* and *linyphia* would have sought refuge among those aristocratic households engaged in commercial textile production, where their skills could be easily repurposed.[98] Even the imperial household was not immune to infiltration, with a number of court servants being periodically exposed as runaways.[99] Heinz Bellen speculates whether some slaves would have been persuaded to flee on the promise of employment as "Schwarzarbeitern."[100] The temptation to admit runaways would have been markedly pressing for estate managers suffering labour shortages, or simply desiring the acquisition of an extra worker.

For many slaves, however, the chance of achieving lasting freedom was too remote a prospect. Instead, fugitives might seek transference to a new *dominus*, one who was more disposed to their favourable treatment. Lawmakers acted to discourage the practice of sheltering runaways, punishing anyone who did so with steep fines or torture.[101] Some *servi* appear to have fled to a friend of their master's, in the hope of enlisting themselves in his service.[102] Whether a householder would be willing to espouse a fugitive seemingly depended, in large part, on the social status of his former owner. Augustine (354–430 CE) makes clear slaves absconding from less influential masters were better positioned to find alternate employment.[103] Conversely, fugitives belonging to powerful magnates had little prospect of finding refuge in another *familia*.

Despite the odds, a number of *servi fugitivi* clearly took up residence with a new master or mistress. From the writings of John Chrysostom, we hear of a widower who had in her service a runaway, partnered with one of her slave women.[104] By all accounts, the slave was able to build a new life for himself, regardless of his status as a wanted fugitive. Others were not so fortunate. Opportunistic slaveholders might have taken advantage of the vulnerability of fugitives, promising them shelter while in reality scheming to sell them on the black market.[105] In all likelihood, runaways fetched lower prices and were hence reserved for the most dangerous and degrading work.[106] The miller in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* might well have employed fugitives on account of his barbaric handling

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[95] Even the resettlement of barbarian farmers on Roman soil, following the Marcomannic Wars (166–180 CE), would have failed to make up for the labour shortages created by the plague. See Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich*, 135.

[96] Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich*, 139.

[97] *Codex Justinianeus*, 11.7.6.

[98] For slave weavers employed in wealthy households, see Varro, *De re rustica*, 1.2.21; Ammianus Marcellinus, 14.6.17.

[99] *Codex Justinianeus*, 12.5.4.4; *Historia Augusta*, "Pertinax," 8.8.

[100] Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich*, 5.

[101] *Codex Justinianeus*, 6.1.4, 6.1.6, 11.53.1.

[102] John Chrystsom, *Adversus Judaeos*, 8.6.

[103] Augustine, *Psalms*, 139.7.

[104] John Chrysostom, *In epistulam I ad Thessalonicenses homiliae*, 11.3.

[105] The jurists attempted to stem the practice of selling fugitives, see *Codex Justinianeus*, 9.20.6.

[106] Vendors were obliged to lists the defects of slaves, including past escape attempts. See Aulius Gallius, *Noctes Atticae*, 4.2.1; Cicero, *De Officiis*, 3.16; Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.1.1. Logically, *servi* sold as defective would have been comparatively cheap.

and blatant indifference to slave life.[107] Even slave-catchers, hired to pursue *servi fugitivi*, apparently targeted runaways in order to illicitly sell them, their body price likely eclipsing the value of recapture fees.[108]

There were, however, avenues by which runaway slaves might legally negotiate their condition. Throughout the ancient Mediterranean, fugitives who had absconded to temples or alters were granted asylum, provided they could demonstrate their master's wrongdoing.[109] From across the Greek peninsular, various inscriptions attest to the habit of temples sheltering runaways. One Andanian stone, dating from the first century BCE, pronounced fugitives who had fled to the sanctuary of Demeter were to be afforded respite.[110] On the island of Sicily the alter of Palici served a similar function, accommodating bonded men and women who had escaped habitually callous masters.[111] Female slaves looking to obtain asylum in temple precincts are depicted with unusual frequency. The second-century CE Greek romance Λευκίππη και Κλειτοφών (*Leucippe and Clitophon*), narrates the title character's abscondence to the temple of Artemis after she had been mistreated by her owner's husband.[112]

Runaways hiding in temple grounds were periodically brought before the magistrates, who decided whether to return them to their owner or demand their transference or manumission.[113] Judging from Emperor Tiberius's (r. 14–37 CE) efforts to curb the asylum rights of runaways, temples must have regularly safeguarded *servi fugitivi*.[114] As well as religious sites, slaves could seek harbourage beneath statues of the emperor.[115] City magistrates were obligated to hear the grievances of runaways sheltering at plinths, mandating the sale of any bonded person they considered inhumanly treated.[116]

By the late fourth century CE, the Church had likewise been incorporated into the civil apparatus dealing with fugitives. Under canon law, bishops and clerics were required to restore runaways who had sought refuge in churches or monasteries.[117] Clergymen were, nonetheless, expected to talk down the master's anger before handing over escapees.[118] Bellen, reflecting on the differences between temple and church asylum laws, concludes the Christian era witnessed a significant downgrade in the protection of slaves.[119] In real terms, the latter adhered to strict legal conventions,

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[107] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 9.12. Bellen favours the *servi fugitivi* hypothesis, arguing the miller's atrocious management of his slaves resulted from their cheap purchase cost. See *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich*, 27–29. M. J. Hidalgo de la Vega, however, discerns no reason why all slaves might not have been treated in this manner. See "The Flight of Slaves and Bands of *latrones* in Apuleius," in *Fear of Slaves, Fear of Enslavement in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Anastasia Serghidou (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007), 331.

[108] *Codex Theodosianus*, 10.12.1. On the corrupt practices of slave-catchers, see David Daube, "Slave-Catching," *Juridical Review* 64 (1952), 12–28.

[109] Euripides, *Supplices*, 267; Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 1094.

[110] *IG* 5.1.1390. For a full translation, see Thomas E. J. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Routledge, 1989), 188.

[111] Diodorus Siculus, 11.89.7.

[112] Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 7.13.2.

[113] Aristophanes, *Horae*, fragment 567.

[114] Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.60.1.

[115] Ulpian, *Digest*, 1.12.1.1.

[116] *Institutiones Justiniani*, 1.8.2.

[117] Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41.1.

[118] Basil of Caesarea, *Asketikon*, 11.

[119] Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im Romischen Kaiserreich*, 75.

while the former amounted to little more than casual mediation. Regardless, both protocols were likely designed to prevent fugitives from becoming a longer-term nuisance. Places of asylum allowed for dialogue between master and slave, circumnavigating the need for more costly pursuit strategies.

Runaways who failed to find alternate livelihoods were forced into a life of crime. Fugitive slaves were often associated with criminal activity, particularly theft and banditry.[120] Alongside impoverished peasants and deserters from the Roman army, runaways populated the ranks of robber gangs.[121] The notorious outlaw Bulla Felix admonished slaveholders to adequately provide for their *servi*, else they generate fresh recruits for his coterie.[122] More explicitly, Diodorus Siculus records the story of a father and son who, on an ill-fated hunting expedition, came across an encampment of fugitive slave brigands.[123] The absence of any standing police force ensured the backcountry between towns and cities was often patrolled by *latrones*.[124] Even in Italy, Juvenal (fl. late first–early second century CE) complained that marshlands and woodlands were inhabited by highwaymen and robbers.[125] To survive, bandits looted roving merchants, plundered villas, ransacked temples, and raided townhouses, making off with any valuables.[126] Some gangs of fugitive slaves swelled to such numbers as to form independent communities, comparable to the maroon societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americas.[127] To take but one well-known example, the slave Drimakos led an uprising against the landowners of Chios, escaping with several hundred fellow bondsmen to the island's mountainous interior.[128] After numerous failed attempts to subjugate the slave commune, the island's local magnates brokered a peace treaty with Drimakos, granting his maroon society quasi-independence.[129] While life outside the law was dangerous, banditry offered runaways a means of survival, not to mention community, where the shared experience of societal alienation surely fostered bonds of kinship.[130]

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120 For the casual association between runaways and theft, see John Chrystom, *In epistulam ad Colossenses homiliae*, 7.3; *In epistulam ad Romanos homiliae*, 17.2; *Ad Theodorum lapsum*, 18.

121 The outlaws described in Apuleius's novel cite poverty as their reason for turning to brigandage, see *Metamorphoses*, 4.23. Among the most famous bandits was Tacfarinas, who deserted the Roman auxiliary corps to lead a troop of vagrants, plundering the North African countryside. See Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.52, 3.20, 3.73; Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 2.3. For the interconnection between Tacfarinas and banditry, see Thomas Grünewald, *Bandits in the Roman Empire: Myth and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2004), 48–53. Legally speaking, military deserters were treated the same as runaway slaves, see Arrius Menander, *Digest*, 49.16.4.14.

122 Cassius Dio, 77.10.5.

123 Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.11.

124 As Brunt observes, "Wherever slavery is found, there are always runaways and in the unpoliced purlieus of Rome they could easily lurk." See "The Roman Mob," 23.

125 Juvenal, *Satires*, 3.306. In like fashion, the prefect of Rome, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (340–402 CE), wrote that he seldom went beyond the city walls owing to the roads being infested with bandits, see *Epistulae*, 2.22. See also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 8.17.

126 In order of appearance, Cassius Dio, 77.10.3; Callistratus, *Digest*, 29.5.2; *CIL* 8.15881; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3.28.

127 For comparison between Roman and American maroon societies, see Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*, 3–6, 40–41.

128 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 265d.

129 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 266f. In return for independence, Drimakos agreed to steal only what he needed from the landowning elite. Equally, any fugitive slave seeking to join his maroon, without good reason, would be sent back to their master.

130 On the camaraderie among bandits, see de la Vega, "The Flight of Slaves and Bands of *latrones* in Apuleius," 334–335.

To conclude, we must again reflect on why so few *ancillae* feature in the extant source material. With the exception of the wet nurse Prima, attempting to bolster her chances of freedom by kidnapping her master's child, we find no escape strategies unique to women. Lacking evidence to the contrary, however, I see little reason to question whether female slaves did not employ similar tactics to their male peers. For instance, enslaved women are known to have sought asylum in temples and beneath statues, where they could petition for a new master or renegotiate their terms of service. Nevertheless, the gendered nature of Roman labour may have, in some ways, restricted the opportunities available to absconding female slaves. The few professions open to *servi fugitivi* — almost exclusively in the agricultural sector — were predominantly staffed by men. Congruently, we find no evidence of female bandits in the Roman world, let alone enslaved women who supported themselves through brigandage. Households geared towards textile manufacture potentially risked employing runaway *ancillae*, though no source attests as much. On the whole, it appears female slaves were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to evading capture, principally as a result of their reduced capacity to find alternate employment. Such circumstances conceivably limited the overall number of unfree women who absconded which, in turn, may account for the evidential shortfall.

3. Self-Killing

Committing suicide can be understood, however paradoxically, as both an act of choiceless desperation and extreme articulation of personal sovereignty.[131] While the agency of suicide victims has been construed differently, there is some consensus regarding self-killing as a kind of liberation.[132] Suicide, in the context of human bondage, might then be considered a form of resistance, fatally terminating the dependency relationship between master and slave.[133]

Self-killing in the Roman world was by no means unusual. Emperors and aristocrats are well known to have committed suicide when faced with declining fortunes or political disgrace.[134] More generally, Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) recommended the old ingest poisons or deliberately overdose

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[131] Definitions of suicide vary, though most stress the agency of the victim in killing themselves. The grandfather of suicide studies, Émile Durkheim, wrote "the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result." See *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. Joseph Swain (1951 repr., New York: The Free Press, 2010), 44. More recently, Diego De Leo *et al*. have noted "Suicide is an act with a fatal outcome which the deceased, knowing or expecting a potentially fatal outcome, has initiated and carried out with the purpose of bringing about wanted changes." See "Definitions of Suicidal Behaviour," *Crisis* 27, no. 1 (2004), 12. For a brief overview of the issue of intent within clinical descriptions of suicide, see Karl Andriessen, "On Intention in the Definition of Suicide," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 36, no. 5 (2006), 533–538. Elsewhere, in a study of the nomenclature of self-killing, Morton M. Silverman *et al*. have devised a scheme distinguishing between the presence and absence of suicidal intent. See "Rebuilding the Tower of Babel: A Revised Nomenclature for the Study of Suicide and Suicidal Behaviors," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 37, no. 3 (2007), 268.

[132] Katrina Jaworski has questioned the interrelation between freedom and suicide in light of Foucault's views on death and power, concluding liberation is ultimately a matter of perspective. See "Suicide, Agency and the Limits of Power," in *Suicide and Agency: Anthropological Perspectives on Self-destruction, Personhood, and Power*, ed. Ludek Broz and Daniel Münster (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 192–194.

[133] Bradley names suicide among the "less common acts" of resistance available to slaves. See *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*, 32.

[134] To cite but a few examples, Aurelius Victor, *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 39.7; Cassius Dio, 68.12.4; Cicero, *Philippicae*, 2.12; Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 30.5; Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Nero" 49; Tacitus, *Historiae*, 2.49; Velleius Paterculus, 2.6.6, 70.5, 87.2.

on opium rather than succumb to senility.[135] The younger Seneca likewise conceded myriad sufferings might necessitate euthanasia.[136] Suicide among slaves is, however, less bountifully evidenced. No record of servile self-killing dates from before the Hellenistic period, while the Republican and imperial epochs yield only a smattering of examples.[137] Demonstrably, of the 960 cases of successful and attempted suicide, recorded in Anton van Hooff's survey of self-killing in the ancient world, I found approximately 20 instances concerning slaves.[138] Although a handful of literary, epigraphic, and papyrological attestations may have escaped my (and van Hooff's) notice, the prevailing conclusion seems clear: self-killing among bondspeople was seldom recorded.

The issue of representation is equally problematic. When slave suicide is documented, it primarily acts to undergird the moralising agenda of the Roman elite, celebrating the fidelity of those *servi* who accompanied their master in death or, better yet, sacrificed themselves so he might live.[139] Reconstructing the psychological motivations behind servile self-killing is consequently difficult, while drawing conclusions on the basis of gender edges impossibility. Nevertheless, the fact that enslaved persons committed suicide cannot be ignored and, in my view, must be understood as a form of eleventh-hour agency if not outright resistance.

In many respects, those factors influencing a slave's decision to commit suicide mirror the escape motives hitherto discussed. Cruel treatment, along with the drudgery of daily life, ranked among the most common justifications for self-killing.[140] Slaves unable to put up with constant beatings and whippings were, for example, often driven to suicide.[141] Likewise, rampant sexual abuse pushed some *servi* to the brink. Nero's (r. 54–68 CE) slave Sporus, having been publicly raped in a re-staging of the story of Proserpine and Pluto, avoided further humiliation by taking his own life.[142] For others, fear of punishment was impetus enough to attempt suicide. Anxious of reprisal, one Greek maidservant, after mistakenly returning a depository fee, sought to procure enough rope to hang herself.[143] Likewise, in Apuleius's novel, a cook contemplates the noose after mislaying a prized cut of meat reserved for his master's dinner table.[144] Runaway slaves facing capture were equally prone to suicide. Ulpian reasoned some *servi fugitivi* might throw themselves into the Tiber to avoid punishment.[145] Anticipating capture, the runaway Callistus (see above) plunged overboard into the Ostian harbour, attempting to drown himself.[146] In like fashion, a slave who had murdered his master jumped into the river Main, preferring a watery grave to the executioner's axe.[147]

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[135] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 20.197–199.

[136] Seneca, *De Ira*, 3.16.3–4.

[137] Anton J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-killing in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 18.

[138] This figure might be rounded up or down depending on whether individuals of probable slave status are included. For the lower classes as a whole, van Hooff found only 87 examples of self-killing. See *From Autothanasia to Suicide*, 238.

[139] For example, see Appian, *Bella Civilia*, 4.26; Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, 3.23.5; Tacitus, *Historiae*, 4.50.

[140] Lenski, "Violence and the Roman Slave," 292.

[141] Paul, *Digest*, 21.1.43.4; Seneca, *De Ira*, 3.4.4. Compare with Staphyla, who jokes her master's inhumane treatment will eventually result in her suicide, see Plautus, *Aulularia*, 50.

[142] Cassius Dio, 65.10.1.

[143] Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 7.3, ext. 5.

[144] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 8.31. Uniformly, a slave steward was beset with anxiety after discovering an error in his master's bookkeeping, see Galen, *De praecognitione*, 6.11–13.

[145] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.17.6.

[146] Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, 9.12.3–4.

[147] *CIL* 13.7070.

Furthermore, rebelling slaves ransacking Sicily during the early first century BCE, committed mass suicide when encircled by the Roman army.[148] A handful of slaves appear to have killed themselves out of reverence for their former master or mistress. Cleopatra's (r. 51–30 BCE) two handmaidens, Charmion and Iras, died together with their queen.[149] Similarly, the freedwoman Epicharis remained loyal to her master even after he was exposed in a plot to overthrow Nero, gibbetting herself in her jail cell.[150]

Self-killing among prisoners of war and *servi novicii* is particularly well-attested. One Spanish captive slit open his sister's throat before starving himself to death, considering unfreedom too great an indignity.[151] At times, whole groups of prisoners are known to have accomplished collective euthanasia. A cohort of Teuton brides, subjugated by the Roman general Marius (d. 86 BCE) in the late second century BCE, exchanged the yoke of slavery for the noose.[152] Likewise, towards the end of the fourth century CE, some twenty-nine Saxon war captives committed suicide en masse, strangling each other one by one as a way of escaping condemnation to the arena.[153] Seneca catalogues the gruesome deaths of several slave gladiators. One captive fighter fell on his own spear, another choked himself by forcing a toilet sponge down his throat, while a further combatant thrust his head into the spokes of a moving chariot, thereby breaking his neck.[154] Moreover, a number of recently enslaved domestics appear to have objected to the menial work they were suddenly expected to perform. One Spartan captive, sold to King Antigonus (r. 306–301 BCE), dashed his brains out on a stone floor after declining to fetch a chamber pot.[155] Analogously, a Spartan δούλη (female slave) refused to perform any task unbecoming of a free woman and, when bidden to do so regardless, killed herself.[156] Evidently, for many war captives, death was preferable to the degradation of slavery.

Suicide motives unique to bondswomen are virtually undetectable, though might be guessed at through widening the evidential net. Freeborn rape victims, in particular, are known to have been driven to self-immolation out of shame or filial duty.[157] Some *puellae* acted preemptively, the teenage newlywed Domitilla, for instance, committed suicide in order to escape molestation at the hands of Gothic invaders.[158] Comparably, a Greek woman by the name of Hippo, threw herself off a clifftop to avoid being captured and raped by enemy soldiers.[159] At the other extreme, jilted brides

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148 Diodorus Siculus, 36.3.6. We might also highlight the story of Coma, brother of Cleon, leader of the Sicilian slave revolt. When questioned by the authorities in regard to the fugitive's strength of arms, Coma opted to suffocate himself rather than betray his comrades. See Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 9.12, ext. 1.

149 Plutarch, *Lives*, "Antony" 85.

150 Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.57.2.

151 Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.4.1.

152 Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 6.1, ext. 3.

153 Symmachus, *Epistulae*, 2.46.

154 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 70.20, 23, 26.

155 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 234C; Seneca, *Epistulae*, 77.15.

156 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 242D.

157 Most famously Lucretia, see Cassius Dio, 2.19; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 4.67; Livy, 1.58. Further examples can be found in Livy, 3.48; Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, 5.24.3. Group suicide resulting from the loss of chastity is also attested, see Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 4.4.2

158 W. D. Lebek, "Das Grabepigramm auf Domitilia (Epigraphica Anatolica 4, 1984, 61f.)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigaphik* 59 (1985), 7–8.

159 Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 6.1, ext. 1. Near identically, one Greek epigram preserves the story of three Miletian women who killed themselves rather than be raped by Gaulish marauders. See *Anthologia Palatina*, 7.492.

and spurned lovers threatened death if not reconciled with their sweethearts.[160] More unusually, the poet Agathias Scholasticus (ca. 530–594 CE) seems to imply that young Greek girls, cloistered away indoors, might fall prey to depression or suicidal thoughts.[161] While the free status of such women prevents direct comparison, it is not unimaginable *ancillae* would have been provoked to self-killing because of sexual abuse, heartbreak, or loneliness.

The manner of death elected by slaves must have largely come down to circumstance. Few masters would have willingly allowed their *servi* to die, equating suicide with the destruction of property. As such, enslaved persons looking to end their lives were often forced to do so clandestinely. While not a slave, Lucius the ass sought an unsupervised moment in which to furtively kill himself.[162] Approximately, Seneca writes of slaves who deceived their guards into allowing them a few minutes of privacy, time enough to commit suicide.[163] The aforementioned gladiator who asphyxiated himself with a toilet sponge, for example, did so while concealed in a bathroom cubicle. An inscription erected in the city of Puteoli listed four categories of people who were to be removed from the city within hours of their death, including slaves who had hung (*suspendiosum*) themselves.[164] In addition to hanging, the jurists figured jumping from heights and drinking lethal potions among the *modi moriendi* favoured by slaves.[165] All three means of self-killing find corroboration in the wider literary sources.[166]

Hanging, however, appears to have been particularly prevalent among women. One gynaecological tractate, belonging to the Hippocratic corpus, goes so far as to say women were more prone to hang themselves than men.[167] Though the reliability of Hippocrates's (ca. 460–370 BCE) comments might be questioned, female suicide by hanging is frequently remarked upon. In addition to the examples discussed above, Diogenes Laertius (fl. third century CE) describes a girl strung up on an olive tree, a sight perhaps not uncommon to ancient townsfolk.[168] In like manner, the elderly servant responsible for maintaining the bandit hideout in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, is found swinging from a cypress branch.[169] Finally, Plutarch (ca. 46–119 CE) relates the mysterious mass suicide of numerous Miletus girls, all of whom embraced the noose.[170]

Before closing, we shall briefly examine the phenomenon of child killing. While infanticide, in the form of exposure, has attracted significant debate, the murder of young children by their enslaved

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160 Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, 1240–1241.
161 *Anthologia Palatina*, 5.297.
162 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 7.27, 10.29.
163 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 70.25.
164 *AE* 1971, 88.
165 Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.23.3.
166 The Christian chronicler Sulpicius Severus (363–425 CE) relates the story of a slave who hung himself, see *Vita Martini*, 8. At least one slave nurse considered jumping to her death, see Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 356. Leaping from bridges and other high places is further attested by Juvenal, see *Satires* 6.28–32. For poisoning, see Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 121–124; Plutarch, *Lives*, "Antony" 85.
167 Helen King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (London: Routledge, 1993), 113. Hanging as a mode of female death might also be deduced from Homer, where Odysseus orders twelve licentious slave women to the gallows, see *Odyssey*, 22.460–464.
168 Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, "Diogenes" 52. For trees as a site of hanging more generally, see Plutarch, *Lives*, "Antony" 70.
169 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 6.30.
170 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 249B–C.

mothers remains comparatively overlooked. Female war captives were especially disposed to infant killing. In his account of Caracalla's (r. 198–217 CE) wars against the Alemanni, Cassius Dio (ca. 155–235 CE) provides a graphic example of puericide.

> Τούτων γυναῖκες ἁλοῦσαι ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ἐρωτήσαντος αὐτὰς τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου πότερον πραθῆναι ἢ φονευθῆναι βούλονται, τοῦθ᾽ εἵλοντο· ἔπειτ᾽ ἀπεμποληθεῖσαι πᾶσαι μὲν ἑαυτάς, εἰσὶ δ᾽ αἳ καὶ τὰ τεκνα ἀπέκτειναν.
>
> Some of their women who were captured by the Romans, upon being asked by Antoninus (i.e. Caracalla) whether they wished to be sold or slain, chose the latter fate; then, upon being sold, they all killed themselves and some slew their children as well.[171]

Manifestly, the female prisoners described by Dio were unwilling to endure servitude and, before taking their own lives, euthanised their offspring. That the captive women first opted to be sold (πραθῆναι), before rescinding their decision, appears consequential. Perhaps the encroaching reality of slavery took some time to accept, or the act of killing (ἀπέκτειναν) was deliberately postponed till the last feasible moment. Strabo (63 BCE–23 CE) records an equivalent case during the Augustan-waged Cantabrian wars (29–19 BCE), where tribeswomen killed their children to prevent their impending enslavement.[172] An epigram penned by the poet Antipater (fl. late second century BCE) narrates another instance of desperate infanticide, centred on a mother's elimination of her daughter as the Roman army sacked Corinth (146 BCE).[173]

But what of women already living as slaves? Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–115 CE), in a rhetorical exercise, furnishes a scrap of evidence for the intentional killing of neonates. The excerpt not only recognises the fact *ancillae* might murder their newborns but cites the trials of childrearing, in addition to the hardships of slavery, as their primary reason for doing so.[174] Some masters, in the Greek provinces at least, may have even sanctioned infanticide. A manumission inscription from the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi records that the slave woman Dioklea was permitted to kill any child born to her during παραμονή.[175] As has been previously identified, the clause was likely intended to prohibit Dioklea from selling her children in order to acquire the money necessary for purchasing her freedom.[176] Regardless, the stone further hints at the prevalence of child killing within slave communities. On reflection, the extant source material indicates that bondswomen extirpated their children in the belief death was preferable to lifelong enslavement. Consequently, we might understand slave infanticide not solely in terms of murder, but as a kind of surrogate euthanasia, where liberation from suffering took precedence over the pain of extinguishing young lives.

For the enslaved self-killing represented something of a final escape, a termination strategy when all other lines of attack proved unworkable. Motives for suicide varied, though many *servi* must have ended their lives in response to appalling treatment. The means of death pursued by slaves often came down to circumstance, with hanging being particularly well-attested among women. The agentic power of slaves in deciding whether to immolate themselves need not be overstated, evidenced well enough by the sources alone. We find something approaching gender-specific

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171 Cassius Dio, 78.14.2.
172 Strabo, 3.4.17.
173 *Anthologia Palatina*, 7.493.
174 Dio Chrysostom, 15.8.
175 *GDI* 2171.
176 Tucker, "Women in the Manumission Inscriptions at Delphi," 235.

suicide in the slaying of infants by their enslaved mothers. While not self-killing in the strict sense, infanticide, in the context of Roman slavery, amounted to a form of euthanasia. The agency of bonded women in ending their own life and the lives of their children, however tragic, can be read as a gesture of defiance.

4. Murder

The famed maxim, you have "as many enemies as you have slaves" (*totidem hostes esse quot servos*), encapsulates a fundamental anxiety at the heart of ancient slavery.[177] Masters living under the same roof as their *servi* were forever vulnerable to outbursts of violence. As repeatedly stressed, enslaved persons had good reason for harbouring animosity towards their owner and his family. Quite plausibly, the killing of *domini* by bonded men and women represents the apex of slave resistance. No undertaking came with greater risks, yet no action expressed more viscerally servile opposition to masterly authority. As with suicide, the evidence for murder is sporadic, though the extant sources offer enough details to attempt commensurate analysis. Gendering the material, as ever, proves challenging, though a few tentative conclusions might be drawn regardless.

Lawmakers were keenly aware of the danger posed by slaves, enacting draconian legislation aimed at mitigating the threat of servile violence. The *Senatus consultum Silanianum*, ratified by Augustus in 10 CE, laid out regulations designed to protect masters. The law worked on the assumption that no householder was safe, legally obliging *servi* to protect their *dominus* at all costs.[178] Even *ancillae* were expected to ward off attackers, either by physically intervening or shouting and wailing.[179] Absurdly, slaves who had interposed on their master's behalf might also be punished in case of fraudulence.[180] Were a master to be killed, all the adult slaves belonging to his household underwent interrogation and torture.[181] As Keith Bradley identifies, only bodily mutilation was thought to bypass the innate criminality of *servi*, revealing their true intentions.[182] The guilty parties were then executed, along with any slaves considered to have helped facilitate — however passively — their master's death. In extreme instances, not only the perpetrators but the entire *familia* were put to the sword, as was the case following Lucius Pedanius Secundus's (d. 61 CE) murder, discussed shortly. Such measures were ultimately intended as a deterrent, encouraging loyalty while inspiring terror in the heart of any *servus* or *ancilla* who dared contemplate murder.[183] Nonetheless, the level of

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[177] Seneca, *Epistulae*, 47.5. This proverb is often mistakenly attributed to the poet Publilius Syrus, who penned a somewhat similar aphorism: "A master who fears his slaves is lower than a slave" (*minus est quam servus dominus qui servos timet*). See *Sententiae*, 363.

[178] Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.

[179] Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.28.

[180] Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.34.

[181] Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.25. Torture was customarily applied in all cases concerning slaves, see Ulpian, *Digest*, 48.18.1. As a point of comparison, Alan Watson underscores the fact no such clause existed in any colonial European or American legal code. See "Seventeenth-Century Jurists, Roman Law, and the Law of Slavery," *Kent Law Review* 68 (1993), 1345.

[182] Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 167. See also J. Albert Harrill, "The Domestic Enemy: A Moral Polarity of Household Slaves in Early Christian Apologies and Martyrdom," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 248.

[183] Incentives were also deployed. Slaves who exposed a plot to kill their master were rewarded with freedom, see Paul, *Digest*, 38.2.4; Marcian, *Digest*, 40.8.5.

juristic scrutiny appending the *Senatus consultum Silanianum*, is surely evocative of the fact slaves did, on occasion, commit homicide.[184]

The reasons why slaves wished to murder their master are easily guessed at: fear of punishment, intolerable treatment, and sexual jealousy being all well affirmed. Augustine writes of enslaved persons who entertained thoughts of homicide in trepidation of violence.[185] Equally, murder might be undertaken in revenge for years of unjust beatings or floggings.[186] For those *servi* continually abused by their master, butchery was surely something of a dark fantasy, even if never brought to fruition.[187] In general, homicide was effectuated by domestic slaves, at least judging from Appian's (ca. 95–165) comments, denoting that householders viewed their closest attendants as would-be assassins.[188] This comes as little surprise, especially when considering the close proximity between master and menial, affording numerous opportunities for violent resistance.

How frequently slave owners were killed by their dependents is impossible to ascertain, though a variety of sources underscore the reality of homicide. In addition to the maxim quoted above, Seneca wrote of the danger posed by disaffected *servi*.[189] The law codes, along with a fifth-century CE horoscope manual, similarly allude to *domini* cut down by their slaves.[190] The *Digest* asserts masters were stabbed, suffocated, or even bludgeoned to death.[191] Covert methods of assassination were also available. An inscription from the central Italian town of Tuder records the discovery of a public slave's attempt to dispose of his superiors by way of black magic.[192] As Campbell Bonner pointed out some seventy years ago, nothing prevented slaves from turning to the occult to resolve domestic quarrels.[193]

Others may have tactfully awaited the opportune moment for dispatching their master. The Roman knight Robustus, for instance, vanished along with his slave outriders while journeying through the Italian countryside.[194] Pliny leaves the question of Robustus's disappearance open to conjecture, though there remains a distinct possibility he was murdered. Even if Robustus had perished by some other means, the law held enslaved persons liable for the death of their master if he expired on the road, spurring many *servi* to abscond.[195] Alternatively, slaves might have sought vengeance against their master's wife and children. Though well beyond our time period, the Byzantine monk John Moschus (ca. 550–619 CE) relates the story of an Alexandrian merchant who, after leaving his

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184 Richard Gamauf, "Cum aliter nulla domus tuta esse possit," in *Fear of Slaves, Fear of Enslavement in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Anastasia Serghidou (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007), 149.

185 Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 1.4.9.

186 Libanius, *Progymnasmata*, 9.7.9.

187 Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, 255.

188 Appian, *Bella Civilia*, 4.14. See also Livy 21.41.10, who equates soldierly rage with the indignation a *dominus* might feel if his slave used weapons against him.

189 Seneca, *Epistulae*, 4.8.

190 *Codex Justinianus*, 6.35.3; Hephaestion, *Apotelesmatica*, 2.23. Pliny might also refer to a freedman killed by his slaves, see *Epistulae*, 8.14.12.

191 Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.17.

192 *CIL* 11.4639. However, as Duncan E. Macrae has demonstrated, the inscription may in fact be rhetorical, aimed at propagating a particular version of events among the local community. See "The Freedman's Story: an Accusation of Witchcraft in the Social World of Early Imperial Roman Italy (*CIL* 11.4639 = *ILS* 3001)," *Journal of Roman Studies* 108 (2018), 56.

193 Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets*, 103.

194 Pliny, *Epistulae*, 6.25.1

195 Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.31; Gamauf, "Cum aliter nulla domus tuta esse possit," 153.

wife and child alone with a male slave, returned to find the δούλος had attempted to murder his family.[196]

It is commonly assumed male slaves were the more likely group to mount armed resistance. While the sources cited above document murder at the hands of enslaved men, *ancillae* are also known to have attempted homicide. All importantly, the *Senatus consultum Silanianum* made no distinction between male and female slaves, implying that, from the jurists' point of view, either gender was capable of violence.[197] Perhaps the most explicit example dates from the First Servile War (135–132 BCE), led by the slave magician Eunus. The revolt's origins can be traced back to the household of Damophilus, a local nobleman who, along with his wife Megallis, were renowned for their abject cruelty.[198] Tiring of their persecution, Damophilus and Megallis's dependents rose up in revolt, igniting a powder keg of servile animosity in the Sicilian town of Enna. Having established control over the city, the rebels executed Damophilus and handed Megallis over to her former *ancillae*, who tortured their mistress before throwing her over a precipice.[199] The years of maltreatment endured by Megallis's handmaids likely explain the brutality of their retribution.

Homicide committed by bondswomen might also be suspected in cases where the gender of the alleged killer was ambiguous. Tacitus's (ca. 56–120 CE) account of the death of the *praefectus urbi*, Lucius Pedanius Secundus, is one such example.[200] Found dead in 61 CE, Pedanius was thought to have been assassinated by one of his household *servi*. The motives given for the senator's murder are particularly intriguing. On the one hand, it was believed Pedanius was killed after backtracking on his promise to manumit the accused. A second possibility concerned the Prefects's lust for a young catamite, whose slave lover, Tacitus speculated, murdered his master out of jealousy. In accordance with the *Senatus consultum*, the entirety of Pedanius's four hundred domestic slaves were crucified, their cross-hung bodies serving as a warning to prospective murderers.[201] While the identity of the culprit was never exposed, Pedanius's killer was unequivocally assumed to be male. Here I follow de Haas, who has rightfully questioned Tacitus's logic, arguing the unidentified murderer could have just as easily been female.[202]

A parallel argument might be leveraged for the killing of the senator Larcius Macedo (fl. early second century CE), recorded in a letter of Pliny's writing.[203] By all accounts, Larcius was viciously clobbered by a group of slaves while taking a bath with his attendant concubines. Despite surviving the initial onslaught, Larcius died several days later, though not before overseeing the punishment of those responsible. As with Pedanius's murder, the sex of the perpetrators is largely unclear, Pliny only specifying the involvement of various slaves. Notorious for his callousness, there is little reason to doubt that *ancillae* did not assist their male comrades in beating Larcius to death.

One further case unmistakably records the involvement of a female slave in the murder of her captor. Remarkably, we can draw on four separate accounts to help clarify the events in question, though I will principally rely on the descriptions furnished by Polybius (ca. 200–118 BCE) and

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196 John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, 75.
197 Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.12.
198 Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.10.
199 Diodorus Siculus, 34/35.15–16.
200 Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.42.
201 Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.43–45.
202 de Haas, "Female Slave Resistance in the Roman Empire," 248.
203 Pliny, *Epistulae*, 3.14.1–5.

Livy (59 BCE–17 CE).[204] The Galatian War (189 BCE), fought between the Roman Republic and the emigre Gauls of Asia Minor, resulted in thousands of spear-won captives. Among the multitude of prisoners taken after the battle of Mount Olympus was Chiomara, wife of the Tectosages chieftain, Ortiago.[205] Placed under the guard of a lecherous centurion, it was not long before Chiomara's extraordinary beauty inflamed her keeper's passions and, taking advantage of her enslaved status, he proceeded to rape her. In an attempt to mitigate the humiliation of defilement, the centurion negotiated Chiomara's release, but not without first demanding her family pay one talent of gold in compensation. A location and time were selected for the handover and, the following night, at a bend in the river beyond the sentry posts, the soldier and Chiomara set out to meet her relatives.

Upon reaching the rendezvous point, Chiomara instructed her kinsmen, "in her own language" (*lingua sua*), to draw their swords and strike down the centurion, by now preoccupied with weighing out his gold. Chiomara then, calling for a blade, hacked off her abuser's head, wrapping it in her dress before escaping back to her husband's camp. In front of Ortiago, Chiomara produced the gory trophy, explaining how she had avenged herself against the centurion's deed of molestation. The foregoing anecdote represents a unique moment in the historical archive, where slave resistance is not only gauged justifiable, but earnestly revered. While Chiomara did not personally inflict the fatal blow, she was clearly the architect behind the centurion's demise, playing upon his greed and inflated sense of impregnability. Likewise, we are left in little doubt as to Chiomara's motives, with the soldier's death embodying the restoration of her sexual fidelity and personal autonomy.

A final mention is owed to toxicants. Roman jurisprudence makes clear poisoning was one means by which slaves could dispose of their master.[206] Extensive use of official tasters (*praegustavi*) bespeaks the general fear of poisoning among the elite.[207] Deadly draughts came with obvious advantages, least of all secrecy. For *ancillae*, the use of poisons may have also offset differences in physical strength, as well as relinquishing the need for weaponry. Though no instances of slave women murdering their master by way of lethal decoctions are known to me, women's skill as poisoners is well evidenced. Lucusta (d. 69 CE), popularly dubbed Rome's first serial killer, ranks among the most famous. A scholiastic comment on a line of Juvenal's writing maintains Lucusta originated from Gaul.[208] Whether an immigrant or brought to Rome as a war captive, Lucusta found employment as a poison specialist in the court of Agrippina the Younger (15–59 CE), where she was requested to concoct a draught appropriate for killing Emperor Claudius (r. 41–54 CE).[209] Nero

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[204] Rarely are stories involving enslaved persons so bountifully preserved, see Florus, *Epitome*, 1.27; Livy, 38.24; Polybius, 21.38; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium*, 6.1, ext. 2. The reports of Polybius and Livy are not only the most extensive, but closest in time to the events described.

[205] It should be noted that only Polybius records Chiomara's (Χιομάραν) name, with Livy simply referring to her wifey status and physical attractiveness.

[206] Ulpian, *Digest*, 29.5.1.18–19.

[207] By the reign of Nero, the number of official tasters in the service of wealthy households was enough to justify the founding of their own burial club. See H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, "Gemeen goed: Over de rol van het vergif tijdens Nero's principaat," *Lampas* 25 (1992), 36.

[208] Juvenal, *Satires*, 1.71. The scholia of the so-called *Pithoeanus* manuscript — named after its sixteenth-century owner Pierre Pitho — attributes Lucusta to Gaulish beginnings. Nineteenth-century biographical dictionaries tend to reproduce this opinion, e.g. Hermann Dessau, *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec I, II, III* (Berlin: Reimer, 1897), 306. For an overview of the extant Juvenalian manuscripts, see Holt N. Parker, "Manuscripts of Juvenal and Persius," in *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, ed. Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 137–161.

[209] Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.66; Cassius Dio, 61.34.

also made use of Lucusta's expertise, instructing her to murder Claudius's son Britannicus (41–55 CE), as well as establish a school for the training of poisoners.[210]

Seneca the Elder (ca. 54 BCE–39 CE) records at least three attempts by women to poison their stepchildren or husbands.[211] A young wife in the *Metamorphoses* likewise schemes to kill her stepson after he refuses to sleep with her.[212] It should be remembered, however, that the trope of women as poisoners emanates largely from the androcentrism of our source base. While historical precedents, embodied by the likes of Lucusta, no doubt influenced literary stereotypes, it is fair to assume some degree of hyperbole in the depiction of female potioneers. This being said, most large cities boasted quarters dedicated to herbalists and draught brewers, at least allowing for the possibility that *servi* acquired noxious substances.[213] Galen (b. 129 CE) relates the story of an enslaved woman who purchased a deathly concoction, albeit on her mistress's behalf.[214] As poisons were most commonly administered via food and drink, female slaves responsible for their master's meals or table service would have been uniquely positioned to commit homicide.

Accomplishing murder was no simple matter. Even if undertaken successfully, few slaves would have escaped with their life. Despite efforts by lawmakers to deter *servi* from attacking their master, the exploitative nature of ancient slavery drove some to bloodthirsty extremes. Revenge appears the most frequent justification for lethal force, whether stemming from feelings of injustice, envy, or simply hatred. The agency of slaves in killing their master is undeniable. Murder not only embodied a drastic power reversal but permanently concluded the asymmetric dependency between *servi* and *domini*. The limited number of attestations to female slaves engaged in violent resistance might be taken as an evidential lacuna, but could equally suggest that *ancillae* confronted their enslavement differently, relying on interpersonal relationships ahead of violence. Unifying all termination strategies however was a desire to radically disrupt the status quo, either through physically removing oneself or eradicating those conduits of oppression, in this case, the master himself.

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[210] Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.15; Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Nero" 33.

[211] Seneca, *Controversiae*, 6.6, 9.5, 9.6.

[212] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 10.4.

[213] In line 472 of Plautus's *Mercator*, Charinus, overwhelmed by thoughts of suicide, deliberates whether to buy a noxious potion from a doctor, intimating they were easy to come by. See also L. Cilliers and F. P. Retief, "Poisons, Poisoning and the Drug Trade in Ancient Rome," *Akroterion* 45 (2000), 90.

[214] Galen, *De Causis Procatarticis*, 14.183.

Conclusion

The first portion of this monograph endeavoured to demonstrate the exercise of sexual agency by female slaves in the classical Roman world. Sexual agency, as outlined in the introduction, takes as its focus the capacity for enslaved women to navigate erotic relationships with their master, as well as resist bodily domination and attempts to curtail their individual subjectivity. In what follows, we shall review the findings of chapters two through four, reflecting on those agentic behaviours pertinent to *ancillae*. Further research questions germane to this book's underlying thesis are demarcated in the closing section.

1. Jeopardy and Chance

Enslaved women in Roman society were culturally envisaged as sexual outlets, assailable bodies free to be exploited by the master class. Chapter two opened with a discussion of this foundational hypothesis, arguing an intermixture of entrenched hierarchies, dehumanisation, and simple convenience made vulnerable bondswomen to sexual objectification and abuse. While acknowledging the clear and present danger of molestation and violence, I maintained *ancillae* were not powerless when it came to sex, being capable of transforming misfortune into opportunities for action.

A number of ideas backgrounded the notion that enslaved women might have capitalised on the sexual interests of their *dominus*, what I collectively termed "cultural openings." Female slaves in the Roman household, by nature of the work they generally performed, came into regular contact with their master. Although close proximity may have increased the likelihood of maltreatment, it furnished enslaved women with chances to become on more intimate terms with their owner. Marital discord also proved advantageous to *ancillae*, who conceivably found favour in the wake of their master's sexual disinterest in his legitimate wife. Not dissimilarly, beautiful slave girls, enlisted in a wide range of vocations, perhaps caught the attention of their *dominus* or one of his guests in the course of elite festivities, paving the way towards a more amorous relationship.

Secondly, it was necessary to emphasise the possibility of genuine romantic feelings between master and *ancillae*. From the literary and epigraphic material, we detect vestiges of the sincere affection some *domini* harboured for their slaves. Tombstone inscriptions are a particularly rich source of information, documenting instances where masters freed a woman in their service for the purposes of marriage. While patron and *libertina* unions were not always benign, it would be ill-judged to assume that marriages between *domini* and ex-slaves were universally coercive. This is further attested by a smattering of literary passages, where masters exhibit protective sentiments or communicate their unwillingness to exploit a female slave on account of their tenderhearted feelings for her.

Once sexually or romantically involved with their *dominus*, enslaved women can be observed to have leveraged their desirability for personal advantage. Favoured *ancillae* peradventure took an operative role in erotic liaisons, stoked competition between admirers, or demanded their manumission as proof of loyalty. Sham displays of affection and feigning love was another tactic employed by slave women, intended to foster patronage or bring about their manumission. Even if a highly sceptical view of master-slave relationships is espoused, sexual agency cannot be outrightly denied. Forming an intimate attachment with one's master can be understood as a survival strategy, a kind of premeditated acquiescence contrived to blunt the very worst degradations of slavery.

The erotic competition between *uxores* and female slaves was yet another locus of agentic manoeuvring. Roman habits of slave keeping, along with the legal permissibility of recasting *ancillae* as legitimate wives, posed a genuine threat to some freeborn women. With a view to staving off encroachments of this kind, *uxores* resorted to violence, levering their greater status and authority to cudgel rivals into submission. More tactfully, sexual jealousies were resolved through the ousting of a slave woman from the *domus*, or the writing of a malediction in the expectation paranormal forces would blight a competitor. Domestic infighting evidences a contemporaneous reaction, on the part of *uxores*, to the sexual agency of enslaved women. If master-slave relationships were deemed socially harmless — not discounting the emotional pain of infidelity — we would not expect to uncover such vigorous fightback against the amatory infringements of *ancillae*.

The final section of chapter two explored the application of the occult arts by female slaves, with special attention being paid to love spells and curses. Bonded women might have cast a love spell in the hope of fortifying their relationship against the advances of a sexual competitor. In reverse fashion, curses could be utilised in an effort to impede a marriage or break unions apart. Both implementations of magic are undeniably agentic, but the writing of maledictions can also be interpreted as a form of self-help. The ritual act of inscribing a lead tablet (or other writing surface) with a curse may have relieved the supplicant of emotional distress, alleviating heartbreak or feelings of romantic envy.

In summary, relations with one's master or patron were a double-edged sword, a waltz of jeopardy and chance, promising both deliverance and danger. It is clear nonetheless that female slaves, in a variety of contexts, deployed agentic stratagems that, even from a distance of some two millennia, appear genuinely transformative. My purpose in underscoring the volitional capacity of slave women was not to simply equate agency with quality of life, nor to temper the cruelties inherent to human bondage. Rather I sought to vivify the diverse texture and patina of the slave experience, accentuating behavioural modes not typically identified with enslaved women.

2. Gendering Resistance

Chapters three and four of this study were broadly concerned with gendering slave resistance, evidencing how acts of servile dissent could be more dynamically understood through the prism of sexual agency. My analysis was divided between those exploits centred on bodily reclamation ("body choices"), and behaviours geared towards the rebalancing of power asymmetries ("termination strategies").

We begin with what I termed "the power of sons," an extension or, more accurately, a possible outcome of the master-slave relationship. Bonded women who provided their owner with a child stood to gain, particularly if the infant was born male. Spouseless *domini*, or masters lacking a son by their legitimate wife, are well known to have rewarded enslaved mothers, either with manumission, bequeathal, or marriage. Even slave *nutricis*, responsible for the care of neonates in elite households, could benefit from the unique attachment they shared with their nurseling. The desirability of sons was enough to speculate whether *ancillae* ventured to influence the biological gender of their unborn child, a process known as sex determination. While evidence for the ancient belief that embryonic development could be influenced proliferates, the absence of any source

describing slaves pursuing such measures forestalls a qualified answer. Nevertheless, if such undertakings were to be proven, they would certainly fall under the bailiwick of sexual agency.

In the opposite manner, the use of contraceptives and abortifacients denote a resistive behaviour purposed to stave off impregnation. A vast array of oral recipes, pessaries, and magical solutions were availed by slave women to manage their reproductivity. The near-total absence of corporal integrity experienced by *ancillae* made them vulnerable to conception by rape. In light of this, fertility management provided female slaves with a means of regaining some measure of control over their bodies, perhaps even hindering attempts by their master to instrument their wombs for the production of heirs or the enlargement of the *familia*. Regardless of the effectiveness of ancient methods of contraception and abortion, it is clear some *ancillae* would have looked to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies.

Consensual sexual attachments between slaves may well represent another locale of resistance. Drawing on past theoretical work centred around the idea of "rival geographies," I put forward the notion of rival "emotional geographies," or rather the capacity for slave women in the Roman world to have pursued intimate relations outside of prescribed limits. For *ancillae*, habitually subject to coercion and sexual violence, the choice of an erotic partner was not only agentic but inherently subversive, a means through which they might reclaim jurisdiction over their bodies and sexuality. Marshalling a range of evidence types, I conjectured illicit lovemaking to have amounted to a covert and, most likely, widespread rebuke of masterly domination.

Among the best-researched exhibitions of servile defiance in the classical world and beyond is abscondence. However, seldom has the feasibility of running away been considered with a view to gender. Following an extensive appraisal of the literary and papyrological material, I found little evidence for slave women falling back on escape as a means of resistance. Although bondswomen do feature in the extant sources, their numbers are dwarfed alongside those references to adult male slaves, the demographic I judged most likely to attempt flight. The reasons behind this anomaly can only be guessed at, though the complications associated with motherhood and childbearing may have dissuaded some *ancillae* from turning loose. This represents the first of two negative conclusions, highlighting the fact that abscondence cannot be understood as an omnipresent response to the crucible of slavery.

The second, marginally less, inconclusive finding relates to self-killing and murder. Within the context of enslavement, suicide can reasonably be interpreted as an extreme declaration of personal sovereignty, a forceful reproach of the power imbalances characteristic of unfreedom. Records of *servi* committing self-immolation in the ancient source material are expectedly rare, with instances specific to bonded women scarcest of all. Where suicide attempts by female slaves are documented, hanging ranks among the most frequently attested means of death. One behaviour almost unique to slave women was the killing of infants, interpretable as a form of "surrogate euthanasia," intended to spare newborns or recently subjugated children the ignominy of enslavement. Gendering the evidence for the murder of *domini* at the hands of their slaves proved equally challenging. We cannot ignore the fact, however frustrating, that the majority of verifiable slave homicides are attributed to bonded males or *servi* in general, with the sex of the perpetrator(s) going unrecorded. All the same, through collating the handful of mentions to enslaved women's murder of their owner, we can, at minimum, surmise violent resistance was undertaken by a minority of female slaves.

These contrasting expressions of servile resistance disclose two key insights. Above all, it is clear that abscondence and violent resistance were not the paramount means through which slave women sought to balance power asymmetries. This is likely because *ancillae* subverted their enslavement by other means, namely in the context of interpersonal relationships and private decision-making. Exceptions to this broad trend confirm its overall validity but also underscore the fact that slave women exercised agency wherever circumstances allowed. Facile as it sounds, this elementary truth rests at the heart of the present inquiry. Agency regularly succumbs to over-theorising, portrayed as a sociological Gordian knot incapable of disentanglement. But seeking to untwine the matrix of human action is, from my own standpoint, an intellectual misfire. Theorising agency should instead assist in widening our cognisance of how different historical actors behaved in heterogeneous places and time periods. For the Roman world, my utilisation of agency theory helped divulge the gendered nature of slave resistance, exposing how sex contrastingly modelled the landscape of servile defiance. It is my hope that future research will dovetail with, or challenge, some of the hypotheses proffered in the course of the foregoing chapters.

3. Further Questions

The title of this monograph is in some respects misleading, namely in that the cultural openings necessary for the exercise of sexual agency were not universally available. Young and beautiful enslaved women in the service of elite households were considerably advantaged, their natural prettiness conferring notable benefits in the informal sexual economy of the *domus*. Many of the literary and epigraphic sources presented in chapter two stress the attractiveness of slave love interests, underscoring the importance of beauty to the establishment of romantic unions. The power of looks to effectuate favourable treatment and social mobility is a widely known feature of modern capitalist societies, but was likewise existent in historical time periods.[1] Nubile bodies were also favoured for their reproductivity. As discussed in chapter three, enslaved women could benefit from mothering their owner's child. Earlier studies of freedwomen commemorated in tombstone inscriptions statistically uphold the notion that *ancillae* of childbearing age were the most likely of all slaves to be awarded their freedom.[2]

While this study took as its focus enslaved women, sexual agency can also be imputed to male slaves. Most famously, the freedman Trimalchio, the antihero of Petronius's (ca. 27–66 CE) novel, was, as a young man, banished to a rural estate on suspicion of helping satisfy the sexual needs of his master's wife.[3] The poets, however derisively, likewise represent slave eunuchs as particularly attractive sexual partners for elite women, on account of the near impossibility of pregnancy.[4] Juvenal (fl. late first–early second century CE) remarks that one castrated *servus* was highly prized by his mistress.[5] In a humorous epigram of Martial's (ca. 40–102 CE) writing, the *pater familias* Almo, suffering from erectile dysfunction, grumbles that his wife, despite spending so much time with his slave eunuchs, never falls pregnant.[6]

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[1] For lookism in the modern world, see, Deborah L. Rhode, *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[2] Alföldy, *Die römische Gesellschaft*, 301; Weaver, *Familia Caesaris*, 70.

[3] Petronius, *Satyricon*, 69.

[4] Maria H. Dettenhofer, "Eunuchs, Women, and Imperial Courts," in *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 85.

[5] Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.366–370. See also Martial, *Epigrams*, 6.67.

[6] Martial, *Epigrams*, 10.91. The joke is intended to be doubly amusing in that, like his penis, Almo's scheme to father those children conceived by his slaves also fails to deliver.

A number of clear research gaps are hence spotlighted by this dissertation. First of all, what constituted a beautiful *ancilla*? Did certain physiognomical features, body types, or even perceived racial differences contribute to an enslaved woman's general attractiveness? Attention to how subjective and culturally mandated ideas of beauty operated in the context of Roman slavery would, no doubt, problematise my initial conclusion that beautiful slave women were best disposed to exercise sexual agency. Scrutinising the erotic dexterity of enslaved men would likewise complement this monograph's investigatory purview. As well as providing a rough check on the prevalence of intimate relationships between male slaves and *matronae*, further gendering the evidence would bring into sharper focus those dimensions of sexual agency unique to *ancillae*.

PART TWO

Han China

V

Tears of Blood

We turn now eastwards, traversing desserts and steppeland, rivers and mountain ranges, before arriving at the territories comprising the Han empire. As with Rome, slavery under both the Western and Eastern Han played no small role in early imperial society. Enslaved persons were a constant feature throughout the dynasty's four-hundred-year history, populating the pages of the chronicles and legal texts. Ahead of investigating expressions of sexual agency, it is crucial we locate slavery in the socio-economic milieu of the Middle Kingdom's formative centuries.

This chapter deliberately mirrors the structure and content of its counterpart, intending to make plain those differences and similarities between Chinese and Roman slavery. As such, readers are invited to view the opening and penultimate chapters as working in parallel, exploring analogous themes from the respective vantage points of two highly unique societies. Beginning with the slave supply, we shall examine the multiple routes to servitude in early China, underscoring those modes of acquisition *sui generis* to the Han. An appraisal of convict labour follows, paying particular attention to the status of bondservants. Next, the manner in which enslaved men and women were trafficked and sold shall be explored, alongside estimations of their relative value. The jobs performed by enslaved women, as well as the labour spheres they inhabited, receive commensurate analysis. A short survey of manumission rounds off our discussion, outlining the sundry paths to freedom available to government and private slaves. Finally, we shall review the institution of concubinage, in addition to explaining how adolescent girls were recruited into the imperial harem.

1. The Slave Supply

Before unification under the short-lived Qin dynasty in 221 BCE, China was divided between a smattering of belligerent kingdoms. The Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國, 453–221 BCE) period, as it is aptly named, was characterised by advances in bureaucratic organisation and military reform, allowing contending polities to gradually annexe their weaker neighbours.[1] Centuries of warfare naturally entailed a steady supply of captives, as armies were defeated and territories changed hands. It is generally agreed upon that spear-won prisoners were a viable source of unfree labour throughout the Warring States epoch. Within the philosophical writings of the *Mozi* 墨子 are preserved accounts of war captives being made "servants and grooms" (*pu yu* 僕圉) and "grinders

[1] For a detailed synopsis of the Warring States period, see Mark Edward Lewis, "Warring States Political History," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilisation to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 587–650.

of corn" (*chunshou* 舂首), clearly obsequious professions.[2] What is more, among the remnants of the pre-imperial Qin statutes we find direct evidence that enemy soldiers (*kou* 寇, lit. "invaders") who surrendered (*xiang* 降) could be made bondservants (*lichen* 隸臣), a lowly convict status.[3] Fighters who refused to lay down their arms were instead taken as captives (*lu* 虜) and perhaps treated in a manner similar to government slaves.[4] However, when it comes to the Han, we remain largely in the dark as to whether the enslavement of prisoners of war continued on any notable scale.

While the establishment of the Han dynasty in 206 BCE brought relative peace to the commanderies, tensions along China's borders, not to mention internal rebellions, ensured military action never truly abated. The dynastic histories make plain the fact imperial armies took significant numbers of prisoners on campaign. Sporadic Chinese offensives against their northernmost neighbour, the Xiongnu 匈奴, frequently resulted in the capture of enemy soldiers and civilians. During the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), the Han general Huo Qubing 霍去病 (d. 117 BCE) seized approximately nine thousand Xiongnu natives in a coordinated strike across Mount Yanzhi 焉支山.[5] Elsewhere, Wei Qing 衛青 (d. 105 BCE), Huo Qubing's uncle, took around seven hundred captives after a skirmish at Long Cheng 龍城.[6] The very name given by the Chinese to the Xiongnu — comprised of the graphs *xiong* 匈 (noise; uproar) and *nu* 奴 (male slave) — perhaps hints at their conceptualisation as a naturally subservient race.[7] Far to the west, in what is today Gansu 甘肅 province, the Han state regularly came into conflict with the Qiang people 羌族. Disagreements occasionally escalated to the point of open revolt and, on one such occasion, under the Eastern Han Emperor He 和帝 (r. 88–105 CE), a large number of the rebelling Shao He 燒何 tribe were captured and enslaved.[8]

Superficially then, it appears as though warfare remained conducive to the state absorption of slave-prisoners. War captives and bonded persons were held in equally low esteem, and this in itself is

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[2] *Mozi*, 7.194–195; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1, no. 2 (1958), 188. Likewise, a chapter of the contemporaneous *Wei Liaozi* 尉繚子, entitled "Wuyi" 武議 (Martial Planning), warns against the enslavement of conquered peoples, suggesting it was a known phenomenon. The nouns *pu* 僕 (servant; follower) and *yu* 圉 (groom; prisoner) are of considerable antiquity, featuring sporadically in the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions. However, it is unlikely that *pu*, during the years of China's earliest history, referred to slaves. See Susanne Adamski, "Indefinite Terms? Social Groups in Early Ancient China (ca. 1300–771 BC) and Strong Asymmetrical Dependency," in *Slavery and Other Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies: Semantics and Lexical Fields*, ed. Jeannine Bischoff and Stephan Conermann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 13; David N. Keightley, *Working for His Majesty: Research Notes on Labor Mobilization in Late Shang China (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.), as Seen in the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions, with Particular Attention to Handicraft Industries, Agriculture, Warfare, Hunting, Construction, and the Shang's Legacies* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2012), 64.

[3] *Shuihudi* (1990), 89 (strip no. 37); Anthony F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C. Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 117.

[4] Robin D. S. Yates, "The Fate of the Defeated: Qin's Treatment of Their Enemies," *Bamboo and Silk* 5 (2022), 15–16.

[5] *Hanshu*, 55.2479.

[6] *Hanshu*, 6.165; Homer H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore, MA: Waverley Press, 1938–1955), Vol. 2, 43.

[7] Randolph B. Ford, *Rome, China, and the Barbarians: Ethnographic Traditions and the Transformation of Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 101.

[8] *Hou Hanshu*, 87.2885.

suggestive of some form of contemporary association between the two groups.[9] Yet, on closer inspection, captives taken in the field are seldom recorded as being enslaved. Where subjugation is explicitly mentioned, it is often with respect to individuals as opposed to whole contingents of prisoners. Non-Chinese rulers resisting Han colonisation, for example, are occasionally documented as being enslaved, though this is hardly proof of an institutional effort towards amassing new chattel.[10] Among the more compelling sources for the enslavement of war captives is the story of Consort Bo 薄姬 (d. 155 BCE), mother of Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE), who was taken prisoner during the early years of the Han conquest and put to work in the imperial weaving house (*zhishi* 織室).[11] On balance, as the late sinologist Clarence Martin Wilbur has pointed out, if prisoners made up a significant contribution to the slave supply, or were in some way perceived as a source of economic gain, we would not expect the imperial annals to have paid them so little attention.[12] In truth, it is often hard to discern the number of captives taken from the number of enemies slain on the battlefield. We must conclude therefore that war captives were an unlikely wellspring of servile labour, despite on occasion being made slaves.

The importation of chattel from abroad no doubt supplemented the Chinese flesh trade. Han emperors regularly received tribute from neighbouring kingdoms, which sometimes included the presentation of slaves. In 49 CE, over nine hundred chieftains of the Wuhuan 烏桓 people came to pay their respects to the imperial court, offering as gifts many bonded men and women.[13] By the same token, small-scale transactions occurred between frontier commanders and tribesmen. Li Xun 李恂 (fl. first century CE), when meeting with emissaries from those states along China's western border, was presented with male and female slaves (*nubi* 奴婢), horses (*ma* 馬), gold and silver (*jin yin* 金銀), as well as a quantity of woollen cloth (*ji* 罽).[14]

Foreign slaves appear also to have been drawn from among the aboriginal peoples of the south. The region of Bo 僰, present-day Yunnan 雲南 and Sichuan 四川 provinces, for instance, was famed for its *tong* 僮 (lit. "youths," an infantilising term for slaves).[15] Southern China's reputation as a cynosure for human trafficking is confirmed by a proclamation of Wang Mang's 王莽 (r. 8–23 CE) government, prescribing execution to whoever engaged in the trade of frontier people.[16] Further mention of Bo's live exports is made by the Eastern Han commentator Fu Qian 服虔 (fl. late second century CE), who noted that the capital of the Western Han, Chang'an 長安, was thronged with

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[9] *Hanshu*, 91.3691. The terms "slave" (*nu* 奴) and "captive" (*lu* 虜) are here mentioned alongside one another, conveying some sense of mutual disdain.

[10] *Hanshu*, 68.2959.

[11] *Shiji*, 49.1970. While the *Hanshu* makes no mention of who staffed the weaving house, we learn from later sources that female slaves made up the bulk of the work force, inferring that Consort Bo was, at one moment in time, engaged in bonded labour. For the administration and organisation of the weaving house, see *Hou Hanshu*, 26.3595. Chauncey S. Goodrich estimates the weaving house, or drying chamber (*baoshi* 暴室), may have served as a kind of prison for those concubines who had lost favour. See "Two Chapters in The Life of an Empress of The Later Han," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 26 (1966), 201.

[12] Clarence Martin Wilbur, "Industrial Slavery in China during the Former Han Dynasty," *The Journal of Economic History* 3, no. 1 (1943), 59.

[13] *Hou Hanshu*, 90.2982.

[14] *Hou Hanshu*, 51.1683.

[15] *Shiji*, 129.3261. The poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如, in a conversation with Emperor Wu, also spoke of the enslavement of southwestern aborigine children, see *Hanshu*, 57B.2586.

[16] *Hanshu*, 99B.4138; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 348.

female slaves from Bo.[17] Merchants from the states of Ba 巴 and Shu 屬, also located in Sichuan province, helped facilitate the movement of slaves from Bo to northern China where they were sold.[18] During his rebellion against the Chinese dowager queen of Nanyue 南越 — what is today northern Vietnam, Guangdong 廣東 and Guangxi 廣西 provinces — Lü Jia 呂嘉 (d. 111 BCE) charged his adversary with purposing to take her attendants to Chang'an to sell as slaves.[19] Though wholly fabricated, there must have been some demand for Yue *nubi* in the capital for Lü Jia to have considered such a ruse believable. Many of those uprooted from the south were presumably intended for the luxury market, where tastes for the exotic flourished. Indeed, oil lamps crafted from ceramic or bronze frequently depict adventitious slaves, who worked in the households of the rich as either domestic servants or entertainers.[20]

Of equal violence to the enslavement of war captives was the abduction and trafficking of free persons. The relatively porous nature of China's border with the Xiongnu exposed those living along the northern frontier to the threat of raids. Steppe horsemen routinely harassed Chinese villages and farmsteads, making off with thousands of captives.[21] Predictably, many of those kidnapped were enslaved.[22] A vivid insight into the personal tragedy of seizure is preserved in Cai Yan's 蔡琰 (ca. 170–215 CE) poem "Eighteen Songs of the Nomad Flute" (*Hujia shiba pai* 胡笳十八拍). Cai Yan, more commonly known by her courtesy name Wen Ji 文姬, was the daughter of the renowned court intellectual Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192 CE). In the chaotic final years of the Eastern Han, she was captured and forcibly married to the king of the Southern Xiongnu, Zuo Xian 左賢.[23] Cai Yan, writing through "tears of blood" (*lei cheng xue* 淚成血), professed her "anger and resentment" (*fen yaun* 憤怨), "shattered will" (*zhi cui* 志摧), and "broken heart" (*xin zhe* 心摺), surely encapsulating the feelings of many deracinated women.[24]

In the opposite manner, stories of runaway slaves escaping over the Great Wall obliquely attest to the capture of nomads at the hands of Chinese frontiersmen.[25] Those slaves decamping across the marches were of probable Xiongnu origin, snatched in retaliatory forays by Han soldiers. The excavated legal manuscripts from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 contain one suit documenting the abscondence of a slave named Yi 宜, who "vaulted over the frontier defences"

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[17] *Shiji*, 116.2993.

[18] *Hanshu*, 95.3838.

[19] *Hanshu*, 95.3856.

[20] For examples, see Jessica Rawson, *Mysteries of Ancient China: New Discoveries from the Early Dynasties* (New York: George Braziller, 1996), 175; Zhixin Jason Sun, *Age of Empires: Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017), 200, 202.

[21] *Hanshu*, 3.99, 4.123; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 199, 246.

[22] *Hanshu*, 94A.3752.

[23] *Hou Hanshu*, 84.2800.

[24] Cai Yan's authorship, it should be noted, is vehemently contested. The poem's transmission reaches us via the *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集, an anthology of Han era poems compiled by the Song dynasty intellectual Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (fl. 1084 CE). That the *Eighteen Songs* finds no mention in earlier collectanea has led some commenters to suggest it was the work of a later poet. However, Cai Yan is well known to have composed her own verse, two *shi* 詩 style poems being preserved in the dynastic history of the Eastern Han, see *Hou Hanshu*, 84.2801–2803. For a short outline of Cai Yan's life, see Lilly Xiao Hong Lee and A. D. Stefanowska, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity through Sui, 1600 B.C.E.–618 C.E.* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharp, 2007), 109–112. A full translation of the *Eighteen Songs* can be found in Kang-i Sun Chang and Huan Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 23–29.

[25] *Hanshu*, 94B.3804

(*yuesai* 越塞) and fled into barbarian territory.[26] We might speculate that Yi, if he was indeed of Xiongnu stock, devised to outdistance his pursuers by escaping into his former homeland.

Borderland hostilities were not the only context in which freeborn men and women were subjugated. In times of unrest, gangs of bandits stalked the countryside looking to profit from the abduction and sale of "people's wives and children" (*ren qi zi*人妻子).[27] Those unfortunates who fell prey to robber bands were trafficked hundreds of miles from their homes to be sold in neighbouring prefectures. Such was the case with the counsellor and general Luan Bu 欒布 (d. 145 BCE), a native of Liang 梁, who, as a young man, was kidnapped and sold in Yan 燕, far to the northeast.[28] Estimating the frequency of these attacks is not possible. However, that the first emperor of the Eastern Han, Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57 CE), had to issue various edicts calling for the release of those kidnapped and sold by brigands indicates it was a substantial problem (see below).

Elsewhere in the transmitted texts, we find numerous stories of high-ranking officials and noblemen disenfranchising commoners. Liu He 劉賀 (93–59 BCE), King of Chang Yi 王昌邑 and grandson of Emperor Wu, ordered his slave superintendent to round up an outfit of teenage girls, forcing them into screened carts before driving on to the capital Chang'an.[29] In a similar incident, the Eastern Han general Dou Xian 窦宪 (d. 92 CE) commanded his retainers to "seize wives and young women" (*qi lüe funü* 妻略婦女).[30] A senior official, and favourite of Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE), attempted to snatch the beautiful daughter of a freeborn man.[31] In later times, Liang Ji 梁冀 (d. 159 CE), brother of the dowager empress Liang Na 梁妠 (106–150 CE), kidnapped and enslaved numerous women and girls, derisively referring to them as his "self-sold people" (*zi mai ren* 自賣人).[32] Perhaps a final mention should be given to Xu Xuan 收宣 (d. 236 CE), the magistrate of Xiapi 下邳, who, accompanied by a group of soldiers, kidnapped and shot with a crossbow a girl who refused his hand in marriage.[33] Quite clearly, not all the aforementioned women were made slaves, though other forms of abuse and maltreatment are self-evident. Nonetheless, taken collectively, these accounts highlight the fact that abduction was not solely the preserve of bandits and barbarians, but also the work of elites.

But what of the adoption of exposed children, so prolific a source of slaves in the ancient Mediterranean? Despite Han biographical writings confirming the prevalence of infant

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[26] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 217 (slip no. 53); Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb no. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1243.

[27] *Hanshu*, 99B.4110; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 285. We gain some sense of the omnipresence of banditry from the *Daybook* (*Rishu* 日書), a Qin era divinatory text advising on the favourability or inauspiciousness of various undertakings throughout the year. Travelling through the countryside on the day of "outside harm" (*waihai* 外害) was, for example, said to risk an encounter with brigands (*dao* 盜). See *Shuihudi* (1990), 181 (slip no. 9); Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 77.

[28] *Shiji*, 100.2733; *Hanshu*, 37.1980. Luan Bu was, in fact, kidnapped and sold three times in his life, but through a combination of skill and luck repeatedly managed to win his freedom.

[29] *Hanshu*, 63.2764.

[30] *Hou Hanshu*, 23.819.

[31] *Hanshu*, 59.2655.

[32] *Hou Hanshu*, 34.1182.

[33] *Hou Hanshu*, 78.2521–2522. For a translation of this episode, see Rafe de Crespigny, *Fire Over Luoyang: A History of the Later Han Dynasty 23–220 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 328.

abandonment, no source concretely demonstrates the enslavement of foundlings. All the same, it is worth giving a cursory overview of the evidence. Poverty, inauspicious omens, and maternal death in childbirth, could have all factored into a family's decision to forsake an infant.[34] Notably, the high official Gong Yu 貢禹 (124–44 BCE) complained in 44 BCE that government poll taxes were forcing commoners to expose their children.[35] Social unrest was equally influential. Han Lang's 寒朗 (fl. mid-first century CE) mother, for instance, felt compelled to abandon her son due to the onset of war, placing him beneath a hedge of brambles.[36] Comparably, a poem of Wang Can's 王粲 (177–217 CE) writing — composed following the sack of Chang'an in 192 CE — illustrates the heartbreak symptomatic of relinquishing newborns.

> 出門無所見，白骨蔽平原。/ 路有饑婦人，抱子棄草間。/ 顧聞號泣聲，揮涕獨不還。
>
> Out of the gate I see / only white bones that strew the broad plain. / A starving woman beside the road / hugs her child, then lays it in the weeds, / looks back at the sound of its wailing, / wipes her tears and goes on alone.[37]

Physiological anomalies seem also to have driven parents to expose their children. Such was the case with Zhou Xie 周燮 (110–159 CE), who was said to have been so "ugly" (*chou* 醜) at birth that his mother wished to abandon him.[38] A baby's disconcerting cries were believed to be similarly unfavourable, foreshadowing the development of a bestial personality.[39] The "Duke Xuan" (*Xuan gong* 宣公) chapter of the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 stipulated that a child with "the voice of a wolf" (*lang zhi sheng* 狼之聲) should not be allowed to live, through fear they would one day precipitate their family's ruin.[40] Even unborn children thought to have behaved abnormally while gestating were earmarked for abandonment. One story documents a certain Tian Wu 田無, who resolved to dispose of her baby after she heard it crying in the womb.[41]

Legally speaking, the Qin government espoused a contradictory logic regarding the admissibility of infanticide. The unauthorised killing of a child was to be punished with tattooing and hard labour, except in cases where an infant was born with a severe deformity.[42] However, another portion of the same text records that the crime of infanticide was not denounceable, effectively limiting a

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[34] Hans Bielenstein, "Wang Mang, the Restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han," in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 273; Jen-Der Lee, "Childbirth in Early Imperial China," *Nan Nü* 7, no. 2 (2005), 218.

[35] *Hanshu*, 72.3075.

[36] *Hou Hanshu*, 41.1417.

[37] *Wen xuan*, 23.1087; trans. Burton Watson, *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 106.

[38] *Hou Hanshu*, 53.1741–1742.

[39] Anne Behnke Kinney, "Dyed Silk: Han Notions of the Moral Development of Children," in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 24–25.

[40] Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition: Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 611.

[41] *Hanshu*, 27C.1473. The sex of the child goes unrecorded.

[42] *Shuihudi* (1990), 109 (slip no. 69); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 139. The precise nature of said deformities goes unexpressed, though skin diseases or abnormal growths might be inferred from the phrase "strange things on its (i.e. the child's) body" (*guai wu ji shen* 怪物其身).

magistrate's capacity to investigate and prosecute.[43] Legal ambiguities aside, the verb phrase denoting the intentional abandonment of a healthy child was *fu ju* 弗舉, generally translated as "not to lift up." Anne Behnke Kinney proposes two readings of *fu ju*, that of the ritual lifting of children on the third day after birth, versus a family's decision not to nurture a newborn.[44] The latter gloss, given the context, emerges as the better fit. Western and Eastern Han legislators are believed to have followed the Qin tradition, disciplining those parents found guilty of infanticide and abandonment.[45] The excessively harsh official Wang Ji 王吉 (d. 48 BCE), not only executed those found guilty of abandoning their children but "buried them in earth and thorns" (*he tu ji mai zhi* 合土棘埋之).[46] Correspondingly, the magistrate Jia Biao 賈彪 (fl. 169 CE) put to death a woman for renouncing her baby, setting a precedent supposedly discouraging others from doing the same.[47] Nonetheless, the likes of Wang Ji and Jia Biao are almost certainly exceptional, dwarfed by the silent majority of officials who overlooked acts of abandonment due to the severity of the times or local customs.

When neonates were abandoned, it often appeared to be in remote places. Secluded lanes, quiet roadsides, mountain woodlands, and even drainage ditches are all mentioned in the textual sources. Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), now lost *Chunqiu jueyu* 春秋決獄, speaks of a man who adopted an infant boy he found swaddled by the side of a road.[48] Likewise, the future grand commandant Yu Yan 虞延 (fl. 65 CE), rescued the daughter of his sister who had been abandoned in a ditch.[49] We might also note a number of mythic examples. After failing to terminate her pregnancy, Jiang Yuan 姜嫄, daughter of the Marquis of Tai 邰侯 and ancestress of the Zhou dynasty, abandoned her newborn baby in a "narrow lane" (*ai xiang* 隘巷), presumably expecting he would go unnoticed.[50] Not dissimilarly, the legendary consort Bao Si 褒姒 was disowned conspicuously enough by her slave mother to be picked up by a couple fleeing the palace of King Li of Zhou 周厲王 (d. 828 BCE).[51] The ease with which foundlings could be adopted at least allows for the possibility some were enslaved or subsumed into highly dependent positions. Uniformly, Wilbur argued poor families may have jettisoned their unwanted children in the vicinity of rich households, in the hope they would be taken in and raised as domestic servants.[52]

Since daughters were considered an economic encumbrance, abandonment appears to have disproportionally affected infant girls.[53] Female infanticide in early China is well documented, with

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[43] *Shuihudi* (1990), 117 (slip no. 103); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 148.

[44] Anne Behnke Kinney, "Infant Abandonment in Early China," *Early China* 18, (1993), 110–111.

[45] Anthony F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law, Volume 1: Introductory Studies and Annotated Translation of Chapters 22 and 23 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 88–89.

[46] *Hou Hanshu*, 77.2501.

[47] *Hou Hanshu*, 67.2216. For the empire-wide illegality of infanticide, see T'ung-tsu Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 23. For a counter argument, see de Crespigny, *Fire Over Luoyang*, 265, note 120.

[48] *Tongdian*, 69.1911; Michael Loewe, "Dong Zhongshu as a Consultant," *Asia Major* 22, no. 1 (2009), 175.

[49] *Hou Hanshu*, 33.1150–1151.

[50] *Lienü zhuan*, 1.3; *Shiji*, 4.111. The *Shiji* account of events records that Jiang Yuan attempted to abandon her son three times. First in a "narrow lane" (*ai xiang* 隘巷), next in the "mountain forests" (*shan lin* 山林), and finally "on the ice of a ditch" (*qu zhong bing shang* 渠中冰上).

[51] *Guoyu*, "Zheng yu" 鄭語, 519; *Lienü zhuan*, 7.146.

[52] Wilbur, *Slavery in China*, 88.

[53] Hans Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty, Volume 3: The People* (Stockholm: The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1967), 16.

passages from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 and *Taiping jing* 太平經 betraying the disposability of daughters.[54] Most famously, the future empress Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (d. 1 BCE) was exposed as a newborn, albeit swiftly recovered by her parents.[55] While not specific to the Han dynasty, naming practices give some idea of the propensity for females to be exposed. Throughout medieval and late imperial China, girls might be named *nai* 耐, meaning "durable" or "resistant," perhaps in reference to having survived attempted infanticide.[56] Although abandonment should not be conflated with other forms of infant killing, the available evidence indicates daughters were cast out far more regularly than sons. Whether gender asymmetries directly impacted early Chinese demographics however, remains unknowable.[57]

We come now to the sale of children, what might be considered a sub-category of abandonment, being similarly indicative of poverty. The expansion of the ruling class and deepening wealth inequality under the Han left much of the peasantry at the mercy of the elite.[58] A single bad harvest could tip smallholders into debt, forcing them to sell their children to make loan repayments or meet government taxes.[59] Responding to such emergencies, the central administration permitted commoners to sell themselves or their children as a means of remaining solvent.[60] The government minister Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (d. 154 BCE) remonstrated that the poor were increasingly dependent on the sale of their sons and daughters to honour crippling tax obligations.[61] Wealthy traders and merchants are likewise known to have offered predatory loans to the destitute, in the expectation borrowers would fail to meet repayments and give over their offspring as collateral.[62]

Among the commentators, some debate surrounds the precise meaning of " to pawn one's children" (*zhui zi* 贅子). Ru Chun 如淳 (ca. 198–265 CE), writing in the Eastern Han, equated the term with the custom of parents in Huainan 淮南 to lease their children for three years and, in cases where they could not be redeemed (*shu* 贖), were "made slaves" (*wei nubi* 為奴婢). On the other hand, the Tang era scribe Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645 CE) wrote that *zhui* 贅 was synonymous with *zhi* 質, meaning to "pawn a hostage," or the term *zhui xu* 贅壻, denoting when a son was commanded to live with his wife's parents.[63] In either case, the movement or transference of subordinate persons from one family to another is clear. There is little to no way of estimating the extent of the sale of freeborn children, though in times of economic hardship it surely underwent a spike.

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[54] *Han Feizi*, 18.949; *Taiping jing*, "Fenbie pinfu fa" 分別貧富法, 36.

[55] *Hanshu*, 97B.3988.

[56] Rubie S. Watson, "The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society," *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 4 (1986), 621.

[57] Debby Chih-Yen Huang and Paul R. Goldin list female infanticide as one of the predominant reasons for imperial China's skewed sex ratio. See "Polygyny and its Discontents: A Key to Understanding Traditional Chinese Society," in *Sexuality in China: Histories of Power and Pleasure*, ed. Howard Chiang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 18.

[58] Li Feng, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 295.

[59] *Hanshu*, 64A.2778–2779.

[60] *Hanshu*, 1B.54, 24A.1127.

[61] *Hanshu*, 24A.1132; Nancy Lee Swan, *Food and Money in Ancient China: The Earliest Economic History of China to A. D. 25* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 164.

[62] *Hanshu*, 24B.1162; Swan, *Food and Money in Ancient China*, 264–265.

[63] For the comments of both Ru Chun and Yan Shigu, see *Hanshu*, 64A.2779. For further evidence supporting the notion that pawning son-in-laws had servile connotations, see Bret Hinsch, "Women, Kinship and Property as Seen in a Han Dynasty Will," *T'oung Pao* 84, no. 1/3 (1998), 5.

By far the most obvious source of *nubi* were those born to their status. Chinese law records parturition among the dominant mechanisms for the enlargement of slave holdings. The early Western Han "Statutes on Miscellaneous Matters" (*Za lü* 襍律) proclaimed that, "when an ordinary person is made the wife of a slave and has a child, the child is given to the slave's master."[64] Equally, children resulting from an illicit union between an enslaved woman, commoner, or servant from another household, were deemed unfree.[65] As the law makes clear, even children fathered by commoners assumed the status of their mother. Conversely, infants born of an illicit relationship between an enslaved man and freeborn woman, inherited their mother's rank.[66] In the main, this anomaly resulted from Chinese patrilineal tradition, where females lawfully incorporated into the household came under the jurisdiction of the male head of the family. Illicit unions, where no formal marriage had taken place, hence invalidated the right of the master to demand the child. It would be somewhat counterproductive to relate all known instances of home-born slaves, so let one example suffice. Wei Qing, the younger half-brother of the Empress Wei Zifu 衛子夫 (d. 91 BCE), was the son of a maidservant and prefectural clerk engaged under the Marquis of Pingyang 平陽侯.[67] While his father was freeborn, his mother's unfree status ensured he too was stricken with the yoke of bondage.

2. Convicts and Bondservants

Conventional wisdom maintains that, for the years preceding the establishment of the Qin dynasty, the generality of slaves were either captured in war (see above) or the descendants of criminals. An oft-cited passage from the *Zhouli* 周禮 chapter "Qiuguan sikou" 秋官司寇 appears to support the latter, relating how male convicts were made criminal slaves (*zuili* 罪隸), while female prisoners thrashed grain (*chong* 舂) and collected firewood (*gao* 槁).[68] However, when it comes to the early imperial period, much debate surrounds the approximate location of convicts (*tu* 徒 or *xingtu* 刑徒) on the spectrum of unfree labour practices.

Following the pre-imperial Qin government's legal reforms in the mid-fourth century BCE, lawbreakers condemned to hard labour sentences were increasingly depended upon to expedite government administration, building projects, and infrastructural upkeep. As such, the generation of fresh convicts to replenish the ranks of the penal labour force was a latent target of the Qin codes.[69] Five levels of hard labour punishment are stipulated in the excavated bamboo slips from tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi 睡虎地. In order of ascending severity, these were: watchman (*hou* 候), robber-guard (*sikou* 司寇), male and female bondservant (*lichen qie* 隸臣妾), gatherer of fuel for the spirits

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[64] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 158 (slip no. 188); trans. Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 617. *Min wei nu qi er you zi, zi bi nu zhu* 民為奴妻而有子，子畀奴主。

[65] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 158 (slip no. 188); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 617. See also Wen Xia 文霞, "Cong Qin Han nubi zui kui tan qi falü diwei 从秦汉奴婢罪窥探其法律地位," *Shou du shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 首都师范大学学报 (社会科学版) 2 (2007), 18.

[66] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 158 (slip no. 189); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 617.

[67] *Hanshu*, 55.2471.

[68] The Eastern Han dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Elucidating Graphs and Analysing Characters*) remarks similarly, "All slaves are [the descendants of] criminals of old" (*nubi jie gu zhi zui ren ye* 奴婢皆古之辠人也). See *Shuowen jiezi*, 12b.260a.

[69] Kathrin Leese-Messing, "Tools of Economic Activity in Early Imperial China," in *Handbook of Ancient Afro-Eurasian Economies, Volume 2: Local, Regional, and Imperial Economies*, ed. Sitta von Reden (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 537.

(*guixin* 鬼薪), white-rice sorter (*baican* 白粲), wall-builder (*chengdan* 城旦), and grain-pounder (*chong* 舂).[70] Categories of punishment did not necessarily reflect the work undertaken by convicts, with the majority of jobs expected of *tu* being shouldered interchangeably.[71] Maxim Korolkov further distinguishes between hard labour convicts (*chengdan* and *chong*), bondservants (*lichen qie*), and those interstitial offenders (*sikou* and *hou*) belonging neither to the commoner or unfree population.[72]

Every hard labour sentence could be matched with some form of temporary or permanent mutilation, acting to visually demarcate the debased status of convicts. The lightest of the mutilating punishments involved the shaving of the head and facial hair, graduating to face tattooing (*qing* 黥), nose severing, and eventually the forceful amputation of feet (*zhan zhi* 斬趾).[73] Under the Qin dynasty, prison labourers were additionally singled out by their distinctive red uniforms. One line from the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of Han*) reports it was not unusual to observe columns of "red-clothed [hard labour convicts]" (*zhe yi* 赭衣) traversing the roads and byways.[74]

The precise duration of hard labour sentences is a matter of some controversy. A memorandum dated to 167 BCE unambiguously records that wall-builders and grain-pounders were to be sentenced for three years, before spending an extra twelve months as fuel gathers and white-rice sorters, at which point they were to be upgraded to the rank of bondservant.[75] After a final year as *lichen qie*, offenders were rehabilitated into the common populous. Those sentenced to bond service from the outset were required to serve for two years, followed by a supplementary year as robber-guards, at which point they too were eligible for promotion to commoner status.[76] Thus, from the mid-Western Han onwards, we can be reasonably confident that fixed-term penalties amounted to something of a legal norm. Various sentencing periods in the unearthed Qin and early Western Han manuscripts appear not to have been similarly capped. A clause from the "Statutes on the

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[70] Robin D. S. Yates, "Slavery in Early China: A Socio-Cultural Approach," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 3, no. 1/2 (2001), 304; Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 193; Kyung-ho Kim and Ming-chiu Lai, "An Overview of the Qin-Han Legal System from the Perspective of Recently Unearthed Documents" in *Routledge Handbook of Early Chinese History*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (London: Routledge, 2018), 396.

[71] Miyake Kiyoshi 宮宅潔, "Laoyixing tixi de jiegou yu bianqian" 勞役刑體系的結構與變遷," in *Zhongguo gudai xingzhi shi yanjiu* 中國古代刑制史研究, trans. Yang Zhenhong 楊振紅 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2016), 62. One bamboo document records that *congren* 從人 (lit. "followers," a kind of war captive) taken in Qin's subjugation of northern China were deemed unsuitable for agricultural work and requested to be transferred to government storehouses and pottery workshops. See *Liye Qin jiandu* (2018), 33–35 (tablet no. 9-22). It should be noted however, that some punishments under the Qin were gender sensitive, with only men being made gathers of fuel and wall-builders, and only women being forced to sort rice and pound grain. This does not appear to have always been the case during the early Western Han where, for instance, two advisers of Liu Wu's 劉戊 (d. 154 BCE), King of Chu 楚王, were shackled, dressed in convict garb, and compelled to pestle grain. See *Shiji*, 121.3121; *Hanshu*, 36.1924.

[72] Maxim Korolkov, "Empire-Building and Market-Making at the Qin Frontier: Imperial Expansion and Economic Change, 221–207 BCE," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2020), 326.

[73] For the social repercussions of mutilation, see Olivia Milburn, "Disability in Ancient China," in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London: Routledge, 2017), 107–109. In 167 BCE, Emperor Wen called for the mutilating punishments of severing and amputation to be replaced with strikes of the bastinado, see *Hanshu*, 4.125, 23.1099.

[74] *Hanshu*, 51.2327.

[75] *Hanshu*, 23.1099; Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law*, 336. The commentary of Ying Shao makes a similar observation, see *Hanshu*, 2.85; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 177.

[76] *Hanshu*, 23.1099; Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law*, 336.

Composition of Judgments" (*Ju lü* 具律), thought to have been promulgated in the summer of 186 BCE, specifies the following:

> 隸臣妾及收人有耐罪，鬼 (繫) 城旦舂六歲。 鬼 (繫) 日未備而復有耐罪，完 為城旦舂。
>
> For a bond servant or bondwoman as well as for an impounded person who is guilty of a crime [that matches] undergoing shaving: detain [the criminal among] the wall-builders or grain-pounders for six years. When the days [of the criminal's detention] are not yet complete, and he or she again is guilty of a crime [that matches] undergoing shaving: leave [the criminal] intact and make [him or her] a wall-builder or grain-pounder.[77]

Quite plainly, in the above scenario condemnation to six years as a wall-builder or grain-pounder was intended to penalise bondservants and impounded persons who had accomplished further wrongdoing. If a criminal was to perpetuate yet another offence during his or her stint as a hard labour convict, the law seemingly allowed for their lifelong demotion to the status of *chengdan* or *chong*, evidenced by the lack of any reference to the intended duration of such punishments. Accordingly, for the decades prior to 167 BCE, it is not unreasonable to suggest that especially hapless convict labourers tolerated perpetual unfreedom.

The interplay between convict labour and private enslavement has stimulated further disagreement. One article, salvaged from the Shuihudi dig site, records the leasing of bondswomen by the Qin government to private householders, on the condition they were adequately fed and clothed.[78] Another legal case, dating from 246 BCE, suggests that the families of convicted lawbreakers were impounded and sold by the Qin state to private buyers, most likely as slaves.[79] In the opposite fashion, the Liye 里耶 documents betray the habit of local authorities in the Qin commandery of Dongting 洞庭 to routinely purchase *tuli* 徒隸 (dependent labourers) and *nu* from private individuals.[80] Masters burdened with unruly *chen* 臣 (male slaves, in Qin terminology) might even have petitioned the state to buy their dependents and enlist them as *chengdan* forced labourers.[81] The farrago of surviving evidence points to the laminous nature of unfree statuses in early imperial China, where the labour of convicts and household slaves could be instrumented in both a private and public capacity.

As if to contribute to the incertitude, the conspicuous absence of government slaves in the disentombed legal slips has led some specialists to imagine that *lichen qie* were the equivalent of state chattel during the Qin and early years of the Western Han.[82] Relating the details of individual arguments would require a chapter in itself, so here I will restrict my focus only to what

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[77] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 147 (slip no. 90); trans. Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 501.

[78] *Shuihudi* (1990), 32 (slip no. 48); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 30.

[79] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 223 (slip nos. 122–123); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 1319.

[80] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 93–94 (tablet no. 8-154), 367 (tablet no. 8-1604).

[81] *Shuihudi* (1990), 154 (slip nos. 37–38); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 193; Katrina C. D. McLeod and Robin D. S. Yates, "Forms of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of The Feng-chen shih," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41, no. 1 (1981), 146.

[82] Gao Min 高敏, *Yunmeng Qin jian chutan* 雲夢秦簡初探 (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 91–108; Gong Changwei 宮長為 and Song Min 宋敏, "Lichenqie shi Qin guan nubi 隸臣妾是秦官奴婢," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1 (1982), 120–126. More recently, Sun Ming 孫銘, "Kou jiang, yiwei lichen jie 寇降, 以為隸臣解," *Chutu wenxian yu falü shi yanjiu* 出土文獻與法律史研究 7 (2018), 138–150.

differentiated bondservants from other hard labour convicts.[83] Two kinds of employment characterised the application of *tu*, including *lichen qie*, who could be set to task on a permanent (*rong* 冗) or rotational (*geng* 更) basis. Concerning the latter, bondservants intermittently deployed by the Qin government were only to receive food rations whilst actively engaged, evincing their capacity to feed themselves when not labouring for the state.[84] Correspondingly, the Qin statutes imply that bondservants were able to clothe themselves, with only unmarried *lichen qie* (i.e. those not belonging to a household) being issued with summer and winter garments.[85] What is more, from the "Statutes on Abscondence" (*Wang lü* 亡律) in the Yuelu Academy manuscripts, we observe that bondservants working as craftsman could higher themselves out as wage labourers when not employed by the government.[86] Bondservants may have also pursued commercial ventures, with another of the Yuelu Academy strips recording the occupation of a coffin market stall by a *lichen*.[87] All four articles leave the distinct impression that bondservants enjoyed a considerable degree of economic autonomy, privileges that did not extend to hard labour convicts *sensu stricto*.

Equally, unlike convicts facing lifelong detention, the Qin government provided *lichen qie* with a means of redemption. Male bondservants who participated in military engagements and cut off the heads of enemy soldiers, for example, could be rewarded with liberation and meritocratic rank.[88] Bondswomen, meanwhile, were entitled to recovery by a male relative, should he commit himself to five years of service on the empire's frontier.[89] This again underscores the fact that bond service was, from the perspective of early Chinese legislators, a comparatively moderate form of hard labour punishment.

In exceptional cases however, it appears wrongdoers could be subjected to government slavery wholesale. The Eastern Han commentator Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140–206 CE) records that in 154 BCE, following the Rebellion of the Seven States (*qi guo zhi luan* 七國之亂), the wives and children of insurgent kings were made government *nubi*.[90] Near identically, during his administration of Henei 河內 commandery, Wang Wenshu 王溫舒 (d. 104 BCE) rounded up wanton members of the nobility, having their entire families and household staff condemned.[91] In both cases, it appears enslavement was deemed to be a more benign punishment than its alternative, execution.[92] Ordinaries caught illegally minting coins were likewise, under the reign of the usurper Wang Mang, enslaved alongside their wives and children.[93] Free commoners may have even opted

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[83] For recent discussions on the status of bondservants in light of the Qin and Han legal evidence, see Gao Heng 高恒, *Qin Han jiandu zhong fazhi wenshu jikao* 秦漢簡牘中法制文書輯考 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 61–74; Korolkov, "Empire-Building and Market-Making at the Qin Frontier," 356–368; Liu Hainian 劉海年, *Zhanguo Qin dai fazhi guankui* 戰國秦代法制管窺 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2006), 275–299.

[84] *Shuihudi* (1990), 32 (slip no. 49); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 31.

[85] *Shuihudi* (1990), 42 (slip no. 94); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 56.

[86] *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* (2015), 61 (slip nos. 68–69).

[87] *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* (2013), 130 (slip no. 64); Ulrich Lau and Thies Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire: An Annotated Translation of the Exemplary Qin Criminal Cases from the Yuelu Academy Collection* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 152–153.

[88] *Shuihudi* (1990), 55 (slip no. 156); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 83.

[89] *Shuihudi* (1990), 54 (slip no. 151); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 73.

[90] *Hanshu*, 6.157; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 2, 30.

[91] *Hanshi*, 90.3656.

[92] Pulleyblank, "The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China," 206.

[93] *Hanshu*, 24B.1184; Swan, *Food and Money in Ancient China*, 352–353.

to become government slaves in return for commuting a loved one's punishment. Most famously, the filial daughter Tiying 緹縈, in a petition to Emperor Wen, pledged to atone for her father's crimes by way of surrendering herself as a palace maidservant.[94] Edicts calling for the pardon of those enslaved for their relative's crimes further attest to the government's habit of sequestering commoners. Emperor An 安帝 (r. 106–125 CE) promulgated one such decree, instructing that those who had been impounded by the state were to be given their freedom.[95]

Convict labourers were put to work by the Qin government on state-managed farms, where they cleared fields and broke earth.[96] Supplementary evidence points to the engagement of bondservants in government workshops, as well as their use as private cooks, court musicians, and runners in the postal relay system.[97] Transmitted textual and archaeological sources from the Han indicate that *tu* were reserved for the most dangerous of jobs. Archetypal labour included the construction of palaces, digging tombs, shoring up dykes, mending roads, felling trees, mining ore, casting iron, boiling brine, and dying fabrics.[98] The digging of Emperor Jing's 景帝 (r. 157–141 BCE) mausoleum, Yang Ling 陽陵, is an especially poignant illustration of the scale of convict drudgery. Located less than two kilometres to the northwest of the Yang Ling tumulus, has been excavated a satellite cemetery containing the skeletal remains of some ten thousand prison labourers. Buried in irregularly sized pits, some containing multiple bodies, archaeologists uncovered numerous skeletons still shackled by iron collars and heavy fetters.[99] Judging from the size of the cemetery alone, sprawling over some eighty thousand square meters, tens of thousands of convicts must have been employed in the construction of the emperor's burial mound. The *Hanshu* affirms that those "prisoner labourers who dug Yang Ling were pardoned from the death penalty."[100] Having exchanged capital punishment for backbreaking physical labour, those convicts involved were, for all intents and purposes, disposable.

Before closing, we ought to remember that the commoner population were similarly mobilised to undertake stints of hard labour. Two forms of conscription tax were levied by the Qin and Han government: civilian and military. With regard to the former, all males from as young as seventeen *sui* 歲 (fifteen by Western standards) were required to devote one month per year to corvée service.[101] In order to minimise damage to agricultural productivity, labour obligations were exclusively imposed on the peasantry during the off-season, that is between planting and harvesting. For the early Western Han, the "Statutes on Government Service" (*Yao lü* 徭律) guided the recruitment and discharge of conscript workers. Jobs included conveying tax grain, road maintenance, hydraulic engineering (i.e. digging canals, shoring up dykes, etc.), building imperial

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[94] *Hanshu*, 23.1098; Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law*, 334.

[95] *Hou Hanshu*, 5.215.

[96] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 31–32 (tablet no. 8-16).

[97] *Shuihudi* (1990), 35 (slip no. 62); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 45. For the appointment of bondservants as cooks (*yang* 養), see *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* (2015), 122 (slip no. 165). For court musicians, see Yates, "The Fate of the Defeated," 15–16. For *lichen* 隸臣 as letter carriers, see *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 285 (tablet no. 8-1154).

[98] Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 232.

[99] Wang Zhongshu, *Han Civilisation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 212.

[100] *Hanshu*, 5.147; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 321. *She tu zuo yang ling zhe si zui* 赦徒作陽陵者死罪。

[101] *Shuihudi* (1990), 6 (slip no. 8.2).

tombs, and repairing city defences.[102] Military enlistment was necessitated for all men aged between twenty-three and fifty-six and typically involved being posted to the empire's frontiers to perform garrison duty (*shu* 戍).[103] Garrison conscripts served for two years, the first of which was spent training in their home commandery, and the second guarding the northern borderlands.[104]

Owing to the fact conscription levies were seasonally bound, convict labour was necessary for the maintenance of the early imperial state, constituting a year-round source of workers. The degraded status of *tu* ensured they could be squandered on a range of hazardous and gruelling jobs, largely unsuited to free commoners. All things considered, Mark Edward Lewis is surely correct when he writes that forced labour was the "foundation" of the Qin and Han empires, so central were convicts to the political economy of China's inaugural dynasties.[105]

3. Trafficking and Sale

Having now outlined the principal founts of dependent labour, we shall proceed to contextualise the purchase and sale of private slaves. The evidence for such transactions is however, regrettably slim, coming down to a handful of literary and legal attestations. Nevertheless, a conjectural reconstruction of the trafficking and auction of slaves is within reach. Han China, being a continental empire, was reliant on river networks and highway systems for the transportation of merchandise.[106] Consequently, whether captured in war, kidnapped, or imported from abroad, human cargo was conveyed overland or down waterways. Many enslaved men and women were driven to market in carts, often encumbered with shackles and iron collars.[107] According to the *Hanshu*, caged wagons were reserved chiefly for adult males, while women and children trudged behind in chains.[108] Journeying to market was no doubt arduous, with the sick and weak frequently dying along the way. In some cases, vendors reported a sixty per cent mortality rate, citing grief and suffering as the primary cause of death.[109]

The biography of Wang Wengxu 王翁須 (b. 115 BCE), mother of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 BCE), furnishes us with vital details in respect to the trafficking of slave women.[110] Born to a poor family, Wengxu was entrusted aged eight or nine to the care of Liu Zhongqing 劉仲卿, youngest son of the Marquis of Jie 節侯. Observing her unusual prettiness, Zhongqing estimated his ward would grow up to be a peerless beauty and covertly schemed to introduce her to the imperial harem. Sometime during her adolescence, Zhongqing resolved to sell Wengxu to the merchant Chang Er 長

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[102] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 188–189 (slip nos. 411–415); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 903.

[103] *Hanshu* 5.141; *Hou Hanshu*, 2.97.

[104] Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, 80.

[105] Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 250.

[106] The road network in early imperial China was highly developed. Derk Bodde has estimated that the Qin highway system totalled some 6,800 kilometres (4,250 miles). See "The State and Empire of Ch'in," in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 1, The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 61.

[107] *Hanshu*, 37.1975.

[108] *Hanshu*, 99C.4167; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 410.

[109] *Hanshu*, 24B.1184; Swan, *Food and Money in Ancient China*, 353.

[110] *Hanshu*, 97A.3962. For a full translation, see Burton Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China: Selections from the History of the Former Han* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 254–256.

兒, a specialist hawker of young girls. Learning of Zhongqiu's intentions, Wengxu fled to her parents, who protested Zhongqing had no right to pawn their daughter. Through lies and deceit, Zhongqing managed to coax Wengxu out of hiding, before swiftly handing her over to the broker Chang Er. By sheer chance, the cart Wengxu was riding in passed the house of her mother and father. Calling out, she denounced Zhongqing's chicanery and explained how she was being driven towards the village of Liusu 柳宿. Naturally, Wengxu's mother and father followed after their daughter, hoping to sue for her release. After briefly returning home to collect provisions, Wengxu's parents hurried on to Lunu 盧奴, in the region of Zhongshang 中山, where they found Wengxu amongst a group of five other dancing girls, all being prepared for auction. Wengxu's mother spent a final night with her daughter, before again hastening home to raise additional funds, leaving her husband behind to oversee proceedings. However, before she could sell enough grain to cover costs, Wengxu's father returned, lamenting how their daughter had already been sold. Here the narrative breaks off, though we learn from complementary accounts that Wengxu eventually entered the service of Liu Ju 劉據 (128–91 BCE), crown prince and erstwhile heir of Emperor Wu.[111]

While the story of Wengxu exposes those networks facilitating the transfer of vendible bodies, how the enslaved were physically sold remains opaque. Imaginably, *nubi* underwent some form of preparation for sale. Perhaps this involved beautification treatments or, at the very least, a short period of rest and recuperation. From the transmitted texts we learn, "when people sell their slaves, they dress them up in embroidered clothes and silk shoes with braided trimmings on the edges, and put them in pens."[112] Credibly, what is being described here is a market for luxury slaves, owing to the fact traffickers had gone to the effort of dressing their wares in costly silks. The presentation of enslaved men and women in pens was presumably for the benefit of potential buyers, who could easily view and compare *nubi* alongside each other. Allusions to slaves being held in enclosures are echoed elsewhere in the histories, perhaps as a result of their being sold next to horses and oxen.[113] The specific nature of how ownership was transferred from purveyor to patron is not wholly clear, though the process almost certainly involved a written contract. Regrettably, no authentic bills of sale survive from the Han dynasty, though Wang Bao's 王褒 (ca. 84–53 BCE) satirical poem "The Slave Contract" (*Tong yue* 僮约), gives some indication of how these documents might have looked.

> 券文曰：神爵三年正月十五日，資中男子王子渊， 從成都安志裏女子楊惠，買亡夫时戶下髯奴便了，决賈萬五千。
>
> The text of the contract read: On the fifteenth day of the first month of the third year of the Shen Jue reign period, Wang Zi Yuan, a male from Zhi Zhong, purchases from Yang Hui, a female of An Zhi district of Cheng Du, the bearded slave Bian Liao, who belongs to the household of her deceased husband, the price is 15,000 cash.[114]

As we would expect, all the typical elements of a sale contract are present; the date of the transaction, the names of the parties involved, the slave's name and the price paid. Wang Zi Yuan 王

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111 *Hanshu*, 8.235; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 2, 199.

112 *Hanshu*, 48.2242; trans. Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 340–341. *Mai tong zhe*, *wei zhi xiu yi si lü pian zhu yuan*, *nei zhi xian zhong* 賣僮者，為之繡衣絲履偏諸緣，內之閑中。

113 *Hanshu*, 99B.4110; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 285.

114 Wang Qitao 王启涛, "Wang Bao 'Tong Yue' yanju 王褒《僮约》研究," *Sichuan Shifan Daxue Xuebao* 四川师范大学学报 31, no. 6 (2004), 77; trans. Cho-yun Hsu, *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 231–232.

子淵 then goes on to list all the jobs he expected Bian Liao 便了 to perform, a point we will return to shortly.

The approximate value of slaves is hard to calculate from so few surviving examples. Under the Qin, all items on sale above the value of one cash were required to be fitted with a price tag.[115] This leaves little doubt that the cost of individual men and women would have been advertised on a sale ticket, hung somewhere from the slave's body. One Han era inquest preserved in the *Book of Submitted Doubtful Cases* (*Zouyan shu* 奏讞書), records that 16,000 cash was paid for a *bi* 婢 (female slave).[116] Similar prices are evidenced by an inventory board from Juyan 居延, where 20,000 cash was handed over for an adult female and 30,000 paid for two adolescent boys.[117] A final example from the Qin is preserved in the Liye bamboo strips, where an adult male was valued at 4,300 cash and a boy priced at 2,500 cash.[118]

In an attempt to give these figures some tangible value, I shall convert cash prices to their equivalent worth in gold. The mathematical text *Suanshu shu* 算數書 (*Book of Numbers and Computations*), also unearthed from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan, provides the exchange rate between gold and cash for the early Western Han. One slip reads, "the value of 1 *liang* of gold is 315 cash."[119] Roughly speaking, one *liang* 兩 (that is twenty-four *shu* 銖) can be calculated as around 15.36 grams, thus a female slave costing 16,000 cash would have been equal to 783.12 grams worth of gold.[120] Owing to the fact that exchange rates between gold and cash varied among commanderies, as well as fluctuating from one year to the next, this estimate should be taken with caution. Alternatively, we might gauge the value of slaves in relation to annual income. As the Japanese scholar Fujita Takao has calculated, peasants unable to pay fines worked off their debt at a rate of six cash per day if they received board, or eight if they went unfed.[121] Assuming an indentured labourer fed himself, the price of a slave would then be equivalent to almost five and a half years of work. Estimating a mean price from only a handful of reliable attestations is currently untenable, though the lower prices recorded at Liye may reflect the lesser value of slaves during the Qin.[122]

The purchase of *nubi* by government offices was somewhat more formalised, beginning with a background check to ensure the slave in question had not been adjudicated for previous crimes or lawfully manumitted.[123] A full medical inspection followed, conducted by the *lingshi* 令使, a low-

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[115] *Shuihudi* (1990), 39 (slip no. 69); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 53.

[116] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 214 (slip no. 9); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 1189.

[117] Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, Vol. 1, 72.

[118] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 66 (tablet no. 8-1287); Robin D. S. Yates, "Female Commoners and the Law in Early Imperial China," in *Rulers and Ruled in Ancient Greece, Rome, and China*, ed. Hans Beck and Griet Vankeerberghen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 172.

[119] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 255 (slip no. 46); adapted from Joseph W. Dauben, "算数書 *Suan Shu Shu* A Book on Numbers and Computations: English Translation with Commentary," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 62, no. 2 (2008), 122. *Jia ga liang san bai yi shi wu qian* 金價兩三百一十五錢。

[120] For Han era weights and measures, see Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 276–280; Michael Loewe, "The Measurement of Grain during the Han Period," *T'oung Pao* 49, no. 1/2 (1961), 65.

[121] Fujita Takao 藤田高夫, "Shinkan bakkin kō 秦漢罰金考," in *Zenkindai Chūgoku no keibatsu* 前近代中國の刑罰, ed. Umehara Kaoru 梅原郁 (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1996), 97–121.

[122] If war captives were indeed a source of slaves during the Qin conquest, high numbers of prisoners would have influenced price elasticity, driving down market rates.

[123] *Shuihudi* (1990), 154 (slip no. 37); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 193.

ranking official charged with record keeping.[124] Based on this medical examination, a price would be negotiated between the seller and *shaonei* 少內, a treasury representative overseeing financial transactions.[125] Unfortunately, the statutes fail to elucidate the average cost of government slaves, simply requiring that the "correct market price" (*yi shi zheng jia* 以市正賈) be handed over.[126] In any case, age, state of health, and the respective proficiencies of individual slaves likely fell under consideration.

4. Female Labour

Expectedly, the domestic application of bonded women and girls was varied, encompassing a wide range of occupations. Sericulture ranked among the most common vocations assigned to private slave women, sometimes on a grand scale. The seven hundred *jia tong* 家童 (household slaves) belonging to the government minister Zhang Anshi 張安世 (d. 62 BCE) were engaged in various handicrafts, perhaps even twining silk for the open market.[127] Though not at the level of the household, female bondservants under the Qin were also forced to spin cloth in government workshops.[128] A register from the Qianling 遷陵 county archive likewise suggests grain-pounders could be made to weave silk yarn.[129]

The entertainment sector was another locale where female slaves were frequently employed. Enslaved singers and dancers are well attested in the sources, especially within the households of the aristocracy.[130] The numerous earthenware statuettes of dancers and musicians, disinterred from the tombs of the kings of Chu, bespeak the popularity of female performers.[131] To satisfy demand, merchants scoured the land looking to recruit and train young girls from poverty-stricken families. Traders from Handan 邯鄲 were renowned for provisioning beautiful and talented girls to play the stage in the courts of the elite.[132] While not enslaved, the women of Zhao 趙 and Zheng 鄭 purportedly travelled great distances for the chance to "show off their figures and faces" (*she xingrong* 設形容), underscoring the demand for female entertainers among the rich.[133] One king went so far as to implore his beloved music slaves to commit ritual suicide and accompany him into the afterlife.[134] Performance-centric vocations could entail high levels of social mobility, the mother

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[124] Yates, "Slavery in Early China," 306.

[125] For the duties of the *shaonei*, see Anthony F. P. Hulsewé, "The Ch'in Documents Discovered in Hupei in 1975," *T'oung Pao* 64, no. 4/5 (1978), 199–200.

[126] *Shuihudi*, 1990, 154 (slip no. 39); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 193.

[127] *Hanshu*, 59.2652. It is generally agreed upon that privately owned slaves under the Qin and Han were not, bar a handful of exceptions, deployed in commercially oriented industries. Among the best-known examples is the merchant Dao Xian 刀閒, who profitably utilised his slaves in the businesses of fishing (*yu* 漁), salt refining (*yan* 鹽), and itinerant commerce. In like fashion, Zhuo Shi 卓氏 apprenticed his *tong* 童 (lit. "youths") in metallurgy, becoming extremely wealthy as a result. See *Shiji*, 129.3279; *Hanshu*, 91.3690–3691.

[128] *Shuihudi* (1990), 35 (slip no. 62); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 45.

[129] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 203 (tablet no. 8-686+8-973).

[130] *Hanshu*, 66.2896; *Yantielun*, 2.121.

[131] For high resolution photographs, see Sun, *Age of Empires*, 136–138; Jay Xu, *Tomb Treasures: New Discoveries from China's Han Dynasty* (San Fransisco: Asian Art Museum, 2017), 66–69.

[132] *Shiji*, 129.3263; *Hanshu*, 97A.3962.

[133] *Shiji*, 129.3271.

[134] *Hanshu*, 53.2421.

of the first Chinese emperor, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE), for example, originally served as a dancing girl under the ownership of a wealthy merchant.[135]

More typically, female slaves were on hand to facilitate their master's comfort, carrying out the myriad chores necessary for the upkeep of his house. Preparing food and cleaning were largely the work of maidservants. Affluent families are known to have utilised *bi* as servers, responsible for bringing their master or mistress's meals to the table. As a case in point, the scullery girl Mei 媚 was taken to court by her tyrannical owner, who complained she had intentionally deposited wild grass in her boiled millet.[136] In a letter to his brother-in-law, Feng Yan 馮衍 (ca. 20 BCE–60 CE) explained how after his wife severely beat the family's only slave girl she was unable to cook or pound grain.[137] The wretched state of Feng's slave, her "hands and feet covered in dirt" (*shou zu bao tu* 手足抱土), hint at the multitude of other tasks she was expected to discharge. Criminal bondswomen in the service of the government were equivalently occupied, assisting cooks in the imperial kitchens and milling flour.[138] Though not strictly pertaining to female slaves, Wang Bao's mock contract (see above) provides a comically long list of jobs he bid his lackey to perform. Among other things, Bian Liao was required to sweep floors (*sao* 扫), weave reed mats (*jie wei* 结葦) and sandals (*lü* 履), draw water (*ji shui* 汲水), raise livestock, hunt game, hew cart shafts (*cai yuan* 裁轅), make charcoal (*zuo tan* 作炭), and gather dry firewood (*gan chai* 乾柴).[139] Even after their master's death, it was not uncommon for a number of enslaved women to serve at his memorial temple, functioning as guards and working to keep the sanctuary clean.[140]

Some *bi* were forever at their master's side. One king had his slave girl chaperone him to the bathroom, where she was instructed to hold his sword while he used the toilet.[141] Following a night of heavy drinking, another maidservant was required to carry and put to bed her mistress's inebriated guest.[142] More outlandishly, an elderly widow demanded she be wheeled around her mansion in an ornate carriage drawn exclusively by female slaves.[143] Running baths, laying out ablutions, and helping their mistress dress and undress were yet other jobs expected of domestics.[144] The twenty-three wooden serving figures recovered from a gentry woman's tomb at Fenghuangshan

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[135] *Shiji*, 85.2508. Revealingly, the girl in question was also a native of Handan.

[136] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 255–256 (slip nos. 162–163); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 1363. The specific job Mei performed comes down to our interpretation of the graph *yang* 養. It is possible to read *yangbi* 養婢 as "kitchen slave" or, as Barbieri-Low and Yates translate, "food-serving slave." However, Ulrich Lau and Michael Lüdke suspect Mei could have also worked as a cook, this certainly makes sense given the context of the lawsuit. See *Exemplarische Rechtsfälle vom Beginn der Han-Dynastie: Eine kommentierte Übersetzung des Zouyanshu aus Zhangjiashan/Provinz Hubei* (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2012), 269.

[137] *Hou Hanshu*, 28B.1003.

[138] *Hanshu*, 23.1091; Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law*, 330.

[139] Wang, "Wang Bao 'Tong Yue' yanjiu 王褒《僮约》研究," 77, 79.

[140] *Hanshu*, 68.2950.

[141] *Shiji*, 105.2805.

[142] *Hanshu*, 92.3711–3712.

[143] *Hanshu*, 68.2950.

[144] *Hou Hanshu*, 84.2798–2799.

鳳凰山, northwest of today's Jingzhou 荊州 city, accentuate the ubiquity of servants in the daily lives of elites.[145]

Enslaved women also worked as medical specialists. A *cairen* 才人 (lit. "talented person," often used to denote a concubine) belonging to the King of Jibei 濟北王, possibly Liu Zhi 劉志 (r. 164–154 BCE), was said to have been skilled in the *fang* 方 technique.[146] William H. Nienhauser interprets *fang* as referring to a certain kind of massage, one that perhaps involved sex acts.[147] Within the imperial palace, wet nurses were recruited from amongst the government female slaves, a highly intimate job necessitating close contact with the emperor and his family.[148] It is worth emphasising at this juncture that *bi* personally attached to their master or mistress would have enjoyed greater prestige. As with other slave societies, proximity often entailed preferential treatment, material comfort, or even manumission.

Although rural production constituted the backbone of the Han economy, it has long been hypothesised that slave labour played only a minimal role in agriculture. The arable lands of ancient China were instead, traditionalists argue, worked by smallholders or tenant farmers, obliging all members of the family to help with planting and harvesting. As Cho-yun Hsu has highlighted, the fact adolescent children were only schooled during the offseason implies their indispensability to agrarian work.[149] If homesteaders required additional labour, hired hands were most likely preferred to slaves, since the purchase of bonded workers necessitated high upfront costs.[150]

Slaves and field cultivation are, nonetheless, periodically mentioned in tandem, suggesting *nubi* were a prerequisite to agronomic production.[151] Wang Mang's reforms at the end of the Western Han, for example, banned both the buying and selling of land and slaves, connoting a possible symbiosis.[152] Moreover, the property registers from Juyan infer slaveholding did indeed permeate the peasant classes, albeit on a modest scale.[153] One farmer retained at least three slaves — two male and one female — alongside his carts and draft animals.[154] Likewise, a model litigation found

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145 Rawson, *Mysteries of Ancient China*, 181. Tomb no. 168, belonging to a district official, and the likely husband of tomb 167's occupant, also contained numerous serving figurines, see Margareta Prüch, "Fenghuangshan Tomb 168, Jiangling, Hubei Province" in *Written in Bones: How Human Remains Unlock the Secrets of the Dead*, ed. Paul Bahn (Richmond Hill, ON: Firefly Books, 2003), 59–60.

146 *Shiji*, 105.2805.

147 William H. Nienhauser, *The Grad Scribe's Record, Volume 9: The Memoirs of Han China, Part 2* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 51.

148 *Han jiuyi*, B.3a.

149 Hsu, *Han Agriculture*, 60.

150 A case report from the Qin era *Models for Sealing and Investigating* (*Fengzhen shi* 封診式) mentions in passing that day-labourers (*yong* 庸) congregated in the market place, feasibly in the expectation they would be recruited by wealthy landowners. See *Shuihudi* (1990), 150 (slip no. 18); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 188–189; McLeod and Yates, "Forms of Ch'in Law," 140–141.

151 *Hanshu*, 11.336, 12.355, 24A.1143. On the other hand, slaves and landholdings could simply have been indicators of wealth.

152 *Hanshu*, 24A.114, 99B.4111. Wang Mang's transient reforms also called for the reclassification of *nubi* as *sishu* 私屬 (private dependents).

153 Slave owning commoners are too evidenced in the Liye documents, see Hsing I-tien, "Qin-Han Census and Tax and Corvée Administration," in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited*, ed. Yuri Pines *et al*. (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 164.

154 Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, Vol. 1, 71–72.

among the Qin statutes dictated an "obstreperous" (*han* 悍) slave who refused to work the fields could be punished and sold to the government.[155]

More pronouncedly, the *Register of Slave Grain Rations* (*Nubi lin shi su churu bo* 奴婢廩食粟出入簿) — a looted wooden manuscript 69 slips in length now housed in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Art Museum — seemingly evidences the use of agricultural slaves on an industrial scale.[156] Dating from ca. 79 BCE, the text reads much like an accounting book, cataloguing the grain allotments to some 42 enslaved families (totalling approximately 200 *nubi*) over the course of the farming season.[157] Whether the slaves in question belonged to the Han government or a moneyed landowner is unclear, with specialists coming down on both sides of the argument. In either case, the *Register* problematises the orthodox view of early imperial Chinese tillage as being the sole domain of smallholders, tenant farmers, and freeborn wage labourers.

Less ambiguity surrounds the utilisation of bonded labour on imperial estates. Contingents of male and female slave gamekeepers staffed the royal parks outside Chang'an, tending to deer and other huntable wildlife.[158] Correspondingly, the pastures reserved for breeding imperial horses were maintained by thousands of slave herdsmen.[159] Private slaves confiscated from merchants who failed to pay the so-called *min qian* 緡錢 tax were distributed among the imperial parklands, where they cared for dogs, horses, and fowl.[160] Unfree men and women may have also laboured as shepherds, even slave children are recorded supervising grazing flocks during the years of the Warring States.[161] Hence we may conclude that *nubi*, while not universally enlisted to work the land, were clearly deployed in other agricultural professions.

5. Manumission

For a lucky few, enslavement found its terminus in manumission. Here it is necessary to distinguish between the freeing of state and private slaves. The imperial administration had in place various guidelines adjudicating the dismissal of *guan nubi* 官奴婢 (government slaves). In the case of palace women (see below) age was, unsurprisingly, a deciding factor. All women older than thirty-five were manumitted and expelled from the inner quarters.[162] Likewise, on the accession of Emperor Ai 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BCE), *guan nubi* over the age of fifty were to be made commoners, and maidservants over thirty released to find a husband.[163] Acts of exceptional devotion were likely

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[155] *Shuihudi* (1990), 154 (slip no. 37); Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*, 193; McLeod and Yates, "Forms of Ch'in Law," 146. McLeod and Yates opt to gloss *han* 悍 as "scold." While by no means incorrect, the English noun is highly gendered, being reserved primarily to censure women. As such, I favour Hulsewé's adjectival rendering.

[156] For the manuscript in full, see *Xianggang Zhongwen daxue wenwuguan cang jiandu* 香港中文大學文物館藏簡牘, ed. Chen Songchang 陳松長 (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue wenwuguan, 2001), 54–85 (slip nos. 131–199).

[157] Lee Sung-kyu 李成珪, "Qian Han ui da tudi jingying gwa nubi laodong xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan suo cang jaindu 'nubi lin shi su churu bo' ui bunseogeul jungsimeuro 前漢의 大土地 經營과 奴婢 勞動 香港中文大學文物館所藏 簡牘 「奴婢廩食粟出入簿」의 분석을 중심으로," *Junggu Gojungse Sayeon Gu* 중국 고중세 사연 구 20 (2008), 23.

[158] *Han jiuyi*, B.9a.

[159] *Han jiuyi*, A.4a.

[160] *Shiji*, 30.1436; *Hanshu* 24B.1171.

[161] *Hanshu*, 55.2471; *Zhuangzi*, 8.323.

[162] *Han jiuyi*, B.3a.

[163] *Hanshu*, 11.336.

another path to freedom. The palace slave woman (*gong bi* 宮婢) Ze 則 was freed by Emperor Xuan out of gratitude for the care she had shown him as a child.[164] Interestingly, the Spring and Autumn (*Chunqiu* 春秋, 770–476 BCE) era nobleman Zhao Yang 趙鞅 (d. 475 BCE) promised that slaves and other menials who fought valiantly on the battlefield would be rewarded with manumission.[165] While servile detachments continued to be marshalled under the Han, there is no evidence indicating soldierly valour was similarly recompensed.[166] Government slaves may have also purchased their freedom. Wei Hong 衛宏 (fl. first century CE) records that manumission was set at one million cash, an impossibly high number scholars have rightly dismissed.[167] Nevertheless, a minority of private *nubi* were able to amass great fortunes and could no doubt afford to buy their freedom.[168] From the dynastic histories, we know of at least one female slave who purchased her manumission, though she was later kidnapped and re-subjugated, for which her master was deposed from his marquisate.[169]

Thanks again to the unearthed Qin and Han legal manuscripts, our knowledge of the manumission of privately owned slaves has been substantially enriched. First, a word on terminology. The technical verb denoting manumission during the Western Han was *mian* 免, meaning "to release" or "to avoid."[170] Naturally, the right to manumit rested solely with the master (*zhu* 主), stemming from his "desire" or "inclination" (*yu* 欲) to liberate favoured *nubi*.[171] Once manumitted, male slaves became known as "private dependents" (*sishu* 私屬), while female slaves took on the status of freedmen (*shuren* 庶人).[172] Male slaves were only upgraded to the rank of *shuren* upon their master's death, contingent, of course, on their continued "good behaviour" (*weishan* 為善).[173] The probationary nature of manumission ensured bonded males tolerated a fragile freedom, with the spectre of re-enslavement a looming possibility.

In the main, freedmen continued to be employed in whatever occupation they had performed as slaves.[174] The fact newly enfranchised persons were exempt from the poll tax and corvée service demonstrates their separability from commoners, as well as underscoring their lasting dependence. A number of gender-specific routes to freedom are also apparent from the excavated texts. Slave women who engaged in sexual relations with their master and gave birth to an heir were, upon his

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164 *Hanshu*, 74.3144. For the manumission of a male slave by Emperor Wu, see *Hanshu*, 68.2959.

165 Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition*, 1845

166 To secure the northern borderlands, Wang Mang established two battalions of slave and convict fighters, entitled *Zhutu* 豬突 and *Xiyong* 豨勇 respectively. See *Hanshu*, 24B.1184–1185, 99C.4155. For slave attendants riding into battle with their masters, see *Shiji*, 107.2846.

167 *Han jiuyi*, B.4b. For the potential of this figure being a scribal error, see Wilbur, *Slavery in China*, 130.

168 Examples of rich slaves can be found in *Hanshu*, 72.3089; *Yantielun*, 6.355.

169 *Hanshu*, 17.665.

170 Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, "Becoming Almost Somebody: Manumission and its Complications in the Early Han Empire" in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 124. For the various meanings of *mian*, as well as its etymology, see Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 577.

171 Barbieri-Low, "Becoming Almost Somebody," 124.

172 The status of "private dependents" is not to be confused with the reforms of Wang Mang, calling for the categorisation of all *nubi* under the same name, see *Hanshu*, 24A.1144, 99B.4111. For a detailed exploration of this issue, see Wang Aiqing 王愛清, "Sishu xintan 私屬新探," *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 2 (2007), 28–32.

173 *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 155 (slip no. 162–163); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 583.

174 *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 155 (slip no. 162–163); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 583.

death, to be manumitted and made commoners.[175] The status of the child in such cases almost certainly followed that of the father, allowing elder sons to inherit householder status and rank. In later centuries, Tang 唐 (618–907 CE) law stipulated female slaves who bore children by their master could expect to be freed and promoted to the status of concubine.[176] Most remarkably, *zhu* who died without an heir could appoint their most trusted and longest-serving slave as a successor, authorising his manumission and inheritance of their property (see Appendix 2).[177]

General proclamations were yet another way private and state *nubi* could achieve their freedom. Four years after the famine of 205 BCE, the dynastic founder, Emperor Gaozu 高祖帝 (r. 206–195 BCE), issued an edict calling for the manumission of those who had been sold into slavery as a result of poverty or hunger.[178] Similarly, in 26 CE, in the opening months of Emperor Guangwu's reign, it was decreed that wives who had been forcibly remarried, as well as disenfranchised children, were to be permitted to return home.[179] Shortly after, in 30 CE, another pronouncement called for the emancipation of commoners and officials who had been illegally condemned during the reign of Wang Mang.[180] The effectiveness of these general amnesties has rightly been questioned. Wilbur estimates they were little more than hollow gestures, designed chiefly to project the image of benevolent rulership.[181] Indeed, both Gaozu and Guangwu inherited dysfunctional states upset by years of civil war, forestalling any realistic hope of enforcing such edicts.

In addition to universal proclamations, the imperial government disseminated edicts ordering the release of commoners subjugated under particular circumstances. Following Guangwu's pacification of the Shandong 山東 peninsula and northern Jiangsu 江蘇, a rescript dated 31 CE demanded peasants kidnapped and sold by bandits be released and return home.[182] Likewise, while campaigning against the imposter emperor Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36 CE) and rebel warlord Wei Ao 隗囂 (d. 33 CE), Guangwu promulgated a decree calling for the manumission of those who had been enslaved or forced into concubinage.[183] Further edicts followed in 38 and 39 CE, targeting freeborn peasants who had been deracinated in Yi 益 and Liang 涼 provinces.[184] As before, the ability of the central government to follow up on such pronouncements is highly questionable. Lastly, we might draw attention to occasions where rulers commanded the release of slaves wronged by their master. Most notably, in 35 CE it was determined that bonded men and women unjustly branded should be awarded their freedom.[185]

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[175] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 185 (slip no. 385); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 861.

[176] *Tanglü shuyi*, 13.256; Wallace Johnson, *The T'ang Code, Volume 2: Specific Articles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157.

[177] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 184 (slip nos. 382–383); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 861. The imperial government's reliance on tax paying households mandated they overlook the stigma of slavery.

[178] *Hanshu*, 1B.54; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 104.

[179] *Hou Hanshu*, 1A.30.

[180] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.50.

[181] Wilbur, *Slavery in China*, 137. For the same point, see Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, 56.

[182] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.52. The bandits in question were most likely the Red Eyebrows (*Chimei* 赤眉) who, for a time, dominated the Qing 青 and Xu 徐 regional divisions.

[183] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.59.

[184] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.63, 64.

[185] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.58. The same edict revoked the law allowing slaves to be publicly executed for grievously wounding commoners.

6. Concubinage and the Imperial Harem

As with many premodern societies, concubinage in ancient China was a recurrent facet of elite life. While males were theoretically monogamous, polygyny was justified by way of cosmological and procreational arguments. For instance, ritual specialists traditionally recommended kings took one wife alongside eight concubines, who together embodied the ninefold division of his lands.[186] During the Spring and Autumn period of the Eastern Zhou 東周 (ca. 1045–256 BCE), consorts were organised hierarchically. A principal wife held the status of *furen* 夫人 and presided over the secondary wives and concubines (*qie* 妾). Secondary wives belonged to the unique category of *ying* 媵, designating a kind of sororal polygyny in which the younger sisters or cousins of the principal wife were given over as bridal companions.[187] Aristocratic husbands were entitled to sexual relations with their wife's auxiliaries, presumably as a failsafe against sterility or infertility.[188]

Concubines made up the lowest rank in the spousal hierarchy of the Spring and Autumn epoch. Formal marriage to a *qie* was strictly outlawed, with the *Kuiqiu zhi meng* 葵丘之盟 (covenant at Kuiqiu) held in 651 BCE explicitly prohibiting such unions.[189] However, a truncated miscellany of rites and ceremonies did appear to institute the transference of some concubines to the household of their master. Being subject to proprietary rights, concubines were additionally vulnerable to physical maltreatment. The sickly Wei Wuzi 魏武子 (fl. sixth century BCE), a minister of the state of Jin 晉, ordered a concubine to be interred alive with his corpse, while a *qie* belonging to Duke Xian of Wei 衛獻公 (r. 576–559 BCE) was flogged by her music teacher.[190] Neither incident was likely to have befallen a legitimate wife.

Although concubines enjoyed greater legal protections vis-à-vis slaves, they were nonetheless debased. The predominant term for a concubine in the years of the Han was *qie* 妾, traditionally denoting female slaves, and correlated to the graph *chen* 臣 (male slave). Diminutive prefixes, such as *pang* 旁 (auxiliary), *pian* 偏 (side), *xiao* 小 (little), and *xia* 下 (lesser), used in combination with the noun *qi* 妻 (wife), could also refer to concubines.[191] Interestingly, the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Book of the Later Han*) twice lists concubines alongside female slaves, explaining how *bi* 婢 and *xiaqi* 下妻 were similarly abducted and sold by human traffickers.[192] As Patricia Buckley Ebrey has rightly identified, whereas the English word "concubine" has connotations of a paramour or

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[186] *Baihu Tong*, "Jiaqu" 嫁娶, 17; Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po hu t'ung: The Comprehensive Discussion in the White Tiger Hall* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 251.

[187] Melvin P. Thatcher, "Marriages of the Ruling Elite in the Spring and Autumn Period," in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, ed. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 31.

[188] Huang and Goldin, "Polygyny and its Discontents," 22.

[189] Olivia Milburn, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 124. A similar covenant was sworn at Yanggu 陽穀 in 657 BCE, see Harry Miller, *The Gongyang Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 87.

[190] Durrant, Li, and Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition*, 683, 1017.

[191] Huang Jinshan 黃金山, "Handai jiating chengyuan de diwei he yiwu 漢代家庭成員的地位和義務," *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 192, no. 2 (1988), 38; Liu Zenggui 劉增貴, "Shilun Handai hunyin guanxi zhong de lifa guannian 試論漢代婚姻關係中的禮法觀念," in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji xuji* 中國婦女史論文集續集, ed. Bao Jialin 寶家麟 (Taipei: Daoxiang, 1991), 11–13.

[192] *Hou Hanshu*, 1B.52, 63.

mistress, *qie* were more akin to maidservants or sex slaves.[193] The obsequious undertones pervading the language of concubinage serve to illustrate the marginal status of *qie*.

Maintaining a clear distinction between wives and concubines was of the utmost importance to lawgivers. Demonstrably, the children of principal wives would always inherit ahead of the sons of concubines, except in cases where a wife lacked male progeny.[194] The Tang dynasty legal code drew even sharper distinctions, equating the blurring of concubinal and wifely status with breaches of ritual propriety.[195] Mourning obligations provide further exemplification of the disparate status of lesser and principal wives. Concubines were required to grieve for their husband, his legitimate spouse, and all their master's children for up to three years.[196] By contrast, Confucian doctrine advised concubines to be lamented for a mere three months.

Relatively little is known about the buying and selling of concubines under the Han, though specialist markets almost certainly catered to elite demand. One anonymous verse from the anthology *Nineteen Old Poems* (*Gushi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首) suggests concubines were purchased from brothels.

> 青青河畔草， 鬱鬱園中柳。 / 盈盈樓上女， 皎皎當窗牖。/ 娥娥紅粉粧， 纖纖出素手。/ 昔為唱家女，今為蕩子夫。 / 蕩子行不歸， 空床難獨守。
>
> Green, green the riverside grass / lush, lush the courtyard willow. / Beautiful and becoming the girl upstairs, / radiant behind the latticed window. / Lovely her blush and powder makeup, / delicately she extends a pale hand. / Once I was a brothel singing girl, / now the wife of a wandering vagrant. / A wayfarer travels but seldom returns, / my empty bed is hard to bear.[197]

Forsaken by her husband, the unnamed concubine reflects on her past as a brothel singer. Her enduring beauty, rivalling even the river grasses and flourishing willow, contrasts sharply with her present-day loneliness, shut away in a lofty garret. Robert van Gulik has interpreted the poem as evidence for the keeping of *qie* among the middle classes.[198] The going rate for concubines is hard to determine, price attestations being few and far between. A humorous story, preserved in the *Han Feizi*, insinuates concubines cost in excess of one hundred bolts of silk.[199]

For more illuminating details we are forced to reckon with much later textual sources. The twelfth-century CE memoir *Dreams of Splendour of the Eastern Capital* (*Dongjing meng hua lu* 東京夢華

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193 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39.

194 *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 182 (slip nos. 361–362); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 839.

195 *Tanglü shuyi*, 13.256; Johnson, *The T'ang Code*, 155.

196 *Liji*, "Sangfu xiaoji" 喪服小記, 21.

197 *Wen xuan*, 29.1344; adapted from Anne Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 39. This poem is most famous in the English-speaking world for being translated as part of Ezra Pound's *Cathy*, a short but revolutionary collection of Chinese verse.

198 Robert van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (1961 repr., Leiden: Brill, 2003), 66.

199 *Han Feizi*, 10.581. Robin D. S. Yates has calculated that the cost of the concubine in question would have been approximately 33,000 cash. See "Social Status in the Ch'in: Evidence From The Yün-meng Legal Documents. Part One: Commoners," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47, no. 1 (1987), 228.

錄), for instance, describes how brokers helped rich families acquire concubines, parading eligible girls before discerning auction-goers.[200] Owing to China's long history of physiognomy, the features and aspect of concubines were highly scrutinised. During the years of the Qing 清 (1644–1912 CE), connoisseurs of young women were especially concerned with odour, smelling a girl's breath or armpits in an attempt to determine her sexual compatibility. Dates might even be inserted into a girl's vagina and handed over to clients to taste, allowing them to more intimately assess her pheromonal fragrance.[201] Needless to say, these examples are taken from many centuries after the collapse of the Han, though it is imaginable that parallel rituals surrounded the purchase of concubines in antiquity.

The work performed by *qie* was, in some respects, comparable to the duties undertaken by slave women. Cultivating mulberry trees, caring for silkworms, fulling cloth, and sewing were some of the domestic chores expected of lesser wives.[202] One, now lost, Eastern Han stele from Sichuan commemorates the life of a teenage concubine, recording her as a devoted spinner and instructress of children.[203] Other responsibilities expected of *qie* included maintaining their master's personal quarters: laying out his bedroll, storing his sleeping mats, as well as sweeping and cleaning.[204] More intimate tasks also fell to concubines, who prepared baths, washed their patron's body, and combed his hair.[205] Although *bi* were sexually available, their primary purpose was not to quell their master's libido. For concubines, on the other hand, satisfying the sexual desires of their master was of the utmost importance. Unlike wives, concubines were expected to perform sex acts deemed socially dishonourable. Drinking parties and orgies, for example, would have seldom been attended by highborn ladies.[206] Overseeing their master's sexual gratification was a near lifelong commitment, with concubines expected to cohabit with their lord every fifth night until he died or, alternately, they aged beyond the point of desirability.[207]

A final mention should be given to the infamous harem system, where myriad concubines were interned to serve the emperor. The structure and purpose of the Chinese harem has largely been understood to reflect the grandeur of the thearch, with palace ladies embodying his power and wealth.[208] In many respects, concubines can be interpreted as the living furnishings of the imperial residence, enhancing its decorativeness and atmosphere. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–87 BCE) records that, after unifying the empire, the first emperor of China, Ying Zheng 嬴政 (personal name), built numerous palaces on the banks of the Han River, filling each with beautiful women.[209] The number of concubines staffing the inner quarters varied, with some estimates ranging into the thousands.[210] Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r. 146–167 CE) was said to have possessed an astonishing six

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[200] Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, 47.

[201] Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: A Social History* (London: Zed Books, 1988), 16.

[202] *Hanshu*, 24B.1181.

[203] Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*, 170–171.

[204] *Lienü zhuan*, 6.129.

[205] *Lienü zhuan*, 2.34.

[206] *Hanshu*, 82.3379.

[207] *Baihu tong*, "Jiaqu" 嫁娶, 40; Tjan, *Po hu t'ung*, 262–263.

[208] Various ways of approaching the harem system have been proposed, see Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, 178–180.

[209] *Shiji*, 6.239.

[210] *Hou Hanshu*, 53.1741, 66.2161, 78.2529.

thousand concubines.[211] Harem setups were mirrored at lower levels of society by wealthy noblemen and members of the literati, though private seraglios never rivalled the emperor's exorbitant sexual menagerie.[212]

The imperial harem was divided into grades, with concubines being awarded a title and fixed income at any given position (see Appendix 1, Table 1). Both salary and rank were designated using the somewhat arbitrary measurement of *shi* 石, best translated as "bushel." This scale was perhaps originally a reflection of the salary in kind paid to officeholders, but in later centuries simply delineated seniority.[213] During the early years of the Western Han dynasty, all women of the harem were referred to as "ladies" (*furen* 夫人), with the ranks of Beautiful Lady (*meiren* 美人), Eighth Rank Lady (*bazi* 八子), Seventh Rank Lady (*qizi* 七子), Estimable Lady (*liangren* 良人), and Senior and Junior Maid (*zhangshi* 長使 and *shaoshi* 少使) being introduced sometime after Emperor Gaozu's death. Emperor Wu added an additional four echelons, those of Favourite Beauty (*jieyu* 婕妤), Graceful Beauty (*xing'e* 婬娥), [Lady of] Splendid Countenance (*ronghua* 容華), and [Lady of] Complete Deportment (*chongyi* 充衣). Finally, Emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 49–33 BCE) created the title of Brilliant Companion (*zhaoyi* 昭儀), the highest grade in the harem system.[214] Those concubines who occupied positions at the top of the pay scale were of equivalent status to senior government ministers. The various designations of 100 *shi* ladies and maids were incorporated at an unknown date, though unlikely any earlier than the reign of Emperor Yuan. The founder of the Eastern Han did away with the highly bureaucratic structure of his predecessors, and instead established a more modest three-tier system (see Appendix 1, Table 2). Under the new model, only concubines holding the rank of Noble Lady (*guiren* 貴人) received a fixed income, with the other palace maids being rewarded with occasional gifts.[215] It is likely as the seraglio grew, some of the older titles used under the Western Han were reintroduced to differentiate between high and low-ranking *qie*.[216]

Imperial concubines were themselves attended by palace women (*gongnü* 宮女 or *gongren* 宮人), selected from the ranks of the government female slaves. Yan Shigu explains that *gong ren* was a specific term for those *bi* consigned to forbidden areas of the palace.[217] Any girl over the age of eight was eligible to be nominated.[218] Once dispatched to the inner apartments, *gongnü* were carefully supervised and prohibited from leaving. There is some indication that palace maids were dressed in green (*lü* 綠) and coached by senior members of the emperor's domestic staff.[219] Gender segregation ensured the work necessary for the upkeep of the inner quarters was almost entirely performed by *gongnü*.

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[211] *Hou Hanshu*, 10B.445. Equivalent numbers are found in *Hanshu*, 72.3071.

[212] The retired official Zhang Cang 張蒼 reportedly had several hundred concubines, see *Shiji*, 96.2682.

[213] For a more detailed outline of the *shi* 石 ranking system, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4–5.

[214] For the ranks of the imperial harem and those tiers added by Emperor Wu and Emperor Yuan, see *Hanshu*, 97A.3935.

[215] *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.400. A memorial submitted by Xun Shuang 荀爽 in 166 CE makes clear that the majority of concubines fell into the lowest rank, that of Talented Lady (*cai nü* 才女). See *Hou Hanshu*, 62.2055.

[216] For more on this point, see Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 74.

[217] *Hanshu*, 97B.3988.

[218] *Han jiuyi*, B.3a.

[219] *Han jiuyi*, B.4a–b.

Joining the imperial harem was no easy matter. By and large, two approaches allowed for the entrance of girls into the palace: recommendation and common selection. The former was solely available to well-connected aristocrats, who might present a memorial to the throne suggesting a sister or daughter. During the reign of Emperor Guangwu, the esteemed general Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 BCE–49 CE) put forward his three daughters for appraisal, stating that the girls were all "graceful, calm, quiet, and courteous" (*wan jing you li* 婉靜有禮).[220] His thirteen-year-old daughter was eventually accepted into the heir apparent's household, later becoming empress. Imperial wives and mothers were also at liberty to nominate handmaids belonging to their retinue. Very occasionally, slave girls of exceptional beauty or talent were proposed by their mistress, as was the case with Empress Dowager Lü's 呂皇后 (d. 180 BCE) maid, the future Empress Dou 竇皇后 (d. 135 BCE).[221] Following her commendation, Lady Dou was sent to serve as an attendant to the crown prince Liu Heng 劉恆, the eventual Emperor Wen.

Common selection allowed for far greater social mobility. In the autumn of every year, a party of high officials and physiognomists were sent out to scour the environs of the capital, tasked with recruiting girls from good families to enter the inner quarters.[222] Those selected were to be no younger than thirteen and no older than twenty. Once brought to the imperial residence, girls were subject to some form of examination and graded according to their suitability. Unfortunately, no ancient text explicitly describes this procedure, though incremental evidence gives some idea of what it conceivably entailed. Superintending the choice of harem ladies was a high-ranking eunuch known as the Prefect of the Lateral Courts (*yiting ling* 掖庭令).[223] Along with his assistants, the Prefect was responsible for judging the beauty and character of potential inmates. A detailed inspection of the girls' appearance by a court physiognomist was one factor influencing his decision. The teenage girl Na 妠, future Empress Liang 梁皇后 (116–150 CE), was looked over by the physiognomist Mao Tong 茅通, who commented on the nobility of her forehead.[224] Divination was another step in the selection process, where a girl's name was submitted to the spirits to assess its auspiciousness.[225] Even if chosen and made an imperial concubine, the young women of the harem may have rarely, if at all, spent time with the emperor. As shall be explored in the following chapter, the harem environment was harsh and fiercely competitive. Only the most resilient and resourceful concubines were able to manoeuvre themselves into opportune positions, and thus capitalise on imperial favour.

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[220] *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.408.

[221] *Shiji*, 49.1972.

[222] *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.400.

[223] Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 63–64.

[224] *Hou Hanshu*, 10B.438–439.

[225] *Liji*, "Quli" 曲禮, 41.

VI

Contesting the Pepper Chamber

Before embarking on this final chapter, a number of caveats should be reasserted. Foremost, here we shall consider the sexual agency of female slaves and concubines in tandem. This signals a marked departure from our analysis of the Roman world, where only enslaved women fell under discussion. As previously outlined, concubines in early imperial China experienced similar levels of dependency to slaves. While by no means analogous, both groups were situated towards the lower end of a gradient stretching from fully dependent to wholly autonomous status.[1] Secondly, the range of agentic behaviours presented in chapters two through four will not undergo commensurate examination. Rather, our crosshairs shall zero in on those notable similarities between Rome and Han China, namely sexual competition and the founding of emotional monopolies. Although token comparisons are drawn throughout, reflection on the implications arising from such a juxtaposition are reserved for the conclusion. A further difference concerns the utilisation of the primary evidence. Hitherto a scattergun approach has been favoured, involving the collaborative application of a diverse range of ancient source types. By contrast, the penultimate and closing sections of this chapter are anchored in case studies, providing exemplary outlooks on, rather than exhaustive treatment of, the Chinese material. Though risking generalisation, these vignettes betray the volitional amplitude of demimonde women on a level rarely attested in other slaveholding societies.

We begin with the objectification and sexual jeopardy experienced by slave women, a topic frequently overlooked in scholarship devoted to human bondage in early imperial China. This is followed by a detailed rundown of the emerging sexual hierarchy, separating legitimate wives from concubines and private slaves. Fatally compromised by arranged marriage and polygyny, however, female dependants were adept in exploiting culturally occasioned fractures in the stratum of the inner quarters. Next, our attention shall turn to the sexual competition between wives, concubines, and enslaved women in elite households. Concubines, in particular, appear to have regularly dominated their master's affections, going to violent extremes in an effort to maintain their influence. To conclude, we shall examine the biographies of two slave dancers who, via the dextrous deployment of their beauty and charm, won the heart of their respective sovereigns and were enthroned as empresses of the Han.

1. Objectification

Unlike classical Rome, slaves in early imperial China were not strictly equivocated with alienable property.[2] Whereas gold, cloth, livestock, and other valuables were assumed under the noun *caiwu* 財物 (lit. "wealth objects"), the enslaved were closer in status to children, that is wholly dependent

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[1] Echoing Juliane Schiel and Stefan Hanß, who argue the social position of enslaved persons is open to negotiation or change, and that slavery is only one of several variations of unfreedom. See "Semantics, Practices and Transcultural Perspectives on Mediterranean Slavery," in *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited: Neue Perspektiven auf mediterrane Sklaverei (500–1800)*, ed. Juliane Schiel and Stefan Hanß (Zürich: Chronos, 2014), 16–17.

[2] Yates, "Slavery in Early China," 291.

but recognised members of the family unit (*jia* 家).[3] However, this is not to suggest that bonded persons during the years of the Han escaped habitual objectification. Though masters had no legal right to kill or inordinately beat their servants, maltreatment was, for the majority of slaves, a fact of life.[4] As a corollary, the dehumanisation of *nubi* was liable to facilitate their use as sex objects, with female slaves appearing particularly vulnerable to the "lurid tortures" of molestation and rape.[5]

Privately owned bonded men and women were routinely exposed to violence. Reflecting on his years of servitude, Wei Qing 衛青 (d. 106 BCE) declared the best a slave could reasonably hope for was the avoidance of scoldings and thrashings, hinting at the ubiquity of such punishments.[6] Numerous anecdotal stories preserved in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of Han*) underscore the despotic treatment of slaves at the hands of the nobility. Liu Yuan 劉元 (fl. 80 BCE), great-grandson of Emperor Jing 景帝 (r. 157–141 BCE) and King of Pinggan 平干王, allegedly butchered several of his grooms and maidservants.[7] Similarly, the nephew of Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE), Zhao Ping 昭平, killed his wife's governess (*zhufu* 主傅) in a fit of drunken rage.[8] The biography of the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 8–23 CE) is especially strewn with notices of slave homicide, perhaps reflecting the desire among the chroniclers to portray his clan as debauched. Wang Mang's middle son, Wang Huo 王獲, murdered a male slave, while his granddaughter was forced to commit suicide after dispatching one of her handmaids.[9] The indiscriminate killing of *nubi* appalled the Confucian politician and philosopher Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), who remonstrated for the abolition of slavery, a measure that he believed would help stem the slaughter.[10]

Masterly disregard for the corporal wellbeing of bonded persons is reflected lexically, with the Qin era nouns *chen* 臣 (male slave) and *qie* 妾 (female slave) laden with connotations of "submission

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[3] The "Statutes on Robbery" (*Dao lü* 盜律) defines *caiwu* as "cash, gold, hempen cloth or silk, grain, horses or cattle" (*qian*, *jin*, *bubo*, *sumi*, *ma niu* 錢，金， 布帛，粟米，馬牛). See *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 145 (slip no. 77); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 471. From the Qin dynasty onwards, slaves were classified as listed persons and included on the household register of their master. Several of the Liye 里耶 tablets record slaves as being part of the family, see Hsing, "Qin-Han Census and Tax and Corvée Administration," 157, 159.

[4] As the "Statutes on Assault" (*Zei lü* 賊律) inform us, even a slave who physically attacked his or her master's family could not be privately reprimanded. Instead, transgressive *nubi* were to be presented before the magistrates for sentencing, in this case public execution. Likewise, husbands or wives who beat their slaves to the point of expiration were liable to redeem the death penalty. See *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 139 (slip no. 39), 140 (slip nos. 46–47); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 405, 407.

[5] Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 71. Although this turn of phrase is used to describe the sexual jeopardy faced by enslaved concubines in the Dutch East Indies, it similarly characterises the threat of rape experienced by female domestics in early imperial China.

[6] *Hanshu*, 55.2471–2472. The quote runs, "Born another man's slave, it is sufficient not to be whipped and cursed" (*ren nu zhi sheng, de wu chi ma ji zu yi* 人奴之生，得無笞罵卽足矣).

[7] *Hanshu*, 53.2421.

[8] *Hanshu*, 65.2851. Watson translates *zhufu* 主傅 (lit. "master's assistant") as "duenna." See *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 87. In all likelihood, the title designated a high ranking female slave responsible for assisting with her mistress's education.

[9] *Hanshu*, 99A.4043, 99C.4153; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 134, 377–378.

[10] *Hanshu*, 24A.1137; Swan, *Food and Money in Ancient China*, 183.

and sexual access."[11] After the establishment of the Western Han, the compound term *nubi* 奴婢 (male and female slaves, viz. "slaves") came to replace *chen* and *qie*.[12] Concurrently, we begin to observe the emergence of various classifications of non-concubinal dependent, retained primarily for their erotic services. The most common of these was *yubi* 御婢, translated here to mean "attendant female slave." The graph *yu*, in the verbal sense of "to drive," traditionally indicated the steering of a chariot, though could euphemistically refer to the sexual partners of a king or emperor.[13] Modifying the noun *bi* 婢 (female slave) however, *yu* is more accurately rendered as "to serve" or "attend," underscoring the intimate relationship such women shared with their master. All importantly, *yubi* seem to have enjoyed greater privileges compared with other domestic servants, though were not of equivalent status to concubines.[14] Occasionally *yu* is amalgamated with the verb *shi* 侍 (to wait upon) but, as the Tang linguist Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645 CE) makes clear, *shiyu* were akin to slaves.[15] Elsewhere we find *shi* in combination with *bi*. Wang Mang allegedly purchased a fertile (*zhong* 種) *shibi*, gifting her to the General of the Rear (*hou jiangjun* 後將軍), Zhu Zi 朱子, who had no sons by his legitimate wife.[16]

From the genesis of the Eastern Han onwards, *yubi* appears to have been gradually superseded in the literary sources by the dissyllabic noun *fubi* 傅婢, meaning "slave chambermaid."[17] Etymologically related to the graph *shi* (see above), *fu* is best glossed as "to assist," but might also be read in connection with the phonemically identical *fu* 附, designating a close favourite of the master. Drawing again on the comments of Yan Shigu, it is apparent *fubi* served a comparable function to *yubi*, being responsible for the upkeep of their master's clothes (*yifu* 衣服) and sleeping

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[11] Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China*, 246. According to Bernhard Karlgren, the graph *chen* 臣 originally represented a vertically positioned eye, symbolic of a bowed head. The character *qie* 妾, on the other hand, is comprised of the graphs *nü* 女 (girl) and *yan* 言 (to speak), the latter formally indicating a kind of flute. The Bronze Age meaning is thus "music girl," denoting those female slaves who entertained the Shang kings. See *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1957), 107, 169. However, the interpretation of *chen* as "slave" in the Shang oracle-bones has recently come under scrutiny, with Susanne Adamski contesting it was instead a general term denoting relationships of subordination or dependence. See "Sklave oder Dienstmann? Einige Überlegungen zum Status von *chén* 臣 in der West-Zhōu-Zeit (1045–771 v.Chr.)," in *Rechtsdenken und Gerechtigkeitssinn in China*, ed. Kerstin Storm and Jonas Polfuß (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 26.

[12] The specific etymological meaning of *nu* 奴 and *bi* 婢 is an involved and open-ended problem. Dismantling the character *bi* — made up of the graphs *nü* 女 (girl) and *bei* 卑 (low-lying; humble) — unmasks its interrelation with notions of social inferiority. See Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 158.

[13] Deconstructing *yu* 御 we find it is an amalgamation of the radical *chi* 彳 (to step) and the character *xie* 卸 (cart driver). Barbieri-Low and Yates consequently translate *yubi* as "riding slave," echoing its graphic composition, see *Law, State, and Society*, 625, note 35. For the sexual usage of *yu* we might look to the "Xuan Gong san nian" 宣公三年 chapter of the *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳, wherein it is written "Duke Wen saw her (i.e. his concubine), gave her an orchid and copulated with her" (*Wen Gong jian zhi, yu zhi lan er yu zhi* 文公見之，與之蘭而御之).

[14] Zhang Xiaofeng 張小鋒, "Shi Zhangjiashan Han jian zhong de yubi 釋張家山漢簡中的御婢," *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 6 (2004), 128.

[15] *Hanshu*, 97A.3959.

[16] *Hanshu*, 99A.4040–4041; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 128.

[17] We find no mention of *fubi* in the *Shiji*. Neither does the *Hanshu* employ the term in any chapter reproduced verbatim from Sima Qian's earlier work. This might be interpreted to mean that *fubi* only permeated the scribal vocabulary during the Eastern Han, and was still deemed semantically relevant enough to be used by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–446 CE) at the time of his compilation of the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Book of the Later Han*).

mats (*renxi* 衽席).[18] The amatory undertones here are self-evident, with *fubi* serving as a kind of pleasure slave, obligated to indulge their master's carnal fantasies. Women and girls of unfree status were afforded no legal protection against sexual impropriety.[19] On the contrary, Han law explicitly licensed the prerogative of elite men to initiate fornicatory relationships with *bi*, provided they were the rightful owner. Beautiful or sexually talented female slaves were, in all likelihood, enlisted as *yubi* or *fubi*, where their bodies could be more easily instrumented for the dual purposes of coition and procreation.

Evidence for the molestation of pleasure slaves falls into two broad categories. The first source grouping largely concerns male agnates who were reprimanded for sleeping with their father or brother's *bi*. Although masters could freely manipulate their own bonded women, engaging in illicit sex with a kindred's slave was considered tantamount to incest.[20] The "Statutes on Miscellaneous Matters" (*Za lü* 襍律) records that having intercourse with one's father's, uncle's, or brother's *yubi* was liable to be sentenced with tattooing and penal labour.[21] For example, Xiahou Po 夏侯頗 (fl. 133 BCE), second husband of the Princess of Pinyang 平陽公主 and Marquis of Ruyin 汝陰侯, was tried for committing adultery (*jian* 姦, more commonly 姦) with his father's *yubi*. To escape punishment, the marquis took his own life.[22] Parallel accusations were levelled against the youngest son of Liu Ci 劉賜 (r. 153–122 BCE), King of Hengshan 衡山王, who pursued a clandestine affair with his father's chambermaid.[23] Exceptionally licentious noblemen, such as Shangguan An 上官安 (d. 80 BCE), made frequent use of his father's harem girls, instigating drunken orgies with copious *shiyu.*[24] Even those *bi* under imperial ownership did not escape violation. One low-ranking courtier (*lang* 郎) raped a government slave woman (*guanbi* 官婢), evading retribution only thanks to his superior Zhang Tang 張湯 (d. 115 BCE), who hushed up the affair.[25] In the same vein, Liu He 劉賀 (93–59 BCE), during his brief occupancy of the throne in 74 BCE, assaulted numerous palace women (*gongren* 宮人) belonging to the deceased Emperor Zhao 昭帝 (r. 87–74 BCE), his uncle.[26]

The second evidential bracket pertains to the lawful, though somehow degenerate, victimising of female slaves. Zhang Jian 張建 (fl. 57 BCE), Marquis of Bocheng 博成侯, had sex with a maidservant in the presence of his wife, the Princess of Yangyi 陽邑公主, in what appears to be a deliberate attempt at mortification.[27] Voyeuristic masters, in particular Liu Zhonggu 劉終古 (d. 46 BCE), King of Zichuan 菑川王, enjoyed watching his male slaves and *yubi* copulate, hosting mandatory sex parties in which he would occasionally partake.[28] Others made more ostentatious use of their slaves, with Liu Quji 劉去疾 (d. 71 BCE) throwing lavish banquets staffed by naked

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[18] *Hanshu*, 72.3068.

[19] The same was true for the Ming 明 (368–1644 CE) and Qing 清 (1644–1912 CE) dynasties, see Matthew Harvey Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 6.

[20] For an overview of illicit sexual relationships, see Yates, "Female Commoners and the Law in Early Imperial China," 162–168.

[21] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 159 (slip no. 195); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 619.

[22] *Hanshu*, 41.2079.

[23] *Hanshu*, 44.2156.

[24] *Hanshu*, 97A.3959.

[25] *Hanshu*, 59.2650.

[26] *Hanshu*, 68.2940–2941.

[27] *Hanshu*, 17.670.

[28] *Hanshu*, 38.2001.

singing girls, whom he forced to "play among the seated [guests]" (*xi zuo zhong* 戲坐中), perhaps a genteelism for erotic favours.[29]

Further underscoring the sexual licence of the Han nobility is the recurrent presence of dildo-like objects in early imperial gravesites. Among the best-known examples come from Mancheng 滿城 tomb no. 1, Hebei province, the final resting place of Liu Sheng 劉勝 (d. 113 BCE), King of Zhongshan 中山王 and half-brother of Emperor Wu. Unearthed in 1968, archaeologists recovered a total of three phalli from Liu Sheng's frontmost burial chamber: two V-shaped bronze dildos fashioned in the style of double-ended penises, and a smaller hollow *olisbos* made of silver.[30] One of the two double-ended phalli was conspicuously displayed, being placed in the centre of the sacrificial hall amongst dining paraphernalia, wine vessels, and sculpted ceramic figurines. The location of the dildo created an implicit connection between erotic activity and banqueting, suggestive of the fact the two were concomitantly enjoyed. As Jie Shi has demonstrated, the symbolic presentation of worldly amusements (feasting, drinking, sex, etc.) in Chinese tombs was intended to entice the deceased's soul into occupying the burial chamber, where they could savour the real-world privileges of elite life in perpetuity.[31] Owing to the shape of the dildo, it has been hypothesised that it was intended for use by two women simultaneously.[32] Assuming this was the case, we might speculate that enslaved women or concubines were required to use such objects in pornographic displays for the gratification of their master.

Sexual misconduct is periodically documented alongside acts of political insubordination, exemplified by the life of Liu Jian 劉建 (r. 127–121 BCE) who not only conspired against the state but inflicted manifold abuses on his dependents. The ferocity of Liu Jian's sadism warrants quoting an excerpt of his *Hanshu* biography in full.

> 宮人姬八子有過者，輒令贏立擊鼓，或置樹上，久者三十日乃得衣；或髡鉗以鈐杵舂，不中程，輒掠；或縱狼令齧殺之，建觀而大笑；或閉不食，令餓死。凡殺不辜三十五人。建欲令人與禽獸交而生子，彊令宮人贏而四據，與羝羊及狗交。
>
> An Eighth-Rank Lady of his seraglio once made a mistake; he unceremoniously ordered her to strip and stand beating a drum. Some [of his women] he would set atop a tree, forcing them to stay there for thirty days before giving them clothes. Some he would have shaved and collared, and made to pound grain with a lead pestle; if they did not reach their quota, he would simply flog them. On others he would set loose wolves to bite them to death; Jian would watch this and laugh greatly. Some he would lock up, denying them food and causing

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[29] *Hanshu*, 53.2431. The language here is problematic. For starters, the noun *chang* 倡 (singer; performer) is gender neutral. Yan Shigu however, informs us that *chang* were the daughters of musicians, see *Hanshu*, 53.2314. Equally, the lyrics (*ci* 辭) sung by the slaves were said to have been initially taught by Liu Quji to his concubine and her sister. Ergo, the music put on for the guests was likely intended for female vocalists. That the singers were objectified is clear, their nudity being unambiguously conveyed via the adjective *luo* 贏 (naked; stripped). Whether the women's entertainment value extended beyond their singing voices hinges on our interpretation of *le* 樂, meaning "to take pleasure," or "delight in." It is certainly possible that, given the context, the songstresses's central purpose was lubricious.

[30] For the discovery of the phalli, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao* 滿城漢墓發掘報告 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), Vol. 1, 100, 120.

[31] Jie Shi, *Modelling Peace: Royal Tombs and Political Ideology in Early China* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2020), 56–59.

[32] Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中國方術考 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2001), 450.

> them to starve to death. In all he killed thirty-five innocent people. Jian wanted to make someone copulate with animals and bear a child; he forced several of his palace women to strip and get on all fours, and copulate with rams and dogs.[33]

Liu Jian's penchant for what we would today consider misogynistic violence and femicide is unequivocal. Whether stripping (*luo* 贏), cudgelling (*lüe* 掠), locking away (*bi* 閉) or starving (*e'si* 餓死) to death his slave girls, humiliation and slow torture abound. We might note that head shaving (*kun* 髡) and collaring (*qian* 鉗) were both state-endorsed punishments, generally accompanying hard labour sentences, such as grain pounding (*chong* 舂), a penalty reserved chiefly for women. Yet, to ancient and modern readers alike, Liu Jian's crowning vice was his taste for bestiality, having a number of his slave women penetrated by rams (*di yang* 羝羊) and dogs (*gou* 狗). Sexual unions of this kind were not only immoral but, as Paul R. Goldin has argued, liable to obfuscate the heavenly distinction between humans and animals.[34]

However, other received accounts of Liu Jian's turpitude contain far fewer sordid details, indicative of later-day embellishments or hyperbole. Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–87 BCE) version of events, published a century before the *Hanshu*, wholly omits images of rampant violence and instead describes Liu Jian's incestuous affair with his father's slave concubine.

> 易王死未葬，建有所說易王寵美人淖姬，夜使人迎與姦服舍中。
>
> When King Yi (i.e. Liu Fei 劉非, Liu Jian's father) had died but was not yet buried, Jian sent an emissary at nightfall to fetch Lady Zhou, his father's favourite concubine, for whom he had developed a great liking. He fornicated with her in the mourning quarters, where he was resident.[35]

The astute reader will be quick to criticise the reliability of the afore-cited sources, being, as they are, taken predominantly from the *Hanshu*. Compiled by Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54 CE), his son Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE), and daughter Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 45–117 CE), the authors of the *Hanshu* had good reason to portray the enfeoffed members of the Han imperial family as naturally seditious. Appointed to the official position of Historian of the Orchid Terrace (*lantai shiling* 蘭臺史令) by Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 57–75 CE) in 66 CE, Ban Gu adopted a political slant favourable to the central government and, in doing so, lambasted those Regional Lords (*zhuhou wang* 諸侯王) who ran afoul of imperial authority.[36] Viewed from this perspective, accounts of the maltreatment of household slaves take on a rhetorical dimension, further legitimising the abolition of kingdoms and princedoms belonging to mutinous elites.

Specific to Liu Jian's biography, it is also worth highlighting the vestiges of a literary trope germane to the Chinese tradition. The figure of the salacious aristocrat — youthful and prone to intemperance — is found recurrently throughout the dynastic histories, owing to its utility as a didactic instrument.[37] Reverse engineering the moralising logic of early Chinese thinkers, we might underscore the link between private enormities and political transgressions. Kings, such as Liu Jian,

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[33] *Hanshu*, 53.2416; adapted from Paul R. Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 89–90.

[34] Goldin, *The Culture of Sex*, 90–92.

[35] *Shiji*, 59.2096; adapted from Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China, Volume 1: The Early Years of the Han Dynasty 209 to 141 B.C.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 453.

[36] For Ban Gu's appointment, see *Hou Hanshu*, 40.1334.

[37] Kinney, *Representations of Childhood and Youth in Early China*, 67–68.

predisposed to brutality and draconian management were judged unfit for office, given that the household was imagined to be a microcosmic state. Liu Jian's callous objectification of *bi* is hence framed to be directly paralleling his later decision to raise the standards of revolt. All the same, it would be narrow-minded to presume that female slaves were never exposed to the kinds of ill-treatment recorded in the *Hanshu*. The surviving evidence more plausibly represents only the apex of servile mishandling, with numerous other degradations going entirely untold.

Masters were not alone in their sexual instrumentation of bonded persons, with a handful of sources pointing to the lascivious use of male slaves (*nu* 奴) by lonely widows and restless wives. Superintendents and other high-ranking *nu* appear to have been the most likely candidates for erotic trysts. Xian 顯, the wife of the powerful regent Huo Guang 霍光 (d. 68 BCE), conducted an illicit affair with the slave overseer (*jian* 監) Feng Zidu 馮子都 in the years following her husband's death.[38] Near identically, Sun Shou 孫壽, while married to the Eastern Han general Liang Ji 梁冀 (d. 159 CE), made love to the slave superintendent Qin Gong 秦宮.[39] Long neglected by her husband, Wu Cai 無采, daughter of the King of Hengshan, took up with a male slave, for which she was reprimanded by her brother.[40] Although beyond our time period, the empress dowager of the Southern Qi, Wang Baoming 王寶明 (455–512 CE), was awarded a harem of thirty uncastrated attendants (*zuoyou* 左右), having protested the gender inequalities circumscribing female rulership.[41] These scattered attestations, however, bespeak the relative infrequency of mistress-slave relationships and undergird the notion that *bi*, not *nu*, were the primary victims of lechery.

2. Sexual Hierarchies

The fact masters could sexually instrument *bi* does not, in and of itself, foreclose the possibility of agency. For the Roman world, I argued the rigidity of elite marriage practices contributed to the outflow of male desire. Malcontented husbands, forced into arranged partnerships, might well have sought sexual or romantic fulfilment with lowborn women, namely prostitutes and slaves. Those shrewd enough to play upon their master's sexual curiosity stood to gain, winning freedom or establishing themselves as legitimate wives. Although the same reasoning cannot be transposed verbatim to early imperial China, enough similarities exist to posit a resemblant analysis.

First of all, it is necessary to understand that, during the years of the Han, emerged, what Griet Vankeerberghen has termed "a new sexual order," or rather the dilution of those privileges traditionally afforded to legitimate wives.[42] Beginning in the Western Zhou 西周 (ca. 1045–771 BCE), the basic patrilineal and patrilocal arrangement of Chinese households underwent solidification, ensuring women fell into one of two categories: those raised within the family (daughters) and those brought in from outside (wives, concubines, and slave girls).[43] In order to

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[38] *Hanshu*, 68.2950. In the years prior to his death, Huo Guang appears to have been equally besotted with Feng Zidu, the pair forming a homosexual attachment. See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990), 49–50. The commentator Jin Zhuo 晉灼 (fl. 265–316 CE) reports Xian was eventually displaced in Feng's affections by a female slave.

[39] *Hou Hanshu*, 34.1180–1181.

[40] *Shiji*, 118.3096; *Hanshu*, 44.2154.

[41] *Nanshi*, 11.331.

[42] Griet Vankeerberghen, "A Sexual Order in the Making: Wives and Slaves in Early Imperial China," in *Sex, Power, and Slavery*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 121.

[43] Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History*, 39.

differentiate, aristocratic males were customarily required to abide by a system of marriage and inheritance that exalted the principal wife. A man was permitted to take only a single *qi* 妻 (wife) but could obtain as many concubines as his rank afforded him. Legitimately married women were conferred the title *di* 嫡, signifying their primacy within the household and granting their eldest son heirship of the family property.[44] Concubines, on the other hand, were ranked as *shu* 庶, a lesser designation that afforded their male offspring no rights of inheritance.[45] As mentioned in the preceding chapter, formal marriage to a concubine was strictly outlawed.

Whereas matters of family life had previously been governed by custom and ritual alone, civil law increasingly came to dictate marriage, inheritance, and household organisation.[46] Paramount to this transformation was the establishment of a universal legal system following the creation of the Qin empire in 221 BCE. The fragmentary civil regulations preserved in the excavated bamboo slips from Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Longgang 龍崗 are regrettably silent apropos inheritance.[47] Fortunately, the domestic statutes unearthed from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 prove more illuminating. During the early years of the Western Han, a distinction was made between inheriting orders of honorary rank and inheriting household property.[48] The "Statutes on the Establishment of Heirs" (*Zhihou lü* 置後律) determined the selection of both the *juehou* 爵後 (heir to rank) and *huhou* 戶後 (heir to householder status). Although the eldest son of the principal wife was listed first in the order of succession, Han law was careful to establish a hierarchy of inheritors should a primary *houzi* 後子 (heir child) be lacking (see Appendix 2). Without purposing to get lost in the details, it is vital to recognise that, in contrast to the feudal model, a son of a concubine was eligible to be made his father's legitimate heir.[49]

Marriage likewise underwent changes in the final decades of the Warring States (*Zhanguo* 戰國, 453–221 BCE). Throughout the early imperial period, a variety of different marital arrangements seem to have been viewed as permissible. Binomes such as *xiaqi* 下妻 (lesser wife) and *pianqi* 偏妻 (side-wife) are found recurrently in the legal statutes from Zhangjiashan.[50] More explicitly, a wooden board from the Liye 里耶 cache records a *xiaqi* as being the wife of a robber-guard (*sikou* 司寇).[51] Wang Zijin has proposed that both terms referred to concubines, an interpretation borne out

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[44] Du Fangqin and Cai Yiping, "A History of the Patriarchal System and Gender Relations," in *Women's Studies in China: Mapping the Social, Economic and Policy Changes in Chinese Women's Lives*, ed. Fangqin Du and Xinrong Zheng (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 2005), 39.

[45] In cases where the principal wife remained childless, tradition sanctioned her adoption of a concubine's son. See Keith McMahon, *Women Shall Not Rule: Imperial Wives and Concubines in China from Han to Liao* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 26.

[46] Anne Behnke Kinney, "Husbands and Wives in Qin and Han-Dynasty Bamboo Legal Texts," *Journal of Chinese History* 6 (2022), 225.

[47] Within the bamboo texts recovered from tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi were found three civil regulations, all pertaining to dept. Likewise, of the 150 slips disinterred from tomb no. 6 at Longgang, two references to compensatory law have been established.

[48] For a comprehensive overview, see Zhaoyang Zhang, *A History of Civil Law in Early China: Cases, Statutes, Concepts and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 96–116.

[49] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 183 (slip no. 368); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 855. The relevant clause reads, "If there are no children born by the principal wife, let the children born by a lesser wife or a side-wife become the heirs" (*qi wu di zi, yi xiaqi zi, pianqi zi* 其無嫡子，以下妻子、偏妻子).

[50] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 140 (slip no. 42), 157 (slip no. 176), 183 (slip no. 368); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 405, 601, 855.

[51] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 264 (tablet no. 8-1027).

when we consider their usage in adjacent texts.[52] For instance, the commentator Yan Shigu writes "*xiaqi* is like saying little wife" (*xiaqi you yan xiaoqi* 下妻猶言小妻), intimating the former was a name for concubines.[53] Even if those categorised as *xiaqi* or *pianqi* were deemed to have been legally wed, they were by no means of equivalent status to formal wives. Logographic differences make clear this polarity, with legitimately married women being described as *qi* 妻 or *fu* 婦, and concubines falling under the pejorative *qie* 妾, a noun, as we have seen, etymologically linked to slavery.[54]

Let us now reflect on the purpose of marriage (*hunyin* 婚姻) in traditional Chinese society. The "Hunyi" 昏義 chapter of the *Liji* 禮記 (*Classic of Rites*) unambiguously declares that wedlock's primary goal was the maintenance of the ancestral temple (*zongmiao* 宗廟) and continuation of the family bloodline (*huoshi* 後世).[55] Owing to the fact marriage was essentially regarded as a vehicle for the production of children — who would inherit responsibility for performing the ancestral sacrifices — parents typically oversaw the nomination of a bride or groom for their son or daughter. As T'ung-tsu Ch'u writes, in no sense was matrimony "concerned with the personal wishes of the man and woman involved."[56] The ritual classics set out plainly how marriages were to be negotiated, though local tradition surely exerted a greater influence than Confucian idealism.[57] Either way, we need only acknowledge the limited role children of marriageable age played in the selection of a life partner. For example, the marriage of Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 206–195 BCE), inaugurator of the Western Han dynasty, was arranged by his eventual father-in-law, Lü Wen 呂文.[58] Likewise, the hermit Dai Liang 戴良 sought out husbands for all five of his talented daughters.[59] Oftentimes parents would enlist the help of a matchmaker, who brought together couples in such a way as to avoid social contraventions. Go-betweens were prone to exaggerate the qualities of potential mates, overplaying a boy's financial resources or a girl's natural prettiness.[60]

A secondary motive for controlling the nuptial process was to ensure the smooth transference of wealth and status. In pre-unification China, real estate was commensurately distributed among heirs via a tradition known as partible inheritance.[61] The resulting burden on family resources, as smaller and smaller parcels of land were divided among beneficiaries, gave rise to the conceptualisation of

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[52] Wang Zijin 王子今, "Pianqi xiaqi kao 偏妻下妻考," *Huaxue* 華學 6 (2003), 151–152.

[53] *Hanshu*, 99B.4119; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 3, 301.

[54] Although both *qi* 妻 and *fu* 婦 can be translated as "wife," subtle nuances differentiate the two graphs. Simply put, *fu* refers to a wife vis-à-vis her parents-in-law, while *qi* connotes a wife in relation to her husband. Alternately, *fu* may have been a more general term for women of marriageable age and *qi*, when combined with the prefix *di* 嫡, reserved for the principal wife alone.

[55] *Liji*, "Hunyi" 昏義, 1.

[56] T'ung-tsu Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1961), 99.

[57] Jack L. Dull, "Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at Pre-Confucian Society," in *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, ed. David C. Buxbaum (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 23–74; Wong Sun-ming, "Confucian Ideal and Reality: Transformation of the Institution of Marriage in T'ang China (A.D. 618–907)," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1979).

[58] *Hanshu*, 1A.4; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 1, 31–32.

[59] *Hou Hanshu*, 83.2773.

[60] Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 144.

[61] The origins of partible inheritance in China are unknown, though doubtlessly ancient. Mark Edward Lewis has suggested the practice may have had a mythic genesis. See *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 108.

marriage among the gentry class as an enrichment strategy. Favourable unions generated new wealth — in the form of bride tokens or dowries — and eased the strain on land-poor parents. Beginning in the fourth century BCE however, the Qin introduced a system of honorary ranks in an effort to weaken the hereditary privileges of the aristocracy.[62] This means of societal organisation was continued by the Han, who extended it to grade all denizens of the empire. Each order of rank (*jue* 爵) — of which there were twenty in total — was accompanied by a set of benefits, including entitlements to farmland (*tian* 田) and dwelling sites (*zhai* 宅). For example, the "Statutes of Households" (*Hu lü* 戶律) from Zhangjiashan stipulated that a holder of the *Gongshi* 公士 rank, the lowest in the Han system, was to be granted one *qing* 頃 (approx. 4.61 ha) of land for field cultivation.[63] A *Chehou* 徹侯, by comparison, qualified for an allotment of ninety-five *qing* (approx. 438 ha), a near hundredfold increase. With the exception of the topmost ranks — the aforementioned *Chehou* and *Guannei hou* 關內侯 — status was uncommonly transmitted intact. A man could designate a single heir to his rank, though the beneficiary would, in most cases, receive the *jue* at one or two positions lower than his father.[64]

Despite the meritocratic ranking system effectively limiting patrimony, there were still good reasons why parents might have sought to oversee their son or daughter's choice of spouse. For one, the stratification of society on the basis of rank may have heightened attention to status, incentivising families to join couples of approximately equal standing. It is also worth emphasising that while orders of honour delimited the inheritance of land, movable property could be freely bequeathed, either by testament in a pre-mortem will (*xianling* 先令) or as a gift. Another clause from the "Statutes of Households" patently declares that valuables (*caiwu* 財物) were eligible to be transferred to relatives.[65] The Liye boards similarly confirm the devolvement of movable assets, with one tablet recording a father's largesse of slaves, grain (*he* 禾), and clothing (*yi* 衣) to his adult daughter (*da nüzi* 大女子).[66] Wealth thus continued to influence a family's pick of son or daughter-in-law, even if the stockpiling of acreage was no longer a collateral objective of marriage.

Under such circumstances, it is imaginable that spousal affinity might fail to take shape. The Qin era divinatory text, the *Daybook* (*Rishu* 日書), unearthed from tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi, hints at the possible reasons for conjugal discord. Several, ostensibly misogynistic, forecasts pivot on the character of the wife: "the wife will be jealous" (*qi du* 妻妒), "the wife will be a scold" (*qi han* 妻悍), "the wife will be talkative" (*qi duo she* 妻多舌), and "the wife will not be tranquil" (*qi bu ning*

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[62] Shang Yang 商鞅 (ca. 385–338 BCE), minister of Duke Xiao of Qin 秦孝公 (r. 361–337 BCE), is generally credited with having established the orders of military and civilian honour as part of his reform programme. The eight lowest degrees of rank, both civil and military, were bestowed upon individuals as a reward for soldierly merit, in particular the decapitation of enemy fighters. Orders of the ninth rank and above were donated more selectively. See Michael Loewe, "Social Distinctions, Groups and Privileges," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 297–299.

[63] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 175–176 (slip nos. 310–313); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 791.

[64] Death by illness or natural causes incurred a two step demotion in rank, see *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 182–183 (slip nos. 367–368); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 855. However, those who died conducting official duties were authorised to pass on their status in full, see *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 183 (slip nos. 369–371); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 855.

[65] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 178–179 (slip nos. 337–339); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 801.

[66] *Liye Qin jiandu* (2012), 356–357 (tablet no. 8-1553).

妻不寧).[67] Indeed, very few of the marriage predictions found in the *Daybook* are favourable, suggesting matrimonial unhappiness was a pressing concern.

Sexual dissatisfaction was also liable to cause problems. Another bamboo manuscript, dating from the Western Han, documents an erotic rivalry between the ugly wife Wang Ji 妄稽 (perhaps better transcribed as Wu Ji 毋稽) and beautiful concubine Yu Shi 虞士. Eponymously named after its lead character and written in the style of a vernacular rhapsody (*sufu* 俗賦), the *Wang Ji* typifies an arranged marriage gone wrong. To summarise, the eminent scholar-official and filial son Zhou Chun 周春, having followed his parent's instruction to marry, is shocked to discover the hideous appearance of his prospective bride. Described as having "feet like knobs of ginger" (*zu re xuan jiang* 足若懸姜) and the "body of a spiny hedgehog" (*shen re wei ji* 身若蝟棘), Zhou Chun is understandably exasperated.[68] Faced with a lifetime of involuntary celibacy, the young man entreats his parents to buy him a concubine. As a result, Yu Shi is introduced to the household, who, in contrast to her mistress, has "long enticing hair" (*chang fa you dai* 長髮誘紿), "white teeth" (*bai chi* 白齒), and "a body similar to wrapped silk" (*shen lei fu su* 身類縛素).[69] Unsurprisingly, jealousy ensues, culminating in Wang Ji's brutish treatment of her rival.

The above examples aptly demonstrate how variances in temperament might derail a marriage. Disaffected husbands, as in the case of Zhou Chun, were at liberty to take a concubine or pursue sexual intercourse with slave girls. While in theory the wife's primacy could not be challenged by the imposition of *qie* or *bi*, she was nevertheless reliant on the maintenance of cordial relations with her spouse. Fading looks or sterility may have portended a loss in influence or, worse still, displacement and divorce. The outsourcing of sexual and reproductive duties inadvertently created an environment of competition, where a wife's insecurities and anxieties were prone to manifest as jealousy.[70]

Female jealousy (*dufu* 妒婦) occupies a conspicuous place in Chinese literary history. The graph *du* 妒 (variously transcribed as 妬) specifically refers to a woman's feelings of possessiveness towards her husband, often following the arrival of a beautiful newcomer. Consisting of the radicals for "woman" (*nü* 女) and "door" (*hu* 戶), *du* has been interpreted to express the arousal of wifely

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[67] *Shuihudi* (1990), 190 (slip nos. 68, 72, 74), 191 (slip no. 80); adapted from Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 71.

[68] *Beijing Daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, (2015), 59 (slip no. 8).

[69] *Beijing Daxue cang Xi Han zhushu*, (2015), 62 (slip nos. 20–21). Although the *Wang Ji* manuscript poses a number of interpretive difficulties, as well as missing a handful of slips, we can be reasonably confident of the location of the above quoted passages in the overall text. See Yang Qian, "Rearranging the Slip Sequence in the *Wang Ji* Manuscript in the Peking University Han Bamboo-Slip Collection," *Bamboo and Silk* 6 (2023), 82.

[70] This is not to underestimate the perilousness of childbirth. A wife not especially in love with her husband may have knowingly avoided intercourse, opting to have a concubine or slave girl risk the dangers of parturiency in her stead. Fatality as a result of childbearing was well acknowledged. The Han dynasty official Huo Guang propounded a ratio of one successful delivery for every ten maternal deaths, see *Hanshu*, 97A.3966. Shrines commemorating young women who died in childbirth were also established. One such alter was set up to a deity (*shenjun* 神君) by a women named Wanruo 宛若 in remembrance of her younger sister, see *Hanshu*, 25A.1216. For maternal mortality rates in early imperial China, see Jen-Der Lee, "The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties," *Journal of Women and Gender Studies* 4 (1993), 64.

jealousy whenever a potential competitor entered the household.[71] This, highly gendered, understanding of jealousy is frequently reflected in the writings of the literati. For example, the Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), commenting on the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) poem "Xiaoxing" 小星 (Little Stars), remarked "[if jealousy arises] as the result of another's looks, it is called *du*" (*yi se yue du* 以色曰妒).[72] Likewise, the poet Wang Yi 王逸 (d. 158 CE), in his exegesis of the *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Songs of Chu*) poem "Li Sao" 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow), opined "to harm a beautiful [woman] is to be *du*" (*hai se wei du* 害色為妒).[73] However anachronistic, jealousy was, to the classical commentators at least, a peculiarly feminine vice.

From the Han dynasty onwards, a wife could be disavowed for exhibitions of sexual jealousy. Jealous outbursts were listed among the *qichu* 七出, or "seven departures," indicating the seven legal justifications for marital dissolution.[74] Although in reality divorce was seldom initiated with regard to the classical prescriptions, jealous sentiments were capable of destabilising a household, often at the expense of the wife.[75] Such changes are evinced by the Han discourse of wifely virtue, where non-jealousy was progressively incorporated as part of the matronly ideal. The bibliophile and scholar Liu Xiang's 劉向 (d. 8 BCE) *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳), written as a kind of handbook for the maintenance of dynastic stability, contains numerous stories highlighting the moral superiority of unenvious wives.[76] To give but one example, the gentlewoman Bao Su 鮑蘇, married to an official from the state of Song 宋, defended her husband's infidelity, proclaiming she had no right to "monopolise" (*zhuan* 專) his love and affection.[77]

An unprovenanced bamboo manuscript in the collection of Peking University advances a kindred view of female behaviour. Known as the *Jiaonü* 教女 (*Instructions to Women*), or alternately the *Shannüzi zhi fang* 善女子之方 (*The Way of a Good Woman*), the text has been conditionally dated to the late Warring States period and is the earliest known book written in China targeting female readers. The messaging of the *Jiaonü* does, in many respects, harmonise with later admonitions texts, devoting a quatrain to the suppression of jealousy.

中毋妬心 / 有（又）毋奸腸 / 亦從臣妾 / 若口笑訣（殃）。

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[71] Chia-lin Pao Tao, "Women and Jealousy in Traditional China," in *Zhongguo jinshi shehui wenhua shi lunwen ji* 中國近世社會文化史論文集 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of History and Philology, 1992), 531–532.

[72] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.63b.

[73] *Wen xuan*, 32.1491.

[74] The earliest account of the *qichu* is found in the "Benming" 本命 chapter of *Dai the Elder's Record of Rites* (*Da dai Liji* 大戴禮記), dating from the Western Han. The other six reasons included: lack of filial piety towards one's in-laws, failure to produce an heir, adultery, prolonged sickness, gossiping, and theft.

[75] Qiaomei Tang, in her analysis of marital separation as a result of jealousy, concludes that, while the *qichu* were sometimes "invoked or implied," the majority of divorce cases "had no direct relation to the classical prescriptions." See "Divorce and the Divorced Woman in Early Medieval China (First through Sixth Century)," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016), 127.

[76] According to Ban Gu, the impetus behind Liu Xiang's writing of the *Biographies* was twofold, serving both to underscore the dissolute influence of lowborn women and showcase positive exemplars of feminine rectitude. See *Hanshu*, 36.1957–1958.

[77] *Lienü zhuan*, 2.37.

> Do not be jealous in your heart / Also, do not be wicked in your mind / Then you can direct your male and female slaves, / When [one character illegible] with happy and sad events.[78]

The author's choice to locate a wife's avoidance of jealous feelings with her management of the household slaves looks to be deliberate. However implicit, the linkage of a heart untainted by resentment and fair conduct towards *qie* may have served as both a discrete warning and lesson for prospective wives. Husbands were, after all, likely to instigate sexual relationships with their slave girls, but a wife's moral superiority derived from her capacity to eschew jealousy.

Strikingly, Ban Zhao, China's first known female historian and author of the instructional manual *Admonitions for Women* (*Nüjie* 女誡), opts not to engage with domestic rivalries. This is particularly bewildering when we consider the essay's didactic function, that is advising young women on how best to navigate the pitfalls of married life. Yet, as Vankeerberghen has argued, while the *Admonitions* makes no explicit mention of *qie* or *bi*, it does recurrently advocate for harmonising relations with those "lesser" (*xia* 下, lit. "beneath") members of the household.[79] From Ban Zhao's perspective, marital amity was, in part, contingent on a wife's "esteem [towards] those below" (*shanggong xia ye* 尚恭下也), a literary slight of hand intimating the need for non-jealousy.[80] Thus, however inconspicuously, the *Admonitions* mirrors the comments of earlier authors, such as Liu Xiang, maintaining a wife's claim to status lay in her magnanimity and wherewithal to overlook adultery.

Herein we glimpse the development of what is, on the face of it, a contradictory vision of female propriety. High-status wives clearly anticipated their husband's pursuit of extramarital sex, though were encouraged to turn a blind eye and, in doing so, convey their moral excellence. Needless to say, this is a utopian view, one which seldom tallied with the complex reality. No amount of social conditioning could forestall the fermentation of bitterness and jealousy, as a concubine or slave woman monopolised her master's sentiments. The Eastern Han writer Feng Yan's 馮衍 (ca. 20 BCE–60 CE) wife, Ren 任, out of fear of rejection, prevented her spouse from buying a concubine in the first place. So extreme was her jealousy that Feng Yan petitioned for divorce, complaining Ren's actions had directly contributed to his family's breakdown.[81] Though few details survive, the mother of Wang Zhengjun 王政君 (71 BCE–13 CE), the future Empress Xiaoyuan 孝元皇后, was said to have also been divorced by her first husband on the grounds of *du*.[82]

Despite the socialisation of women and girls to abhor jealousy and promote domestic concord, emotional harm was, by and large, unavoidable. Marriages, whether prearranged or not, were unquestionably destabilised by polygyny. The Chinese virago, as Yenna Wu observes, was "the inevitable result of the double standard connected with extramarital and multi-spousal

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[78] Zhu Fenghan 朱風瀚, "Beida cang Qinjian Jiaonü chushi 北大藏秦簡教女初釋," *Beijing daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexueban)* 北京大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 52, no. 2 (2015), 7; trans. Olivia Milburn, "Instructions to Women: Admonitions Texts for a Female Readership in Early China," *Nan Nü* 20 (2018), 182.

[79] Vankeerberghen, "A Sexual Order in the Making," 134.

[80] Here I have relied upon the transcription provided in Ann A. Pang-White, *The Confucian Four Books for Women: A New Translation of the Nü Sishu and the Commentary of Wang Xiang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 50.

[81] Feng Yan writes, "Encountering jealousy, my family has crumbled and collapsed" (*zaoyu jidu*, *jia dao benghuai* 遭遇嫉妒，家道崩壞). See *Hou Hanshu*, 28B.1003.

[82] *Hanshu*, 98.4015.

relationships."[83] The enmity between husband and wife could, and was, manipulated by ambitious concubines and female slaves. The end result being, for those sagacious enough to try, the wholesale usurpation of the principal wife's dignities.

As Francesca Bray has correctly identified, concubines and enslaved women, from the wife's perspective, represented something of a "triple threat."[84] Not only could *qie* and *bi* compete for her husband's attention, but climb the sexual hierarchy in the event she failed to bear a son. In a society where the production of male heirs was considered tantamount to filial piety, a woman's claim to virtue hinged, to some extent, on her individual fertility.[85] Among the peasant classes, where polygyny could not be afforded, the obligation to supply an heir fell to a single woman. However, for elite wives, social motherhood took precedence over biology. Any child born to a concubine or slave could technically fall under the purview of the matriarch. The dynastic history of the Eastern Han provides a neat illustration of social motherhood in action.

> 顯宗即位，以后為貴人。時后前母姊女賈氏亦以選入，生肅宗。帝以后無子，命令養之。謂曰：「人未必當自生子，但患愛養不至耳。」后於是盡心撫育，勞悴過於所生。
>
> When Xianzong (i.e. Emperor Ming) came to the throne, the empress was made honourable lady. During this time the daughter of the elder sister of the empress's stepmother, Jia, was also selected to enter [the palace] and gave birth to Suzong. Because the empress had no child, [Emperor Ming] ordered her to take care of him, saying "It is not necessary to give birth to a child oneself. What should cause worry rather, is [the child] not being nurtured thoroughly." Thereupon the empress fostered him with all her heart, and became more wearied and worn than if it had been her own child.[86]

Evidently, the birth of Suzong 肅宗 to consort Jia 賈 was not considered detrimental to Empress Ma's 馬皇后 (d. 79 CE) authority. Instead, Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 57–75 CE) requested the child be placed under the care of the empress, who raised Suzong as if he were her own son. From the perspective of ritual thinkers, the consorts and concubines of the ruler were formulated as auxiliaries, sharing in the principal wife's duty to propagate male descendants. Social motherhood was then, in some respects, a counterweight to polygyny, itself, as the early twentieth-century sinologist Florence Ayscough discerned, the "logical outgrowth" of a cultural system where ancestor worship predominated.[87]

Even if relations between a married couple were strained, children born to concubines or maidservants were always consigned to the legal authority of the principal wife. This is not to imply however that *qi* and *bi* never profited from biological motherhood. As outlined in the previous chapter, slave women who fell pregnant with their master's child were entitled to manumission. The relevant legal clause, preserved in the "Statutes on the Establishment of Heirs," runs as follows:

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[83] Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 28.

[84] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 355.

[85] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism And Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 123.

[86] *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.409; adapted from Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 297–298.

[87] Florence Ayscough, *Chinese Women, Yesterday and Today* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), 54.

> 婢御其主而有子，主死，免其婢為庶人。
>
> Should a female slave serve [at the bedside of] her master and have a child, when the master dies, manumit the female slave and make her a freedman.[88]

Interestingly, the law does not stipulate the gender of the child, with the graph *zi* 子 serving for progeny of either sex.[89] The erotic nature of the relationship between master (*zhu* 主) and *bi* is inferred by the character *yu* 御, discussed in greater detail above. Following Anthony Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, it is likely the automatic manumission of favoured slave women was intended as a failsafe against incest. Any *bi* was, lest we forget, upon her master's death liable to be transferred to the property holdings of his son, who might be tempted to instigate a proscribed affair.[90]

Crucially, as Vankeerberghen has pointed out, the knowledge that child-rearing could result in freedom may have encouraged some *bi* to solicit the attention of their master.[91] For a handful of slave women, the birth of a son not only promised manumission, but marriage. Such was the case of Wan, whose life story is preserved in a fascinating litigation dated to 229 BCE.[92] Formally enslaved to the merchant Pei 沛, Wan had been sexually favoured by her master and bore him a son and daughter, named Yi 義 and Qie 娭 respectively. Ten years prior to the lawsuit, Pei's wife, Wei 危, had died childless. Opposed to finding a new bride, Pei instead manumitted Wan and set her up as his legitimate wife. Two further children, the boy Bi 必 and the girl Ruo 若, were born in quick succession. Pei then endeavoured to have Wan incorporated into his ancestral lineage, notifying the family elders who oversaw her assimilation. In accordance with ritual, Wan contributed to the burial expenses of the destitute and partook in funeral banquets with her husband. Following Pei's death, Yi was declared heir and inherited his father's rank and estate. However, part of Yi's bequeathal — a guesthouse and market stall — was contested by another of Pei's one-time menials (*li* 隸), a man known as Shi 識.[93] As the trial unfolded it was revealed that, while Pei had freed Wan, he had not listed her as his wife on the household registers (*huji* 戶籍) kept by the local government.[94] Consequently, the judges were unsure whether to treat Wan as a manumitted (*mian* 免) slave or a legitimate wife (*qi* 妻), statuses affording distinct legal privileges. For our purposes, we need only underscore two points of detail. First of all, Wan clearly benefited from her mistress's childlessness to the extent she was freed, married to her master, and able to establish her son as the heir to her husband's estate. Secondly, it appears mechanisms existed for transforming *bi* into *qi*, and that household registration served to finalise changes in status.

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[88] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 185 (slip no. 385); trans. Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 861.

[89] Zhang, *A History of Civil Law in Early China*, 120–121.

[90] Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 861, note 68.

[91] Vankeerberghen, "A Sexual Order in the Making," 126.

[92] *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* (2013), 154–155 (slip nos. 112–115); Lau and Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire*, 195–199.

[93] The noun *li* 隸 is gender neutral, but here references a male domestic worker. As with *tuli* 徒隸 (labour servants), *lichen* 隸臣 (bondservants) and *liqie* 隸妾 (bondswomen), *li* belonged to a highly dependent status group. However, the precise difference between *li* and *nubi* 奴婢 is unclear. Lau and Lüdke conclude *li* were privately held servants enrolled on their master's household register, but admit uncertainty in all other respects. See *Exemplarische Rechtsfälle vom Beginn der Han-Dynastie*, 131, note 723.

[94] *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian* (2013), 157 (slip no. 119); Lau and Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire*, 200.

In like fashion, concubines stood to benefit from motherhood. The early Western Han legal slips excavated from Zhangjiashan contain several attestations to stepmothers (*houma* 後母) and so-called "false mothers" (*jiamu* 假母), the latter perhaps referring to a *qie* who fostered her master's child.[95] What is more, concubines may have brandished a kind of de facto power through their biological son in the event he was designated his father's heritor. Liu Xiang recounts a, perhaps apocryphal, story of a concubine who continued to serve her deceased master's wife, despite her son having inherited his father's rank and estate.[96] The anecdote's preservation likely reflects its unusualness, with established concubines having, in actual fact, little need to pay deference to their former mistress. It appears some masters were keen to stem the influence of *qie* who mothered several children. The elderly chancellor (*chengxiang* 丞相) Zhang Cang 張蒼 (d. 152 BCE) was said to have renounced intercourse with a concubine once she fell pregnant, feasibly in an attempt to preclude the establishment of private support networks.[97] Indeed, concubines who presided over a uterine family might, in time, take control of a household, much to the vexation of the principal wife's family.

The foregoing discussion is, by necessity, a simplification, examining a difficult intermixture of cultural practice and individual psychology. However, generalisations aside, we might review a number of definite conclusions. Foremost, it is clear that principal wives were differentiated from lowborn women, chiefly through the establishment of a formalised sexual hierarchy. Nevertheless, the boundaries between wives, concubines, and slaves were not impermeable, having undergone a weakening in the aftermath of the Qin and early Western Han legal reforms. All importantly, the Han statutes enabled the children of *qie* to be named their father's heir, should a *qi* lack progeny of her own. Next, it is vital to underscore the role of arranged marriage and polygyny in supplying concubines and *bi* with opportunities for patronage. A husband's right to multiple sexual partners fostered an environment of domestic rivalry and erotic contest. Though fierce and frequently bloody, concubines and slave women did, on occasion, manoeuvre themselves into positions of dominance. Childrearing was another avenue via which female dependents might attain some measure of influence. Enslaved women who bore their master a son or daughter could expect to be manumitted, and *qie* recast as authoritative mothers. In sum, elite cultural praxis afforded concubines and female slaves the required latitude to exploit circumstantial breaks in the sexual hierarchy.

3. Household Competition

So far we have established the following: slave women and concubines under the ownership of elites could be freely exploited, and yet both *qie* and *bi* had opportunities for social advancement. It now remains to consider the agency of female dependents in navigating the cutthroat environment of the household. Regrettably, evidential shortcomings prohibit the definite identification of

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[95] *Zhangjiashan* (2001), 179 (slip no. 340); Barbieri-Low and Yates, *Law, State, and Society*, 801. Zhang reaches a different conclusion, translating *houmu* 後母 as "later mother" and *jiamu* 假母 as "stepmother." See *A History of Civil Law in Early China*, 128, 225. Elsewhere *houmu* is interpreted to mean "foster mother," denoting a principal wife who adopted a son from her husband's paternal relatives. See Huang and Goldin, "Polygyny and its Discontents," 25. However, in the "Statutes on Households" from Zhangjiashan it is clear that *houmu* refers to the father's principal wife after a child's birth mother had died or been divorced. Hence *jiamu* must indicate another kind of motherly figure, one most likely of concubinal status, in light of the mildly disparaging *jia* 假 (false; borrowed).

[96] *Lienü zhuan*, 4.86.

[97] *Shiji*, 96.2682; *Hanshu*, 42.2100.

maidservants as volitional actors. This being said, we do find attestations to master-slave relationships, albeit refracted through the prism of the jealous wife discourse. Consequently, we shall focus more on the capacity for *qie* to outmanoeuvre prospective rivals and, in doing so, claim the greatest share of their master's goodwill. Here I will return to the idea of emotional monopolies — outlined in the introduction to this monograph — underscoring a kind of surrogate power obtainable through the domination of one's master's affections.

The historian of slavery is well accustomed to grasping at faint shadows. This is especially true when it comes to the sexual agency of *bi*, where few meaningful corroborations for master-slave relationships exist beyond the imperial household. Nevertheless, we do catch glimpses of what was the potential outcome of such liaisons, namely wifely retribution, sometimes on a Machiavellian scale. Found within the Tables (*biao* 表) portion of the *Shiji* 世紀 (*Records of the Grand Scribe*) is a gruesome account of slave homicide. The wildly jealous Yi Jun 宜君, the wife of Shi Zihui 史子回 (d. 58 BCE), was said to have strangled (*jiao* 絞) to death more than forty of her husband's *shibi*.[98] Not content with simply murdering her rivals, Yi Jun cut off (*duan* 斷) the forearms and lower legs of the women's first-born children, using the amputated limbs as part of a magical curse (*mei dao* 媚道).[99]

However, we must also reckon with the influence of chauvinism when it comes to accusations of female jealousy.[100] At least one woman was falsely accused of murdering her husband's maidservant. The events in question revolved around the wife of Wei Xiang 魏相 (d. 59 BCE), chancellor under the reign of Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–48 BCE).[101] Following the suicide of a female slave belonging to Wei Xiang's household, his political rival, Zhao Guanghan 趙廣漢 (d. 67 BCE), endeavoured to frame the girl's death as murder. Seeking to intimidate Wei Xiang, Zhao Guanghan accused his wife of homicide, presenting a memorial to the throne requesting the chancellor be thoroughly investigated. As a result, Wei Xiang's wife was brought to trial and, alongside a number of her attendant slaves, cross-examined before the court. Unperturbed, Wei Xiang mounted his defence, claiming an earlier scolding had compelled the enslaved woman to take her own life, and that she was not killed as a result of his wife's jealousy. At length, the judges ruled against Zhao Guanghan, for which he was sentenced to be cut in two at the waist.

This episode reveals a number of interesting points of detail. For one, it is entirely possible Wei Xiang did indeed maintain a sexual relationship with his unnamed *fubi*. As delineated above, slave chambermaids were enlisted primarily for their venereal services. Moreover, the fact Wei Xiang's slave was prompted to hang herself (*jiaosi* 絞死) after committing, what the *Hanshu* describes as an "error" or "fault" (*guo* 過), underscores her acute personal distress. Conceivably Wei Xiang had assured a stern punishment or, however farfetched, broke off relations with his paramour. More importantly, for Zhao Guanghan's suspicions to have been taken at face value, there must have been some underlying belief in the possibility a wife might dispatch a rival out of jealousy. Disregarding

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98 *Shiji*, 20.1065.

99 In all likelihood *mei dao* 媚道 referred to a kind of witchcraft used to obtain or win back a lover. This is at least the meaning in *Hanshu* 97B.3948 and 3984, chronicling two accusations of *mei dao* against Empress Chen Jiao and Empress Xu (see below).

100 Various interpersonal conflicts between women are inaccurately framed as jealousy in the sources. See Olivia Milburn, "Jealousy and Domestic Violence by Women in Early and Medieval China," *T'oung Pao* 107, no. 5/6 (2021), 555.

101 *Shiji*, 96.2687 and *Hanshu*, 76.3205.

the forced confessions Zhao Guanghan extracted from Wei Xiang's slaves, his indictment appears to have rested on the presumption sexual competition inspired murderous resolve.

Not all accounts of intrigue are tainted with violence. Yuan Ang 袁盎 (d. 148 BCE), a close favourite of Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE), is known to have treated compassionately an official whose secret affair with a maidservant was exposed.[102] Despite the slave girl belonging to him, Yuan Ang resolved to keep the matter private, continuing to employ his secretary as if nothing were amiss. Yet, when the official was informed his benefactor was privy to the liaison, he attempted to run away. Mounting his horse and galloping after the man, Yuan Ang convinced him to return to his service and, in lieu of punishment, made him a gift of the slave. Though difficult to substantiate, it is possible the relationship between the official and Yuan Ang's maidservant was romantic in nature. The *Shiji* describes their entanglement as *dao ai* 盜愛, or "secret love," phrasing evocative of mutual affection. Likewise, the *Hanshu* avoids derogatory wording, the verb *si* 私 implying only a clandestine romance. The maidservant was almost certainly of a young age, with both texts referring to her as *shi er* 侍兒 (lit. "serving child"). As the commentary of Wen Ying 文穎 (fl. 196–220 CE) makes plain, *shi er* was a known synonym for *bi*.

The agency of *qie* in securing emotional monopolies is far less muted. In few places was the vying for influence among concubines more ruthless than within the family of Liu Ci, the last King of Hengshan. After the death of Liu Ci's first wife, Cheng Shu 乘舒, his favourite concubine Xu Lai 徐來 (d. 122 BCE) was established as queen. Resenting Xu Lai's newfound status, Jue Ji 厥姬, another of the king's consorts, accused the queen of having brought about her predecessor's death through witchcraft (*gu* 蠱).[103] While Jue Ji's accusations failed to have Xu Lai deposed, they were successful in stirring up the feelings of the heir apparent, Liu Shuang 劉爽, eldest son of Cheng Shu. Conscious of the rift between her and Liu Shuang, Xu Lai plotted to have the crown prince demoted and her own son, Liu Guang 劉廣, appointed next in line for the throne. Around the year 125 BCE, Xu Lai's stepmother was attacked and wounded. The king, suspecting Liu Shuang to have commissioned the assailant, was furious and proceeded to beat (*chi* 笞) his son.[104] To add insult to injury, when Liu Ci was suddenly taken ill, the heir apparent showed no interest in caring for his father, bogusly claiming to be equally unwell. Following his recovery, the king sought to punish Liu Shuang's behaviour, divesting him of the title of crown prince and setting up his younger brother, Liu Xiao 劉孝, in his place.

Still unsatisfied, Xu Lai then ventured to do away with her husband's youngest son. Wishing to besmirch his reputation, Xu Lai induced one of her slave maids, a talented dancer (*shan wu* 善舞) already favoured by the king, to seduce Liu Xiao, thereby exposing him to allegations of incest.[105] Catching wind of Xu Lai's machinations, Liu Shuang felt he had little choice but to act. He therefore planned to rape his stepmother, with the aim of shaming her into silence. One evening, when the queen was drinking alone, Liu Shuang came forward to propose a toast and, seizing her by the thighs, demanded she lie with him.[106] Outraged, Xu Lai complained to the king, who had Liu

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[102] *Shiji*, 101.2743; *Hanshu*, 49.2274.

[103] *Shiji*, 118.3095; *Hanshu*, 44.2154. Xu Lai did not personally cast the malediction. Rather, she enlisted the help of a female slave, who performed the spell on her behalf. Ban Gu quotes Jue Ji as follows, "Xu Lai employed a female slave to kill the heir apparent's mother with black magic" (*Xu lai shi bi gu sha taizi mu* 徐來使婢蠱殺太子母).

[104] *Shiji*, 118.3096; *Hanshu*, 44.2154.

[105] *Shiji*, 118.3096; *Hanshu*, 44.2155.

[106] *Shiji*, 118.3096; *Hanshu*, 44.2155.

Shuang fettered and imprisoned in the royal dungeons. Before she could plan her next move, however, Liu Ci was indicted on charges of rebellion. With her husband's kingdom dismantled, Xu Lai was convicted of witchcraft and put to death in the marketplace.

For all its subterfuge, Liu Ci's family soap opera feels almost benign when compared to the gut-churning tragedy of Liu Quji. Few figures in the history of early imperial China have inspired such contempt, so heinous were the crimes of the King of Guangchuan 廣川王. As a young man Liu Quji was said to have traversed his fief in the company of armed hoodlums, relishing in extended hunting trips and the destruction of grave sites.[107] Schooled in the *Classic of Changes* (*Zhou yi* 周易) and *Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語), Liu Quji expressed little interest in Confucian teachings, once directing a slave to murder his boyhood tutor.[108] Liu Quji's sex life was equally unbridled, his palace boasting a lavish harem staffed by dozens of concubines. The consorts Wang Zhaoping 王招平 and Wang Diyu 王地餘 enjoyed the greatest prestige, both of whom Liu Quji had vowed to one day make queen.[109] Yet, following a period of illness, Liu Quji came to dote on another of his *qie*, a concubine by the name of Yangcheng Zhaoxin 陽成昭信, who had carefully nursed him back to health. Shortly after his recovery, Liu Quji was having sex (*xi* 戲) with Wang Diyu when he discovered a knife (*dao* 刀) hidden in the sleeve (*xiu* 褎) of her dress.[110] Furious, the king beat and questioned Wang Diyu, who confessed to plotting to kill Zhaoxin with the help of her sister-in-arms, Wang Zhaoping. Wang Zhaoping was then summoned before Liu Quji, who stabbed her repeatedly with an iron needle (*tie zhen zhen* 鐵鍼鍼) until she admitted her role in the conspiracy.[111] Looking to make an example of the two women, Liu Quji publicly hacked his former lovers to death:

> 乃會諸姬，去以劍自擊地餘，令昭信擊昭平，皆死。
>
> Then, having assembled all the concubines, Qu personally struck Diyu with his sword, and had Zhaoxin strike Zhaoping, until both died.[112]

This proved only the beginning. Hellbent on securing her position, Zhaoxin feared the attendant slaves of Wang Zhaoping and Wang Diyu might let slip news of their mistresses's murder. All three maidservants were then, as a precautionary measure, rounded up and sent to the gallows. Sometime later, Zhaoxin complained of having nightmares, in which the ghostly apparitions of her dead rivals came back to torment her. Both corpses were hence disinterred and their remains burnt to ash. By this time, Zhaoxin's ruthlessness appeared to be paying dividends, with Liu Quji having appointed her queen. Nevertheless, the emotional monopoly Zhaoxin had worked so hard to fabricate was, soon enough, threatened by another pair of lesser consorts: Tao Wangqing 陶望卿 and Cui

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[107] *Xijing zaji,* 6.1b. For tomb robbery under the Han, see Raimund Th. Kolb, "Übeltäter, Rächer und Rebellen". Die han-zeitlichen "Jungen Männer" (*shaonian*)," in *Han-Zeit: Festschrift für Hans Stumpfeldt aus Anlass seines 65. Geburtstages*, ed. Michael Friedrich, Reinhard Emmerich and Hans van Ess (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 436.

[108] *Hanshu*, 53.2431.

[109] *Hanshu*, 53.2428.

[110] The verb *xi* 戲 can be literally translated as "to sport" or "amuse oneself" with. However, a sexual reading befits the context. After all, it is unlikely Liu Quji would have discovered the knife were he not undressing Wang Diyu.

[111] Following Yan Shigu's comment in understanding the first *zhen* 鍼 as a noun and the second in the verbal sense of *ci* 刺 (stab; pierce).

[112] *Hanshu*, 53.2428; adapted from Wilbur, *Slavery in China*, 352.

Xiucheng 崔脩成. In response, the queen complained to her husband, slandering Tao Wangqing's lack of deportment and preference for clothes unbefitting her rank.[113] Liu Quji however, insisted minor contraventions would never dampen his love, noting only Tao Wangqing's sexual infidelity could precipitate her downfall. Ever mendacious, Zhaoxin concocted a story, alleging Tao Wangqing had exposed (*tan* 袒) her naked breasts (*xi* 裼, lit. "bear the upper body") to a painter (*huagong* 畫工), as well as routinely left the women's quarters to spy on (*kui* 窺) the young officials (*langli* 郎吏) in attendance at Liu Quji's court. Whether convinced by his wife's defamation or simply addicted to bloodlust, the king made up his mind to obliterate Tao Wangqing.

> 去即與昭信從諸姬至望卿所，贏其身，更擊之。令諸姬各持燒鐵共灼望卿。望卿走，自投井死。昭信出之，椓杙其陰中，割其鼻脣，斷其舌。謂去曰：前殺昭平，反來畏我，今欲靡爛望卿，使不能神。與去共支解，置大鑊中，取桃灰毒藥并煮之，召諸姬皆臨觀，連日夜靡盡。
>
> Qu then went with Zhaoxin and the other concubines to Wangqing's rooms, where they stripped her naked and took turns beating her. Then he ordered the concubines to each take a branding iron and burn Wangqing together. Wangqing ran away and threw herself into a well where she died. Zhaoxin took her body out, pounded a wooden stake into her vagina, sliced off her nose and lips, and cut out her tongue. Then she told Qu, "earlier when we killed Zhaoping, she came back to haunt me, so now I want to pulverise Wangqing, making it impossible for her to turn into a spirit." She and Qu then dismembered the body, placed it in a huge cauldron, stewed it with peach ash and poison, and called all the concubines to watch over it day and night until it had completely dissolved.[114]

The story does not end here. Shortly afterwards, Tao Wangqing's younger sister Du 都 was also purged, as Zhaoxin attempted to wipe the floor of competition. Quite predictably, Liu Quji's sexual appetite was soon wetted by another of his concubines, Rong Ai 榮愛, whom he enjoyed drinking with. Employing the same tactic, Zhaoxin maligned Rong Ai, claiming she was naturally promiscuous and given to illicit affairs. In a symbolic display of anger, Liu Quji set alight a shirt, the collar of which Rong Ai had lately embroidered.

> 愛恐，自投井。出之未死，笞問愛，自誣與醫姦。去縛繫柱，燒刀灼潰兩目，生割兩股，銷鉛灌其口中。愛死，支解以棘埋之。
>
> Ai was terrified and threw herself into a well. When they pulled her out she was still alive, so they whipped her and interrogated her until she admitted falsely to having had an illicit affair with the physician. Qu bound her up and tied her to a pillar, burned her eyes out with a hot knife, cut her legs off at the thigh while she was still alive, and poured molten lead into her mouth. Ai died and they dismembered her, burying her under a pile of thorny brambles.[115]

Zhaoxin's playbook resulted in the deaths of fourteen concubines, all of whom were, somewhat ironically, buried under the Longevity Palace (*changshou gong* 長壽宮), home of the king's mother. With the intention of conclusively monopolising Liu Quji's patronage, the queen transformed the

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[113] *Hanshu*, 53.2429.

[114] *Hanshu*, 53.2429; adapted from Graham Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 95.

[115] *Hanshu*, 53.2430; trans. Sanders, *Words Well Put*, 95–96.

inner quarters into an effective prison. Zhaoxin then appointed her elderly slave maid (*da bi* 大婢) as overseer, instructing that no concubine was to be allowed out, except when summoned to banquets. Only Zhaoxin's niece, Chenghua 乘華, was permitted to attend the king's bedchamber, presumably on account of her blood relationship to the queen. Intending to mitigate her husband's loss of sexual variety, Zhaoxin presented him with ten male slaves, who distracted Liu Quji with idle games and wine drinking. The queen's victory was, however, short-lived. Much the same as Xulai, her fate was sealed when Liu Quli's crimes were finally exposed. Whereas her husband escaped with banishment, Zhaoxin was publicly executed in 71 BCE.

Taking stock, we can determine that, while masters evidently took up with *bi*, the agency of slave women in the formation of such partnerships is, at best, ambiguous. Concubines, on the other hand, exhibit clear subjectivity. The narratives of Xulai and Zhaoxin, however disturbing, give voice to the ambition, cunning, and violent ingenuity of *qie*. Ascending the sexual hierarchy required a concubine to first ingratiate herself with her patron. For Zhaoxin, this entailed utilising her master's poor health as an opportunity to win favour. Once an emotional monopoly had been established, it needed to be defended. Slander was a powerful weapon in neutralising potential threats. Both Xulai and Zhaoxin made use of defamation, often playing upon their husband's sexual jealousy as a means of dislodging a favourite. Slave girls loyal to their mistress could be deployed to a similar effect. Xulai instructed an enslaved dancer to seduce the heir apparent, with the aim of having him disinherited. Likewise, Zhaoxin hoped to control access to the king through appointing her maidservant as overseer of the inner quarters. Determination to supplant the competition came at a psychological cost. Zhaoxin was visibly traumatised by her role in the murder of Wang Diyu and Wang Zhaoping, her anguish manifesting in the form of nightmares and insomnia. Post-traumatic stress, coupled with marriage to a despot as sadistic as Liu Quji, may well have induced bouts of psychosis. Whether Xulai and Zhaoxin are deserving of our sympathy is open to question, though the pressures of concubinage surely exacerbated acts of individual brutality.

But how are we to account for the discrepancy in sexual agency between concubines and slaves? Foremost, we must reflect on the calibre of our evidence. The dynastic histories, while generally reliable, were not concerned with documenting slave life in all its multiplicity. On the contrary, *bi* largely feature as adjuncts to powerful men and women, delimiting their potential for agentic behaviour from the outset. Romances between master and slave, unless deemed politically consequential, go entirely unrecorded. Alternately, the proclivity for elite men to retain concubines may have dampened sexual enthusiasm for *bi*. With the exception of the imperial harem, *qie* were recruited from the lowest orders of Han society and of similar abasement to slaves. Thereby, masters hoping to expand their sexual horizons would have, in all probability, looked to *qie* ahead of *bi*. Concubinage was also better suited to the forming of long-term relationships. Unlike bonded women, who might rarely come into contact with their master, concubines were purchased expressly for amatory companionship. This, in turn, furnished *qie* with numerous opportunities to embed themselves in their patron's heart.

4. Imperial Rivalries

Much of the foregoing discussion carries over to the imperial harem, long recognised as a site of intrigue and rivalry.[116] For palace ladies in the service of the emperor however, the stakes were all

[116] Rafe de Crespigny "The Harem of Emperor Huan: A Study of Court Politics in Later Han," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 12 (1975), 2.

the higher. Monopolising the ruler's time and energies not only resulted in patronage but wieldable political authority. The sheer number of concubines deployed in the inner quarters acted to intensify competition. As Lisa Ann Raphals has underlined, jealousies and interpersonal tensions often boiled over, culminating in the ruin of powerful families or the weakening of the state.[117] The Rear Palace (*hougong* 後宮) thus promises fertile ground for investigating the sexual agency of concubines and enslaved women.

Being the legitimate wife of the emperor, the empress presided over all other women consigned to the imperial harem. Her status was reflected in the architecture and layout of the Rear Palace. Lower ranking concubines were housed in the Lateral Courts (*yeting* 掖庭), while the empress resided in the Pepper Chamber (*jiaofang* 椒房), so-called on account of the ground Sichuan peppercorns mixed into the plasterwork.[118] Although topping the sexual hierarchy, the empress was by no means unassailable. The near-endless supply of concubines and palace maids (*gong nü* 宮女) retained to serve the emperor posed a constant threat to her ascendancy. Challengers were liable to take advantage of the emperor's sexual disinterest in his wife, or curry favour through birthing an heir.[119] Although the empress could assert titular rights over the sons and daughters fathered by her husband, a childless consort was, in reality, exposed to deposition, particularly if her marriage had soured or the political influence of her natal family had diminished. Several empresses and favourites murdered the progeny of their rivals in a bid to maintain influence. For example, Liang Nüying 梁女瑩 (d. 159 CE), first wife of Emperor Huan 桓帝 (r. 146–168 CE), forced abortions on any concubine who fell pregnant by the sovereign.[120]

In keeping with the telos of this dissertation, here we shall concentrate on just a handful of imperial wives and concubines, the majority of whom were born into slavery. Through recounting their stories, the phenomenon of sexual agency in the context of the Rear Palace might be fully articulated. We begin with Wei Zifu 衛子夫 (d. 91 BCE), the second wife of Emperor Wu and among the longest-serving consorts in Chinese history.[121] Little is known of Wei Zifu's early life, though she was likely born around the year 153 BCE in, what is today, the city of Linfen 臨汾. Her mother, a household slave (*jiatong* 家僮) in the service of Emperor Wu's elder sister, the Princess of Pingyang 平陽公主, came to be known by the appellation *ao* 媼 (old lady), though her personal name goes unrecorded.[122] The identity of her father is similarly obscure. The *Shiji* describes Wei Zifu's mother as *hou qie* 侯妾, meaning "marquis's concubine," allowing for the possibility she fell pregnant by the Princess of Pingyang's husband's father.[123] Yan Shigu lends some credence to this

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[117] Lisa Ann Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 11.

[118] Olivia Milburn, "Aromas, Scents, and Spices: Olfactory Culture in China before the Arrival of Buddhism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 3 (2016), 454–455.

[119] Jennifer Holmgern has suggested endogamy may have contributed to the breakdown of relations between emperor and empress. The young age at which a wife was selected for the emperor prohibited meaningful choice, leading to feelings of resentment in adulthood. See "Imperial Marriage in the Native Chinese and Non-Han State, Han to Ming" in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, ed. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 64.

[120] *Hou Hanshu*, 10B.444.

[121] Reigning for a total of thirty-eight years, Wei Zifu is only surpassed by the forty-two year tenure of Wang Xijie 王喜姐 (1564–1620 CE), wife of the Wanli Emperor 萬曆帝 (r. 1572–1620 CE), fourteenth ruler of the Ming.

[122] *Hanshu*, 55.2471.

[123] *Shiji*, 111.2921.

report, claiming *tong* 僮 was a noun occasionally reserved for enslaved *qie*.[124] Another probable candidate was Zheng Ji 鄭季, a low-ranking official enrolled in the marquis's household and the father of Wei Zifu's younger brother, Wei Qing.[125] The confused parentage of Wei Zifu may obliquely testify to the sexual availability of slave women, who were ever susceptible to libidinous elites.

Growing up in her mistress's household, Wei Zifu was said to have been trained in singing, dancing, painting and calligraphy. A competent performer, she was eventually assigned to the princess's troupe of chorus singers (*ou* 謳).[126] By this point in time, Emperor Wu had ruled over China for several years but, lacking an heir by his first wife Empress Chen Jiao 陳嬌皇后 (ca. 160–110 BCE), had failed to cement his authority.[127] Liu Che 劉徹, to take Emperor Wu's given name, had been designated crown prince as an infant, and his marriage to Chen Jiao predetermined.[128] The pair were formally wed subsequent to Liu Che's accession in 141 BCE when he was just sixteen *sui* 歲 (fourteen or fifteen by Western reckoning).

In an effort to compensate for Chen Jiao's presumed infertility, the Princess of Pingyang sought to nominate ten "girls of good families" (*liang jia nü* 良家女) for the imperial harem. After leading the annual sacrifices at Bashang 灞上 in the spring of 139 BCE, the emperor returned to the capital via his sister's residence, who took the opportunity to present him with those concubines (*mei ren* 美人, lit. "beauties") she had assembled for his pleasure. Emperor Wu, however, expressed little interest in any of the girls on display. Wine and food were then promptly served, and the princess's household ensemble called out to perform. As the recital progressed, the emperor found himself increasingly transfixed by Wei Zifu's girlish beauty and grace of movement. The largely fictional *Han Xiaowu gushi* 漢孝武故事 (*Tales of Han Emperor Wu*) portrays Wei Zifu's behaviour as coquettish, alleging that she flirted (*tiao* 挑) with the emperor each time she stepped forward to

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[124] *Hanshu*, 55.2471.

[125] *Hanshu*, 55.2471.

[126] *Shiji*, 49.1978; *Hanshu*, 97A.3949.

[127] Absence of an heir undermined Emperor Wu's legitimacy. Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), King of Huainan 淮南王, was consequently approached to perform treason. See *Shiji*, 118.3082; Lu Zongli, *Rumor in the Early Chinese Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 63–64.

[128] When Chen Jiao was in her middle teens she had been proposed to marry Liu Rong 劉榮 (d. 148 BCE), Emperor Jing's eldest son and erstwhile heir apparent. The match was discourteously rejected by Liu Rong's mother, Lady Li 栗姬, who bore a grudge against Chen Jiao's own mother Liu Piao 劉嫖 (ca. 189–116 BCE), the so-called Grand Princess 長公主. Unperturbed, Liu Piao entreated another of Emperor Jing's concubines, Wang Zhi 王娡 (d. 126 BCE), whose five-year-old son Liu Che was greatly favoured by the ruler. See *Shiji*, 49.1976; *Hanshu*, 97A.3946. Legend has it that, when the young Liu Che was asked by his future stepmother whom he might take as his bride, he pointed to Chen Jiao and said, "If I could have Ajiao (i.e. Chen Jiao) as my wife, I would build her a house of gold" (*ruo de Ajiao zuo fu*, *dangzuo jin wu zhu zhi ye* 若得阿嬌作婦，當作金屋貯之也). See *Han Xiaowu gushi*, 7.2.

sing.[129] Momentarily excusing himself, Emperor Wu summoned Wei Zifu to his private clothing carriage (*yi xuan* 衣軒) — a known euphemism for the bathroom — where the couple proceeded to have sex.[130] The emperor thereupon returned to the banqueting hall "extremely satisfied" (*huan shen* 驩甚) and presented his sister with a thousand catties of gold, who, in turn, memorialised that Wei Zifu was to accompany him back to the royal palace. Mounting the carriage steps, the princess took Wei Zifu by the arm and offered her some parting encouragement: "Go now! Eat well and exert yourself" (*xing yi! qiang fan mian zhi* 行矣！強飯勉之).[131]

Once established in the Rear Palace, however, Wei Zifu appears to have been neglected, languishing alone for upwards of a year.[132] In the meantime, Emperor Wu had set about discharging any palace lady he considered no longer of service to the throne. During the course of his expulsion campaign, Wei Zifu petitioned the emperor to join those concubines earmarked as surplus. Regardless of whether her entreaty is to be interpreted as performative, or stemming from a genuine desire to exit the palace, Wei Zifu found herself steadily more prized. Her meteoric ascent was helped, in no small part, by the birth of three daughters.[133] Emperor Wu's marriage to Chen Jiao was by now in its death throes. Suicidally jealous and still childless — despite having spent ninety million cash on specialist doctors and fertility rites — the empress resorted to black magic (*meidao* 媚道) and shamanistic poisons (*wugu* 巫蠱) in a last-ditch attempt to reclaim her husband's love and blight Wei Zifu.[134] An investigation was quickly launched, supervised by the prosecutor Zhang Tang 張湯 (d. 116 BCE), who exposed the sorceress Chu Fu 楚服, along with a number of the empress's closest allies, ordering their decapitation and heads impaled on stakes in the market place.[135] In the autumn of 130 BCE, Wei Zifu was officially crowned empress and, two years later, bore a son, Liu Ju 劉據, who was nominated as heir apparent.

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[129] *Han Xiaowu gushi*, 8.2. All received editions of the *Han Wu gushi* 漢武故事 — as it is more commonly known — are reconstructions, pieced together from a range of complex textual genealogies. Erroneously attributed to the first century BCE poet Wang Bao 王褒, among others, the *Tales* was more likely compiled in the late Six Dynasties from a range of older sources. The early twentieth-century writer and translator Lu Xun 魯迅 attempted to collect the various recensions of the *Tales*, publishing a flawed transmission as part of his *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉. Among Lu Xun's most glaring omissions was ignoring the *Shuofu* 說郛 (*Environs of Fiction*) version of the text, differently titled as *Han Xiaowu gushi* 漢孝武故事. Compiled in the Yuan-Ming transition and attributed to Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, the *Shuofu* is itself a labyrinthine work. While a number of *Shuofu* manuscripts survive, only the so-called *Hanfenlou* 涵芬樓 100 fascicle edition contains a rendering of the *Tales*. For the textual history and dating of the *Han Wu gushi*, see Thomas Eric Smith, "Ritual and the Shaping of Narrative: The Legend of the Han Emperor Wu," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1992), 101–133. For the *Shuofu* manuscript tradition, see Christopher P. Atwood, "The Textual History of Tao Zongyi's *Shuofu*: Preliminary Results of Stemmatic Research on the *Shengwu Qinzheng Lu*," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 271 (2017), 1–70.

[130] *Shiji*, 49.1978; *Hanshu*, 97A.3949. The *Han Xiaowu gushi* additionally describes that when Wei Zifu let down her hair (*tou jie* 頭解) the emperor marvelled at its length and lustre.

[131] *Shiji*, 49.1978; *Hanshu*, 97A.3949.

[132] Again the *Tales of Han Emperor Wu* furnishes us with complementary details. Supposedly the emperor neglected Wei Zifu because of his Daoist regimen, obliging him to have sex with a different concubine every night. To quote, "At this time there were several thousand palace women, who received favour in sequence" (*shi gongnü shuqian, jie yi ci xing* 時宮女數千，皆以次幸). See *Han Xiaowu gushi* 8.2.

[133] *Shiji*, 49.1979; *Hanshu*, 97A.3949.

[134] *Shiji*, 49.1979; *Hanshu*, 97A.3948.

[135] *Hanshu*, 6.164.

Wei Zifu was not the only dancer of humble origins to be favoured by Emperor Wu. Among the palace entertainers was the court musician Li Yannian 李延年 (d. 91 BCE), a gifted songwriter and singer.[136] Once, when attending the emperor, Li Yannian debuted a new composition entitled *Song of the Fair Lady* (*Jiaren ge* 佳人歌), the lyrics envisioning a girl of the north so beautiful as to destabilise whole cities and states.[137] Greatly pleased, Emperor Wu bemoaned the non-existence of such a woman, before the Princess of Pingyang informed him that Li Yannian did, in fact, have a younger sister of exceptional comeliness. Forthwith, she was summoned to the palace to dance for the emperor, who quickly found in her a novel sexual diversion. When Lady Li 李夫人 (fl. late first century BCE), as she came to be known, fell critically ill she strategically refused Emperor Wu an audience. Berated by her sisters for disdaining the emperor's wishes, Lady Li explained her choice in frank and sobering terms.

> 我以容貌之好，得從微賤愛幸於上。夫以色事人者，色衰而愛弛，愛弛則恩絕。上所以孿孿顧念我者，乃以平生容貌也。今見我毀壞，顏色非故，必畏惡吐棄我。
>
> It was because he (i.e. Emperor Wu) liked my looks that I was able to rise from a lowly position and enjoy the love an favour of the ruler. But if one has been taken into service because of one's beauty, then when beauty fades, love will wane, and when love wanes, kindness will be forgotten. The emperor thinks fondly of and tenderly of me because he remembers the way I used to look. Now if he were to see me thin and wasted, with all the old beauty gone from my face, he would be filled with loathing and disgust and would do his best to put me out of mind.[138]

Physical beauty, however transformative, was ultimately evanescent, dulled by familiarity and the weight of years. Lady Li, knowing well the fragile concessions her good looks afforded, tactfully withdrew from court life, aspiring to imprint the memory of her younger self on the emperor's mind. In doing so, Lady Li hoped her family might retain those privileges her beguiling appearance had earlier secured.

We know of one further consort who rose from obscurity to win patronage at the court of Emperor Wu. The daughter of a criminal sentenced to castration, surnamed Zhao 趙, Lady Gouyi 鉤弋夫人 (113–88 BCE) came to the attention of the emperor by way of prognosis. Returning from an inspection of the commanderies (or hunting trip), Emperor Wu was approached by a diviner, who indicated the presence of an auspicious woman. In response, the emperor ordered messengers be sent out in search of her, who later returned with a girl whose hands were perpetually clenched in fists. Miraculously, when Emperor Wu ventured to caress her palms, her fingers loosened to reveal a jade hook in one hand, bringing about her dual epithets *quan* 拳 (fist) and *gou* 鉤 (hook).[139] Lady Gouyi quickly ascended the ranks of the imperial harem, reaching the grade of Favourite Beauty (*jie yu* 倢伃). After a pregnancy that was said to have lasted fourteen months — the same gestation period as the mythic sovereign Yao 堯 — Lady Gouyi gave birth to a son, Liu Fuling 劉弗陵 (94–74 BCE).

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[136] For biographical information concerning Li Yannian, see David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide, Part One* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 500–501.

[137] The poem can be found in both *Hanshu*, 97A.3951 and *Yuefu shiji*, 84.1181. For commentary, see Hans H. Frankel, "The Development of Han and Wei *Yüeh-fu* as a High Literary Genre," in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 256–257.

[138] *Hanshu*, 97A.3952; trans. Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 249.

[139] *Hanshu*, 97A.3956; *Han Xiaowu gushi*, 10.2.

Shortly after the birth, a crisis erupted at the heart of Emperor Wu's government. Wei Zifu's son, Liu Ju, now responsible for the day-to-day running of the administration, became embroiled in a conflict with the high official Jiang Chong 江充 (d. 91 BCE). Coinciding with the gathering political storm, the ailing Emperor Wu, now in his mid-sixties, fell gravely ill. Fearing execution in the event of Liu Ju's accession, Jiang Chong schemed to indict the heir apparent and Wei Zifu on charges of necromancy.[140] Catching wind of the plot to oust him, Liu Ju had Jiang Chong arrested and put to death. Mistaking his actions for rebellion, however, the emperor ordered Liu Ju to be taken into custody. Rather than face allegations of treason, Liu Ju fled the capital and hung himself, triggering a large-scale meltdown in public order. The palace steps ran with blood, as loyalists to the Wei clan and Liu Ju were purged.[141] Even the empress, stripped of the imperial seal and ribbon, was forced to take her own life. In the aftermath of the slaughter — his daughters, best-loved wife, and son dead — Emperor Wu appointed Liu Fuling as crown prince, who ascended the throne as Emperor Zhao 昭帝 in 87 BCE.

We come now to one of the most remarkable stories in Chinese history, that of the slave girl turned empress Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (d. 1 BCE) and her winsome sister Zhao Hede 趙合德 (d. 7 BCE). It should be remarked from the outset that the personal names of both women are unknown, with the former being merely an epithet (see below) and the latter a literary invention. Subject to innumerable rewritings, the ascendant star of the Zhao sisters has delighted and scandalised readers for millennia.[142] The daughter of enslaved parents, Zhao Feiyan was abandoned shortly after birth, enduring hunger and cold for three days, before a change of heart prompted her recovery.[143] In drawing attention to Zhao Feiyan's exposure, the authors of the *Hanshu* were likely betokening her extraordinary future.[144] Partway through childhood, Zhao Feiyan entered the service of the Princess of Yang'e 陽阿公主, where she was trained in singing and dancing. Lithe and nimble-footed, the young Zhao quickly earned the sobriquet *feiyan* 飛燕, or "Flying Swallow." One day, when Emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) was banqueting with the princess, he was treated to a performance by Zhao Feiyan. Greatly affected by her elegance and sexual magnetism, the emperor invited Feiyan and her younger sister to join the imperial harem. Both were made court ladies and assigned the rank of Favourite Beauty.

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[140] After searching the heir apparent's residence, Jiang Chong claimed to have dug up black magic paraphernalia, see *Hanshu*, 6.208; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. 2, 114.

[141] For an exhaustive account of the witchcraft trials and Liu Ju's downfall, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (1974 repr., London: Routledge, 2019), 37–90.

[142] The most enduring fictional account is the novella *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* 趙飛燕外傳 (*The Unorthodox Biography of Zhao Feiyan*). Foreshadowing later works of Chinese erotica, the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* purports to narrate the luxuriant living and sexual excesses of the Zhao sisters. Although drawing on earlier material, the *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* is not to be considered an historical source, most likely dating from the mid ninth century CE. See Olivia Milburn "On *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan*, China's Earliest Erotic Fiction," *Asia Major* 31, no. 1 (2018), 102. For translations, see Wolfgang Bauer and Herbert Franke, *The Golden Casket: Chinese Novellas of Two Millennia*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), 45–57; Olivia Milburn, *The Empress in the Pepper Chamber: Zhao Feiyan in History and Fiction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021), 37–49.

[143] *Hanshu*, 97B.3988. The *Zhao Feiyan waizhuan* claims, quite bogusly, that Zhao Feiyan and her sister were the result of an affair between the Princess of Gusu 姑蘇公主 and a musician by the name of Feng Wanjin 馮萬金. Both individuals are, as far as we can tell, literary fabrications.

[144] Infants who survived abandonment were considered predestined for a life of great virtue or wickedness, see Kinney, "Dyed Silk," 25.

Despite the emperor and his wife, Empress Xu 許皇后 (d. 8 BCE), having been wed for over a decade, their marriage remained childless. Bar a son and daughter who had died young, the empress had struggled to conceive, straining their already fraught relationship. Emperor Cheng did, however, retain a second favourite, Ban *jieyu* 班婕妤 (48–6 BCE), great-aunt of the future historian Ban Gu.[145] Belonging to a prominent family of scholars and officials, Ban *jieyu* was raised amidst the "fragrance of books" (*shu xiang* 書香), growing up to be an accomplished reader and writer.[146] She bore the ruler two sons, both of whom died in infancy, but continued to flatter Emperor Cheng through gestures of wifely sharing, recommending her maidservant Li Ping 李平 to the royal bedchamber.[147] Enjoying favour until the Hongjia 鴻嘉 reign period (20–17 BCE), Ban *jieyu*'s influence began to wane following the introduction of the Zhao sisters to the Rear Palace. Sensing Empress Xu's power was on the ebb, Zhao Feiyan levelled accusations of witchcraft, claiming she and Ban *jieyu* were imprecating her and other concubines.[148] The empress was swiftly demoted and placed under house arrest, while Ban *jieyu* escaped punishment only through her eloquent defence, quoting passages from the *Analects* of Confucius in support of her innocence.[149]

Following her successful smear campaign, Zhao Feiyan was enthroned as empress in the summer of 16 BCE. However, the emperor's attention then pivoted to Zhao Hede, who he promoted to the rank of Brilliant Companion (*zhao yi* 昭儀) and set up in the Residence of Bright Sun (*zhaoyang she* 昭陽舍).[150] Notwithstanding the emotional monopoly the Zhao's had established over Emperor Cheng, neither sister fell pregnant. To compensate, the *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* (*Xijing zaji* 西京雜記) claims Zhao Feiyan smuggled "philandering youths" (*qingbo shaonian* 輕薄少年) into her private quarters, having sex with them repeatedly in an effort to conceive.[151] This pornographic anecdote, rightly proven to be imaginary, does however go someway in reflecting the desperation and anxiety occasioned by infertility.[152] At length, having received bribes from the empress dowager, Zhao Feiyan permitted her husband to appoint Liu Kang 劉康 (27–1 BCE) as heir apparent. For additional details concerning the dominance of the Zhao sisters, we are forced to wait until Emperor Cheng's death in 7 BCE, when the *Hanshu* account re-engages.

Supposedly the picture of health, Emperor Cheng's expiry came as a shock to the central government. After an evening of merriment with the kings of Chu 楚 and Liang 梁, the emperor awoke unable to dress himself and having lost the power of speech.[153] While modern commentators

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[145] Biographical information for Ban *jieyu* can be found in *Hanshu* 97B.3983–3988, with supplementary details garnered from *Lienü zhuan* 8.

[146] David R. Knechtges, "The Poetry of an Imperial Concubine: The Favorite Beauty Ban," *Oriens Extremus* 36, no. 2 (1993), 128.

[147] McMahon, *Women Shall Not Rule*, 77.

[148] *Hanshu*, 97B.3984.

[149] After being absolved of witchcraft, Ban *jiuyu* petitioned Emperor Cheng to serve the empress dowager, Wang Zhengjun, in the Palace of Eternal Trust (*chang xin gong* 長信宮). Her loss of favour was immortalised by the poem *Song of Resentment* (*Yuange xing* 怨歌行), in which she compared herself to a summer fan discarded with the onset of autumn, a now proverbial metaphor for fleeting love.

[150] *Hanshu*, 97B.3989. The Residence of Bright Sun was exceptionally luxurious, boasting a vermilion painted courtyard, gilded doorways, steps of white jade, and timber walls adorned with gold rings, jade disks, and kingfisher feathers.

[151] *Xijing zaji*, 85.

[152] Written centuries after the collapse of the Han dynasty, it has been argued that the *Xijing zaji* took inspiration from Age of Disunion (220–589 CE) accounts of female licentiousness. See Milburn, *The Empress in the Pepper Chamber*, 72.

[153] *Hanshu*, 97B.3989–3990.

have pointed to a stroke as the likely cause of death, the *Hanshu* casts suspicion on Zhao Hede.[154] Later texts go so far as to claim the emperor died of an aphrodisiac overdose, supposedly prescribed by the Brilliant Companion. Whatever the case, Emperor Cheng's demise proved a major blow to the Zhao sisters, who were entirely reliant on his patronage and support. The empress dowager Wang Zhengjun 王政君 (71 BCE–13 CE), then issued an edict to her nephew Wang Mang, requesting he investigate the suddenness of the emperor's death. Fearing the worst, Zhao Hede took her own life, while Zhao Feiyan quickly ingratiated herself with Liu Kang, now enthroned as Emperor Ai 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BCE).

For several years prior to Emperor Cheng's passing, rumours had circulated the inner quarters regarding the deliberate killing of infants at the behest of Zhao Hede. Seeking to uncover the truth, an inquiry was launched, headed by the high official Xie Guang 解光. After several months spent interviewing palace ladies, eunuchs, and slave attendants, Xie Guang presented his findings to the court. The probe revealed Emperor Cheng had indeed kept two favourites in the later years of the Zhao's monopoly, the slave girl Cao Gong 曹宮 and concubine Beauty Xu 許美人, both of whom had borne him sons.

> 宮即曉子女，前屬中宮，為學事史，通詩，授皇后。房與宮對食，元延元年中宮語房曰：「陛下幸宮。」後數月，曉入殿中，見宮腹大，問宮。宮曰：「御幸有身。」其十月中，宮乳掖庭牛官令舍，有婢六人。
>
> The woman named Cao Gong was the daughter [of the government slave woman] Cao Xiao. She formally belonged to the Middle Palace, where she learned to read and became a scribe. After mastering the *Classic of Poetry*, she gave the empress (i.e. Zhao Feiyan) instruction in it. She (i.e. Cao Gong) and Dao Fang engaged in *duishi*, and in the first year of the *yuanyen* period (12 BCE) she said to Dao Fang: "His majesty has favoured me!" Several months later her mother Cao Xiao came to the apartments where the girl was living and noticed that her belly had grown large. When she questioned her about it, Cao Gong replied, "I have received the imperial favour and I am pregnant." In the tenth month of that year, she was taken to the lodge of the Supervisor of Cattle for the women's quarters and there bore her child, with six slave women in attendance.[155]
>
> 許美人前在上林涿沐館，數召入飾室中若舍，一歲再三召，留數月或半歲御幸。元延二年襄子，其十一月乳。
>
> The Beauty Xu formally resided in the Chomu Hall of the Shanglin park. She was often summoned to the Decorated Chamber or to such-and-such a residence of the palace complex, sometimes remaining for several months, other times for half a year. She enjoyed imperial

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[154] Zheng Fu 鄭甫, "Han Chengdi zhi si yu 'yinghou shouxin': Cong Zizhi tongjian guanyu tianren ganying de yize jizai tan qi" 漢成帝之死與 '熒惑守心': 從資治 通鑒關於天人感應的一則記載談起," *Zhonghua wenhua luntan* 中華文化論壇 1 (1999), 125.

[155] *Hanshu*, 97B.3990; adapted from Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 267–268. The phrase *duishi* 對食 is near untranslatable and perhaps a euphemism for female homoeroticism. The graph *dui* has two relevant meanings, those of "to face" and "with each other." In the nounal sense, *shi* can mean "food" or, when employed as a verb, "to eat." Thus we might gloss *duishi* as "paired eating," implying mutual cunnilingus.

> favour and in the second year of *yuanyen* (11 BCE) became pregnant. She bore a child in the eleventh month of that year.[156]

Reading between the lines, it is apparent Cao Gong became acquainted with Emperor Cheng while tutoring his wife in the *Shijing*. After the birth of her child, the eunuch attendant Tian Ke 田客 was sent with a message instructing the palace jailer Ji Wu 籍武 to escort Cao Gong and her newborn to the prison infirmary. Three days later, Tian Ke delivered a second letter to Ji Wu, this time inquiring whether the child was still alive. Replying in the affirmative, a further note was sent down from the throne, angrily requesting Ji Wu dispose of the child. Anticipating retribution either way, Ji Wu memorialised to the emperor reasoning, in the absence of an heir, it would be unwise to have the infant murdered.[157] Ignoring his pleas, the boy was placed in the care of a wet nurse (*ru mu* 乳母) and instructions were given for Ji Wu to oversee Cao Gong's suicide.

> 後三日，客復持詔記，封如前予武，中有封小綠篋，記曰：「告武以篋中物書予獄中婦人，武自臨飲之。」武發篋中有裹藥二枚，赫蹏書，曰「告偉能：努力飲此藥，不可復入。女自知之！」偉能即宮。宮讀書已，曰：「果也，欲姊弟擅天下！我兒男也，額上有壯髮，類孝元皇帝。今兒安在？危殺之矣！奈何令長信得聞之？」宮飲藥死。
>
> Three days later, Tian Ke again came with a message from the emperor, sealed as before, and gave it to Ji Wu. Inside the message pouch was a small green box, also sealed, with a note attached to it that read, "Instructions to Ji Wu: take the letter and other things in the box and give them to the woman in jail. Stand by personally while she drinks the contents." When Ji Wu opened the box he found two packets of medicine and a small piece of red paper which said, "Instructions to Weineng: be brave and drink this medicine — you can never come to the palace again, as you yourself know." Weineng was Cao Gong's other name. After Cao Gong had finished reading the note, she said, "Just as I thought — he's (i.e. Emperor Cheng) to let those two sisters run the whole empire for him! My baby was a boy and had beautiful hair on his forehead — he looked just like Emperor Yuan the Filial (i.e. Emperor Cheng's father). And now where is he? They've probably killed him! If only I could get word to the Palace of Lasting Trust!" Then she drank the medicine and died.[158]

With Cao Gong dispatched, Zhao Hede turned her attention to the six maidservants who had assisted at the birth. Although recognising the slaves had committed no offence, Zhao Hede professed they could not be allowed to live, offering the women a choice of private suicide or execution beyond the city walls. Finally, there was the problem of what to do with the child itself. Barely eleven days old, he was snatched from his wet nurse's arms and given over to Li Nan 李南, overseer of the women's quarters. The *Hanshu* admits no details of Cao Gong's son's fate, though he was likely killed and discreetly buried in the palace grounds.

News of the birth of Beauty Xu's son was met with similar vengeance. Zhao Hede made no attempt to disguise her jealousy, reviling the emperor's sexual faithlessness in an eruption of desperate rage.

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156 *Hanshu*, 97B.3993; trans. Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 270.

157 When inquiring how Emperor Cheng responded to his memorial, Tian Ke replied "he stared straight ahead" (*cheng ye* 惩也), evoking images of the ruler's leaden gaze and silent despair.

158 *Hanshu*, 97B.3991; adapted from Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 269.

The episode makes for tragic reading, an indelible Judas kiss still palpable aeons after its initial composition.

> 後客子、偏、兼聞昭儀謂成帝曰：「常紿我言從中宮來，即從中宮來，許美人兒何從生中？許氏竟當復立邪！」懟，以手自擣，以頭擊壁戶柱，從牀上自投地，啼泣不肯食，曰：「今當安置我，欲歸耳！」
>
> Later Huo Kezi, Wang Pian, and Zang Jian, coachman of the Brilliant Companion, overheard their mistress say to Emperor Cheng: "You lied to me all those times you said you had just come back from the empress's palace! If you were always returning from the empress's palace, then how does it happen that Lady Xu had given birth to a child? I suppose in the end you are going to set up another Empress Xu!" In her furry she beat herself with her own hands, struck her head against the walls, doors and columns, and flung herself off the bed to the floor, where she wept and wailed and refused to eat, saying, "Now what are you going to do with me? Just send me home, I suppose!"[159]

Emperor Cheng entreated Zhao Hede not to lose heart, reaffirming his commitment and promising never to advance a rival concubine to her status. Word was then sent to Beauty Xu, requesting she hand over her child to the eunuch Jin Yan 靳嚴. Placing him in a woven basket and depositing it on the southern side of her chamber blinds, the newborn was then conveyed to the emperor's private quarters. After inspecting the hamper, Emperor Cheng and Zhao Hede commanded their attendants to leave the room, before proceeding to smother the infant. A surreptitious message was then written out, tied with a green cord and placed next to the body, providing instructions for its disposal.

> 恭受詔，持篋方底予武，皆封以御史中丞印，曰：「告武：篋中有死兒，埋屏處，勿令人知。」武穿獄樓垣下為坎，埋其中。
>
> The eunuch Wu Gong then received an order to take the hamper and the message pouch and give them to the jailor Ji Wu; both were sealed with the emblem of the middle aide to the imperial secretary. The message read, "Instructions to Ji Wu: there is a dead baby in the hamper — bury it in a secluded spot and let no one know about it." Ji Wu thereupon dug a hole at the foot of the wall surrounding the jail tower and buried it.[160]

My description of Zhao Feiyan and Zhao Hede's life trajectory has, so far, aligned precisely with the version of events given in the *Hanshu*. But to what degree can this, largely hostile, account be relied upon as a faithful transmission? Needless to say, the chief authors of the *Hanshu* — Ban Biao and his son Ban Gu — had sufficient motive to loath the Zhao sisters, who had disrupted the relationship between Emperor Cheng and Ban *jieyu*, their patrilineal relative.[161] It is not hard to envisage the lasting dislike the Ban family would have felt towards Zhao Feiyan, who had successfully frustrated their ambition to have Ban *jieyu* installed as empress. However, there are good reasons to believe that the *Hanshu* preserves a reasonably accurate narration of the chaotic final years of Emperor Cheng's reign.

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[159] *Hanshu*, 97B.3993; trans. Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 270.

[160] *Hanshu*, 97B.3993–3994; trans. Watson, *Courtier and Commoner in Ancient China*, 271.

[161] Ban *jieyu* was the sister of Ban Zhi 班稚, the father of Ban Biao.

For starters, it is worth highlighting the source material Ban Gu consulted in the writing of the *Hanshu*, identified by Clyde B. Sargent as follows: (1) literary productions by Western Han authors, (2) archival records dating from the Western Han, and (3) information garnered from oral traditions.[162] For the biographies of Emperor Cheng and Zhao Feiyan, coming in *juan* 卷 (scroll; fascicle) 10 and 97 respectively, it is likely Ban Gu and his colleagues referred principally to archival documents.[163] After all, Ban Gu was uniquely positioned to examine the imperial records, having been appointed in 66 CE to the official position of Historian of the Orchid Terrace (see above). On this basis, it is quite possible Ban Gu examined interview transcripts and other reports gathered as part of Xie Guang's original inquiry.

Moreover, in contrast to Sima Qian's rhapsodic literary style, the authors of the *Hanshu* employed an urbane, almost detached, narrative voice, exhibiting minimal stylistic deviation throughout the *zhuan* 傳 (biographies) portion of the chronicle. While this is no place to discuss the complexities of style and voice in the early *zhengshi* 正史 (dynastic histories) tradition, the subtle reproach directed towards the Zhao sisters appears not to be personally motivated, but rather in line with general Confucian disapproval regarding lowborn consorts. As Raphals identifies, the presentation of Zhao Feiyan and Zhao Hede substantially conforms to earlier models of "women as agents of destruction," most notably the malefic concubine of King You of Zhou 周幽王 (r. 781–771 BCE), Bao Si 褒姒.[164]

The task of concluding so layered and multifaceted a history proves difficult. Even the most cursory overview of the source material betrays the violence and instability typifying the lives of imperial consorts. Indeed, of the seventeen Han empresses to be enthroned during the Western Han, eight were deposed, six forced to commit suicide, one murdered, and two compelled to witness the execution of their closest relatives.[165] Juxtaposed with later dynasties, the Western Han was unusually bloody, with the killing tides engulfing courtiers and concubines alike. The fierce competition for imperial patronage necessitated a kind of ruthlessness, at odds with the etiquette and courtly niceties typically associated with the inner quarters. As Rafe de Crespigny succinctly puts it, "even as games were played, the players pretended not to be taking part."[166]

We can, nonetheless, discern a number of agentic strategies implemented by palace women to obtain favour. Both Wei Zifu and Zhao Feiyan honed their skill in the performing arts, doubtlessly appreciating the fact that talented and beautiful slave women stood a better chance of manumission. While neither could have foreseen marriage to the emperor, their upbringing in the households of imperial affines may well have inspired thoughts of hypergamy. Equally, both consorts manipulated domestic strife to their advantage. Wei Zifu was clearly preferenced ahead of Chen Jiao for her fecundity. Zhao Feiyan, on the other hand, personally accused Empress Xu of witchcraft, dissolving any residual feelings the emperor may have harboured for his spouse. Once in power, influence could be derived through a mixture of erotic surrogates and child-rearing. Wei Zifu relied on her son's appointment as heir apparent, whereas Zhao Feiyan sanctioned Emperor Cheng's sexual interest in her younger sister.

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[162] Clyde B. Sargent, "Subsidized History: Ban Ku and the Historical Records of the Former Han Dynasty," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1944), 129.

[163] Anthony E. Clark, *Ban Gu's History of Early China* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 39.

[164] Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 85.

[165] Milburn, *The Empress in the Pepper Chamber*, 14.

[166] de Crespigny, *Fire over Luoyang*, 113.

The violent maintenance of emotional monopolies is most explicitly demonstrated by Zhao Hede. Like her sister, Zhao Hede secured patronage by way of her beauty and sexual talents, embedding herself in Emperor Cheng's affections. Yet, upon discovering the emperor's unfaithfulness, she switched tactics, opting instead to voice her perturbation. Open expressions of jealousy were liable to backfire, and only attempted when a consort could be sure of her place atop the sexual hierarchy.[167] The strength of Zhao Hede's monopoly is evidenced by her involvement in the murder of at least two imperial sons. Cao Gong's infant boy was, in all likelihood, killed upon Zhao Hede's request, while she and Emperor Cheng personally eliminated Beauty Xu's child. The fact Emperor Cheng was willing to forgo an heir to placate his lover, as well as tolerating her own childlessness, betrays the extent of Zhao Hede's influence.

Although fraught with risk, contesting the Pepper Chamber could radically alter the life course of demimonde women. However implausible, the enslaved dancers Wei Zifu and Zhao Feiyan achieved, through a mixture of sexual charisma and chicanery, imperial enthronement. The volitional amplitude of both consorts is undeniable, though so to their dependence on the emperor's continued support. The ebbing of imperial protection, for Wei Zifu and the Zhao sisters alike, resulted in their forced suicide. We would do well to remember the tender age at which concubines were entered into the harem fixture. Wei Zifu, for instance, was barely passed her early teens when favoured by the emperor and uprooted to the Rear Palace. Lacking family connections and political allies, it is remarkable ex-slaves were able to institute themselves as royal consorts, bespeaking their judicious exercise of sexual agency.

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[167] Ch'ü, *Han Social Structure*, 48.

Conclusion

Gathering together the various strands running through the second half of this monograph proves challenging. The axial difficulty at this juncture lies not in recapping the similarities and differences between ancient Rome and Han China, but rather in the meaningful unknotting of the data to extrapolate the why factor. Simply underscoring resemblances and disparities, while thought-provoking, fails to elicit the distinct cultural forces influencing the performance of sexual agency. Attempting to circumvent this pitfall, here I will offer a number of explanations as to why, despite historical variances, bonded women and girls in the classical occidental and oriental world responded in kind to their enslavement.

Before doing so, however, it is worth reviewing the central lines of inquiry the comparative component of this dissertation sought to engage with. As emphasised in the introduction, my juxtaposition of Roman and Han Chinese slavery was deliberately imbalanced, with the former receiving considerably more analysis. In this sense, the purposing of early imperial China was largely illustrative, a barometer of sorts, enabling my focal hypothesis to be tested on a contemporaneous, though decidedly unique, ancient society. This being said, allow me to summarise the principal arguments hitherto discussed. Foremost, Roman and Chinese practices of slaving, labour division, and manumission — coming in chapters one and five respectively — fell under examination. Secondly, in chapters two and six, I underscored the capacity of female slaves and concubines to exploit the venereal interests of their master, both in elite households and, specific to ancient China, the imperial harem.

The aforementioned chapter division informs the structure of the present conclusion. We first take into consideration the possibility that variances in the means of enslavement — namely the external and internal traffic of bonded persons — recognisably affected the life prospects of female slaves. Roman and Chinese manumission laws are then fleetingly juxtaposed, allowing us to better elucidate their similarly gendered approach to the freeing of enslaved women. The radically separable purpose of concubinage in Roman and early Chinese society warrants independent discussion, being of great importance to the buildout of sexual competition within the household. Penultimately, the intercultural value of sexual agency, as a theoretical framework, shall be assessed, with special consideration being paid to the formation of emotional monopolies. In the final analysis, we are obliged to deliberate whether the agentic strategies pursued by female slaves in the ancient world can be gauged as historically typical, redolent of the challenges symptomatic of human bondage from a global perspective.

1. Enslavement and Manumission

The subjugation and traffic of bondspeople in classical Rome and Han China was notably dissimilar. From the mid-200s BCE onwards, warfare constituted a major fountainhead of servile bodies in the ancient Mediterranean. Roman legions fighting campaigns on enemy soil, captured and enslaved hundreds of thousands of prisoners, many of whom were transported back to Italy and sold. It is no accident that chattel slavery was most intensely practised in the coastal lands of the empire bordering the Mediterranean, where the supply of enslaved persons was copious.[1] While spear-won captives, taken in China's wars against the Xiongnu 匈奴 and northwestern oasis states

[1] Brent D. Shaw, "Africa," in *Handwörterbuch der Antiken Sklaveri*, ed. Heinz Heinen *et al*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), Vol. 1, 49.

were sporadically made *nubi* 奴婢 (slaves), it appears prisoners of war were never systematically enslaved during the Han.

Equal divergences are perceivable when it comes to the enslavement of abandoned infants. For the Roman world, the adoption of foundlings comprised a viable source of slave labour. Neonates exposed in the days or weeks after birth could be rescued and taken in as future household servants or, when old enough, sold on for a profit. No such market existed for foundlings in early imperial China. Although infants were routinely exposed throughout the years of the Qin and Han empires, there is little evidence to suggest they were ever made *nubi*. Instead, the domestic trade in slaves revolved around the kidnapping and pawning of women and children, with traffic experiencing an upsurge in years of social unrest or famine.

Whereas Rome's supply of fungible bodies primarily consisted of chattel slaves, the early Chinese state relied upon gangs of forced labourers. Convicts sentenced to terms of penal servitude made up one arm of the Han empire's coerced workforce. Hundreds of thousands of bonded prisoners were employed in government-sponsored workshops, mines, iron foundries, and infrastructure projects. The relative disposability of penal labourers occasioned their "gulag-like" treatment, being reserved for the most dangerous and unpleasant of jobs.[2] Penal servitude among the Romans was far less pronounced. In contrast to the Han, *servi poenae* (slaves of the penalty) amounted to only a fraction of the total slave population, with other configurations of unfree labour proving far more efficacious.

But of what consequence were the structural variances between the Roman and Chinese generation of dependent bodies? If the current state of the evidence is to be relied upon, the Roman slave supply can be described, in the late Republic and early Principate at least, as majority external in nature. War captives unquestionably furnished the labour markets of Italy and beyond with vast numbers of *servi*, who were drafted into private and state enterprises alike. By comparison, the early Chinese merchandising of imperial and household slaves was principally internal, deriving from kidnapping, pawnage, natural reproduction, and government-initiated confiscations. Though peregrine *nubi* were doubtlessly present in early China, it is unlikely they ever rivalled the many millions of non-autochthonous slaves trafficked into Roman lands.

Debates as to whether the external or internal sourcing of enslaved persons determined the parameters of their future treatment remain inconclusive.[3] Ostensibly, slaves brought into the household from outside would have been at a clear disadvantage, being, as they were, unfamiliar with the culture and language. Somatic differences (i.e. skin colour, hair texture, eye shape, etc.) may have also contributed to the othering of externally derived *servi*, negatively differentiating them from home-born or locally acquired slaves. From this perspective, we might imagine that, in aggregate, enslaved men and women sharing the same ethnicity and native language as their master

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[2] Scheidel, "Slavery and Forced Labour in Early China and the Roman World," 146.

[3] Historians of the trans Atlantic slave trade have long juxtaposed the internal dynamics of African slavery with the reliance on externally sourced bondspeople in the Americas. The Atlantic slave trade has itself often been characterised as an outgrowth of internal slaving in West Africa. See Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les traites négrières: Essai d'histoire globale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 185–186; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 74, 97. Patterson is among the few scholars to have considered how the "mode of acquisition" came to influence the quality of life experienced by slaves, see *Slavery and Social Death*, 174.

stood a greater chance of assimilation. Presupposing this was the case, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesise that *nubi* — largely the result of internal procurement — would have been more favourably positioned to integrate. Roman *servi*, on the other hand, might well have experienced reduced life prospects, stemming from the fact they were transplanted into an alien milieu. The reality however appears somewhat more convoluted, especially when considering the forces of gender. Beautiful and young female slaves, for instance, were often fast-tracked, regardless of origin, to the heart of the family on account of their sexual attractiveness or fertility. Roman jurisprudence even supports the idea that new (*novicii*), that is recently imported slaves, were preferenced over *vernae* (home-born slaves) on account of their increased malleability.[4] In light of this, the potential for enslaved women to behave agentically looks to be unaffected by the external or internal orientation of the slave supply.

As is to be expected of a society so reliant on chattel labour, emancipatory procedures in the Roman world were highly sophisticated. By and large, Roman law allowed for the freeing of *servi* in two ways: manumission with and without *civitas* (citizenship). Release from slavery with citizenship rights bestowed upon freedmen a host of legal privileges from which they were previously excluded. Yet manumission did not entail absolute freedom, with ex-slaves being required to perform lifelong *opera* (part-time enforceable work). From the early first century CE onwards, a second category of informal manumission was established, permitting slaves to be made Junian Latins. Suspended between the poles of freedom and citizen status, the designation of *Latini Iuniani* limited the number of slaves entitled to *civitas* wholesale.

Manumission in early imperial China was, on the weight of the present evidence, marginally less complex. Analogous to Rome, the power to emancipate a slave rested squarely with the master. Upon manumission, male slaves assumed the rank of private dependents (*sishu* 私屬), whereas female slaves were automatically elevated to the status of freedmen (*shuren* 庶人). Pending their continued loyalty, private dependents could be transformed into *shuren* following their master's death. On the face of it, the Han custom of postponing full manumission for male slaves calls to mind the classical Greek tradition of παραμονή, a similarly conditional release from slavery. Whether freed as *sishu* or *shuren*, ex-slaves typically continued in the same occupation they had fulfilled when in bondage. Quite plainly, one key divergence between Roman and early Chinese manumission practices lies in the relevance of citizenship. Under the Han dynasty, no equivalent concept to *civitas* existed, with the population instead being organised vertically into "ever-shifting but finely calibrated hierarchies."[5]

We find greater overlap when it comes to the gendered dimension of manumission. While Roman law lacked a specific clause mandating *domini* to free *ancillae* by whom they had fathered children by, manumission was necessary for marriage and the establishment of heirs. Equally, freedom may have been awarded to slave mothers who raised a predetermined number of children. Incentivising reproduction, even if only to grow the *familia*, likely benefited some *ancillae*. The Han statutes were notably more explicit. Enslaved women who had provided their master with a child were, upon his death, required to be manumitted and made commoners. In later dynasties this precedent was further liberalised, stipulating that any female slave who bore her master a son or daughter was to be freed and promoted to the status of concubine. On balance, the Chinese manumission laws

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[4] Ulpian, *Digest*, 21.1.37.

[5] Hans Beck and Griet Vankeerberghen, "The Many Faces of the People in the Ancient World," in *Rulers and Ruled in Ancient Greece, Rome and China*, ed. Hans Beck and Griet Vankeerberghen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 7.

emerge the more generous, perhaps with the outcome that freedom was more regularly awarded to enslaved women in the Han empire.

It is not unthinkable to speculate that enslaved women in ancient Rome and China would have, where feasible, manoeuvred themselves into such a position as to benefit from the manumission laws. However, to assume that slaveholders engaged in a form of "sex-for-manumission" would be inaccurate.[6] The freeing of bonded women who had mothered their owner's son or daughter was pragmatic, a means through which to legitimise offspring and thereby guarantee inheritance rights. For those *ancillae* and *bi* 婢 (female slaves) who never birthed their master's child, despite their sexual involvement with him, manumission could remain elusive.

2. Concubinage

The social practice of concubinage proves equally momentous for questions of sexual agency. The habit of Chinese elites to retain tens, if not hundreds, of concubines in purpose-built harems finds no parallel in the ancient Mediterranean.[7] Although the keeping of lower-status women as concubines was not unknown in the Roman world, it served a markedly different purpose. To be sure, *concubinatus*, what is normally translated as "concubinage," was a non-nuptial relationship serving as an alternative to legitimate marriage. At heart, a concubine was taken in place of a wife and could not legally be kept alongside a spouse.[8] Generally speaking, *mariti* (husbands) were expected to find sexual and intellectual fulfilment in their *uxores* (wives), affording little room for concubines in the Roman household.

Classical Greece and Rome are somewhat unique among ancient societies in upholding monogamy as the social norm, even for the ruling elite.[9] Notwithstanding, few believed that monogamous relationships were incompatible with polygamous sexual activity.[10] As has been repeatedly highlighted, Roman masters were entitled to venereally possess any of those enslaved women and girls under their control. By extension, specially favoured *ancillae* could be manumitted for the purposes of wedlock or childbearing. Thus, for the majority of *domini*, concubinage promised no obvious advantage, as any female slave could be instrumented for her erotic services or fertility. Only when a man wished to take up with a freedwoman not under his patronage did *concubinatus* prove expedient. In such cases, the jurists determined neither party was to be held liable for *stuprum* (illicit sexual activity).[11] More often than not, however, concubinage was pursued when marital restrictions inhibited the formation of a long-term partnership. Soldiers and sailors enlisted in the Roman armed forces, for example, were prohibited from marrying until they had completed their

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[6] Phrasing borrowed from Rosemary Brana-Shute, "Sex and Gender in Surinamese Manumissions," in *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, ed. Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 184.

[7] A small number of Roman texts do bespeak the habit of unscrupulous emperors keeping what might be described as harems. For example, see Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*, "Tiberius" 43.1, "Domitian" 22; *Historiae Augustae*, "Commodus" 5.4.

[8] *Codex Justinianeus*, 5.26.1.

[9] Walter Scheidel, "A Peculiar Institution? Greco-Roman Monogamy in Global Context," *The History of the Family* 14, no. 3 (2009), 283–284.

[10] Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity*, 135

[11] Thomas A. J. McGinn, "Concubinage and the Lex Iulia on Adultery," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 121 (1991), 346–347.

term of service.[12] Correspondingly, senators may have resorted to concubinage if enamoured with a woman they were legally debarred from wedding.[13]

The maintenance of concubines (*qie* 妾) in early imperial China satisfied an entirely disparate cultural logic. As outlined in chapter five, concubinage traditionally helped secure marriage treaties between allied states, with the younger sisters or cousins of the bride performing the duties of lesser wives. In many ways, concubinage was a protuberance of sororal polygyny, resulting in its conceptualisation as an augmentation, rather than a substitution, of traditional marriage. Although men were, legally speaking, permitted to take only one wife, nothing forbade wealthy householders from purchasing numerous concubines.[14] Unlike *bi*, concubines were acquired explicitly as objects of sexual fancy and as bearers of contingency heirs. Enslaved women favoured by their master could, nevertheless, be promoted to the rank of *qie*. In this regard, being made a concubine amounted to a graduation in the sexual hierarchy, conferring greater prestige and domestic privilege on the awardee.

From this brief rundown, it is clear the Roman and Chinese application of concubines was significantly unalike. In classical Rome, concubinage was primarily strategic, allowing couples to avoid indictments of *stuprum* or partially formalise established relationships. For the ancient Chinese, on the other hand, concubines — a pendulous status hung between servitude and wifehood — were conceived of as appendages, providing sexual variety and supporting the principal wife's function as a homemaker and caregiver. These differences go someway in explaining why, for the Han dynasty, the exercise of sexual agency features so rarely in extant mentions of female slaves. Masters seeking erotic diversions, or to combat their legitimate wife's barrenness, would have, in all probability, looked to concubines ahead of slave girls. Moreover, those *bi* who successfully ingratiated themselves with their master could be promoted to the status of *qie*, lessening the need for enslaved bedmates.

Taken collectively, two observations might be drawn. In the first place, Roman habits of slave keeping seemingly afforded unfree women greater opportunities for establishing intimate relationships with their master. The absence of a system of concubinage similar to that which emerged in ancient China feasibly diminished competition. Female slaves in classical Roman society did not have to contend with multiple women of decidedly higher status. By contrast, hypergamy in the Roman world emerges as a more remote prospect, conceivably on account of the nonexistence of a formal midpoint between slavery and marriage. This is most viscerally demonstrated by the fact that no slave woman during the years of the Western Roman Empire was

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[12] For the marital restrictions experienced by Roman servicemen, see Chester G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy: 31 B. C.–A. D. 324* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 1941), 90–94; George R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 133–142.

[13] Paul, *Digest*, 23.2.44.

[14] There is some indication that, from the Eastern Han onwards, the size of a man's harem was contingent on rank, as was the case in later dynasties. Unsurprisingly, such prescriptions were regularly flouted. See Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Medieval China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 17; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 107.

ever crowned empress.[15] We can therefore conclude that, while the volitional exploits of concubines and slave women bore a noticeable resemblance, how concubinage physically materialised impacted the style and scope of sexual agency.

3. Emotional Monopolies and Sexual Competition

Sexual rivalries, in both the Roman world and early imperial China, materialise as one of the predominant themes when investigating the agentic exploits of female slaves. In chapters two and six, hostilities between wives, concubines, and slave girls all came to the fore, highlighting the domestic strife occasioned by attempts to institute an emotional monopoly. This prompts a dyad of questions: (1) why did female dependents in two highly unique societies deploy comparable tactics of sexual agency, and (2) to what extent can these strategies be perceived in other historical contexts? While the latter query extends beyond the remit of this study, a number of explanations can be posited with regard to the former.

For clarity's sake, I define an emotional monopoly as the capacity for a slave woman or concubine to dominate the affections of her master or patron, to the extent she was favoured above her potential sexual competitors. Besides aptitude, successfully ingratiating oneself required the existence of, what I termed, "cultural openings," or rather those established social practices liable to be manipulated by particularly sharp-witted dependents. Proximity ranked first among those culturally instigated windows of opportunity. Both female household slaves and concubines, by necessity of the work they performed, were favourably situated to become on more intimate terms with their master. As discussed above, concubines in early imperial China were obtained with the expressed purpose of sexual companionship, while the personal attendance expected of some *ancillae* and *bi* guaranteed they too piqued the erotic curiosity of their owner.

The custom of elite families to arrange marriages for their sons and daughters, in both ancient Rome and China, provided additional latitude for slave women and concubines. Arranged marriages, prioritising the cementation of wealth, land holdings, and political power, were given to result in feelings of apathy between wedded couples. Against this backdrop, the prerogative of male householders to sexually instrument their female slaves, as well as procure concubines, fostered a domestic environment ripe for extramarital romance. From the perspective of *ancillae* and *bi*, capitalising on their master's sexual disinterest in his wife could have acted as a springboard for the inception of a more permanent attachment. The sexual rivalries engendered by a husband's favouring of his slave girls or concubines often resulted in jealousy, an emotional response that, under the Han empire at least, could be exploited by *qie* and *bi* to incense their master against his spouse.

Husbands lacking an heir from their legitimate wife may have also been tempted to rely upon the fertility of enslaved women and concubines. As already made clear, delivering the master's child could result in manumission or, under particular circumstances, the elevation of bonded women to

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[15] In all likelihood Helena (ca. 246–330 CE), mother of Constantine (r. 306–337 CE), was enslaved in her youth, see Julia Hillner, *Helena Augusta: Mother of the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 16, 30. The Eastern Roman emperor Justin (r. 518–527 CE) took as his spouse a barbarian slave girl named Lupicina (d. 523/524 CE), later enthroned as Euphemia. See Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), 14. Analogously, Justin's adoptive son, Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565 CE), married Theodora (ca. 500–548 CE) who, as a young woman, was said to have been prostituted in the hippodrome, see James Allan Evans, *The Empress Theodora: Partner of Justinian* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

concubinal or wifey status. Although freedom and marriage were by no means a foregone conclusion, birthing a son or daughter did provide slaves with a foundation of sorts, a base from which they could exercise surrogate power (via their children) or further grease the wheels of their master's sentiment.

Specific to the Roman world, we also encounter the idea of "hyper visibility," that is situations in which *ancillae* could attempt to manipulate their sexualisation for personal advantage. Banqueting parties, drinking revelries, and even brothel visits could all have furnished slave women with chances to exploit the sexual interests of men. An echo of this behaviour is likewise perceptible within elite Chinese households where, we might recall, the slave dancers Wei Zifu 衛子夫 (d. 91 BCE) and Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (d. 1 BCE) captured the attention of their respective sovereign. While recognising the dangers of attributing faculty to enslaved persons when it comes to sex — a service they were often powerless to withhold — I reject the notion that objectification eradicated a woman's capacity to behave agentically.[16] Despite clear power asymmetries, the work spheres inhabited by enslaved women and girls did, on occasion, provide them with openings to cordon off emotional monopolies.

Yet the preceding evaluation says nothing as to why emotional monopolies were so ubiquitous a tactic in the first place. To answer this question, it is necessary to recognise the highly gendered composition of Roman and Chinese slavery, systems of human bondage that were, in a broad sense, responsive to patriarchal impulses. Discounting the visible overlaps in the treatment of male and female slaves, we notice the relatively limited opportunities for social mobility afforded to bonded women on account of their exclusion from productive work.[17] In place of this, *ancillae* and *bi* tended to rely on interpersonal relationships ahead of economic undertakings to improve their life prospects. Enslaved women and concubines, were then, both hamstrung and empowered by their gender, compelled to avail themselves of the maladies of slavery through strategies of emotional propinquity. Forming a long-standing attachment — simulated or genuine — with one's master was not only prudent, but capable of bringing about an enslaved woman's social metamorphosis.

Testing the validity of my hypothesis in other slaveholding societies is a matter best left to others. The results of existing studies do however appear to corroborate my general findings. Though often couched in a different vocabulary, unfree women and girls have recurrently been found to exercise sexual agency in a variety of global cultures and time periods. Kristina Richardson, for example, has demonstrated how enslaved singing girls in the ninth and tenth century CE Abbasid court "exploited their sexuality" and proximity to the ruler for private gain.[18] Likewise, for late

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[16] Needless to say, overemphasising the magnitude of autonomous behaviour ascribable to female slaves would be delusive, they were, after all, subject to coercion and violence. In my own view however, contrasting agency and victimhood is something of a false dichotomy, especially in the face of the complex, and often contradictory, life experiences of enslaved women. For a parallel line of argument, see Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette, "Seeing Beyond Prostitution: Agency and the Organization of Sex Work," in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, ed. Magaly Rodríguez García, Lex Heerma van Voss and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 748–774.

[17] This is not to say female slaves were completely absented from work spheres entailing productive labour, rather it was atypical. For example, Ulrike Roth has argued, on the basis of a small number of excavated loom weights and one spindle whorl, for the involvement of *ancillae* in wool production on the Roman farming estate. See "The Female Slave in Roman Agriculture," (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2003), 42–45.

[18] Kristina Richardson, "Singing Slave Girls (*qiyan*) of the Abbasid Court in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Children in Slavery Through the Ages*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 106–107.

nineteenth-century Morocco, Chouki El Hamel has argued that slave women dragooned into concubinage were proficient in cultivating attachments with their master, behaviour he characterises as a form of "emotional refuge."[19] Not dissimilarly, Janet Hoskins has shown for the Eastern Indonesian island of Sumba, that female slaves could regain their personhood through calculated "marriage strategies," incorporating themselves into established lineage houses.[20] Naturally, these assorted citations represent only a modicum of the existing and, as of yet, unwritten scholarship, but nonetheless accentuate the elucidatory potential of trans-historical theorising.

[19] Chouki El Hamel, "Surviving Slavery: Sexuality and Female Agency in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Morocco," *Réflexions Historiques* 34, no. 1 (2008), 77.
[20] Janet Hoskins, "Slaves, Brides and Other 'Gifts': Resistance, Marriage and Rank in Eastern Indonesia," *Slavery & Abolition* 25, no. 2 (2004), 104–105.

Appendix 1: Ranks of the Imperial Harem

Table 1. The Western Han

Title	Rank	Date of Introduction
Brilliant Companion (*zhaoyi* 昭儀)	Status equal to a Chancellor (*chengxiang* 丞相)	During the reign of Emperor Yuan
Favourite Beauty (*jieyu* 婕妤)	Status above the Nine Ministers (*jiuqing* 九卿)	During the reign of Emperor Wu
Graceful Beauty (*xing'e* 娙娥)	Fully 2000 *shi*	"
[Lady of] Splendid Countenance (*ronghua* 容華)	2000 *shi*	"
Beautiful Lady (*meiren* 美人)	Equivalent to 2000 *shi*	Sometime after 195 BCE
Eighth Rank Lady (*bazi* 八子)	1000 *shi*	"
[Lady of] Complete Deportment (*chongyi* 充衣)	Equivalent to 1000 *shi*	During the reign of Emperor Wu
Seventh Rank Lady (*qizi* 七子)	800 *shi*	Sometime after 195 BCE
Estimable Lady (*liangren* 良人)	Equivalent to 800 *shi*	"
Senior Maid (*zhangshi* 長使)	600 *shi*	"
Junior Miad (*shaoshi* 少使)	400 *shi*	"
[Lady of] all Purposes (*wuguan* 五官)	300 *shi*	Unknown
[Lady of] Complaisant Constancy (*shunchang* 順常)	200 *shi*	"
[Lady] without Impurity (*wujuan* 舞涓)	100 s*hi*	"
[Lady of] Total Harmony (*gonghe* 共和)	100 *shi*	"
[Lady of] Pleasing Spirit (*yuling* 娛靈)	100 *shi*	"
[Lady of] Various Comforts (*baolin* 保林)	100 *shi*	"
Virtuous Maid (*liangshi* 良使)	100 *shi*	"
Night Attendant (*yezhe* 夜者)	100 *shi*	"

Table 2. The Eastern Han

Title	Date of Introduction
Noble Lady (*guiren* 貴人)	During the reign of Emperor Guangwu
Beautiful Lady (*meiren* 美人)	"
Talented Lady (*cainü* 才女)	"

Appendix 2: Hierarchy of Inheritors During the Western Han

Reconstructed from the early Western Han civil statutes excavated from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan, given below is the line of succession for matters of inheritance after the death of the head of a household. Han law distinguished between inheriting orders of honour (rank or title) and the inheritance of households (property and status within the household). Table based on that compiled by Zhaoyang Zhang, with minor corrections.[1]

<table>
<tr><th></th><th colspan="4">Inheritance of Honorary Ranks</th><th colspan="3">Inheritance of Households</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">1st</td><td rowspan="5">Sons (nan 男)</td><td>1st</td><td colspan="2">Eldest son born to the principal wife</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="5">Same as left</td></tr>
<tr><td>2nd</td><td colspan="2">Younger sons born to the principal wife</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">3rd</td><td>1st</td><td>Sons born to a later wife</td></tr>
<tr><td>2nd</td><td>Sons born to a divorced wife</td></tr>
<tr><td>4th</td><td colspan="2">Sons born to concubines</td></tr>
<tr><td>2nd</td><td colspan="4">Daughters (nü 女)</td><td colspan="3">Father (fu 父)</td></tr>
<tr><td>3rd</td><td colspan="4">Father (fu 父)</td><td colspan="3">Mother (mu 毋)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">4th</td><td colspan="4" rowspan="2">Mothers (mu 毋)</td><td rowspan="2">Widows (gua 寡)</td><td>1st</td><td>Principal wife (qi 妻)</td></tr>
<tr><td>2nd</td><td>Concubines (qie 妾)</td></tr>
<tr><td>5th</td><td colspan="4">Brothers (nan tongchan 男同產)</td><td colspan="3">Daugthers (nü 女)</td></tr>
<tr><td>6th</td><td colspan="4">Sisters (nü tongchan 女同產)</td><td colspan="3">Grandsons (sun 孫)</td></tr>
<tr><td>7th</td><td colspan="4">Principal wife (qi 妻)</td><td colspan="3">Great-grandsons (er sun 耳孫)</td></tr>
<tr><td>8th</td><td colspan="4">Grandfather, male lineage (da fu 大父)</td><td colspan="3">Grandfather, male lineage (da fu 大父)</td></tr>
<tr><td>9th</td><td colspan="4">Grandmother, male lineage (da mu 大母)</td><td colspan="3">Grandmother, male lineage (da mu 大母)</td></tr>
<tr><td>10th</td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="3">Siblings (tongchan 同產)</td></tr>
<tr><td>11th</td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="3">Nephews (tongchan zi 同產子)</td></tr>
<tr><td>12th</td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="3">Slaves (nubi 奴婢)</td></tr>
</table>

[1] Zhang, *A History of Civil Law in Early China*, 101.

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