Working Moms: Motherhood, Occupation, and Status in Roman Italy, ca. 100 BCE-150 CE


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Introduction

*Hospes quod deico paullum est asta ac pellege / h{e}ic est sepulcrum hau(d) pulc(h)rum pulcrai feminae / nomen parentes nominarunt Claudiam / su<u=O>m mareitum corde deilexit s{o}uo / gnatos duos creavit horunc alterum / in terra linquit alium sub terra locat / sermone lepido tum autem incessu commodo / domum servavit lanam fecit dixi ab{e}i*[1]

> Friend, I have not much to say. Stop and read. This tomb, which is not fair, is for a fair woman. Her parents gave her the name Claudia. She esteemed her husband in her heart. She bore two sons, one of whom she left on earth the other beneath it. She was pleasant to talk with and she walked with grace. She maintained the household, she worked in wool. That is all [I have to say], you may go.[2]

So writes a bereaved husband upon the death of his wife.[3] This monument to Claudia has frequently

been cited as an example for the ideal nature of a Roman woman.[4] It is sweet, pithy, playful, and

most importantly expresses deeply held notions of Roman womanhood. Thus, it catches the reader

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[1] CIL VI.15346.

[2] My translation is very close to that of Lefkowitz. See translation in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome,* 3rd edition, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press (2005), 16.

[3] Some scholars argue that the opening and closing lines are in Claudia's voice as they are written in the first person. It seems to me that the speaker is more likely her commemorator, probably her husband. I base this reading on the way the poem transitions from first to third and back again. It reads as if the author is asking the reader to stop as he describes the person whom he has buried rather than the deceased asking the passersby to stop and read. See Mario Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome*, Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, (2008),162-163.

[4] The suggestion is that, while the epithet is stereotypical, it is both socially appropriate (Kathryn McDonnell, "A Gendered Landscape: Roman Women's Monuments, Patronage, and Urban Contexts in Pompeii, Isola Sacra, and Aquileia," Dissertation. UNC (2005),137-8) and expresses the deeply held values of those who considered themselves Roman, which Werner Reiss argues was necessary to assert a distinctly "Roman" identity in the face of an increasingly diverse Roman empire (Werner Riess, "*Rari Exempla Femina*: Feminine Virtues on Roman Funerary Inscriptions" in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, edited by Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (2012), 494-5, 499-501). The inscription is one of the first examples of Roman men's words about women in Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant's *Women's Life in Greece and Rom*e, 3rd edition, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press (2005),16, which give the impression that it is a good example of what many (most?) men hoped for in a wife. For further examples of scholars' adoption of the "chaste and industrious" wife and mother motif, (phrase borrowed from Suzanne Dixon, Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut?, Cultural Representations of Women in the Roman Economy," in *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*, edited by Eireann Marshall and Fiona Mchardy, (2004), 57) see also Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus*, OUP (2008), 29-30; Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage:* iusti coniuges *from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, Oxford: Clarendon Press*, 1991, 232; Karen Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*, CUP, Cambridge (2010), 292-293.

or students' attention and sticks. But this approach is too neat, too clean. The grieving husband's description of his wife fits the description of the ideal woman that modern Western people have inherited via the tradition of western civilization. However, even though the epitaph confirms those ideas about women's roles in marriage it does not mean that Roman women were indeed generally like Claudia or that social consensus held that women should be. Rather than telling modern scholars much about ancient Rome, Claudia's monument speaks to the preconceived notions moderns have about Roman women.

Aside from this monument, nothing is known of Claudia. The limited information makes it all the easier to assert that Claudia represents the average Roman women since there is no clear indication that she was a member of the upper class or even a particularly wealthy member of the artisan class. In short, it seems that her monument provides an apparently neat and uncomplicated window into the world of the Roman woman. However, the epitaph is archaizing and idiosyncratic. The unusualness of the monument becomes even more important when Matteo Massaro's analysis of it is addressed. It is probable that the monument is archaizing and idiosyncratic because it is a forgery.[5] In fact, it has been lost since the fifteenth century and its find spot is completely unknown.[6] Pirro Ligorio transcribed the monument, and while he transcribed many genuine inscriptions, he is also widely believed to have been a forger.[7]

There are several reasons for accepting Massaro's interpretation. First is the idiosyncratic language. *Corde deilexit s{o}uo* is a unique phrase. It is also awkward to translate. Usually, scholars

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[5] Matteo Massaro, "Questioni di autenticita di iscrizioni metriche (o affettive)," in *Spurii lapides: i falsi nell'epigrafia latina,* edited by Federico Gallo e Antonio Sartori, Milan: Bibliotech Ambrosiana (2018), 127.

[6] Étienne Wolff, *La poésie funéraire épigraphique à Rome,* Presses Universitaires de Rennes (2000), 127. See also Massaro, "Questioni," 109.

[7] Fernando Loffredo and Ginette Vagenheim, editors, *Pirro Ligorio's Worlds: Antiquarianism, Classical Erudition and the Visual Arts in the Late Renaissance*, Brill (2018).

settle on some version of "she loved him in her heart." The phrase, however, does not convey any

sentiment common in Roman epigraphy.[8] Roman husbands tended to celebrate behavior that

indicates loyalty to the family rather than love. When love is mentioned, it is more typically

described as *amor* or in terms of affection (*adfectio*) or marital harmony (*concordia*).[9] Second, the

characteristics Claudia is praised for, beauty, eloquence, and grace (*pulcrai feminae* and *sermon lepido tum*

*autem incessu commodo*) are not at all typical adulations.[10] Rather, women who are esteemed by their

husbands are usually described with the words *pudicitia, castitas, obsequium, pietas,* and *sanctitas.* It is also

the only inscription in CIL that praised a wife for *lanam fecit*[11] and one of only nine that refer to

wool-working as an expected skill in a spouse.[12]

Next, it is very strange to indicate that her parents named her Claudia (*nomen parentes*

*nominarunt Claudiam*). In Rome, names were not given, they were inherited, and not only would her

parents have called her Claudia, so would the rest of her acquaintances.[13] Thus, her father's *nomen*

(family name) would have been Claudius. Furthermore, Massaro argues that the epigraph does not

fit the genre of epigraphy but rather the genre of literature.[14] If Massaro is correct, then it is no

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[8] Matteo Massaro, *Epigrafia metrica latina di eta repubblicana*. Bari: Istituto di Latino (1992), 96-97. Additionally, he shows that when *delicta* is used is it most regularly used by the husband who expresses the sentiment toward his wife.

[9] Massaro, "Questioni," 108.

[10] Massaro, *Epigrafia*, 81.

[11] Alison D. Jeppesen-Wigelsworth, *The Portrayal of Roman Wives in Literature and Inscriptions* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), University of Calgary, Calgary, AB (2010), 11, 218-219.

[12] *Ibid.*, 218-219. For an example of this assertion, see Wolff, 88, 126-127. Wolff sees this trait as archaizing, indicating that it was no longer common for wives to work wool at the time Claudia's epitaph was made (127).

[13] Massaro, *Epigrafia*, 80.

[14] *Ibid.*, 83. See also Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources,* Genres*, and Real Life*, Duckworth (2001) for the importance of recognizing genre and reading evidence with it in mind.

wonder the epitaph confirms western notions of Roman womanhood. It is a product of late medieval Europe, a period during which ideas of romantic love were burgeoning. Moreover, and more importantly, it cannot be upheld as an example of idealized Roman womanhood and it cannot be taken as a representative example of social expectations for Roman wives and mothers because it is not Roman at all. That scholars continue to use it as a foundational text suggests an impulse to identify an archetypal text for Roman womanhood. It is necessary (and possible) to do the history of Roman motherhood and womanhood without this monument. Indeed, it must be since there is no place for a medieval forgery in the historical record of classical Rome.

The monument to Claudia, then, is emblematic of the work that still needs to be done on Roman motherhood. This study takes up the questions of Roman domesticity and motherhood ca. 100 BCE and 150 CE. Most of my attention is focused on Roman Italy, but there are deviations from the geographical center of the study due to the distribution of evidence. I have established these parameters largely because most of the evidence for classical Rome is concentrated there. I employ social scientific theory, including queer and socialization theory, to reevaluate the idealized notions of motherhood like those expressed in the Claudia monument, namely that women aspired only to marital affection and motherhood. I suggest that women did not always aspire to motherhood and that, when they did, their lives did not always conform to the ideal. Furthermore, I focus exclusively on lower-class mothers, including enslaved, freed, and freeborn women, rather than the Roman elite, who have been the subject of most research on women and motherhood. These lower-class women make up the vast majority of Roman women and potential mothers, but they have received the least attention, in part because the evidence for their lives as mothers is scant.

A short aside is required to explain my interpretation of two vexed concepts addressed in this study: "elite" and upper class. Among the ways scholars have described the elite are via the legal categories of *honestiores* and *humiliores*, senatorial and equestrian class status, membership in the

imperial family, and holding high-ranking positions in city governance.[15] Still others, even those

whose work contains the word elite in their titles or as categories of analysis, are less clear.[16] Since

the concept is central to determining the scope of this study, it is essential to outline here. "Elite"

can carry many shades of meaning depending on context, the society in question, and writer's

perception. There are at least four factors that shape social order in Rome, which allow one to

identify members of the elite: power, wealth, influence, and family respectability.[17] Taking these

factors into account, it seems most accurate to consider the elite senatorial and equestrian freeborn

citizens. My use of the phrase "upper class" carries with it very similar connotations with just one

notable difference. Namely, that wealth and civic power or influence are the main attributes. Family

respectability is not significant in this category because it is truly only those families that had been

established among the elite for generation (or those few men, like Cicero, who broke into their ranks

as a *novus homo*) who met the qualifications for familial respectability. So, while I do not consider

artisans, freedmen, and freeborn people who acquired wealth and influence through their business's

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[15] Thomas Habinek, "Seneca's Renown: '*Gloria, Claritudo*," and the Replication of the Roman Elite" *Classical Antiquity*, 19:2 (2000), 266-67; David Armstrong, "*Juvenalis Eques:* A Dissident Voice from the Lower Tier of the Roman Elite," in *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, edited by Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood, Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, (2012), 60-62. Both Habinek and Armstrong include word studies to help solidify their modes of demarcating elite status. For Habinek, *gloria* and *claritudo* (as his title indicates) are key and terms reserved for those with the political and social influence that characterize the elite. For Armstrong, owing a *domus ab urbanus* is a mark of elite status, although he makes a clear distinction between *equites* and *senatores*, whom he calls "magnates," 65-66. Walter Scheidel, "Emperors, Aristocrats and the Grim Reaper: Towards a Demographic Profile of the Roman Elite" *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 49 (1991) limits his definition to members of the imperial family, senatorial classes, and city councilors, 254.

[16] Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press (1984), does not provide any definition of elite.

[17] This is a modification of Max Weber's formula for his theory of stratification as expressed in "The Distribution of Power Within the Community: Classes, *Stände*, Parties." Although Weber argues for just three components, with *Stände* (status) being the most important, *Stände* can be separated into two parts for Roman society. These two parts, influence and family respectability, together determine one's *Stände*. Max Weber, "The Distribution of Power Within the Community: Classes, *Stände*, Parties," translated by Dagmar Waters, Tony Waters, Elisabeth Hahnke, Maren Lippke, Eva Ludwig-Glück, Daniel Mai, Nina Ritzi-Messner, Christina Veldhoen and Lucas Fassnacht, *Journal of classical sociology* 10, no. 2 (2010), 137-152.

elite, I do identify them as upper class. Some of these upper-class people make it into this study as the funerary monuments throughout the empire are often theirs, but they are not the central population. Rather, the focus is on lower-class women.

### A Brief History of the Scholarship

The mid-1960s marked the modern beginning of the social-historical study of Roman women and the Roman family. One of the pioneering essays, written in 1965 by Keith Hopkins,' "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," used demographic tools to estimate the average (mode) age at which Roman women married.[18] By counting ages at death and years of marriage on funerary monuments, Hopkins concluded that this age was around 13 or 14.[19] His approached sparked several similar studies in the decades to follow and eventually triggered a debate. In 1987, Brent Shaw challenged Hopkin's conclusions on the grounds that his sample was too small and inappropriately supplemented by textual evidence. Shaw asserted,

> "the handful of *exampla* that can be culled from the major literary sources is so manifestly biased…that they can surely reveal very little of general practices outside those circles and circumstances…[T]herefore, the literature of the upper classes offers little hope of a solution to our problem, and no arbitrary match of the statistical modes found in epigraphical data with the upper-class cases provided by the literary evidence can prove very much."[20]

Conducting his own analysis based on alternative research methods and a larger body of epigraphical evidence, Shaw revised the average age at marriage up to 18 for "*most* girls in Roman

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[18] Keith Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," *Population Studies* 18 (1965), 309-327. Hopkins used inscriptions from CIL 6.1-30,000 as his sample. Of these, 287 contained the information necessary to calculate the modal age at marriage, 319, n. 45.

[19] Keith Hopkins, (1965), "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," *Population Studies* 18. Hopkins asserts that marital ages seem to skew older for Christians. For pagans he finds 12-15 to be the modal age and for Christians, 15-18, 319. He believes both are skewed high and therefore settles for a modal average of 13/14 for age at marriage among both groups, 326. He does acknowledge that the evidence did not allow for a clear assessment of class-based differences and therefore makes no such inferences, 322.

[20] Brent Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations" *The Journal of Roman Studies* vol. 77 (1987), 33.

society."[21] In the decades between, numerous scholars, including Hopkins alongside Keith Bradley, Natalie Kampen, Robert Saller, Brent Shaw, Susan Treggiari, and Paul Weaver made use of epigraphical data to construct histories of families, women, and slaves.[22] Hopkins' decision to treat tombstones as demographic data had proven to be a valuable tool, although the method is not without its pitfalls.[23]

In the decades following Hopkins' use of epigraphical evidence as a singular body for research, other scholars adopted a similar strategy, focusing on a single type of evidence, like legal texts and art, to support their claims. These archive-based approaches have been valuable as they have laid the foundation for further scholarship and have demonstrated the importance of looking beyond the classical literature for evidence. For example, Jane Gardner's *Women in Roman Law and Society* (1986) uses legal records to elucidate the social expectations of Roman women as they were outlined in Roman law and to supplement work by and for scholars who have no substantive experience with legal sources. The codes themselves are often fragmentary, confusing, and do not

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[21] *Ibid.,* 36-9, 43-44.

[22] Keith R. Bradley, "Age at Time of Sale of Female Slaves," *Arethusa* 11, no. 1/2 (1978): 243-252; Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia*, Berlin (1981); Richard P. Saller and Brent Shaw, Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 74 (1984): 124-156; Brent Shaw, "Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Later Roman Empire," *Historia* 33 (1984): 457-497; A sampling of Susan Treggiari's work includes "Jobs in the Household of Livia," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975): 48-77, "Jobs for Women." *American Journal of Ancient History* 1 (1976): 76-104; "Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy." *Florilegium* 1 (1979): 65-86; Paul Weaver, *Familia Caesaris*, CUP (1972); Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, Canberra: Humanities Research Centre (1991).

[23] See Walter Scheidel, "Roman Funerary Commemoration and the Age at First Marriage" *Classical Philology* 102:4 (2007), 391, 402; Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 BC to AD 284*, Yale University Press (1974), 239-240; Shaw, 33, 39-42. Scheidel is responding to Shaw's article referenced here and to Richard Saller's corresponding article about age at first marriage for men, "Men's Age at Marriage and its Consequences for the Roman Family" *Classical Philology* 82 (1987), 30-46 as well as to the revised hypotheses proposed by A.A. Lelis, W.A. Percy, and B.C. Verstaete, *The Age of Marriage in Ancient Rome*, Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press (2003). He cautions scholars about placing too much emphasis on funerary evidence for demographic studies.

clearly distinguish women based on social status or other modes of categorization. Gardner, of course, recognizes the difficulties that flow from working primarily with the legal codes and acknowledges that they only give access to the *limits* of expected behavior, not to the *practice* of living women in Roman society.[24] Gardner's contributions to the study of Roman women is substantial as she established a model for engaging with legal texts and compiled an impressive body of legal evidence form which future scholars could draw.

An example of the use of images for the historical study of women is Natalie Kampen's *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia*. Through careful analysis of artistic depiction of women at Ostia, she demonstrated that women had a robust engagement in local business and other elements of economic and social life.[25] The work of all three scholars, Hopkins, Gardner, and Kampen, has shifted the state of scholarship on women in the Roman world. Gardner and Kampen's work has generally been considered authoritative and all three were pioneering, inspiring other scholars to adopt and adapt their work and methods for further study of Roman women.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a wider range of research on Roman women and the family blossomed following Sarah Pomeroy's important work on women in Greek and Roman antiquity, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, first published in 1975 and reprinted several times since.[26] Among the most influential scholars to follow her model for the study of Roman women are Suzanne Dixon, Jane Gardner, Natalie Kampen, Beryl Rawson, and Susan Treggiari.[27] Each has established a solid foundation for nearly all research on Roman women.

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[24] Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society,* Indiana University Press (1986), 1-3.

[25] Kampen, 85-86.

[26] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddess, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York: Schocken Books (1976).

[27] Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1988); Beryl Rawson, editor, *The Family in Ancient Rome, New Perspectives* NY: Cornell Press (1986); For the remainder, see n. 19.

At the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, research into various

aspects of familial life in the Roman period became increasingly concerned with the lives of lower-

class Romans. In the 1990s, the same group of scholars continued to produce work in finer detail.[28]

Other notable scholars were added to their ranks and by the beginning of the 2000s there were

numerous studies in Roman history that addressed the place of women in Roman society.[29] In these

decades, the work often took on a more nuanced set of evidence, combining literary and material

culture to refine the narratives. Consequently, they began to reveal new facets of Roman life and

demonstrate the value of Roman women's history by showing that many of the modern West's

inherited ideas about the Romans are incorrect or applied only to the Roman elite.

Of the robust research of the end of the twentieth century, by far the most important for the

current study is Suzanne Dixon's *The Roman Mother*. Her work has become authoritative and every

study of Roman motherhood, womanhood, or the family in some way relies on her work, including

this one. Dixon argued that Roman mothers were markedly different from modern mothers in that

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[28] A selected bibliography of their work includes Sarah Pomeroy *Spartan Women* (2002), *The Murder of Regilla: A Case of Domestic Violence in Antiquity* (2007)*, Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. (1999); Beryl Rawson *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (1991)*, The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, and Space* (1997)*,* and *Children and childhood in Roman Italy* (2003); Jane Gardner "Gender-role Assumptions in Roman Law," *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 39. (1995) 377–400, "The Adoption of Roman Freedmen" *Phoenix* Vol. 43 No. 3. (1989), 236-257; Natalie Kampen *Family Fictions in Roman Art. Essays on the Representation of Powerful People* (2009); Richard Saller *Patriarchy, property, and death* (1994); Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (1992), *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres and Real Life* (2001), and *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, ed. (2001).

[29] Maureen Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe,* OUP (2006); Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation*, OUP (1995); Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen*, OUP (2000); Emily Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna,* London: Routledge (1999); Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, (1992); Thomas A McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, OUP (1998); Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor,* OUP (1992); Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labor and Women's Life in the Ancient World (I)," *Greece and Rome*, 42, no. 2 (1995): 202-217, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labor and Women's Life in the Ancient World (II)," *Greece and Rome*, 43, no. 1 (1996): 1-10.

they were not affectionate and regularly engaged with their young children but were instead

authoritarian "transmitter[s] of traditional morality."[30] She focused the bulk of her attention on

upper-class mothers, as the evidence best supports an analysis of their place in Roman society. It

remains one of the very few book-length studies of Roman motherhood and no one has challenged

her main conclusions. Since her book was published in 1988, only three books on historical Roman

motherhood and one on Greek motherhood have been written. To supplement those, there have

been only handful of article-length studies and two classicists have written monographs on

representations of motherhood in literature.[31] Since Dixon focused primarily on upper-class Roman

women and their approaches to motherhood, I aim to add a second layer to her work by evaluating

motherhood among lower-class women.

### Methods

Much of the dedicated research on Roman mothers and the Roman family is accomplished

through analysis of elite literature, legal documents, or funerary epigraphy. This study, while making

use of each of these bodies of evidence, will not place its emphasis on the evidence, as has been the

norm, but rather on the questions asked of it. Since so much of the evidence for motherhood is

found in elite sources, it is not always relevant. Consequently, there are numerous classical references

to Roman motherhood that do not make it into this study. Given that such references are quite

limited in the first place this may seem unusual, but notable scholars have already collected

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[30] Dixon, 233.

[31] The four historical monographs are Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1994); Julie Langford, *Maternal Megalomania: Julia Domna and the Imperial Politics of Motherhood*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (2013); Alicia D. Myers, *Blessed Among Women?: Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament,* OUP (2017); and Ada Nifosi, *Becoming a Woman and Mother in Greco-Roman Egypt: Women's Bodies, Society, and Domestic Space,* Routledge (2019). The two classicist monographs are Antony Augoustakis, *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic.* OUP, (2010); Mairéad McAuley, *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius*; OUP (2016).

references to maternity and made several generalizable and valuable inferences from them.[32] I aim to modify the now-standard approach by first asking questions about the social institution of motherhood then identifying evidence that provides an answer and using theoretical frameworks to address the gaps. The central question for this project is how did social intersections affect the concerns, behavior, and attitudes of non-elite Roman mothers and women preparing for motherhood? At some points in the study, there is a paucity of evidence and answers will necessarily be largely theoretical. Nevertheless, the questions are valuable in so far as they challenge the idea that motherhood was a nearly uniform institution, little affected by the many circumstances mothers encountered.

To illustrate the scope of the shift, it helps to show how others have proposed reshaping the questions and reacting to those suggestions. A good example of a call for a new approach is in archeologist Penelope Allison's "Using the Material and Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space." She observes that "questions are often asked of the material remains that are more applicable to the documentary sources" and proposes "more rigorous and thorough material cultural approaches to the material evidence of the classical world that ask answerable questions of the material remains."[33] Allison's statements are important in this context for two reasons. In the first place, she indicates just how much scholars of ancient societies privilege the textual evidence and, in the second place, makes a clear case for asking new questions that are relevant to the context and that allow for an unforced interpretation, i.e., not making the material evidence conform to the textual. Ideally, however, questions should not be asked *of* the evidence;

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[32] Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1988); Maureen Carroll, *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World.* OUP (2018); Larsson Lovén, Lena, "Roman Motherhood," in *Women in Antiquity,* Stephanie Lynn Budin, ed. Milton: Taylor and Francis, (2016), 885-894.

[33] Penelope M. Allison, "Using the Material and Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space" in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 105:2 (2001), 181.

rather, questions should be asked first then evidence should be identified to explore the answers to them. To put it another way, rather the allowing the evidence to drive the kinds of questions asked, the questions asked should determine how to use the evidence.

Hence, my proposal is for a method that asks questions about Roman motherhood that do not have ready answers. When questions drive the project, it becomes necessary to ask *if* maternity defined Roman women rather than accept the received knowledge *that* motherhood was the primary objective of all Roman women.[34] Following that, it becomes possible to ask about the circumstances of maternity. What consequences did enslaved, freed, or freeborn status have? How did women's occupations, family life, and health affect her approaches to motherhood? How much did wealth affect mothering habits? Did women ever prioritize other identities over motherhood? Did they avoid motherhood and if they did why? How did they do so and were their efforts effective? Each of these questions is addressed from multiple angles in this study. Organized by citizen status—enslaved, freed, freeborn—it aims to demonstrate that citizen status had a profound impact upon motherhood among lower-class Roman while other intersectional factors shaped it within the citizen status groups.  To draw conclusions about non-elite Roman women, thoughtful and careful use of "controlled inference," to borrow a phrase from Marilyn Skinner, is essential.[35] This process helps to de-center the elite, ruling-class perspective, which then allows one to make reasonable claims about

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[34] Of these monographs on Roman motherhood listed in n. 31, none address lower-class women at length, nor do they challenge the presupposition that motherhood represented the ideal for "Roman women," an apparently amalgamate category.

[35] Marilyn Skinner, ed. "Introduction" to *Rescuing Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity*, *Helios* 13, 2 (1987), 3, "Real women, like other muted groups, are not to be found so much in the explicit text of the historical record as in its gaps and silences circumstance that requires the application of research methods base largely upon controlled inference." This argument is echoed and used effectively by Walter Scheidel in "The Most Silent Women of Rome: Part 1," *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Oct. 1995) 202-205.

the strategies Roman women from the lower social strata adopted in response to motherhood or potential motherhood.

Framing the questions are three main theories— *lifeworlds*, queer, and socialization— supported by networks, comparative, and emotionological models. Each of these approaches will be more completely addressed in chapter 2, but a brief outline is presented here. To begin, *lifeworlds* is an intersectional concept coined by Caitlyn Colins, sociologist of motherhood, which she defines as "a distinctive social universe of individual experiences, interactions, organizations, and institutions shaping employment and child-rearing possibilities that women can envision for themselves."[36] To apply the concept to Roman motherhood, there are a few obvious modifications required, however. First, employment was not understood at all in the same way as it is today. A very many Roman women worked and, I argue, many prioritized their occupational identities above their maternal ones, but the word employment implies a fluid occupational construct that did not exist in Rome. Second, it is not possible to know what Roman women envisioned for themselves. Instead, I consider the possibilities on a spectrum, while the specific choices women made remain unknown. Still, the application of the model is valuable despite these limitations because it creates a set of social circumstances to evaluate in relation to motherhood. I will argue that motherhood may not have been the most important aspect of a woman's social life in classical Rome. Rather, "experiences, interactions, organizations, and institutions" shaped whether a woman prioritized motherhood over other aspects of her life. The concept of *lifeworlds* allows for greater nuance in interpretation and recognizes that, while there are broad social principles that can (and must) be applied to a study of maternity in any culture, there are also individualized applications of those

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[36] Caitlyn Collins, *Making Motherhood Work,* Princeton University Press (2019). Although the concept is hers, she acknowledges the etymology of the word on pg. 6, n. 22 and her adaptation of it from Björn Kraus' definition: "a person's subjective construction of reality, which he or she forms under the condition of his or her life circumstances—their social and material environmental conditions."

principles. In short, it is a useful guide for assessing the potential range of attitudes toward maternity, the expressions of those attitudes, and the differences in social experience and expectations for women from different social groups.

Incidentally, the political landscape of Rome constituted one of the more significant institutional factors for Roman women. In her essay on motherhood and modern imperialism, Anna Davin shows that motherhood, or at least expectations of motherhood, can be closely tied to political motives.[37] These motives shape what resources women have, who intervenes in family life (how they do it and to what end), and how all of this ultimately affects the social fabric of a society. The moral reforms of Augustus are just one of the more obvious examples of political intervention into family life. The *lex Julia* and *lex Pappia Poppea*, which criminalized adultery and incentivized marriage and childrearing, intended to shape political sentiment and social behavior.[38] However, for lower-class Roman mothers, the impacts of the laws were probably relatively limited as they were largely targeted at elite men and women who were unmarried and childless. Ultimately, lower-class Roman women had virtually no state-sponsored institutional support for childrearing because they were not politically significant. Thus, their *lifeworlds* were shaped by the fact that nearly all their supports came from personal networks.

Second, queer theory creates opportunities to identify liminal groups whose potential for maternity has rarely been acknowledged or considered in a meaningful way. Among these groups are prostitutes, enslaved women, and the rural and urban poor. A particularly important influence on my application of queer theory is Kathy Rudy, who asserts that queerness is a "willingness to seek out sites of resistance to normalcy in any possible location." I have adopted queer theory according to

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[37] Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop* no. 5 (1978), 56.

[38] Gardner, 78-79, 127-131.

her method for "challeng[ing] what is perceived as normal."[39] By questioning whether motherhood
was a defining characteristic for Roman women, this study is a direct challenge to the normal view
of Roman women. For example, Roman motherhood is almost exclusively studied within the
context of legal Roman marriage. Only rarely does the discussion extend beyond these boundaries,
usually to acknowledge the exceptional situation of enslaved women and *de facto* marriages that were
recognized as a consequence of extended cohabitation, primarily among soldiers.[40] Sex workers
(both free and unfree) and unmarried women who grappled with the possibility of becoming
mothers are even less frequently treated in scholarly explorations of Roman motherhood.[41]  Second,
Rudy argues that queer theory resists categorization on the basis of presumed norms.[42] Although the
study is organized according to the three main citizen-status categories in Roman society, it resists
categorization by exploring the range of possibilities for women within those groups, acknowledging
when the approaches overlap, and de-centering idealized motherhood. I argue for the possibility that
women made choices that were not consistent with the presupposition that their primary identities
were wrapped up in becoming wives and mothers and that they were active in shaping their own
lives. The lives of lower-class Roman women were varied and their responses to motherhood were

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[39] Kathy Rudy, "Queer Theory and Feminism," in *Women's Studies* 29 (2000): 197.

[40] Lena Larsson Lovén, in "Roman Motherhood" In *Women in Antiquity*, ed. Stephanie Lynn Budin, Taylor
and Francis (2017), states that "in this chapter, an attempt will be made to discuss aspects of both the ideals
and the realities of Roman motherhood, although it is more challenging to identify the realities, especially for
others from groups other than elite circles" (885-6). Despite the effort, the discussion of motherhood remains
confined to marriage. The only exception is acknowledgement that not all women in Rome had the right to
marriage, namely slaves or *peregrini* (891). She further asserts that "Roman motherhood, or parenthood, was
important in all social classes" (891) but offers no supporting evidence for the broad claim.

[41] For the contemporary debates regarding motherhood and intersectional statuses as well as a refutation of
the idea that "true mothers" are those who are in stable heterosexual marriages (or at least long-term
relationships) see Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernardi "Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and
Reproduction," *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 2 (2011), 166. For a brief discussion of ancient women whose
statuses made motherhood a more complicated endeavor, see Anise Strong *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman
World*, CUP (2016).

[42] Rudy, 203.

complicated. Queer theory provides an avenue for exploring these liminal groups and their non-normative responses to motherhood.

There is some significant baggage that accompanies the application of queer theory to motherhood studies. Motherhood is a topic often avoided by queer theorists because of the tendency to essentialism, which takes the biological capacity of some people to bear children and makes it a central component of being.[43] Motherhood, however, was and is a significant aspect of social as well as biological life. Societal norms and expectations shape ideas about and approaches to motherhood. Queer theory, therefore, is applied in part to avoid essentializing views of motherhood. Rather than accepting received knowledge that Roman women pursued motherhood as a primary goal for their lives, I question whether motherhood was a central component of many women's lives. Unfortunately, I am not able to apply the theoretical framework as fully as I would like by interrogating notions of womanhood and gendered categories.[44] Nevertheless, I acknowledge the range of biological possibility. In general, however, there is no way around recognizing the historical fact that the Roman understanding of womanhood invariably included an individual's potential to bear children.

Third, socialization theory highlights not only how women came to learn social norms, but how they interacted with them, modifying them to their own circumstances. In this way, socialization theory resists universalized[45] concepts of motherhood and centers women's responses

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[43] Samira Kawash, "New Directions in Motherhood Studies," *Signs* 36, no. 4 (2011), 972. Kawash notes that feminism in the 1990s regularly engaged in motherhood studies, while the first decade of the 2000s was virtually bereft of such work. She argues for a reinvigoration of research and theorization of motherhood.

[44] For a brief discussion of the challenges of engaging with queer theory outside of sexuality studies and an argument for expanding the use of the theoretical construction, see Noreen Giffney, "Denormatizing Queer Theory—More than (simply) Lesbian and Gay Studies," *Feminist Theory* 5, no.1 (2004), 73-78.

[45] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 1 (2003), 118. See chapter two for a more complete explanation of his approach and their consequences for this study.

to maternity in their relationships. John Robb, in "Beyond Agency," argues that agency should be located *in* the relationships people have as these relationships shape behavior and expectations while behavior and expectations simultaneously shape the relationships.[46] In other words, the connections women made, their modes of communication, and their broader social *milieu* provides the means by which women might express agency. Their decisions to act or react to a given social cue had the inverse effect of shaping the social environment as well. These relationships must have been central to the social construction of motherhood and the impact mothers had on society. This socialization model emphasizes the conscious, reciprocal nature of the process of learning social norms.[47] Though the circumstances one lived in determined what was possible for most women and meant that many elements of their education went unquestioned, girls and young women were actively involved in the process of learning what it meant to become a mother and they made personal decisions based on what they learned.[48] Therefore, I argue that women had some personal agency in managing their own reproductive efforts and that their modes of preparation were diverse and influenced by intersecting circumstances.

To contextualize my application of socialization, it is necessary to provide a brief historiography of the concept. Socialization theory is quite varied, but its origins are in Weberian and Durkheimian theories of social organization.[49] Both have their shortcomings, but each indicate the

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[46] John Robb, "Beyond Agency," *World Archaeology* 42, no. 4. (2010), 505.

[47] Allison James, *Socialising Children*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), 50.

[48] Robb, 498, "Moreover, cultural behaviour articulates with the 'real world out there' via action. Agents exist in, and understand implicitly, their landscape of action, which represents a set of possibilities and challenges formed by the past. Thus, there is a dialectical relation between structure, which allows and channels action, and action, which recreates structures."

[49] The most relevant texts from each author are Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation* translated by Keith Tribe, HUP (2019) and Emile Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Condition" translated by Irene Eulriet and William Watts Miller in *Durkheimian Studies New Series*, Vol. 11 (2005), 35-45.

significance of the relationship between the social organization and the individual. According to

Weber, the "sociological construal and understanding of action [social constructs] remain merely

processes and specific contexts for the action of individual people, since for us these are the sole

understandable agents of meaningfully oriented action."[50] For Durkheim, a person is the sum of two

oppositional parts: the individual and the social. He argues that each person leads a "double

existence" which consists of two parts, 'one purely individual, which has its roots in our organism,

the other social, which is nothing except an extension of society."[51]

In response, Anthony Giddens argues that neither the individual nor the social system are

enough to explain human socialization. Instead, he contends that these are reciprocal and

inseparable elements and that it is only through the reciprocal relationship, which he calls the

"duality of structure," rather that the dichotomy proposed by Weber and Durkheim, that people are

socialized.[52] For Giddens, socialization is reflexive. "That is to say, actors not only monitor

continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also

routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move."[53] It is Gidden's

reconceptualization of socialization that most clearly informs intersectional approaches to

socialization and this study.

Applying Giddens' model leads to a four-fold expansion of the conception and implications

of socialization. First, while socialization a sociological concept, it also has historical,

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[50] Weber, Economy and Society, 89-90.

[51] Durkheim, 44.

[52] Anthony Giddens, The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press (1984), xxi.

[53] *Ibid.*, 5. In Giddens' theory, reflexivity is "the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life. To be a human being is to be a purposive agent who has both reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (including lying about them)," 3.

anthropological, and psychological implications.[54] Second, it is not always overt, acknowledged as a manifest purpose, or even noticed by those who are undergoing the process. Third, socialization can be used to reinforce already established norms or to revise normative behavior to meet new or fluctuating social circumstances. Finally, socialization is multi-directional. The explicit educator is also learning and responding to the student, sometimes deliberately, sometimes not. As a whole, then, socialization is a messy process that requires analysis of multiple factors.

To engage in analysis of the modes of socialization for a past society, one for which practices are no longer observable and people are not available for interview, is risky but necessary because it compels the historian to explore both how social interactions were organized and how they shaped behavior in that historical context. Applying Gidden's socialization theory means that one must expect some deviation in behavior, that those deviations are shaped by circumstances and relationships, and that all actors are influenced by the socialization process. Finally, it requires skepticism of the typical historical sources and cognizance of the fact that the views expressed therein are not universal, but specific to that sociohistorical group. There is no doubt that using socialization theory, along with queer theory and *lifeworlds,* in the examination of motherhood among lower-class Romans will involve some speculation as direct evidence for certain behaviors does not always exist. So, the use of comparative evidence and careful inference are complementary strategies that help to illuminate those aspects of Roman society that remain in the shadows. Nevertheless, these three frameworks establish methods and boundaries to assess the less visible aspects of preparation for motherhood in Rome.

To support these three main theories, I also employ network analysis, comparative history, and emotionology. Network analysis reveals both how urban, artisan-class mothers and a rural, poor

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[54] Philip Mayer, "Introduction" in *Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthropology*, edited by Philip Meyer, Routledge (2004), reprint. Original publication, *Tavistock Publications* (1970), vxii-xix.

mothers navigated different social networks and how those networks overlapped in some

circumstances, i.e., at the market or during civic cult rituals. In Rome, women's networks are evident

in occupational inscriptions. Engagement with their various forms of employment led them to

navigate "strong" friend-family networks and "weak" networks,[55] both of which included people

whose status and daily lives were quite diverse, among them: slaves, family members, care takers,

friends, and teachers. Presumably, it was largely in these networks that information was transmitted

from one woman to another, especially concerning those topics which seemed peculiar to women:

birth, motherhood, and women's health. These networks did not only transmit information,

however. They established social and professional circles, integrated disparate communities, and

created opportunities for women and men who were engaged in them.[56] In addition, women

regularly interacted with the larger community, as women in Rome were relatively free to participate

broadly in social life. They engaged in broader network activities like running shops and large

businesses, working for shop owners, producing marketable goods, participating in religious rituals

(including attending games, theater productions, and poetic recitations), hearing public speakers,

observing art, reading inscriptions, and watching the interactions of other people.

Comparative history helps to fill in gaps that exist in the evidence for Rome. Since there is

decidedly little evidence that supports the study of motherhood among the lower classes, it is

necessary to turn elsewhere as a means of identifying the possible range of behavior Roman women

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[55] I have borrowed the terminology regarding types of networks from Claire Taylor, "Women's Social Networks and Female Friendship in the Ancient Greek City," *Gender & History* 23, no.3 (2011): 704-705. Strong networks denote relationships that are well-developed and separate the group from others, primarily friendships and family relationships. Weak networks describe relationships that have few or no affective ties, and are characterized by loose, regular contact with people outside of close circles.

[56] Taco Terpstra, *Trading Communities in the Roman World: An Economic and Institutional Perspective*, Brill (2013), 144, 216; Miko Flohr and Andrew Wilson, "Introduction," in *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*, edited by Miko Flohr and Andrew Wilson, OUP (2016), 10.

exhibited. In this study I rely primarily on early modern Europe and the Atlantic slave societies. The first helps to illuminate the lives of freeborn Roman women while the second elucidates freed and enslaved women's circumstances. There is significant precedent for this approach in the history of Roman slavery and the Roman lower-classes.[57] My application is, of course, to Roman motherhood, but both comparative societies are equally relevant to my work.

Finally, emotionology explores the way expectations for emotions interact with the way people expressed themselves in real contexts.[58] In Roman history, this kind of study has often focused on whether Roman parents loved their children.[59] I also explore how social environment and the emotions those elicited shaped responses to motherhood. A comparative example for this kind of work is Emma Griffin's "The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture and Poverty in Victorian Britain." Through autobiographical accounts of lower-class adult children who described their mothers and childhood, she shows that women often did not incorporate social norms into their approaches to motherhood.[60] Although there are no autobiographies from Rome and there were significant societal difference between Rome and Victorian London, there were similarities in

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[57] For the lower classes: Neville Morley, "The Poor in the City of Rome," In *Poverty in the Roman World.* edited by Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, CUP (2006), 21-39; C.R. Whittaker, "The Poor," In *The Romans,* edited by Andrea Giardina, The University of Chicago Press (1993) 272-299; for enslavement: Sinclair Bell and Teresa Ramsby, editors, *Free at Last!: The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire*, Bristol Classical Press, (2012); Marc Kleijwegt, "Deciphering Freedwomen in the Roman Empire," in *Free at Last!: The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire*, edited by Sinclair Bell and Teresa Ramsby, Bristol Classical Press (2012), 110-129; *The Faces of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old and New World Slavery*, edited by Marc Kleijwegt, Brill (2006); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study,* HUP (1982); Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery, Between Evidence and Models*, London: Institute of Classical Studies (2007); Walter Scheidel, "Human mobility in Roman Italy, 1: The Free Population," *Journal of Roman Studies* 94 (2004): 1–26.

[58] Peter Sterns and Carol Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813-836.

[59] Philipe Airès, *The World of Children*, London: Hamlyn, (1966); Michael Golden, "Did the Ancients Really Care when Their Children Died?" *Greece & Rome* 35, no. 2. (1988): 152-163.

[60] Emma Griffin, "The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture and Poverty in Victorian Britain," *American Historical Review* (Feb 2018): 60-85.

circumstances for lower-class mothers that can help explain the responses women exhibited toward motherhood, shaped by their *lifeworlds.*

Maintaining a tension between social constructions and lived experience, shaped by individual circumstances, is a central aim of this study. Women's responses to the social expectations pertaining to motherhood were distinctive. Unlike the traditional approach to historical study, which seeks to identify principles and generalizable ideas and trends, this study aims to challenge those trends and notice where, when, how, and why people did or did not adhere to social expectations. The *lifeworlds* of non-elite Roman women were no doubt sharply different from those of the elite, whether republican or imperial. Consequently, women's experiences must also have been distinct. Together with feminist, socialization, and queer theories, the intersectional approach inherent in the concept of *lifeworlds* provides access to groups who are not well represented in the historical and archeological record.

### Evidence

Evidence for Roman mothers of the lower class is scant. Thus, I draw from several different bodies to evaluate the *lifeworlds* of Roman mothers and how those women prepared for and responded to the possibility of motherhood. I draw on Roman literature, including philosophy, poetry, history, theater, and legal codes, funerary inscriptions and reliefs, and material evidence. The body of evidence is ultimately not much different from that regularly used for the study of Roman families, childhood, enslavement, and womanhood but it has not been applied consistently to the study of lower-class mothers because much of the textual evidence is concerned primarily with the upper-class. Therefore, I propose that applying the theoretical frameworks I've adopted allows them to be read in a fresh way. I have also followed Suzanne Dixon's lead in taking into careful consideration of the rules of genre for interpreting the evidence.[61] Drawing from a wide range of

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[61] Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women,* Duckworth (2001), 118.

material, some of which is not typically considered relevant to history, and attending to genre levels, the evidence makes it possible to apply a broad range of sources to this study.

The textual sources are dominated by elite men who were wealthy, well-educated, and powerful. They are politicians, historians, poets, philosophers, lawyers, and jurists. I have drawn from each of these genres and more. Elite male dominance of the literature of all genres means that information about women is always mediated through their voices. Furthermore, those men did not often have reason to address the lower classes in general, much less lower-class women. When motherhood is addressed, it is usually idealized or politicized. At first glance, that may seem a hinderance to this study, but they serve a useful purpose in part *because* of the focus on idealized and politicized motherhood.[62] The literature has sometimes been taken as descriptive evidence for motherhood, but I show that those descriptions are often inconsistent with motherhood as it was practiced. For example, Cicero's *pro Cluentio* is drawn upon as evidence for upper-class mothers aborting their children to spite spouses or as leverage for political and personal machinations.[63] However, Cicero is smearing his client's accuser, not relating historical fact. Thus, his accusation of abortion and murder relates anxiety about women having too much control of their reproduction rather than proof of women's behavior. Consequently, Cicero and others may not be able to provide direct information on motherhood, but they do reveal expectations, desires, anxieties, and stereotypes that shaped the boundaries of respectable behavior for Roman women.

I also draw from "entertainment" literature, specifically satire, elegy, and comedy. Like the other textual evidence, these are all mediated through elite male voices and thus must be treated

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[62] As Ann Chapman argues in *The Female Principle in Plutarch's* 'Moralia' Dublin: University College, Dublin Press (2011), 4-5, Plutarch, among others, "projects an image of *his* ideal woman," which is at least partially composed to resist what Chapman supposes is "more than a little defiance in sophisticated young Greco-Roman women" [emphasis mine].

[63] *Pro Clu.* 11.32.

carefully and according to genre. Unlike the more serious material created by men like Cicero,

Plutarch, Seneca, and Pliny the younger, however, these do not portray idealized women, rather they

satirize and lament women's behavior in society.[64] Thus, they deliver negative stereotypes that mark

the boundaries of propriety, which reveals a divide between the elite and the masses. It also reveals

the range of behavior between the idealized notions of motherhood expressed in the more serious

literature and the stereotypes of bad women.

Roman comedy, I think, provides the best textual evidence for lower-class women. Like the

other "entertainment" literature, it can reveal a range of behavior for women of the lower class. It is

often rejected as valid material for historical studies precisely because it is comedy. I find it a better

resource than the rest, though, because its closeness to daily life is a window into lower-class society.

Of course, just as the rest of the textual literature is governed by genres, so too is comedy.

Furthermore, it traffics in stereotypes and tropes, which can be dangerous pitfalls. Just as Cicero

cannot be trusted to be telling the truth about Cluentius' accuser, neither can Terence be trusted to

relate the regular behavior of lower-class women. Nevertheless, the stereotype marks another

boundary that, when triangulated with the boundaries of the rest of the textual evidence, can reveal

the space that women actually lived within.

Legal codes, as Jane Gardner, Judith Evans Grubbs, and Thomas McGinn have shown, draw

attention to how the law extended into the lives of average people. The codes highlight elite

concerns about status and inheritance that reinforce the stratification of Roman society. They

provide yet another window into the space inhabited by lower-class Romans, specifically women.

Next are the medical texts of Soranus, Galen, Celsus, Dioscorides, and the Hippocratic authors

(although the last is much older and Greek, the Hippocratic traditions had a profound effect on

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[64] A clear and straightforward explication of this idea can be found in Rhiannon Ash's, "Women in Imperial Roman Literature," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, edited by Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillion, Wiley Publishing (2012), 444.

Roman medicine and therefore are sometimes relevant to the study of motherhood in Rome). These are key to understanding the ways women prepared for or avoided motherhood. They furthermore reveal the kinds of concerns most women carried with them as they weighed the risks and benefits of motherhood. Although not a medical author, I also draw on Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* for similar reasons. The many herbal and magical recipes for various ailment he provides are valuable for thinking about how women used and communicated information about health, pregnancy, and childbirth.

The last category of evidence is material culture. Both archeological and epigraphical evidence are included here. I make use of both, but epigraphy figures more prominently into my narrative. I focus on funerary inscriptions and reliefs. While most people who were able to have monuments established were not exactly poor and probably fit more into the *plebs media* than the lower-classes, inscriptions are also windows into the worlds of non-elite Romans.[65] As with the rest, they are governed by genre, in this case the "epigraphic habit," which not only shaped what the inscriptions said but who received commemoration in the first place.[66] Not all inscriptions follow the genre closely and those can be revealing. In this study, I focus on inscriptions that relate directly to women's occupations and childbirth as they are the most relevant. Unlike other scholars of women and the family, I have not conducted any quantitative analysis of the evidence, however. In this study, the qualitative data is more important.

Sometimes reliefs or statuary accompany the inscriptions. The reliefs often tell different stories from the inscriptions they accompany as the genres are different. Kampen's work has shown

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[65] Johnathan Edmonson, "Roman Family History" in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, edited by Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmonson (2014), 561. Edmonson's contention is that epigraphy provides a "much wider perspective" than literary sources, though he acknowledges that this is a debatable point.

[66] Henry Mouritsen, "Freedmen and Decurions: Epitaphs and Social History in Imperial Italy," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 95 (2005), 39, 60; Greg Woolf, "Monumental Writing and the Expansion of Roman Society in the Early Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 86 (1996), 24; MacMullen, 239.

that imagery relates historical information that words cannot and vice versa. While the inscriptions are governed by the conventions of the epigraphic habit and social stratification, people were often freer to manipulate the rules of funerary inscriptions with reliefs.

Aside from funerary monuments and reliefs, I also draw upon archaeological research that has been conducted on Roman women in Pompeii and in the western Roman forts. Reading the evidence through gendered lenses supports research on the ways women prepared for motherhood. Objects such as footwear, buttons, and pins at Roman forts provide access to groups of women whose histories are virtually unwritten.[67] Like the rest of the evidence, gendered objects need to be contextualized within other elements of a Roman woman's *lifeworld*. Thus, an object can be used to understand whether women were present in a fort, but without context, it is difficult to understand what that meant for social life in a military setting or how women participated in the community.

To highlight the importance of genre in the case of inscriptions, the epigraphic habit, and the way various forms of evidence interact, I offer the following example. Publia Glypte erected a monument to two infant boys, Nico, eleven months, and eight days, and Eutyches, one year, five months, and ten days. The inscription conveys difference between the two boys' statuses. Nico is described as *filius* (son) while Eucyches is *verna* (homeborn slave).[68] In contrast to the inscription, the relief that accompanies it depicts the boys as young men, wearing *toga praetextae* and holding scrolls. The *toga praetexta* is reserved for Roman citizens and the scrolls in their hands indicate an emphasis

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[67] For a summary see P. Allison, "Mapping for Gender, Interpreting Artefact Distribution Inside 1st and 2nd century A.D. Forts in Roman Germany," *Archaeological Dialogues* 13, no. 1 (2006), 1-20.

[68] CIL 6.22972 *D(is) M(anibus) / Niconi filio / dulcissimo / qui v(ixit) mens(ibus) XI / diebus VIII / Eutycheti / vernae / qui vix(it) an(no) I / mens(ibus) V dieb(us) X / Publicia Glypte fecit*

To the shades, To Nico, a most sweet son, who lived eleven months and eight days. To Eutyches, home-born slave, who lived one year, five months, and ten days. Publicia Glypte made this.

on education, particularly oratory, a field dominated by citizen men.[69] Thus, while at least one of the

boys was enslaved, they are both depicted as free, educated Roman citizens.[70]

If only the relief were to have survived, there would have been no indication in the image

that the boys were babies when they died, nor would one have been able to predict their status.

Conversely, if only the inscription had survived, Publia's sentiments about the children would not be

evident. The image provides a sense of aspiration and social belonging. Importantly, it conveys a

relationship that is impossible in the status-language of funerary monuments and reveals a social

relationship that is far more nuanced than the text allows for. The boys are depicted as social equals

so the *verna* status of Eutyches and *libertus* or *ingenus* status of Nico is elided. They are instead simply

boys, whom the commemorator imagines growing into typical Roman boys. It becomes a way to

recognize affectionate relationships that do not depend on the hierarchy of Roman society. The

inscription, on the other hand, adopts the appropriate *genre* of funerary inscriptions and situates the

boys in their social contexts. The combination of the two reveal that social order and sentiment are

not identical. It also suggests that Publia considered herself a mother-figure to both and envisioned

them growing up together, ultimately achieving integration into Roman society. Maybe she hoped

Eutyches would be manumitted so that he might follow the same course through life as her son.

In sum, as Jennifer Baird points out in her re-assessment of a famous Pompeiian armband,

"we need to be open to the range of meanings and viewpoints and ask what our readings tell us not

only of the Roman but of ourselves and our own interpretative processes."[71] Like Baird, I argue that

processes need to create greater nuance rather than aim for a singular narrative and that scholars

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[69] Maureen Carroll, *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World,* OUP (2018), 232-233.

[70] Janet Huskinson, "Picturing the Roman Family," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, edited by Janet Huskinson, Blackwell (2011), 523.

[71] J.A. Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," *Helios* 42, no. 1 (2015), 169.

need to be self-conscious about the way the evidence is interpreted. Furthermore, we need to be cognizant of the impact previous interpretations of the evidence have had on modern understanding of Rome and contemporary society, which has many traditions rooted in the idealized Roman world. Therefore, this study is cautious about making broad generalizations about "motherhood" from any of the evidence that remains, intending to reveal the various ways non-elite Roman women approached motherhood (or at least the potential for it), how those approaches shaped Roman society, and how they shape modern views of womanhood and motherhood.

### Rationale for the Current Project

Women in the Roman Empire navigated a huge range of circumstances intersected by class, status, citizenship, urbanity, occupation, family, and more. The confluences of these circumstances colored not only the lived experience of Roman women but also the expectations they and those around them had for their lives. Among the scholarly questions concerning Roman womanhood that are confronted by these factors are whether it was really a standard expectation for a woman to marry and bear children. How did women prepare for the possibility of becoming mothers, even if that meant rejecting it? If some women did not view marriage as the main ambition of their lives, then they may not have generally expected to have children. For those who did marry, they might not have expected to have children. By asking how women prepared to become mothers, I also entertain the idea that some women rejected the role. The various *lifeworlds* women navigated, socialization experiences, and liminality are key to understanding why some women chose to become mothers and others did not. An exploration of motherhood is not only about *how* women mothered, but also about *whether* they mothered and *why*. Rather than accepting that women were generally aspiring to motherhood, I first interrogate the question then reorient motherhood around the confluence of circumstances that shaped a woman's life.

This dissertation challenges the perennial presumption that women in Roman Italy based their identities, at least in part, on motherhood. The lower classes, on whom this study focuses, represent the bulk of Roman society. They were slaves, freedpeople, and Roman citizens.[72] Many lower-class Roman citizen men would have been eligible to participate in republican governance, but they were very unlikely to be among those who held the highest positions and had significant social and political sway. The lower-class women in this study have little place in the literature of the Roman elite, as they were not influential in Roman politics, were not members of the elite orders (*senatores* or *equites*) and did not have families whose names carried weight in public contexts. Some of these women might have been reasonably well off, but they were unremarkable in the estimation of those who had political and social influence. However unremarkable they may have been, lower-class women better illustrate the intricacies of Roman society than do the more notable women like Terentia, Livia, or Cornelia Africana, about whom scholars know much more. It is therefore essential to focus on them rather than on the upper classes who have already received the bulk of scholarly attention anyway.

The impact of social intersections, *lifeworlds,* was substantial and employing social scientific theory provides an avenue for understanding how the intersections affected women's perceptions of motherhood and how those perceptions shaped the choices potential mothers made. Queer theory is especially valuable to this aspect of the study as it rejects the idea that motherhood is a natural and universalized role. Instead, it emphasizes that structural and social contexts and the intersections shape the opportunities, desires, and approaches women take to motherhood. In the process, it reveals the social behavior groups of women who are largely invisible in the historical record.[73] I

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[72] Foreign-born people (*peregrini*) were also present in the Roman lower classes, but they do not figure into this study as their practices and social norms often fall outside of Roman norms.

[73] Kawash, 972.

hope to demonstrate that Roman women's lives were complex and that traditional interpretations of gender roles for Roman women obscure their real behavior and their contributions to society.

As historian Emma Griffin points out in her article "The Emotions of Motherhood" studying motherhood is not merely an exercise in adding to the historical record. Rather, the process of "interrogating the silent voices of subordinate subjects has not simply added to our understanding… it has upended earlier narratives that were founded on their exclusion."[74] This type of historical exercise, evaluating lower-class women and their responses to motherhood, changes our understanding of the eras within which historians work. If Roman women were not always preparing to become mothers but instead sometimes prioritized occupations, relationships, or bodily health, then modern women who do the same are not historical anomalies. Rather, they are part of a long tradition of active and socially engaged women whose contributions to history and society, although obscured, are significant.

## Outline of Chapters

In chapter 2 I take up the question of preparation, laying the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation. First, I more thoroughly explain how *lifeworlds*, queer theory, and socialization theory pertain to the study of Roman motherhood. Then, I take on the concept of anticipation for motherhood. I argue that women prepared for motherhood through their engagement with social networks and *lifeworlds*, noting that pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood had a significant impact on women's work and livelihood, requiring them to consider the consequences of motherhood as they prepared for the possibility. I then evaluate how becoming a mother for the first time constituted a new phase in a woman's life, requiring a reorganization of priorities and

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[74] Emma Griffin, "The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture, and Poverty in Victorian Britain" in *American Historical Review*. (Feb 2018), 64.

responsibilities. Following that, I explore pregnancy as the first stage in the maternal phase of some women's lives.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5 I organize the discussion around enslaved women, freedwomen, and freeborn women, respectively, as each status marked the structural limits of a woman's ability to make choices about motherhood. In chapter 3, I evaluate how enslavement shaped preparations for motherhood. Next, I explain what family life among enslaved people was like, taking into consideration the likelihood that families were divided by sale and other means. Then I assess the kinds of work enslaved women were engaged in, including prostitution, and explain that the various occupations assigned slave women and the fact of enslavement had a profound impact on their ability to make reproductive choices and raise their children.

In chapter 4, I focus on freedwomen, who occupied a kind of borderlands between enslavement and full freedom as a freeborn Roman citizen. I begin by explaining how the social location of freedwomen was distinct, shaping their *lifeworlds* and socialization process. I continue the theme by evaluating how their networks and families straddled the line between enslavement and freedom, the significance of their patrons (former enslavers) in their lives and the consequences each of these had on motherhood.

In chapter 5, I evaluate the lives of freeborn Roman women. I consider how their family lives were distinct from slave and freed and how their social networks, concerns about pregnancy, and desires for motherhood were shaped by their status as freeborn women. In some ways, especially as it pertains to health and environmental factors, freeborn women did not differ much from other women because they were all subject to diseases and environmental circumstances, ones that were different region to region, but not deeply affected by social stratification. In this chapter, I find that freeborn women were more likely to organize their lives around marriage that those who

were not. However, there was still a meaningful population of freeborn women who did not marry

and did not have children. Their lives, too, were varied, shaped by social location and *lifeworlds*.

Chapter 2: Motherhood and Infancy: First-time Mothers, Decision-making, and Social Expectation

In this chapter I explore the relationship between social context and the individual roles of potential mothers. At the same time, I counter the common presumption that the phrase "Roman motherhood," is sufficient for evaluating the lives of young Roman women who might or might not have become mothers. Social intersections, modes of socialization, and *lifeworlds* had a significant impact on the choices young women had before them and the ways they responded to those choices.

Social interactions shaped women's understanding of what was expected of them and how they could (or should) respond to social norms. Importantly, social norms are not universally followed by members of a given society and are not unchanging. Rather, people make choices about accepting or rejecting norms and, consequently, the norms are refashioned to meet needs, beliefs, behavior, and expectations as they change in society.[75] They informed young women's perspectives on the lives they should lead, including their potential to become mothers, and whether they accepted them. Consequently, this chapter will be concerned with young women and girls who might have anticipated motherhood in their near futures. Anticipation of motherhood does not assume that all women prepared to become mothers, however. Anticipating and acknowledging the possibility of maternity also meant that some women prepared themselves to avoid maternity as there were undoubtedly life circumstances and professions that made becoming a mother particularly disadvantageous.

This chapter will first address how three key theoretical frameworks—*lifeworlds,* queer theory, and socialization theory—apply to preparation for motherhood and decision-making among first-time mothers. Second, it will outline the early stages of potential motherhood, including how the

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[75] Giddens, 3.

more substantial social intersections, namely wealth, occupation, citizen status, lifestyle, and networks affected them. The second section begins by analyzing the ways women from different social locations prepared themselves for the possibility of becoming pregnant. Iterating the element of possibility, this section also outlines possible reasons women might have avoided pregnancy or may have desired motherhood but never achieved it. Finally, the chapter shifts to focus on those women who did become mothers by outlining the earliest stages of motherhood: pregnancy and childbirth. In all the sections, the central theoretical frameworks are applied. The chapter concludes by describing briefly how each of these elements might have been approached by free, freed, and enslaved women, the subjects of the following chapters.

Before undertaking the main body of the chapter, however, it is necessary to address common misconceptions about Roman women and motherhood. If the traditional interpretation of women in Rome is to be believed, all women were prepared primarily for lives as wives and mothers, seeking to become respectable *matronae*. The evidence for this assertion in the Roman context, however, relies primarily upon the elite male perspective and a select few funerary inscriptions.[76] There are some significant methodological problems with accepting at face-value testimony of these sources as clear evidence for the general social practices of Roman women. First, they provide an all-too-easy path to glossing women as "wives and mothers," thereby circumnavigating nuanced discussion about their place in Roman society. Second, the sample used to reinforce the primacy of the maternal role is narrow while the so-called epigraphic habit reveals a convention for establishing

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[76] The most commonly cited inscriptions to support this view are CIL 6.15346 dedicated to a certain Claudia (which, as I show in chapter 1, is probably a forgery); CIL 6.41062 is a *laudatio* dedicated to an unknown woman who has been called "Turia" by scholars because of the similarities in the inscription and historical accounts of a woman named Turia; CIL 6.10230, another *laudatio* dedicated to Murdia, a mother of four children who is praised by her son for showing equanimity in her bequests; AE 1987, 179, dedicated to a woman whose name is partially missing (…nia Sebotis remains) and who is praised for never venturing into public without her husband and being a dedicated wife; and CIL 3.3572 dedicated to Veturia Fortunati, who was *univera* (married to only one man) and a mother of six children.

funerary monuments that tends to focus on maternal behavior for women.[77] Third, monuments like

the ones listed are specifically associated with the upper classes in Rome.[78]

To highlight the scholarly problems with glossing Roman women as wives and mothers, the

following paragraphs provide several examples from scholarship both within and without the fields

of Roman women and family. The glosses are most notable in work outside of the study of the

Roman family and in overviews of the history of Roman women and family. Following are two

examples from other fields of study, a classicist's analysis of Roman fables and a textbook intended

for undergraduate use. First, Teresa Morgan, in *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire*, wrote,

"Women and the family are not synonymous but as *most* women are treated as wives or mothers,

they can be taken together" (emphasis mine).[79] Morgan is establishing the context for her decision to

group Roman proverbs about family and women together, which carries with it some important

implications about both the concept of family and of motherhood. She easily elides womanhood

with concepts of family even while acknowledging that they "are not synonymous" by accepting the

commonly held (though inaccurate) notion that women were *primarily* wives and mothers.

Consequently, the category of "family" proverbs reinforces flat notions of womanhood, matrimony,

and maternity. Second, John Riddle, in *A History of the Middle Ages, 300-1500*, summarizes "Women

in Classical Civilization" this way:

> "The Romans regarded a woman's role to be a fit mother for her children…Women were
> excluded from public religious and political functions," and "unless a woman was a
> prostitute, barmaid, actress, or a slave, she was supposed to remain chaste except when she

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[77] Hilary Becker, "Roman Women in the Urban Economy: Occupations, Social Connections, and Gendered Exclusions," in In *Women in Antiquity,* edited by Stephanie Lynn Budin, Milton: Taylor and Francis (2016), 915.

[78] "Turia" and Murdia are at least of equestrian status while Veturia Fortunati was married to a centurion. …nia Sebotis is a possible exception as she is commemorated as the daughter of Quintus Minucius Marcellus, the son of a Quintus of the Palatine tribe, one of the four urban tribes to which freedmen were often assigned. Although maybe a descendant of a freedman, she might very well have been quite wealthy.

[79] Teresa Morgan, Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire, CUP (2007), 50.

was the willing, albeit unenthusiastic consort of her lawfully married husband. Upper-class women stayed home…"[80]

In short, he explicitly reinforces the wife/mother motif as established fact. Since the book is intended for undergraduate students of medieval history, this might very well be their first or only encounter with Roman women. These glosses lead casual observers of Roman social history to continue to believe that women were not active outside of their homes, despite the substantial evidence to the contrary.

It is also easy for social historians to exclude women from other social categories. Except for scholarship that directly addresses women's roles in certain sectors of the Roman world (women in religion, women in the economy, and women in prostitution, for example) most research approaches women exclusively from the context of the family. Even in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Social History*, where women should figure prominently, they are relegated to just a few chapters: "Making Romans in the Family," "Women in Society," "Children in the Roman Family and Beyond," "Roman Prostitutes and Marginalization," and a section on enslaved families. In a book that is supposed to summarize all the major fields of study in Roman social history, women should be much more broadly represented.[81] Relegating women to familial roles encourages one to read all Roman women according to the elite expectations for respectable women.[82] Rome elite authors

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[80] John Riddle, in *A History of the Middle Ages, 300-1500*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, (2016), 50. Notably, Riddle's work on contraception and abortion in the Roman period should lead him to have been much more nuanced in his description considering that he acknowledges the use of both among women from all social strata in his scholarship.

[81] Michal Peachin, editor, *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, OUP (2011). There are only 15 indexed references to women in 730 pages of text outside of the chapters listed and motherhood is not indexed at all. There is, of course, no index for references to men as they are ubiquitous.

[82] Even work on prostitution is primarily done according to a *matrona*/prostitute binary, highlighting what was respectable or honorable about *matronae* and what was shameful about prostitution, missing the spaces in between. Anise Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, CUP (2016) and Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World, A Study of Social History and the Brothel*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2004) and *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, OUP (1998).

emphasized the maternal and marital roles of women. Indeed, there is little doubt that, at least publicly, elite and powerful men expected the women in their social circles to marry relatively young, have children (or at least appear to want children, in the event that none were born), and behave according to a proscribed set of rules designed to legitimize and substantiate their own sense of power and influence. Two commonly cited funerary inscriptions, the so-called *Laudatio Turia* (CIL VI.41062) and the *Laudatio Murdiae* (CIL VI.10230), praise both women for their devotion to family, reinforcing the social ideals of the elite. Although some women conformed to these idealized values, they cannot be applied to all women of any class. In some cases, life circumstances compelled women to adopt different roles regardless of whether they hoped to become mothers while at the same time women at every level of society resisted, adopted different models for their lives, and modified established norms to suit their needs.

Maybe the most problematic glosses are found in pieces of scholarship that perpetuate the elite notions of ideal woman from within the fields of the history of family and women. For example, Lena Larsson Lovén, begins her chapter, "Roman Motherhood" in *Women in Antiquity* by writing:

> Motherhood was fundamental in Roman society, in the personal lives of women and men, and as part of a generic female identity. The biological role of women was their most important social role, and motherhood increased the status of a woman, especially for mothers with male offspring. In Roman perceptions of a female life-course, marriage and motherhood were closely intervolved, and girls would grow up with the prospect of a future marriage, childbearing and motherhood as central in their lives.[83]

In each of the above instances, the problem is not that motherhood and family are highlighted. The problem is that motherhood and family are isolated from other areas of women's lives and are portrayed as the most important roles in women's lives. The assertion that women were first wives and mothers means that women who did not become either are excluded from the

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[83] Lena Larsson Lovén, "Roman Motherhood," in *Women in Antiquity*, edited by Stephanie Budin, Milton: Taylor and Francis (2016), 885. See also Gillian Clark "Roman Women," *Greece & Rome* 28, no. 2, (1981), 209.

history of women and motherhood. Of course, this study is focused on motherhood, but an accurate history of it requires that the concept be problematized by incorporating the many other facets of a woman's life into the narrative and taking seriously the women who did not become mothers.

It is clear from inscriptional evidence, papyri, sculpture, and literature that women from all social classes were actively engaged in public and private endeavors that were much more far-flung than their immediate domestic concerns.[84] They had political influence, were essential to the economic stability of Rome, and contributed to public life in many other ways, including as benefactors. Among the evidence for women with economic and political influence is a *lex* issued by the emperor Claudius in 52 CE that was recorded in the *Tituli ex corporae Ulpiani*. It provided an exemption to the "law of three," (*ius trium liberorum*), granting women freedom from *tutela mulieris,* provided they could prove they had borne three children (for *ingenuae*) or four children (for *libertae*). The new *lex* was derived from the Augustan legislation encouraging marriage and childbearing, the *Lex Julia et Papia Poppaea*, passed in 18 BC and 9 AD.[85] With the legislation, Claudius extended the

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[84] A sampling of studies of women's engagement in various aspects of the public sphere include John Evans, *War, Women and Children in Ancient Rome,* London: Routledge (1991); Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society,* Routledge (1986); Emily Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Person Women and Civic Life in the Latin West*, OUP (2015); Claire Holleran, *Shopping in Ancient Rome: The Retail Trade in the Late Republic and the Principate*, OUP (2012); Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia*, Berlin (1981); Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, Norman, OK; University of Oklahoma Press (1992); Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World, A Study of the Social History & the Brothel*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press (2004); Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self Presentation and Society*, London: Routledge (2008); Matthew J. Perry, *Gender, Manumission and the Roman Freedwoman*, CUP (2017); Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery Between Evidence and Models*, London: Institute of Classical Studies (2007); Celia Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press (2006).

[85] Dio, *Hist.* 54.16.1-2; 56.1, 10; Suetonius *Aug.* 34; Tacitus *Ann* 3.25, 28. As Judith Evans Grubbs in *Women in the Law in the Roman Empire*, Routledge (2002), 84 notes, it is not possible to discern which of the two pieces of legislation contained this particular provision. Consequently, they are often referred to as a pair, such as I have them listed in the text.

exemption to freedwomen who had not given birth to the requisite number of children if they lent their ships to a state-run grain importation program.[86]

The Claudian law highlights women who were active in public contexts. The existence of the legislation indicates that women were professionals with a real influence on political, economic, and social activities.[87] Second, they were a large and important enough group of women to justify passing the legislation because they could provide meaningful relief for the government, which desperately needed to increase the grain supply to the city. Third, achieving *ius liberorum* was difficult and desirable enough to make overriding it an appealing incentive for professional freedwomen to lend their equipment and expertise to the state program. Fourth, women merchants, whether mothers or not, did not have maternity as their only means of social identity. They also developed professional and economic aspects of their lives, sometimes prioritizing them over motherhood. Of course, Claudius' legal loophole for ship-owning freedwomen does not at all mean that the women were all childless. However, it suggests that the economic contributions women made were as important as the contributions they might make as mothers of numerous children. In fact, equating the *ius liberorum* with lending ships to the state is a clear indicator that the women's economic contributions were, at least in a moment of need, as significant and valuable as motherhood.[88] There should be no

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[86] *Tituli Ulpiani* 3.6, Gaius *Inst.* 1.32c, Suetonius *Cla.* 18.2-19.

[87] Matthew Perry, 66, 203 n. 117; Marc Kleijwegt "Deciphering Freedwomen in the Roman Empire," 118; Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 224, 231 n.54.

[88] For a comparison on incentivizing women to women to work in a time of political and economic need, see Margaret W. Rossiter's study of women's participation in the American workforce during WWII. Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action, 1940-1972*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1995), 2.

doubt that the professional elements of some women's lives affected their approach to motherhood and the ways they reflectively navigated the routines of their social context.[89]

Motherhood probably was not the most socially important aspect of some women's lives. A sizeable group prioritized economic, social, and political interests over maternal or familial ones, while their occupation, relative wealth, and socio-legal statuses worked together to shape their attitudes toward and preparation for motherhood. Though social historians have studied motherhood, the economy, social status, and occupations of women, there has yet to be a study that considers these aspects of life as an integrated whole. In my view, the compartmentalization of the various social strands is deeply problematic as it precludes the development a realistic schema for Roman social life. In addition to reinforcing the stereotype of women as mothers, separating motherhood from other aspects of social life limits our ability to understand how those social elements shaped women's approaches to motherhood, how they made decisions about becoming mothers (including avoidance), and how they established priorities in their lives.

### Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to First-time Motherhood

#### *Lifeworlds*

As outlined in chapter 1, the theoretical framework of *lifeworlds* is central to this study. It provides a means for organizing the various intersectional elements of life among lower-class Roman women. The concept of lifeworlds is supported by socialization theories and supplemented by queer theory. Roman women regularly worked in the hospitality, retail, domestic, entertainment, and craft sectors of the Roman economy.[90] Freedwomen often retained roles assigned to them

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[89] Anthony Giddens, xxiv, argues that the process of reflexively moderating social behavior is essential for one's ability to navigate social environments and for understanding individuals as agents, though restricted by social context, time, and place.

[90] For scholarship attesting to the extent of women's involvement in these sectors of the Roman economy see Suzanne Dixon, "Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut?, Cultural Representations of Women in the Roman Economy," in *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*, edited by Eireann Marshall and Fiona Mchardy

during former enslavement, a sign of their work's centrality to the Roman economy. The

occupational status of these women directly contributed to their *lifeworlds* because their various

responsibilities shaped their ability (and desire) to raise children. Not only did occupation shape their

approaches to motherhood, so did their relationships, relative wealth, and citizen statuses as *ingenuae,*

freed, or enslaved women.

*Lifeworlds* are also shaped by political and social systems. Rome lacked formal social supports

for working mothers, making it more difficult for them to juggle work and motherhood.

Furthermore, under Augustus and in the centuries following, Roman laws, like the *Lex Julia et Papia*

*Poppaea*, bolstered the idealized view of women by passing legislation that prioritized marriage and

childbearing, thereby weakening the conceptual possibility of structural supports for women who

did not conform to the new moral regime. In her study, *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage*

*Careers and Caregiving,* Caitlyn Collins demonstrates just how significant the political and social

supports are for women who work and mother. By conducting interviews with women from four

different modern states, the United States, Italy, Germany, and Sweden, she was able to demonstrate

that states that have more policy-based support for working women make motherhood easier to

balance with work. She is careful to note that social policies are not the only factors shaping

mother's responses to work, rather "the larger social context, including beliefs about gender equality,

employment, and motherhood, are all critical factors for understanding and resolving the conflicts

these mothers [in her study] experience."[91]

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(2004), 56-73; Claire Holleran, "Women and Retail in Roman Italy," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, edited by Greg Woolf and Emily Hemelrijk, Leiden: Brill (2013), 313-330; Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*; Holleran, *Shopping in Ancient Rome;* Kampen, *Women and Status*; and Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," in *American Journal of Ancient History* 1 (1976): 76-104.

[91] Caitlyn Collins, 247.

Thinking about the intersections of the various elements of a woman's life and the sociopolitical context as an integrated whole via the *lifeworlds* framework opens avenues for research, making it possible to see the various ways in which women approached motherhood. Thus, there is no one version of Roman motherhood that is sufficient for evaluating the lives of young Roman women who might or might not have become mothers. Liminal social location, modes of socialization, and *lifeworlds* had significant impact on the choices young women had before them and the ways they responded to their maternal choices.

### Queer Theory

Queer theory creates space for analyzing motherhood and its various manifestations among Roman women who are otherwise difficult to discern in the historical record. Kathy Rudy describes queer theory as a method for "recognizing the role of interpretation in all areas of human life" and "being committed to challenging what is perceived as normal."[92] Applying her definition and combining the framework with *lifeworlds*, queer theory shows that though women in some circumstances sought to become mothers and wives by achieving the respectable status of *matrona*, many women did not.[93] In fact, many women who were less privileged did not seek to become *matronae*, others, specifically women who worked taverns or inns were prostitutes or actors, who carried that dishonorable status of *infamia,* that is, "a person without reputation," were explicitly excluded from attaining the status of *matronae*.[94] According to the *Digest of Justinian*, "where one woman keeps an inn and employs others as prostitutes (as many often do on the pretext that they

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[92] Kathy Rudy, "Queer Theory and Feminism," in *Women's Studies* 29 (2000): 197.

[93] Even among the elite *matrona* status was sometimes rejected by women. For example, Augustus' daughter Julia was notorious for her licentious behavior and unwillingness to conform to her role as a member of the imperial family, Suetonius, *Aug.* 65 and Tacitus *Ann.* I.53.

[94] *Dig.* 23.2.43.9 and 48.5.25(24).

are servants), she must be classed as a procuress."[95] Reading this with a queer perspective reveals a

powerful elite male bias against inn and tavern works, based in large part on their low social status.[96]

More importantly, however, it shows the vast social gap between *matronae* and prostitutes.[97] They are

binary characterizations, rooted in elite Roman views of womanhood.[98] In that vast space between

the two, existed women who were neither *matronae* nor *infamiae,* Rather, they were "average" *ingenuae*,

freedwomen, and enslaved women who lived and worked in a wide variety circumstances that

shaped their social roles. Many did not achieve (or seek to achieve) *matrona* status. Some remained

unmarried, did not have children, and prioritized other aspects of their lives. In other words, the

binary shows liminality and ideal, but it also shows the space where most women lived.

Queer theory helps to overcome the disabilities crated by binary concepts of normalcy and

deviance. David Halperin and John Winkler are particularly important for conceptualizing the range

of sexual and social identities. Though both focus primarily on male sexuality, their approaches

provide tools for problematizing singular notions of motherhood by avoiding essentialization of

womanhood (the practice of directly associating women's desires and attitudes toward motherhood

with their biological capacity for bearing children). They also establish methods for overcoming

erasure of people and their social behavior. Winkler's complication of modern interpretations of

Greek culture that situates women more organically in its social fabric is an approach that is

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[95] Dig 23.2.43.9 Si qua cauponam exercens in ea corpora quaestuaria habeat (ut multae adsolent sub praetextu instrumenti cauponii prostitutas mulieres habere), dicendum hanc quoque lenae appellatione contineri. Translation by Alan Watson in The Digest of Justinian, Vol. 2 Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1985), 204.

[96] McGinn, Economy of Prostitution, 20.

[97] For studies that evaluate the differences between *matronae* and prostitutes, see Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons*, (2016), McGinn, *Economy of Prostitution* and *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, and Christopher Faraone and Laura McClure, ed., *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, Wisconsin Studies in Classics Series, Madison, WI: University of Madison Press (2006).

[98] McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, 10-13.

invaluable to a study like this one because it provides a means of thinking about the more nuanced ways women approached motherhood.[99] Halperin's insistence on recognizing how modern notions of sexuality frame historians' approach to ancient ones (he challenges even the concept of sexuality as it pertains to the ancient world) provides an important reminder of the significance of a scholar's own social location and historical moment in analyzing those of the past.[100]

Unfortunately for historical study, conversations about the maternal remain rooted in studies of *matronae*, reinforcing a singular interpretation of motherhood. However, women from all walks of life, many of whom may have never hoped for such a dignified title, also were mothers and potential mothers. Except for studies that address the conditions of enslavement,[101] there has yet to be any monograph on how women in different social strata approached motherhood. There have, however, been several studies on lower-class women and their occupations.[102] Illuminating the one-dimensional approach to motherhood and a woman's potential rejection of it, Etienne van de Walle, in his essay, "Towards a Demographic History of Abortion," rejects any notion that women who were not "prostitutes or desperate wenches" would have sought out abortions on the grounds that it was simply too risky.[103] Although abortion was certainly a risky venture, the assertion that only "prostitutes or desperate wenches" would have ever sought it draws on tropes of deviance that relegate all behavior deemed socially irresponsible or undesirable to the most marginalized groups of

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[99] John Winkler, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece, Routledge (1990).

[100] David Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, University of Chicago Press (2002).

[101] For example, Keith Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* NY: Johnson Reprint Corp., (1984) and "On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," *Slavery & Abolition*, 1987, 8, no. 1, 42-64.

[102] See the section "A Brief History of the Scholarship" in Chapter 1 of this study.

[103] Etienne van der Walle, "Towards a Demographic History of Abortion," *Population: An English Selection* 11 (1999), 128.

people. While prostitutes almost certainly made frequent use of the various methods for preventing or ending pregnancies, they were not the only people who did.[104] The trope further marginalizes those already othered while similarly preventing scholars from exploring approaches to motherhood and its avoidance among other groups. It also suggests a stigma against contraception and abortion that may not have been widely felt among Roman women. In short, the perspective that van de Walle expresses undermines the complicated realities of life for women of all statuses and misleads because it masks deviant behavior among groups of women who are traditionally considered "normal," while perpetuating ideas of deviance as something that is liminal or even a condition of moral degeneracy that is somehow exclusive to those liminal populations.

Kathy Rudy's essay, "Queer Theory and Feminism," is also essential for this study. While Halperin and Winkler focus on sexuality, Rudy emphasizes how queer theory can illuminate studies of women by rejecting concepts of normalcy. She argues that the process of rejecting normalcy creates discomfort because it challenges long-standing ideas of what womanhood (motherhood) looked like.[105] Interestingly, motherhood has not always been a welcome topic of study for queer theorists partly because of its tendency to be essentialized.[106] However, motherhood is just as complicated and varied as sexuality and concepts of womanhood are and can therefore benefit from the application of the theory. The historical representation of women as primarily associated with respectable domesticity dismisses women who did not adopt the modes of motherhood and womanhood commonly accepted. Queer theory allows this study to disrupt and challenge those

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[104] Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *Ancient Society*, 11/12 (1980/1981), 8.

[105] Rudy, 204.

[106] *Ibid.*, 207.

commonly held and essentializing ideas of motherhood, revealing the many ways women approached and carried out their lives.

### Socialization Theory

As modern sociologists have demonstrated, socialization is not a passive process. Rather, people are active in responding to efforts to define their places in society.[107] Just as queer theory rejects universalization so does an active model of socialization. The social historian Walter Johnson's perspectives on slavery are helpful here. He argues that the category of a Roman slave "[elides] all sorts of actions into the abstract category of 'slaves' agency,' [which] seems to presume the identity of the subject of history—i.e. an 'an individual slave' rather than 'a Christian' or 'a mother' or 'the Igbo' or 'the Blacks.'"[108] As he points out, such categories miss the point of historical studies that aim to elucidate the lived experience of people who fit into a given category. Failing to consider the intersectionality of an individual's social location means that "slaves" or "mothers" are treated as a wholistic group with only one narrative. Just as Johnson argues that a "slave" was an individual and multi-faceted person, so too were Roman mothers.

Socialization begins as soon as a person can interact with her environment. Children observe their families, caretakers, and playmates and slowly begin to imitate them, developing ideas about the world and their place in it. While socialization through play may not be understood within formal networks, it in fact is a network activity.[109] Play suggests that young girls watched and imitated the adults around them, just as they do today. Free children likely played regularly with enslaved

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[107] Allison James, *Socialising Children*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2013), 17-18.

[108] Walter Johnson, "On Agency" *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003), 118.

[109] James, 79-80.

children, especially in larger households within which children were sent to the nursery to be cared

for by one or more *nutrices*.[110] They would therefore have begun to organize themselves socially and

learn how to interact according to the social norms. Through play, too, the children would have

begun to practice the skills that would be necessary for adulthood.

One important archeological body of evidence for the significance of play in young girls'

lives is the discovery of dolls. Most of the dolls that have survived were well-made of more durable

materials and had articulated limbs. Both the craftsmanship and the quality indicate that they were

for wealthier girls. How "elite" they were is hard to say, but they were often made of expensive

materials (ivory, for example) and at least two were found in elaborate sarcophagi, one with a

mummified girl.[111] There have also been found a very few dolls made from more accessible (and

inexpensive) materials like wood, clay, and even wax. The latter are likely to have been far more

plentiful that the archeological record suggests since these less-expensive materials are also more

perishable.[112] Presumably, girls of all statuses probably played with dolls.[113]

Some scholars argue that young girls primarily used the toys to pretend motherhood, much

like children who play with baby dolls today.[114] However, the dolls that have been preserved are not

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[110] Bradley "Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 71-72; Juvenal, *Satire* 10.116-117, 14.164-169.

[111] Fanny Dolansky, "Playing with Gender: Girls, Dolls, and Adult Ideals in the Roman World" in *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 31, No. 2 (October 2012), 268.

[112] Dolansky refrains from making any suggestions about lower-class play since the artifacts that survive are clearly associated with affluent families. Her view is "since there is no evidence linking these [lower-class and slave] girls to dolls, the conclusions reached about girls and doll-play must pertain predominately to upper-class girls" (259-60). I disagree with this approach as it has the effect of universalizing elite practices and ideas. Even with the admission that the work focuses on elite people, the ultimate impression is that the conclusions are more-or-less generally "Roman."

[113] *Ibid.,* 260. She is hesitant to say how likely she thinks it is that lower-class and enslaved girls did. However, there is some limited evidence, which she refences in n. 12, namely cloth dolls preserved in Egypt and a reference in the *Satyricon* (40) to a girl playing with "straw puppet." It seems most likely that young girls, especially, had less sophisticated dolls, even though evidence for them is thin.

[114] *Ibid.*, 267 and Mario Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover*, translated by L. Gibbs (1999), 216, sees girls playing with the dolls to imagine much more than motherhood. In contrast to her own interpretation, she highlights

babies but adults. So, if they were used by girls to pretend motherhood, it is likely that they pretended the dolls themselves were mothers.[115] It is also quite possible that baby dolls did exist but did not survive. However, there is no way to confirm that. Taking a different perspective, Fanny Dolansky suggests that these dolls may not have been used to play wife and mother (at least not only) but instead were instruments for imaginative play for girls, much like Barbies are for girls today. If she is correct, young girls did not only aspire to motherhood. They maybe also aspired to various social roles and, maybe among the lower classes, professions. Thus, they would have been socialized to roles that are much less visible in the historical record but every bit as essential to Roman daily life.

As the girls grew into young women, those socialization processes would have changed, as would the agents of socialization. Young women became more active in their environments, in fact, there is evidence that some girls were trained in professional roles before the age of 10.[116] Viccentia, who died at nine years, nine months old, was commemorated by her parents as an *aurinetrix* (gold spinner). It is likely that Viccentia was a slave, nevertheless, a significant part of her young life was dedicated to her occupation. For girls like Viccentia, who were trained early, their expectations for adulthood might not have centered around motherhood but instead around the occupation they were learning.[117] By considering the implications early training might have had on young women, it

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R. Janssen, "Soft Toys from Egypt," in *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt, Journal of Roman Archaeology* Supplementary Series 19, edited by D.M. Bailey, (1996): 239, who holds the view that girls pretended to be mothers.

[115] *Ibid.*, 266-7.

[116] CIL 6.9213, *Viccentia dul/cissima filia / aurinetrix q(u)ae / vixit an(nos) VIIII m(enses) VIIII*. For discussion, see Lena Larsson Lovén, "Women, Trade, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy" in *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*, edited by Andrew Wilson and Miko Flohr, OUP (2016), 206.

[117] There are also examples of four *oranatrices*, commemorated between the ages of 9 and 13. Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, "Desperate Housewives? The Adaptive Family Economy and Female Participation in the Urban Labor Market," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, edited by Greg Woolf and Emily Hemelrijk, Brill (2013), 306.

becomes easier to see social organization a little differently. Although traditional understanding of Roman womanhood suggests that girls were all socialized to be wives and mothers, inscriptions like Viccentia's make it clear that motherhood was not always the central focus of a young girl's life. Rather, *lifeworlds* shaped their modes of socialization and lifestyles.

Evidence

As with all chapters of this study, evidence is limited and it is necessary to read it against the grain, looking for lacunae, behavior that does not align with the norms, and criticisms of women who challenge the standard notions of Roman motherhood. However, unlike many studies that depend upon quantifiable evidence for family relationships or women's occupations,[118] there is no method available for counting how many women became mothers and how many of those same women worked, in part because the evidence for working women is usually not the same as the evidence for motherhood. Scholars of the family and of working women both emphasize funerary monuments, but the monuments that describe work (whether in words or visually) are often not the same as the monuments that describe motherhood.[119] There are very few examples of inscriptions that provide information both on a woman's occupation and her maternity.[120] This poses a research problem, but it does not necessarily tell us anything about whether working women were mothers.

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[118] Examples include, Keith Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," *Population Studies* 18 (1965): 309–27; Tim Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society,* The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1992); Richard Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death*, CUP, (1994). Walter Scheidel, *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in Ancient Demography*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*. Supplementary series no. 21. Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, (1996); Brent Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 30-46.

[119] For example, very few of the inscriptions analyzed for evidence of working women by Sandra Joshel in *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome* or by Natalie Kampen in *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia*. Berlin, 1981, also provide evidence for maternal relationships.

[120] A search of the *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby*, using the terms *mater* and each of the occupations listed by Treggiari in "Jobs for Women," yields only 10 inscriptions. Of those, only two, AE 1969/70, 00065 and CIL 6.9493, directly connects an occupation with a mother. For the others, a mother is named as a commemorator for a daughter who is identified by her occupation. Incidentally, some of the deceased

There are at least five possible reasons for this gap: 1. It simply did not make social sense for a woman to establish a monument as a mother and list her occupation. For many families, a mother's work status was not relevant to her commemoration of a deceased child. 2. Working women may have often been childless; thus, the evidence would not overlap because the groups are, in fact, distinct. 3. Women who married and had children and were economically comfortable enough to afford a funerary monument that followed idealized norms and avoided work as much as possible. 4. Some women, regardless of wealth and status, decided to be memorialized according to a maternal ideal that followed the genre-based standard, eschewing her work life, even if she worked consistently. 5. Working mothers valued their occupation and desired to be commemorated as professionals rather than mothers. However, lack of quantifiable evidence is not a disadvantage for this study because I am interested in qualitative answers about the range of possible responses rather than identifying which were the most common.

One of the few examples of working mothers is the funerary monument of Mecia Dynata. In the dedication, Mecia Flora,[121] Mecia Dynata's mother, describes herself as a haircutter (*tonstrix*).[122]

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working women were quite young and therefore were unlikely to have had any children yet: A nine-year-old *ornatrix* (CIL 6.9731), a fourteen-year-old *vestiplica* (CIL 9.3318), and a sixteen-year-old *pediequa* (CIL 6.6335).

[121] CIL 6.9493 Dis Man(ibus) / Meciae L(uci) f(iliae) Dynat(a)e / ex testam(ento) et dona(tione) t(estamenti) c(ausa) / L(ucius) Mecius L(uci) f(ilius) Ermagoras / pater Mecia Flora mater / tonstrix L(ucius) Mecius L(uci) f(ilius) Rusticus / frater lanarius ad vic(um) Fort(is) / Fortun(ae) agrum sive hort(os) III / cum taber(nis) III item aedifici(a) inc(h)o{h}a(ta) / resp(ondentia) III grat(uito) h(oc) e(st) prox(ime) sacel(lum) d(ominae) / Isidis et alia(m) taber(nam) ab ultr(a) / vic(um) Triari quot est intr(oitus) / it(em) fons Marian(us) her(edibus?) / com(prehensa) sic u(ti) a(nte) l(ectum) e(st) / in h(ac) t(aberna) sunt com(prehensi) or(dines) / h(uius) s(epulcri)

[122] Some scholars translate *tonstrix* as wool-cutter. Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, in "Desperate Housewives? The Adaptive Family Economy and Female Participation in the Urban Labor Market" in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, 2013, edited by Greg Woolf and Emily Hemelrijk, Leiden: Brill (2013), even translates the word both ways on the same page (307). She labels Mecia Flora a wool-worker and another woman, Iole Pompeiana, a barber. See also Cameron Hawkins, *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy*, CUP (2016), and Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," who says the term is ambiguous but is probably best translated barber or manicurist (n.16). She also allows for the possibility that it means "cloth finisher" but she finds it unlikely (n. 31).

Together with her husband, Lucius Mecius Ermagoras, and son, Lucius Mecius Rusticus, she made

the dedication according to her daughter's will and with her daughter's own money. From this

monument, we learn a few things about the interrelationship between work and motherhood in

Rome. First, we learn Mecia Dynata had enough wealth and personal power to require and pay for

her own funerary monument, suggesting that she, like her mother, worked in a skilled trade.[123]

Second, Mecia Flora was also a professional woman, a role she must have considered a central part

of her identity since she put it on the monument honoring her deceased daughter. In fact, her

occupation was apparently more important than that of Mecia Dynata's father since his is not listed

anywhere on the monument (though the son is described as a woolworker or *lanarius)*. Third, Mecia

Dynata was presumably unmarried, as was her brother, Lucius Mecius Rusticus. There is no

indication of Mecia Dynata's age, but her will and bequest makes clear that she was an adult woman.

Mecia Dynata appears to have not had any children at the time of her death either, otherwise, they

almost certainly would have been identified on the monument. In sum, we see a working mother, a

single successful working women and skilled family, each with their own occupations, acquiring

wealth independently of one another. They were more than wives and mothers and wanted their

professional successes to be remembered. Though women like the Mecias may have been in the

minority, they are clear examples of the kinds of lives some Roman women led.

A second body of evidence, philosophical texts, particularly those of the stoics, like Seneca,

Plutarch, and Pliny are useful for identifying ideals and, through finding criticisms of women who do

not conform to their idealized standards for motherhood, Roman women with different values

become evident.[124] Satirists like Juvenal, who lampoon women for behavior that they disdain (or that

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[123] In the second part of the inscription, we learn that she bequeathed three shops, indicating that she owned multiple businesses, or at least had multiple locations for her business. See Becker, 925; Treggiari, "Lower-Class Women in the Roman Economy" *Florilegium* 1 (1979), 70; Groen-Valinga, 307.

[124] Seneca, Consl. Helvica, Plutarch, Advice to the Bride and Groom.

their readers disdain)[125] are useful, too, because they help highlight the many ways women in their world might have behaved, even if it was distasteful to elite men. Beyond these, poetry, theater, legal codes, medical texts, histories, and novels are useful for identifying marginalized groups and finding conduct among women that does not align with the norms. As previously mentioned, many of these must be read "in reverse" of what the authors probably intended. They wanted to highlight the dignity of women who met their standards for ideal Roman women, not to highlight the myriad other ways women lived their lives. Queer theory is probably the most useful theoretical tool for reading these texts because it provides a framework for identifying liminal approaches to womanhood that are usually hidden.

### Anticipation of Motherhood

The application of queer and socialization theory as well as the concept of lifeworlds, alongside careful reading of the evidence can help answer three questions central to this study: how did women prepare for the possibility of motherhood? How did *lifeworlds* shape that preparation? How did women manage the significant changes motherhood brings?

Before a young woman became pregnant, she would have encountered numerous children, mothers, and childless women, in circumstances both good and bad. Those social interactions would have informed her understanding of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood and shaped her attitudes toward them. One example of how a young woman might come to learn about pregnancy comes from the Greek Hippocratic text, *On the Nature of the Child*. The Hippocratic author relates the story of a signing girl who was pregnant for the first time and realized it because she "had heard what other women say to one another, that when a woman is about to conceive, the seed does not run out of her, but remains inside."[126] The young woman apparently did not have a strong network of

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[125] Especially *Satires* 6 and 14.
[126] On the Nature of the Child, 2.1.

people to communicate with about pregnancy since she had to learn what she could by overhearing other conversations about conception. Networks, then, were certainly active but not all women were engaged in them.[127] Probably, young women who had not yet become pregnant were excluded from many of those conversations as they would not have much to add to them and it may have seemed unnecessary (or improper) to include them unless the older women were expecting her to become pregnant soon.

The implications of pregnancy on women's work and livelihood were considerable. Potential mothers needed to consider the possible complications pregnancy and childbirth bring, the time lost at work in post-partum recovery, and the long-term obligations of having and raising children, who require time, money, and energy that women might previously have been placed elsewhere. Women from all social strata took precautions against pregnancy with contraceptives and abortifacients or found ways to alleviate themselves of the obligation to raising children through exposure or infanticide for various reasons.[128] Although the elite ideal was that women would marry and have children, these cannot have been forgone conclusions for any woman. On the other hand, women who were positively influenced by their experiences, internalized idealized womanhood, or simply

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[127] Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, OUP (1993), 99-100. In her study of Victorian women, Ross found that lower-class women were less likely to have knowledge about pregnancy and birth. While this may not have been the case in Rome, it nevertheless demonstrates that class and other circumstances shaped the kinds of networks women engaged in.

[128] Angus McLaren, *A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Blackwell (1990), 50, 53-54, 61-62; Konstantios Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, Duckworth (2002), 97.

desired to have children might have sought out ways to improve their chances for motherhood.[129] For these women, their ideals and desires outweighed the risks.[130]

A woman's marital status also shaped her approach to motherhood. Much of the scholarship on motherhood in Rome presumes marriage (legal or *de facto*) as a prerequisite for motherhood. In fact, most sections like this one outlining the background of preparation for motherhood begin with a description of Roman marital patterns to establish the family as the main location for childbearing. The underlying presumption is that women married and *then* became mothers. The presumption is so strong that scholars sometimes do not even acknowledge the possibility that women were single (or that they had children outside of marriage) in their analyses. For example, Rachel Meyer, in a study of female benefactors in Roman Hispania identified three women, Baebia Crinita (CIL 2.5402), Quintia Faccina (CIL 2.1055) and Cornelia Marullina (CIL 2.3265 and CIL 3.101) whose monuments mentioned only their filiation and no husband.[131] The last of these, Cornelia Marullina, also referenced her son, L. Cornelius Marullus. Despite the omission of husbands, Meyer does not even entertain the possibility that the women had not married. She offers only the following three possibilities for the omissions: 1. The woman's natal family was more important than her husbands; 2. The woman and her natal family were so well-known she had no need to mention her husband; 3. Her husband (and children) were deceased. In short, the overwhelming presumption of marriage

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[129] There were several practices and remedies that Roman medical scholars believed supported conception. Whether effective or not, the prescriptions clearly show that some women desired to improve their chances of conception. Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.5.25 (to induce menarche) 1.10.36, Dioscorides *De Med.* 2.75.1; 2.100; 3.52.1; 4.189.2

[130] Hin, Saskia. "Family Matters: Fertility and its Constraints in Roman Italy," In *Demography and the Graeco-Roman World, New Insights and Approaches*, edited by Claire Holleran and April Pudsey, CUP (2011), 110.

[131] Rachel Meyer, "Exceptional Female Benefactors in Roman Hispania" in *Classical Journal* 107 n. 2 (2021): 182-184, 185-186, 188-190.

and motherhood prevented Meyer from thinking about what womanhood might have looked like without marriage.

The supposition that women married and had children (only after having married) is problematic because it hinders the study of motherhood as one of many possibilities rather than a near certainty for Roman women who were shaped by a myriad of social factors. While many women did marry, the possibility that many others did not is essential to explore because it shapes our understanding of Roman womanhood. In Garnsey and Saller's, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture*, they address the question of singleness and childlessness in relation to Augustus' legislation aimed at incentivizing marriage and childbearing and discouraging the reverse. They suggest that singleness was pervasive.[132] To support their interpretation, they cite Pliny and Seneca's dismay that people were not marrying and trying to have children. They argue that Romans had become more individualistic. They were less focused on inheritance and maintenance of familial lines and more focused on their own personal ambitions.[133] If Garnsey and Saller are correct, then it is possible that individualism was one of the social values that shaped attitudes at all levels of society.

It is difficult to know how widespread individualism was among any group, but particularly among the non-elite members of society. That said, organizations like *collegia* suggest that middling Romans, maybe especially freedmen, were concerned with social mobility.[134] As the elite moved away from protecting lineage, the middling Romans seem to have moved toward it. As concern for

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[132] Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Second Edition, London: Bloomsbury (2014), 165.

[133] *Ibid.*, 166.

[134] Scholars have noticed that *collegia* were as much social organizations as they were economic. One of the central concerns addressed on many of the monuments is financial support for the burial of members and their families. Emphasizing burials suggests that they were concerned with maintaining *gens* and establishing lasting funerary monuments so that the memories of those who died could be kept alive. See Jonathan Perry "Organized Societies: *Collegia*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, edited by Michael Peachin, OUP (2011), 505-507.

family legacy or an emphasis on individualism pertains to the lowest classes, however, it is not clear. Nevertheless, there must have been fewer resources and fewer reasons to work at maintaining familial lineage among the lower classes, even as family was important in individual lifetimes. Hence, focus on immediate circumstances would have predominated, shaping their decisions about marriage, children, and other aspects of their lives.

Provided the thesis is correct, some women were likely to choose singleness while others chose marriage and family. Some interesting evidence for the possibility derives from funerary monuments set up for women by friends or parents rather than husbands or children. Without discounting Meyers' set of possibilities (spouses and children predeceased or that her natal family was more prominent or important than her husband's) it must be allowed that the women commemorated were never married.

While singleness must be accounted for, marriage (or committed cohabitation) was, in fact, common among all classes of Romans, including those who could not legally marry, like soldiers and slaves. Couples likely sought to have children, but that would have looked different for families at different social strata.[135] According to the established social norms, married women were expected to submit to their husband's sexual advances so that they might become pregnant because the essential

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[135] Larsen-Lovén, "Roman Motherhood," 888. Many that do not begin with marriage in their descriptions of motherhood do assume it and take up motherhood only within the context of the natal family. For example, Tim Parkin, "The Roman Life Course and the Family," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, edited by Beryl Rawson, Blackwell (2011), does not make a single reference to single parenthood or the life course outside of the family unit. Angus McLaren, *A History of Contraception From Antiquity to the Present Day,* Blackwell (1990), in his history of contraception, a topic which might lead one to presume regular reference to women who are not married, limits his discussion of the topic to marriage as does Mireille Corbier in her chapter, "Child Exposure and Abandonment" in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, edited by Suzanne Dixon, Routledge (2001), 52-73. One scholar who acknowledges the predisposition toward privileging the concept of family and marriage in studies that require attention to birth rates, is John Caldwell, "Fertility Control in the Classical World: Was There a Fertility Transition?," *Journal of Population Research* 21, no. 1 (2004), 6.

purpose of marriage was to for a woman to bear children.[136] They were also required to raise

children who were born unless the father decided it was not in his interest to do so.[137]  Thus, in

marital relationships, the potential father had the formal decision-making power. In some marriages,

it can be presumed that men took advantage of the power afforded them and carefully controlled

their wives and their efforts at having children. However, that does not seem to be the usual case.

Women in upper-class households, especially *materfamilias,* had significant say in the major familial

decisions. Potential parents in the middling and lower classes may have taken a relatively egalitarian

approach to family life as well.[138] Consequently, many Roman women likely had substantial input

about having and raising children.

In planning for parenthood, parents would have considered the economic costs and benefits

of having children, but there was certainly more at play.[139] Mothers in particular needed to consider

time and energy to care for their children and the kind of arrangements they would be able to make

with family and hired (or enslaved) help with childcare and provide guidance for raising children into

adolescence.[140] Each of these choices were influenced by their own ideas of what marriage and

family should look like. Further factors that shaped decisions to bear and raise children include

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[136] Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride and Groom*, 34 and 46. Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*: iusti coniuges *from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1991), 8.

[137] Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture,* Berkeley: University of California Press (1987), 160. It was the right of the father to decide whether to raise children as his own.

[138] Saller and Garnsey argue that by the imperial period, Rome had become an individualistic society, which contributed to singleness and childlessness. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture,* Second Edition, London: Bloomsbury (2014), 165. Individualism is also associated with egalitarianism because people are less dependent upon one another, thus, decision-making has to be more evenly distributed.

[139] Hin, 105, acknowledges the different cultural elements at work, though she is thinking on a macro-scale, so her concern is with concepts like "'social,' 'religious,' or 'political.'" influences.

[140] Hawkins, 240, indicates that families regularly acquired apprenticeships and other work arrangements through acquaintances.

housing conditions,[141] opportunities for apprenticeships or other roles that could help support a

child to an independent career,[142] and emotional and personal well-being.[143] The many facets of their

lives, micro- and macro-social, shaped how they understood and approached the possibility of

motherhood. Although frequently portrayed as idyllic, or at least static and predictable, choices

about motherhood and approaches to it were complicated even within the confines of marriage.

Marriage, however, was far from the only context for motherhood. There were clearly

women who bore children without ever marrying.[144] Most of these circumstances involved slaves

who formed family units but were not legally permitted to marry. Nevertheless, there is some limited

evidence that such relationships occurred among free(d) people as well. For example, Maria Stacte, a

concubine, had a child named Maria Pieris, with her partner, Aquilius Rufus.[145] Maria Pieris was

identified as Aquilius' daughter, but she took her mother's name, indicating her illegitimate status.

Although a single example, it confirms that unmarried, free women who were in partnered though

non-marital relationships had children with their partners. Like Maria Stacte, some unmarried

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[141] Janet DeLaine, "*Insulae*," in *A Companion to the City of Rome*, 1st ed., edited by Claire Holleran and Amanda Claridge, Wiley & Sons (2018), 320, describes *insulae* that were probably part of workshops. In these circumstances, the living quarters were small, which may have affected a family's (or woman's) ability to raise children.

[142] *Ibid.*, 201.

[143] Peter N. Sterns and Carol Z. Stearns, 819, 822, 828 reveal just how much emotion affected family relations and motherhood.

[144] Beryl Rawson, in "Roman Concubinage and Other De Facto Marriages," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974): 296-297, finds that most inscriptions that include reference to illegitimate children and their parents suggest slave status of at least one parent at the time of the children's birth. There are some examples of families that are probably all freeborn, but she finds only a few. Of course, that does not mean that such relationships did not exist, it simply means that explicit commemorations of them were infrequent. Although for our purposes numbers do not matter much, she (201 n.44) and Susan Treggiari, in "*Concubinae*," *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 49 (1981): 68-69 both indicate that it is possible that couples who were unmarried actively avoided having children.

[145] CIL 9. 2346, *A]quillius L(uci) f(ilius) Ter(etina) / Rufus / [a]ed(ilis) IIvir praef(ectus) i(ure) d(icundo) sibi / et C(aio) Aquillio Floro f(ilio) et / Mariae Pieridi f(iliae) et / Mariae Stacte concub(inae) / arbitratu eius / testamento*. Treggiari "Concubinae," 69, 81.

women were in committed though informal relationships, while others were in relationships that were simply not recognized by the law, like enslaved women or soldiers' partners. Mistresses, prostitutes, and single women (sometimes widowed, sometimes not) from any number of other backgrounds became mothers without being in long-term relationships, although there is little formal evidence in the record.[146] Although there is evidence that unmarried women became mothers, it seems to be the case that many women actively avoided motherhood, even if they were sexually active.[147] The significant point is that women did not have to marry to become mothers (and, conversely, that marriage did not actually equate to motherhood).[148] Marriage was one of the contexts within which women bore children, but it was far from the only one.

Unmarried women would have taken different factors into account when considering motherhood. Most unmarried women were probably the partners of soldiers or slaves who, while living in committed relationships, could not legally marry.[149] At least some women cohabitated with

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[146] Some evidence comes from Roman comedy. There are eight instances of rape in the surviving plays. In all of them, young, unmarried women become pregnant outside of marriage. Of course, this is less-than-ideal evidence, but it demonstrates that there must have been some frequency of men taking advantage of unmarried women, sometimes resulting in pregnancy and motherhood. While the women in the comedies are all ultimately married, that cannot have been the reality for most women who found themselves in a similar situation. Tara Mulder, "Female Trouble in Terence's *Hecyra*: Rape-Pregnancy Plots and the Absence of Abortion in Roman Comedy" *Helios* 46, no. 1, (2019), 37. Beryl Rawson, in "*Spurii,* and the Roman View of Illegitimacy," *Antichthon* (1989), 39, acknowledges the presence of single mothers in Rome, though they are difficult to identify in the historical record.

[147] The sheer number of contraceptive and abortifacient herbal prescriptions and regular reference to women's unwillingness to bear children support this notion.

[148] Despite the etymology of the word *matrimonium*, which Susan Treggiari, in *Roman Marriage*, shows means "to make mothers," there were innumerable married women who never had children and, presumably, many who never intended to.

[149] Phang, Sara Elise, "The Families of Roman Soldiers (First and Second Centuries A.D.): Culture, Law, and Practice," *Journal of Family History* 27, no. 4 (2002), 365 finds that about half of all commemorated soldiers from the second century had wives or children. These numbers were much lower in the first century, but the ban on marriage seems to have been more strictly enforced. Beryl Rawson, "Roman Concubinages," 289, and Susan Treggiari, "*Concubinae,*" 64, both find that in inscriptions that explicitly describe women as *concubinae,* most of the women are freed. Although extra-legal, soldiers seem to have considered their relationships marriages, thus eschewing the use of the term *concubina* while freedwomen and their partners who might otherwise have been able to marry but chose not to use the term more frequently.

but did not marry their partners[150] and some bore children as the consequence of a short-term relationship. The latter of the two are especially difficult to find in the historical record, though the almost certainly existed. In both cases, children born of the unions were illegitimate and therefore took the *nomen* of their mothers. As Beryl Rawson has shown in her assessment of legal and epigraphical evidence, illegitimacy imposed some disadvantages on mothers and on children born of non-legal marriages.[151] Illegitimate children were under the *potestas* of their mother's father (if he were living) or, in the case of enslaved children, her enslaver. Mothers never exercised *potestas* over their children.[152] Thus, mothers took on more responsibility for illegitimate children, whom the fathers (if known) did not have to recognize as their own.

Mothers were legally the relatives through whom illegitimate children took their status. So, if a mother were a citizen, *peregrini* or a slave, the child would be, too. Mothers who kept their children probably raised them on their own, except in the following circumstances: the mother and child were enslaved, and the enslaver chose to separate them; the mother married and therefore joined a new household wherein the children had a stepfather to help support their needs; the mother was in a stable relationship with the child's father, i.e., soldiers' wives, couples living in *contubernium,* and enslaved family units. Among the few disabilities that illegitimate children suffered were that they were not automatic inheritors if their father's (provided they were known) died intestate. During the reign of Augustus, they lost the right of being entered into the official birth registers of Roman citizens and they were usually relegated to the "inferior urban" tribes rather than to the mother's

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[150] For example, Maria Stacte, n. 145.

[151] Rawson, *"Spurii,"* 10.

[152] Gardner, Women in Roman Law and Society, 137.

father's tribe.[153] Ultimately, then, illegitimacy might have been a factor a mother would take into consideration, but it was not regularly a serious social, legal, or economic impediment. For some, like freedwomen, citizen birth was more important than legitimacy. Thus, some people chose to identify themselves or their children as illegitimate with the formula *spuria (patris) filius* (abbreviated *Sp. f.* on monuments) to indicate their freeborn status.[154] Mothers who were Roman citizens and who bore illegitimate children could expect that their children were able to live and work just as their peers did.

For those who were single mothers, either because of a short-term relationship or loss of a partner, mothering while working would have become more complicated because they had only their own incomes to support themselves and their children and would most likely have had to make difficult choices about having children. Young children were probably an impediment while older children would likely have been put to work. Women in these circumstances probably had very few choices about how to raise their children. They therefore may have been more likely than those who were married or partnered to avoid pregnancy or dispose of children they could not or would not care for.[155]

Ulrike Roth, Susan Treggiari, Sandra Joshel, and Claire Holleran have argued that most women worked primarily in trades that were traditionally associated with the home or in the retail sector, which were probably more conducive to raising children than some other work was, thereby

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[153] Rawson, *"Spurii,"* 28.

[154] Judith Evans Grubbs, "Making the Private Public: Illegitimacy and Incest in Roman Law," in *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion* 65 (2015), 124.

[155] Comparative evidence from nineteenth century Europe suggests that single motherhood was relatively common, even in a society that was exceptionally critical of unmarried women with children, and that those mothers were likely to abandon their children to foundling homes. Some committed infanticide, but it seems that it was relatively uncommon and generally associated with a mother's poor mental and emotional state. Josef Ehmer, "The Significance of Looking Back: Fertility before the 'Fertility Decline'" *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 2 (2011): 27-8.

easing the burden of child rearing.[156] Hilary Becker's summary of women's occupations indicates

that women worked in a wide variety of industries. Nevertheless, she, too, concludes that most

women worked in domestic settings or retail.[157] Thus, those women who worked in more labor-

intensive jobs may have been fewer in number, but their occupations would no doubt have caused

them to think carefully about whether to have and raise children.

Women would have had some challenges, for example, their work would be interrupted

more frequently, however, they might generally have been able to continue generating an income

even with young children around.[158] The archeological evidence at Pompeii suggests that business

establishments were often connected to small upper-level homes, indicating that many shopkeepers

lived and worked in the same unit, simply shifting from the main level shop during the day to the

upper levels after the shop closed.[159] This, too, might have simplified single, working motherhood

since everything could be contained in a single unit. In addition to preparation for motherhood,

women also prepared for (and established) careers, skills, and interests, sometimes establishing lives

that were incompatible with motherhood.

Although some did avoid motherhood, many had, or tried to have, children and had to

balance their roles as mothers with the other areas of their lives. So, as much of the scholarship on

motherhood has shown, young women from the upper classes were very likely prepared for

domestic roles, including motherhood (even if they chose not to adopt those roles), while women in

the artisan classes who were prepared for trades or accounting might have had to learn to balance

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[156] Roth, *Thinking Tools*; Susan Treggiari, "Jobs for Women;" Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*; Claire Holleran, "Women and Retail," 313-330.

[157] Becker, 915.

[158] Roth, Thinking Tools, 17.

[159] Suzanne Dixon, "Exemplary Housewife," 58.

household work and careers with child rearing.[160] For those in the lower classes who were unskilled, they would have had little opportunity but to work for meagre wages in jobs that were probably temporary or menial, beg, or resort to prostitution.

For elite women, socialization to motherhood seems to have occurred regularly. They were expected to marry and have children to establish lines of succession and ensure clean transference of inheritance to the next generation. Nevertheless, not all women conformed. Augustus' marriage legislation, while targeting single men, also suggests that there were single women who did not marry. Furthermore, there is evidence that marriages in the upper classes, sometimes despite couples' best efforts, did not produce children.[161] On the other hand, children must also have been actively avoided in some marriages.[162] Upper-class women lives were shaped in part by social and economic pressure to have legitimate children for inheritance purposes and political disincentives to remain childless for the same reasons.[163] Some women conformed to the ideal and others did not. Nevertheless, their *lifeworlds* were significantly different from those in the lower classes.

Among the artisan classes, women who anticipated motherhood would have needed to prepare themselves for the possibility that, if they had children, they would have their children with them while working and teach them to work, too, or arrange for childcare. Middling Romans

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[160] Cameron Hawkins, *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy*, 258. Hawkins argues that women were not likely to be artisans themselves but rather supported their husbands or took on limited low-skill labor to make ends meet as needed.

[161] Pliny the Younger's wife, Calpurnia, lost their only child through miscarriage, *Ep.* 8.10.

[162] Pliny asserted that his lifetime was "an age when the advantages of childlessness make many people feel that one child is too much" *Ep.* 4.15. Translation by Keith Hopkins in *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History*, part 2, CUP (1983), 96.

[163] Pliny says as much in *Pan.* 26.5 *Locupletes ad tollendos liberos ingentia praemia et pares poenae cohortantur, pauperibus educandi una ratio est bonus princeps.* "The rich are encouraged to rear children by high rewards and comparable penalties: the poor have only one inducement—a good prince." Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, translated by Betty Radice, LCL, HUP (1969), 380-381.

seemed to have lived reasonably comfortable lives, but they had to work to maintain them. Some scholars are not convinced that women in these classes worked very much, but Claire Holleran and Suzanne Dixon have shown that women were active in the retail sectors of the economy.[164] Moreover, they were active in the service sector and in manufacture.[165] Thus, working women would have had to weigh their ability to maintain professional obligations while meeting the obligations of parenthood, including pregnancy and childbirth, which would both require at least some shifts in workload and time away from work. Since Rome had no social support system for working mothers, they would have been obligated to negotiate these challenges on their own. Complicated circumstances meant that women and their partners sometimes had to decide which children keep, which to abort, and which to expose in order to meet their (and their families) needs at a particular moment in their lives.[166] Their *lifeworlds*, then, meant they would have had to make some difficult choices about having children and maintaining professional obligations.

The very poor would have to contend with the distinct possibility that their children would find themselves similarly desperate. Women who could barely support themselves would have had a difficult time supporting children. Their need to concern themselves primarily with survival must have shaped their approaches to motherhood. If effective contraceptives cost anything for sexually active poor women, then they may have been more likely than others to expose children they could

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[164] Holleran, "Women in Retail," and Dixon, "Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut?"

[165] Treggiari, "Jobs for Women" and Dixon, "Exemplary Housewife or Luxurious Slut?" There is also evidence (addressed by Dixon) that wealthy women owned some of these enterprises as well. Since this study is on lower-class women, however, references to women working in the retail, service, or manufacturing sectors usually focus on those women who were employed (or were obligated freed or enslaved women) by those who owned the businesses.

[166] Kapparis, 121.

not raise.[167] Because they were almost certainly under nourished, however, they may have also been less fertile that women who had more nutritious diets.[168]

Freedwomen occupied a distinctive middle-zone in Roman society. Their approaches to potential motherhood were colored by their former enslavement and obligations to their patrons after manumission. Freedwomen who did not have children before their manumission had a different set of structural concerns to address when preparing for motherhood. Although somewhat tangential to this section, it is worth noting that freedwomen could (and often did) have children while they were still enslaved. Legally, enslaved children were only tied to their mothers insofar as it confirmed the enslaver's ownership and remained enslaved unless the enslaver chose to free them separately.[169] Women who did not have children until after they were freed, however, raised full Roman citizens. Their children were under the *potestas* of their fathers (provided he was free and recognized the child) or were fully the responsibility of the mother, just as other illegitimate children were. Maybe most significantly, many freed people were subject to specified obligations, *operae,* to their former enslavers, thereby limiting their options.[170] For those women, their *operae* consisted primarily of continued work in the sector they were in before they were freed. They were expected to allocate a certain amount of their time per year to their patron's benefit, forfeiting whatever wages were earned during that period to him/her.[171] These obligations may have complicated their ability to have and raise children, depending on the nature of it. Sometimes freedwomen were manumitted

[167] Ehmer, 28.

[168] Keith Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8, no. 1 (1965), 139 n. 40.

[169] *Dig.* 1.5.15; 34.10(11)1.

[170] Marc Kleijwegt, "Freed Slaves, Self-Presentation, and Corporate Identity in the Roman World," in *The Faces of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old and New World Slavery*, Brill (2006), 90.

[171] Matthew Perry, 78-79.

with the express purpose of becoming wives of their former enslavers. Women probably

experienced this circumstance differently based on how amicable their relationships with their

former enslavers were. Consequently, their desire and ability to have children was likely colored by

the interests of their former enslavers, who may have chosen to marry their former slaves to retain

more control over them and his own property.[172]

Enslaved women would have had the further burden of knowing that any children they had

would be born into slavery. Whether a particular woman lived in comfortable circumstances, even

relative independence, or was assigned to some laborious, thankless role in the *familia*, her children

were ultimately the property of her enslaver, to do with as s/he wished. The mother might have

been permitted (or compelled)[173] to raise the child or the child might have been separated from her

for any number of reasons. Thus, for enslaved women, economic security must have been one

concern for expectant mothers, but it was probably overshadowed by her enslaved status. In short, a

woman's marital, citizen, and economic statuses, together with her personal *lifeworld* shaped how she

approached the possibility of motherhood and the long-term consequences of having children.

### Becoming a Mother for the First Time

Becoming a mother for the first time would have constituted a major transition in the life of

a young woman. Motherhood is an entirely new phase of life, with different responsibilities,

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

[173] There is a debate between Keith Bradley and Ulrike Roth. Bradley, based on a sample of inscriptions and Egyptian papyri, argues that enslaved children were most likely taken from them mothers to a wet-nurse, while Roth, citing her reading of Columella's reference to his reward to women who *reared* (her emphasis) three or more children and the apparently pervasive textile production enterprise at rural estates, thinks that most women were compelled to raise their children themselves. Bradley, "Slave Supply and Slave Breeding," 70 and Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery, Between Evidence and Models,* London: Institute of Classical Studies (2007), 10-13, 23. Roth cites Bradley, "Wet-nursing in Rome," *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, edited by Beryl Rawson, NY: Cornell University Press (1986), 202-213 in her refutation of his argument.

concerns, and desires all shaped by a woman's new status as mother. The newly pregnant woman would have developed new concerns related to her potential motherhood. I do not mean to say that women suddenly felt maternal and were anxious to meet their little child (although some undoubtably were), rather, I mean to say that as soon as a woman realized she was pregnant, she must have begun to come to terms with what that pregnancy meant for her, whatever the outcome. Depending on a woman's life circumstances, she may have chosen to raise the child, expose it, commit infanticide, or abort it. (Natural intervention might have shaped her expectations, too as spontaneous miscarriage occurs in about 30% of all pregnancies.)[174] There are many reasons why women might take any of these paths, but ultimately, they had to choose one. So, for women who were pregnant for the first time, this decision and the many considerations that followed were significant. This section will focus on those women who chose to bear their children and planned to raise them.

The age at which women first became mothers is debatable. Some scholars, like Keith Hopkins and Arnold Lelis, argue for a relatively early average age at first marriage for women (and therefore motherhood), in their mid-teens. Others, like Brent Shaw and Richard Saller, argue for later marriages in their late teens and early twenties.[175] However, all four were primarily concerned with the age of upper-class girls at first marriage, making it difficult to apply their work to lower-

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[174] R. Linnakaari, et al., "Trends in the Incidence, Rate, and Treatment of Miscarriage—Nationwide Register-Study in Finland, 1998-2016," *Human Reproduction* 34, no.11, (2019): 2121.

[175] Keith Hopkins, "Age of Roman Girls at First Marriage," *Population Studies* 18, no. 3 (1965): 326; Arnold Lelis, *The Age of Marriage in Ancient Rome*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, (2003), 100; Brent Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 39; Richard Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death*, 33. All rely on data extracted from funerary inscriptions. However, Saller and Shaw's methods for collecting evaluating the data differ from Hopkins and Lelis, resulting in contrasting conclusions.

class women. Though Hopkins addresses lower-class women by suggesting that they might have

married at later ages, he indicates that he has no means for supporting that claim.[176]

Giving birth in one's teens is notoriously dangerous as young women tend not to be

physically capable of supporting a pregnancy and giving birth as well as women who are somewhat

older (typically in one's twenties).[177] Funerary inscriptions seem to suggest the anxiety early

pregnancy caused as women who died in childbirth are sometimes remembered according to the

pain they suffered while attempting to give birth.[178] For example, the husband of a woman named

Candida describes her as "a woman who was tormented in her attempt to give birth for four days"

(CIL 3.2267). Another is a first-person narrative inscription dedicated to Rusticeia, which asserts that

she died because of "childbirth and spiteful fate" (CIL 8.20288). Comparative evidence from

twentieth century interviews of lower-class British women who chose to abort their children indicate

that fear of death and a lack of resources led many women to their choices. They asserted that "they

would be happy… to bear children…if only there was more money, or they hadn't been warned

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[176] Hopkins, "Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," 326.

[177] Soranus, 1.8.33, however, recommended that women become sexually active around the age of 14. He believed waiting too long could cause problems during childbirth.

[178] CIL 3.2267 D(is) M(anibus). | Candidae coniugi bene me|renti ann(orum) p(lus) m(inus) XXX qu(a)e me|cum vixit ann(os) p(lus) m(inus) VII | qu(a)e est cruciata ut pari|ret diebus IIII et non pe|perit et est ita vita fu|ncta. Iustus conser(vus) p(osuit).

CIL 8.20288
D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum).
Rusticeia
Matrona
v(ixit) a(nnos) XXV.
causa meae mortis partus fatu[mque malignum].
set tu desine flere mihi kariss[ime coniux]
[et] fil(ii) nostri serva com[munis amorem].
[- – – ad caeli] transivit spi[ritus astra]
[- – -] maritae [- – -].

they'd die carrying another child to term…"[179] While it is difficult to know for sure, many young Roman women, too, must have been somewhat fearful of pregnancy, especially if they knew what to expect or had witnessed other women who suffered difficulties associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

In her history of the poor in nineteenth and early twentieth-century London, Ellen Ross reveals the challenges young mothers, especially single, first-time mothers, faced as women became aware of their pregnancies.[180] Although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were quite different from Rome ideologically, the kinds of challenges and suffering poor mothers faced were likely comparable to those Roman women experience, with, of course, the notable difference of changes in approaches to medicine and childbirth. Ross found that many mothers dreaded the discovery of pregnancy. Not realizing they were pregnant until quickening, women sometimes fainted or experienced deep despondency at the knowledge that they were going to have a child. Mothers who were expecting a child for the first time often did not know much about pregnancy, birthing, or raising children and were therefore completely overwhelmed by the sudden onset of new responsibilities and anxieties about what each major stage in motherhood might bring.[181] She found that although upper-class girls often knew what to expect, lower-class girls were mostly ignorant of the realities of sex, pregnancy, and birth. Mothers who were otherwise attentive did not discuss these topics with their children.[182] It is completely unknown whether young women in the poorer classes of Roman society were aware of what to expect as they prepared for motherhood, but the case of

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[179] Nadine Attewell, Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire, Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2014), 147.

[180] Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Outcast Mothers in London, 1870-1918, OUP (1993), 106-108.

[181] *Ibid.*, 104.

[182] *Ibid.,* 99-100.

the young singing girl in the Hippocratic corpus and the realities of life in "outcast London"

suggests that poorer Roman girls may have been underprepared for the transition into motherhood.

### Pregnancy

As previously mentioned, pregnancy was sometimes hard to detect in the ancient world. Many

of the symptoms that modern women associate directly with pregnancy today—cessation of

menstruation, changes in digestion, morning sickness, and fatigue, for example—were not easy to

associate with pregnancy in a world where nutrition was inconsistent. Poor nutrition can affect

women's menstrual cycles, interrupting it, which might lead women to believe they are pregnant

when they are not. To resume a regular cycle, women took herbal remedies, of which some were

also used as abortifacients.[183] Thus, some women, who believed they were experiencing irregular

menstruation might have been pregnant and aborted a child unknowingly. Women who were

particularly stressed or suffering from malnutrition, might have not been able to conceive at all.[184]

The inability to easily detect pregnancy may have contributed to low birthrates, high anxiety about

pregnancy, a relatively high rate of abortion, and instances of infanticide and exposure.

Although difficult to identify for many women, Soranus indicated that there were signs

women could look for, though he acknowledges that "some people have said that <conception>

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[183] Amenorrhea was apparently a common malady among Roman women. Keith Hopkins, "Contraception in the Roman Empire," in *Sociological Studies in Roman History*, CUP (2018), 74 [Originally published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1965) 124– 51].

[184] Saskia Hin, 111. Furthermore, living conditions were difficult in Rome, where malaria, parasites, and several human and nature-induced dangers were common. Gregory S. Aldrete, "Hazards of Life in Ancient Rome: Floods, Fires, Famines, Footpads, Filth, and Fevers" in *A Companion to the City of Rome,* 1 ed., edited by Claire Holleran and Amanda Claridge, Wiley (2018), 365-381; Brent Shaw "The Seasonal Birthing Cycle of Roman Women," in *Debating Roman Demography,* edited by Walter Scheidel, Leiden: Brill (2001), 86; Robert Salleres, *Malaria and Rome: A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy.* CUP (2002); Vivian Nutton "Medical Thoughts on Urban Pollution," in *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, edited by Valerie Hope and Eireann Marshall, Florence: Taylor and Francis (2000), 65-67; Walter Scheidel, "Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II: The Slave Population," in *JRS*, vol. 95 (2005); Joan Stivala, "Malaria and Miscarriage in Ancient Rome," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (2015); Julianna Schantz-Dunn and Nawal M. Nour, "MPH Malaria and Pregnancy: A Global Health Perspective" in *Expert Review of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2, no. 3 (2009): 189-190.

cannot be realized," thereby acknowledging the difficulty in identifying a new pregnancy.[185] The

following are the signs of conception Soranus identifies: a shiver after intercourse, softening of the

"orifice of the uterus," vaginal dryness, cessation of menstruation, "heaviness in the loins," swelling

breasts, upset stomach, changes in the appearance of the skin, and abdominal swelling (later).[186]

Notably, the initial symptoms are quite subjective and would be difficult to detect. Later symptoms

are much more obvious and closer to the ones modern women use to identify pregnancy, though

they do not usually begin until several weeks after conception, contributing to the likelihood of

"surprise" pregnancies. Women were most likely to identify pregnancy after quickening occurred.

According to Pliny, people believed that a series of symptoms began around the tenth day after

conception and quickening around the fortieth day for male children and the ninetieth day for

females.[187] Identifying the date of conception must have involved some guesswork and it seems

likely that identification came from counting backward to a sexual encounter once a woman

experienced symptoms. However, their dating system was off, thus, women who did not discover a

pregnancy until quickening were much further advanced in the gestational period that she likely

believed. Thus, new mothers might have had a difficult time determining whether she was pregnant

or suffering from some malady.[188]

      Once a woman discovered her pregnancy, she had to determine how to respond. For those

who chose to carry and bear the child, their lives necessarily shifted to accommodate their

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[185] Soranus, 1.12.44, all translations of Soranus are taken from Owsei Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1956).

[186] *Ibid.*, 1.12.44

[187] Pliny *NH* 7.6.41

[188] Although Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen,* OUP (2001), 163 suggests that women were likely to be aware of pregnancy and that women who took herbs to restore menstruation (ostensibly because of irregularity) were likely using them knowingly to cause miscarriage.

pregnancies. Soranus recommended that women avoid all vigorous exercise and strong emotion as he believed that both could cause one to lose a recently conceived child. He advised that they should remain in bed for a couple of days as well, working to increase their appetite so that they might eat enough to sustain both themselves and their babies. As the pregnancy progressed, he proscribed light exercise, baths, and avoidance of sexual intercourse.[189] Each of these precautions, he asserted, prevented miscarriage and helped to ensure healthy babies. Pregnancy can often be difficult for women in all historical moments. Rome was no exception. Galan, for example, describes a series of maladies he believed were caused by pregnancy, inevitably weakening the woman.[190] So, while Soranus' suggestions were probably beneficial, many women who did not have significant leisure would have been unable to follow them. In fact, most women in this study would have had a difficult time accomplishing even one of his recommendations. Those who ran businesses, sold merchandise in the markets, were compelled to work for enslavers or patrons, maintained households (their own or another's), or were otherwise denied the luxury of easy walks and daily baths, were almost certainly too busy to follow guidance of the kind Soranus gave because they were obligated to continue with their work to the greatest extent possible.[191]

Soranus has little sympathy for women who did not follow his instructions and made no provisions for women to seek a middle-of-the-road path to a healthy pregnancy. In the section immediately following his advice for pregnant women, he wrote,

> "Even if a woman transgresses some or all of the rules mentioned and yet miscarriage of the fetus does not take place, let no one therefore assume that the fetus has not been injured at all. For it has been harmed: It is weakened, becomes retarded in growth, less well nourish,

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[189] Soranus, 1.14.46.

[190] Flemming, 340-341.

[191] Comparative evidence reinforces the argument. Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childbearing, and Slavery in Jamaica,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2017), 71-72.

and, in general, more easily injured and susceptible to harmful agents; it becomes misshapen and of an ignoble soul."[192]

His condemnation of any kind of movement beyond what he has described seems a kind of safeguard for his approach to pregnancy. If a child suffers any weakness at all, it can be blamed on an unwillingness to take the measures necessary to protect a pregnancy. Among the items he did not address (or maybe did not know) is the rate of spontaneous miscarriages. Neither does he acknowledge the potential presence of congenital defects, weakness caused by illness of either the mother or child, nor parasites. Each of these, of course, could explain many of the problems he associated with women's behavior. Thus, he placed the responsibility for healthy pregnancy and infancy fully on the mothers' shoulders. Although many women were probably not at all familiar with Soranus, midwives may have been trained according to his or a similar method and therefore passed along similar admonishments to young women.

His inability to identify a middle ground for working women suggests that his manual was meant to primarily serve upper-class women. It also suggests that lower-class women probably had no guide like Soranus to turn to, rather, they had the experiences of the women around them and whatever advice they were able to gather along the way.[193] Furthermore, their work was often non-negotiable. Their work was necessary for their own livelihoods and for the economic stability of the retail sector in Rome. Most women, especially in the lower classes, were almost certainly unable to rest for the duration of their pregnancies and would have had to make some adjustments to their work lives to accommodate their changing bodies.

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[192] Soranus, 1.14.47

[193] Comparative evidence, once again, is illuminating. Ellen Ross, 99-100, Loretta Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion: 1800-1970," *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, edited by Stanlie James and Abena Busia, Routledge (1993), 144.

Many women worked in food stalls and in other retail settings.[194] They were likely to be involved in the businesses, sometimes running shops, sometimes working in essential employee capacities whether in food preparation, merchandising, bringing in customers by talking to people on the streets, keeping accounts, or in some other role.[195] Many of the occupations women undertook required being on their feet for long hours. In any case, they were regularly busy maintaining their livelihood. Consequently, even though most women probably could not have done as Soranus recommended, pregnant women would have often needed—or at least would have benefited from—some shifts in their work routines. Women who worked in food stalls, for example, and who experienced morning sickness might very well have needed to change roles, staying away from the food (and the customers) as much as possible. For those whose work required heavy lifting, they might have had to shift that responsibility to another person while pregnant. Changes in work circumstances may have been difficult for some women to maintain, like those who had little help, were working in short-term positions, or were enslaved.[196] The opportunity to make necessary changes depended fully on a woman's personal circumstances as there were no formal supports for pregnant working women. For these women, pregnancy, which can already be difficult, was complicated by their life circumstances.

Despite the changes women were almost certainly making to their daily lives and the challenges that came with them, many decided to have and raise at least some of their children.

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[194] Holleran, "Women and Retail," 314, 316.

[195] See notes 84 and 159. Though, as the paragraph connected to n. 159 indicates, these scholars, especially Roth and Holleran, also assert that retail was conducive to child rearing. While this is probably true as compared to some other potential roles, it was nevertheless a major transition for women that almost certainly required at least some temporary reworking of their responsibilities and lifeworlds.

[196] Roth, 17 and 23, suggests that rural slave women, whom she believes were mostly engaged in textile production, would have been in relatively comfortable circumstances for pregnancy and child rearing because their work was repetitive and easily interrupted. Moreover, they could watch over their children themselves while they worked.

Their *lifeworlds*, not just their jobs, would have shifted. New priorities, or at least a reevaluation of them, would have emerged as women learned to navigate the anticipation of motherhood in the context of their occupation, status, relative wealth, and familial circumstances. For example, if care and nursing for their child needed outsourcing, women would have to reallocate resources to contracting that care.[197] Wet-nursing contracts would have needed to provide enough to the wet-nurse to justify her dedicated labor and time, as well as the regulations on her lifestyle that often came with the work. Thus, women who chose to use wet-nurses were probably reasonably comfortable financially but may have had to make some difficult choice to accommodate the new expense.

A woman might also have to consider who in her family could provide support during birth and then later, as the child grew. Mothers and mothers-in-law were often involved in childrearing. For example, Quintilian indicates that grandmothers were often expected to support their daughters in childrearing.[198] We learn from Favorinus, too, just how much grandmothers were involved from his conversation with the mother of a woman who'd just given birth, presumably to her first child.[199] In the passage, Favorinus appeals to the new mother's mother, asking that she encourage her daughter to breastfeed the baby herself. She refused as she and her daughter had already agreed to use a wet nurse. The choice the new grandmother and mother made, however, is less important than the direct intervention of the parturient woman's mother in the decision-making process. Considering that plans for nursing was the main subject, the young woman was probably a first-time mother, otherwise we could expect that Favorinus would not have been so likely to try to influence her choice. That he approached the mother rather that the parturient woman, expecting her to know

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[197] Bradley, "Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt." *Klio* 62, no. 62 (1980), 323.

[198] Quintilian *Institutes* Or. 6.8.

[199] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 12.1.4–7.

the young woman's plans and to influence her if the plans did not align with his philosophical beliefs about breastfeeding, suggests that she was expected to take on a decision-making role for her daughter. In short, her relationships with close relatives might have to shift and they might take on new responsibilities as mother-helpers. Of course, both situations are concerned with wealthy women and assume that the grandmother of the newly born child is still living. Nevertheless, the norm of retaining social support from living relatives very likely extended to the lower classes, too. There is no doubt that situations existed in which mothers were more-or-less on their own raising children. In those cases, the *lifeworlds* might have changed even more dramatically. Unfortunately, direct evidence for these circumstances does not exist.

Complications in pregnancy were quite common as high maternal/infant mortality and the medical advice to women show. Even casual observers, like Pliny the Elder could easily deduce the dangers of pregnancy. Pliny wrote that women were most likely to experience complications in pregnancy in the fourth and eighth months. If they were to attempt abortion in that period (or if a miscarriage were to have occurred) they were most likely fatal to the mother. For infants, the most dangerous time to be born was in the seventh month as they were among the weakest babies in their first six weeks of life. [200] For babies born before then, they were very likely to have been stillborn.[201] Pliny records several instances of children born by cesarian section after the mother had died while attempting to give birth.[202] Although his gestational calendar was inaccurate, it reveals just how much people were conscious of the complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Thus, they

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[200] Pliny the Elder, *NH*, 7.5.40.

[201] *Ibid.*, 7.5.38.

[202] *Ibid.,* 7.9.47.

established ways to attempt to protect themselves and their children by carefully tracking a

pregnancy's progress.

Other evidence for the challenges of childbirth is found in Plautus' comedies. Plautus, in

*Truculentus*, act 1 wrote that Phronesium, a prostitute, pretended to have given birth to a boy. While

talking with her former lover, Diniarchus, (whom she hoped to deceive), Phronesium's slave girl,

Astaphium, said, "poor me, I shudder every time there's a mention of birth, that's how close your

Phronesium came to dying."[203] Although she was saying so as part of the plot to dupe Diniarchus,

Astaphium hints at a grim reality of high maternal mortality rates. It seems that Astaphium was quite

fearful of childbirth (or maybe she was just playing on her expectation that Diniarchus would find it

terrifying). Either way, the implication is that birth was so unpredictable that it was a near death

sentence for women.

Social intersections, modes of socialization, and *lifeworlds* had significant impact on the

choices young women had before them and the ways they responded to those choices. Their work,

home, social, and environmental circumstances all significantly shaped their approaches to

motherhood. In anticipation of pregnancy, women needed to take stock of their material

circumstances, physical health, and marital status as they considered the possibility of becoming

mothers. As women became mothers for the first time, the decisions they had to make were further

impacted by their networks, the circumstances of their pregnancies, and the potential complications

that came along with pregnancy and childbirth. As women became aware of their pregnancies, these

concerns must have multiplied. Women had to reorganize their lives to accommodate pregnancy and

a new child, though their *lifeworlds* were such that these kinds of changes were often difficult to make

and maintain. Thus, despite the best medical advice, women continued to work in less-than-ideal

situations. In the end, however, while some women were dissuaded from giving birth and raising

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[203] *Truculentus*, 195-198. Translated by Jeffery Henderson in *Plautus V* in LCL, HUP (2013), 289.

children because of their *lifeworlds*, many others chose to bear and raise at least some of their children. Although difficult, many, though not all, women believed that the sacrifices and challenges were worthwhile.

Chapter 3: Identity, Anticipation, and Preparation for Motherhood (or not) among Enslaved Women

Introduction

The life of a slave mother must have been markedly different from that of a free or freed woman regardless of class for the very fact that she was unfree. In this chapter, the focus is on private slaves, held by people of all classes (except the aristocracy). I do not consider imperial slaves as those are treated by several other scholars[204] and they are not a good fit for a project about lower-class mothers. Though imperial slaves were by definition marginal and inferior to free and freed people, they were much more likely to have lived in reasonably comfortable circumstances, were members of an exceptionally large group of relatively privileged enslaved people and sometimes lived more or less as if they were free.[205] Similarly, women who were sent to the mines are excluded from this study as their conditions were such that mothering would have not been possible because of the harsh labor.[206] The remaining group of enslaved women constituted a large proportion of all

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[204] See John Bodel "Slave Labor and Roman Society," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, CUP (2011), 311-336; Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome,* CUP (1994); Heinrich Chantraine, *Friegelassene und Sklaven im Dienst der römischen Kaiser, Studien zu ihrer Nomenklatur* Wiesbaden: Steiner (1967); Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology,* expanded and edited by Brent Shaw. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener (1998); Peter Hunt. *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery.* Wiley-Blackwell. (2017); Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*, CUP (2010); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study,* HUP (1982); Susan Treggiari, "Jobs in the Household of Livia," *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 43 (1975), pp. 48-77; Paul Weaver *Familia Caesaris,* CUP (1972).

[205] Keith Bradley *Slaves and Masters in Ancient Rome: A Study in Social Control*, NY: Johnson Reprint Corp., (1984), 63. Slaves could also be freed informally. Those people lived in freedom in practice but not by law and were therefore not Roman citizens, as those who were freed formally were. The provision was formalized during the Principate by the *Lex Junia Norbana*, which made those informally freed Latins. They were assigned to a *gens* but they still did not gain citizen status. The provision remained in place until Justinian repealed it in 531, *Cod.* 7.6.1. Any slave could be freed under these provisions. I highlight them here because many imperial freed slaves were Junian Latins. Even among those who remained enslaved, though, there were several who lived and worked almost totally independent of direct imperial oversight.

[206] Bradley, in *Slaves and Masters,* has asserted that there was "no female presence in the labour force" at the mines, because the work was too dangerous and physically demanding (77). However, a precept of the emperor Constantine states that "if a decurion secretly, without the knowledge of the managers and the

women enslaved in the Roman period. Consequently, studying these women and their preparation for and response to motherhood provides meaningful access to the ways mothering while enslaved shaped Roman society.

Although the focus of this dissertation and chapter is Roman Italy from 100 BCE to 150 CE, the limited nature of the evidence will require that I extend my boundaries beyond both of those. For example, I will be using evidence from Egypt and Carthage, some of which extends into the third century CE. I will also be using legal evidence that extends to the sixth century CE and Justinian. While not ideal, these will allow me to consider questions that are not possible if I keep my evidence strictly within the geographical and chronological limits I have established for the study.

Motherhood must have been particularly distinct among private slaves in Rome. Egyptian papyri suggests that the frequency of sale was potentially quite high and that many women could expect to be placed on the auction block during their childbearing years.[207] Keith Bradley estimates that, based on 29 Egyptian papyri, the average age at time of sale was 22.5 years and that about 60% of all sales of enslaved women occurred between the ages of 17 and 27.[208] The age of women at sale suggests a premium on young women who had reached puberty and therefore could have been reasonably expected to bear children. The fact that the remaining 40% of enslaved women were under the age of 14 or over the age of 25 indicates that fertility was certainly not the

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procurators, begins a relationship with someone else's slave, We ordain both that the woman shall be cast into the mines as a consequence of a sentence…" (*Cod.* 4.3.1). Translation taken from *The Codex of Justinian: A New Annotated Translation with Parallel Latin and Greek Text,* volume edited by Bruce W. Frier, book 5 edited by Thomas A. J. McGinn, CUP (2016), 1129. I acknowledge the lateness of the provision, but it remains relevant to this study as it demonstrates that women were, at least by the fourth century, sometimes present in the mines. Clearly their presence there was a virtual death sentence, but they nevertheless were sent.

[207] Keith Bradley, "Age at Time of Sale of Female Slaves," in *Arethusa* vol. 11 no. ½ (1978), 246.

[208] *Ibid.*, 245.

only factor slave-owners considered when purchasing slaves. Nonetheless, the large proportion of women sold in childbearing years suggests that it was a significant consideration.

Furthermore, the sale of young women reveals that slave mothers had little ability to intercede on behalf of their daughters to prevent their sale. Through a consideration of the ages at sale and the frequency at which children were sold as individuals, Christian Laes interprets the same body of evidence to demonstrate just how common it must have been to sell children as individuals rather than as part of a family.[209] In the Delphic manumission records, too, some 80 percent of manumitted children were freed separately from their mothers.[210] The papyrological and Delphic records that have survived indicate only some of the ways enslavers dealt with mothers and children, but evidence from other provinces, funerary monuments, legal evidence, and skeletal remains seems to affirm the supposition.[211] Even if the records are not representative, they demonstrate that at least some women experienced being sold during childbearing years, were separated from children and had little influence in preventing the sale of loved ones. Ultimately, the number of women in such circumstances is unimportant for this study. What matters is that it fits into the range of experience and possibility for

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[209] Christian Laes, "Child Slaves at Work in Roman Antiquity" in *Ancient* Society, Vol. 38 (2008), 243, citing P. Oxy. II 263;375; 1209 P. Mich. V 278; P. Vindob. Boswinkel 7; SB V 7573; PSI XII 1254; BGU I 316. See also tables I and II from Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 54, 57.

[210] Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 208.

[211] See Peter Hunt *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery*, John Wiley & Sons (2018), 114 for a more positive interpretation of the Delphic records. Citing Hopkins and Roscoe's identification of 29 instances of mothers and children being sold together, he concludes that, "slaveholders acknowledge only the maternal bond." It is notable, however, that of the 133 records, the vast majority indicate that children and mothers were *not* sold together. Thus, the "maternal bond" may have been sometimes recognized at time of sale, but it was clearly less common, at least in Delphi, than separating mother and child.

enslaved women, suggesting that being sold was a central concern for all enslaved women.[212] During

the phase of their lives when they were most likely to become mothers and form romantic

relationships, women were clearly subject to the prospect of separation from children, partners, and

familiar circumstances without warning.

Other contextual conditions, like the wealth and status of the enslaver, working

conditions, geographical location, family organization, enslaver personality, and much more

would have impacted approaches to mothering. Difference in circumstances would have

shaped relative material comfort, stability in relationships and lifestyle, emotional support

systems and more for enslaved women. Despite the differences, all enslaved women

remained legally equal in the sense that they had little to no control over their personal

circumstances as enslaved persons.

Ultimately, enslavers had the legal right to separate mother and child whenever and however

they deemed,[213] whether by sale, child exposure, transfer to different properties, nurses, job training,

or changes in responsibilities. There are several examples of separation in Egyptian papyri and

suggestions of it in funerary monuments. Beryl Rawson identified several such families in her study,

"Family Life Among the Lower Classes in the First Two Centuries of the Roman Empire." In an

analysis of funerary monuments in Rome, she identifies four families in which the mother, father,

and child were all enslaved at the time of the child's birth but freed by different enslavers by the time

of the child's death.[214] Through her analysis of the monuments and consideration of the fact that all

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[212] Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1992), 45.

[213] *Dig.* 1.5.15; 34.10(11)1. See also Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 209 for an explanation of both entries.

[214] Beryl Rawson, "Family Life Among the Lower Classes in the First Two Centuries of the Roman Empire," in *Classical Philology* vol. 61 no. 2 (1966), 78-79. The inscriptions identified are CIL 6.11924, 26755, 23151, and 18886.

were freed by different enslavers, she concludes that the families were separated by sale sometime before their deaths. Importantly, these reveal just how early children were sometimes separated from their mothers.[215]

One particularly striking example of manumission at a very young age is recorded on the funerary monument of a freed toddler named Daphne. She died at the age of one, but the monument indicates she has a different *nomen* than either her father or mother when she was freed.[216] Why the child was sold and then freed is unknown. There is generally a presumption that the slave market existed only for economic reasons. However, there are several potential reasons for sale, some of which may not have been economically motived.[217] It is possible that she was freed in anticipation of her death. It may also be that there was a contractual agreement among the various enslavers to free the family members at a given time.[218] If the latter were the case, then the purchase of the child would seem to be for a non-economic reason. There are other possibilities, too. For example, an enslaver may have died, so the child was transferred to the ownership of another household, either inherited by descendants

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[215] Various elements of the *Digest* and *Codex* indicate that sale or manumission of children at very young ages did occur. In one instance, *Cod.* 7.4.14, the jurists indicate that a child in utero could be manumitted while the mother remained enslaved.

[216] CIL 6.26755. *D(is) M(anibus) / T(itus) Statilius Cal/listus et Dasu/mia Harmation / Fabiae Daphne / filiae dulcissi/mae fec(it) vix(it) / ann(um) I d(ies) XXXXVI*

[217] Children, though cheaper to buy, were more expensive and less productive to own, since they could not have worked at the same level of intensity as adults and required supervision, education, and generally greater care than adult slaves, Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 58. Though the intensity of their work must have been less than that of adults, there is sufficient bioarcheological evidence to suggest that some did work hard enough to suffer injuries related to heavy labor. Laes, "Child Slaves," 235-7.

[218] *CJ* 4.57.3 relates the case of a young girl sold at the age of 7 under the condition that she be freed at the age of 25. When she bore a child at the age of 25 the new enslaver did not manumit her accordingly and both she and the child were judged free by the court because of the sale contract even though she remained in bondage for two more years.

or spouses via the deceased enslaver's will or sold at the time of the enslaver's death.[219] The child may also have been sold in an arrangement to benefit the seller (friendly relations perhaps?) rather than the buyer. Additionally, it is possible that another enslaver could provide childcare or other support that the original enslaver could not. Finally, the buyer may have hoped the child would grow up to become a contributing member of the *familia*. These, however, are only possibilities. Ultimately, in Daphne's case, a mother lost her child both to another enslaver and to death. The fact that the parents established a monument to their one-year-old daughter and described her as *filiae dulcissimae* in their commemoration suggests that her mother and father had real parental affection for her despite the painful circumstances.

Although Daphne's parents were enslaved, they were clearly able to remain in contact and had a personal relationship with one another. Not all enslaved women were able to maintain relationships with their children, however, as there were undoubtably situations in which the children were sold to enslavers who took them far from their parents or vice versa. No matter how socially free an enslaved woman was to identify herself as a mother, the legal recognition of maternity for a slave woman extended only so far as to determine the rightful owner of the newly born slave-child as the infant was always the property of the mother's enslaver.[220] Thus, any relationship a mother might have had with her children was subject to the interests and consent of her enslaver.

Though the biological aspect of motherhood—that is, giving birth to a child—remains the same regardless of social status, the social construction of motherhood was vastly different for slave women, as opposed to free and freed women, because the mother had no legal right to make decisions about her family's living situation, even the separation between herself and her child,

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[219] Many transfers of properties and manumissions appear to have occurred in a testamentary context.

[220] *Dig.* 1.5.5.1 and *Cod.* 3.32.7.

including the level of proximity to her child. That was the right of her enslaver alone. However, the family and enslaved – enslaver dynamic is difficult to specify because, despite the legal right of an enslaver to use and dispose of her slaves as she liked, each enslaver could also develop complicated relationships with her slaves. In short, the range of possible maternal challenges and circumstances for enslaved women was distinct from those of free and freed women because any decisions regarding their own or their children's life circumstances were subject to the whims of their enslavers.

Thus, enslaved women approached motherhood differently from free and freed women, but the approaches within the enslaved population were not all the same. Some women might have been incentivized to bear children. For example, Columella suggests that it was irregular for women to bear three or more children by describing such women as *fecundioribus,* (more fertile).[221] Nevertheless, he seems to have encouraged it by offering manumission for such women. Yet others, given the possibility of sale or other disadvantage to themselves or their children caused by enslavement, may have resisted bearing children, even when benefits were offered. Just before his comment about fertility, Columella writes, *"… praemio prosequimur eos, que strenue atque industrie se gerunt"* "I honor with a reward those who perform vigorously and diligently." This comment suggests that, to him at least, bearing many children was a mark of compliance for female slaves. It is therefore likely that some women did not bear children and almost certain that most did not bear so many (*fecundioribus* is a comparative adjective suggesting that women who bore three or more children were

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[221] Columella, in *Res Rus.* 1.8.19 indicates that he often released women who had born three children from their work obligations and those who bore more were granted freedom.

particularly fertile) even if that were what the enslaver desired it.[222] Comparisons with American

slavery suggests that the knowledge that one's child would be enslaved themselves was a deterrent to

motherhood for some women.[223] Unlike the women enslaved by Columella, who were encouraged

by not compelled to bear children, there were enslaved women who were purchased as "breeder"

slaves by others and who may have been subject to enslavement regardless of the number of

children born.[224] In the end the intersection (and paradox) of biological, social, and legal

motherhood among enslaved Roman women was complicated and varied dramatically from one

enslaved woman to the next.

A central question explored throughout the study is whether and how women who did not

want to have children may have avoided it. Of course, enslavement compounded the question since

women were technically not at all free to make any decisions about their reproductive lives. As with

all things, enslavers determined whether a woman should bear a child or not. Comparative evidence

from the American South suggests that it may have been possible for women to subvert their

enslaver's desires, but such subversions were exceptionally risky. For example, Loretta Ross's

research suggests that planation owners' anxiety about enslaved women procuring abortions were

substantiated by evidence of traditional abortion methods African midwives shared with their fellow

enslaved women. One particularly telling anecdote revolves around a midwife's conversion to

Christianity and her spiritual conviction that the abortions she'd helped women procure before her

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[222] Further, women may have been able to abort pregnancies with the use of established abortifacients before anyone else knew they were pregnant. Since pregnancy was more difficult to detect than it is now, pregnancy was not usually confirmed until "quickening," that is, when the mother could feel the baby moving.

[223] See the paragraphs following for an extended discussion. Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2005), 103.

[224] *Dig.* 5.3.27, For more on the possibility that women were purchased as breeder slaves, see the section in this chapter "Mothering While Enslaved." Furthermore, Columella's comment seems to suggest that his practice of offering rewards to women who bore several children was an unusual practice. The concept of systematic breeding is questionable in the Roman period. Though enslavers clearly wanted female slaves to bear children, systematic breeding may not have been the standard approach.

conversion were sinful.[225] Barbara Bush's research also suggests that abortions were regularly

procured according to traditional African methods among enslaved women. Citing physicians' and

plantation owners' complaints about women frustrating their efforts at reproducing the enslaved

population.[226] Since it was difficult to prove most abortions, however, enslaved women were not

usually punished for procuring them, it seems, however the methods were often dangerous, putting

the mother's life at risk.[227]

By contrast, in Rome, some manumission contracts stipulated that women bear a certain

number of children, reinforcing incentives for childbearing. The implication is that enslaved

women may have been reluctant to have children, but incentives like manumission must

have motivated some women to at least attempt to bear the requisite number of children.[228]

Finally, familial relationships among enslaved people may or may not have been particularly

common, but they certainly existed and, as they were generally modeled after free families,

having and raising children seems to have been important to enslaved Roman families.

Consequently, it is likely that the enslaved population of Rome was largely reproduced by the

slaves themselves because the women were more likely to bear children than prevent

pregnancy or abort.

There is a significant debate about whether the population was maintained by

imported (read trafficked) slaves or by home-born slaves. William Harris asserts that

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[225] Loretta Ross, "African-American Women and Abortion," 145.

[226] Barbara Bush, "Hard Labor: Women, Childbirth, and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies," in *More than Chattel,* edited by Darlene Clark Hine and David Barry Gaspar, Indiana University Press (1996), 205.

[227] *Ibid.,* 205, n. 58.

[228] It is also possible to interpret these manumission records inversely. Namely, women were so reluctant to bear children that enslavers used manumission clauses like these to keep women enslaved, knowing that they were not likely to fulfill the obligation.

trafficked slaves from conquered territories and exposed infants increased as slaves in another

person's home constituted the majority of the slave population.[229] In contrast, Scheidel argues that

that there was a "balanced distribution" of males and females in the slave population and that the

population was primarily maintained by home-born slaves.[230] However much the demographic

balance of male-to-female slaves was skewed (significantly, according to Harris and negligibly

according to Scheidel) and no matter the possibility that the enslaved population was replenished

primarily by home-born slaves or trafficking, it is generally agreed that women who were enslaved

were expected to bear children. Even if they did not reproduce at a rate significant enough to sustain

the population and even if they were not always purchased specifically for that purpose, their

childbearing capacity seems to have been a significant factor in their value and age at sale.[231]

One significant component of this debate hinges on whether families were formed and

whether women were willing to carry children to term. Comparative evidence from the Americas

suggest that some populations were able to sustain themselves via reproduction (largely in the

American South) while others did not (Jamaica is one example). Those populations were influenced

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[229] William Harris, "Demography, Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves," in *JRS*, vol. 89 (1999): 63. Harris argues that Scheidel's conclusion are spurious and ignores evidence. He responds by suggesting an imbalanced population of male-to-female slaves and the likelihood that female slave children were exposed at higher rates, 69. His analysis is based primarily on a comparative study of enslavement with 19th century slave societies. He, however, excludes the Antebellum South, which did reproduce slave populations by means of reproduction among enslaved women, on the grounds that, in the South, slave families predominated while in Rome, they were an exception, 68. The latter assertion is difficult to maintain as the evidence for family life among enslaved Romans is significant. Counting the number of enslaved families is a nearly impossible endeavor, but the frequency of commemoration among enslaved populations by life-partners and references to slave families in numerous texts, including Columella and Varro, suggests that families were formed at least frequently enough to make them appear normal.

[230] *Ibid.,* 75. His assertions are based on mathematical calculations of the slave populations, proposing that whatever the initial ratio the population would necessarily level out over time. He asserted that importation of slaves declined significantly in the late Republic, while comparative evidence suggests that life expectancies for enslaved populations matched that of the free population, thereby ensuring a reproductive rate similar to that of the free population.

[231] Walter Scheidel, "Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II: The Slave Population," in *JRS*, vol. 95 (2005), 55.

primarily by slave holders' practices in allowing or establishing families, purchasing enslaved women of childbearing age, and ensuring conditions were conducive to carrying children to term, recovering after giving birth, and ensuring childcare for infants. In Jamaica, enslavers sometimes attempted to force familial relationships on their slaves, but those were not particularly successful.[232] There is also evidence to suggest that poor health and efforts to frustrate enslavers' efforts to force childbearing meant that women did not give birth often and, when they did, it was primarily to unhealthy children.[233] The comparisons are useful for thinking about how to interpret evidence from Rome as they demonstrate clearly that different slaving regimes resulted in different outcomes for childbearing among enslaved women.

If Scheidel's assessments of the Roman slave population is correct and it was maintained by the birth of home-born slaves, then the Roman slaving system was probably more like the North American system than Jamaica's. Ultimately, I tend to agree with his assessment as it seems very unlikely that Harris' argument that the population was maintained by importation (which was severely reduced after the major wars of expansion ended) and the exposure of unwanted infants. Indeed, childbearing seems to have been a preoccupation of the jurists. Although not directly evidence for frequent childbearing among enslaved women, as the jurists were primarily interested in the legal consequences of having home-born slaves, the frequency of references to it and the paucity of references to abortion, which preoccupied both Jamaican and North American jurists and physicians, suggests that childbearing was both a desired outcome for enslaved women and one that occurred frequently enough to

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[232] Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childbearing, and Slavery in Jamaica.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2017), 45, 62-63.

[233] Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*, UNC Press (2009), 214.

justify extensive legislation about women who were sold at childbearing age. Evidence that suggests women were typically bought in their childbearing years, confirms this view.[234] As I just indicated, a key difference between Roman and American slaving systems is that American enslavers were constantly expressing the concern that slave women were deliberately preventing births,[235] but there is little evidence from Rome to suggest that enslaved women attempted to abort children or employed contraceptives frequently enough to garner significant attention among enslavers. That does not mean that it did not happen, but the practices did not invoke the same kind of preoccupation and condemnation as they did among Atlantic slave holders.

Further comparative examples reveal very real concerns that enslaved women in all societies where enslavement was inheritable, including Rome, had. Tiya Miles, in *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, cites Harriet Jacobs' anxieties about having a child born a slave, sometimes wishing that the child would have died in infancy because "death is better than slavery."[236] Furthermore, a study of abortion among enslaved women on the American South, by Loretta Ross, indicates that enslaved women practiced birth control and infanticide against the wills of their enslavers.[237] On the other hand, before the abolition of the slave trade in the United States, American enslavers deemed women's hard manual labor more important than childbearing since it was easier and cheaper to import male slaves than it was to excuse women from work or assign them lighter labor during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. While some women dreaded becoming mothers, others desired children and worked within internal networks to find midwifery

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[234] See n. 207.

[235] Loretta Ross, 145.

[236] Miles, 104.

[237] Loretta Ross, 144-145.

support, herbal and ritualistic remedies, and comradery to support pregnancies and births despite the enslaver's wishes.[238] In both instances, women subverted their enslavers' efforts to control their reproductive lives. While it cannot be confirmed that the same occurred in Rome, the possibility remains that, though women were not *permitted* any control over their reproductive lives, they were sometimes able to wrest that control away anyway.

### Methods

To better evaluate the circumstances of enslaved women in the Roman republican and imperial periods, the theoretical frameworks of *lifeworlds* and queer theory will be applied. As noted previously, it is not a centrally significant element of this study to affirm that any one behavior dominated the way enslaved women approached motherhood. It is more important to show what kind of behavior was possible, even if it is only attested once or made visible by triangulation, comparative analysis, or controlled speculation. Limited access to evidence also means that theoretical frameworks are particularly important because they provide boundaries and methods for evaluating what little evidence does exist. Sexuality, sexual abuse, and marginalization of enslaved people requires frameworks that analyze the range of possibilities for women's lives and consider the consequences of those possibilities on motherhood. For example, social relationships, including networks among enslaved people shape the possible outcomes for women of different social strata among the enslaved, which helps to identify the lived experiences for women in particular social locations.[239] A woman who was captured and enslaved as an adult by a wealthy Roman,

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[238] Turner, 14.

[239] For examples of networking analysis in the ancient Mediterranean, see Claire Taylor, "Women's Social Networks and Female Friendship in the Ancient Greek City" in *Gender & History* 23 no. 3 (2011) 703–720, Claire Taylor, "Social Networks and Social Mobility in Fourth Century Athens," in *Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World,* edited by Claire Taylor and Kostas Vlassopoulos, OUP (2014), 35-53; Esther Eidinow, "Networks and Narratives: A Model for Ancient Greek Religion." *Kernos* 24: (2011) 9–38, and Päivi

working in a domestic context as a nurse, would have a different range of possibilities than a woman who was born enslaved (*verna*) to a middling enslaver, managing the complete range of household duties. Further, women who were prostituted, did harder labor in rural contexts, worked in specific industries, or were enslaved by poor Romans would have entirely different circumstances. Therefore, it is essential to consider the *lifeworlds* of these women and their marginalized status as enslaved people if it is going to be possible to understand their lives as (potential) mothers.

Queer theory allows for the study of liminality by using indirect evidence to reach groups of people who otherwise have not made the historical record. More than that, though, it aims to center these liminal experiences, helping readers to understand how and why the circumstances of the marginalized shaped (and still shape) a society.[240] In this case, queer theory provides a way to glimpse how the power structure of Roman enslavement shaped motherhood despite the vast range of material and social circumstances for enslaved women. Enslaved women were subject to the will of their enslavers, including their sexual will. Consequently, sexual activity was always potentially abusive, no matter how consensual it appeared.[241] Enslaved mothers, then, never experienced motherhood the same way a free or freed woman did, regardless of the other elements of her *lifeworld*. Comparison can only be made within the enslaved population; hence the chapter devoted specifically to them. Queer theory is useful for thinking about marginalized elements other than sexual activity, too, insofar as it provides access to, "whatever is at odds with the normal, the

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Setälä and Liisa Savunen, editors, *Female Networks and the Public Sphere in Roman Society*, Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, (1999).

[240] Chelsea Blackmore, "How to Queer the Past Without Sex: Queer Theory, Feminism, and the Archaeology of Identity," in *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archeological Congress*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2011), 79.

[241] Sarah Levin-Richardson, "Sex and Slavery in the Pompeian Household: A Survey," in *Slavery and Sexuality in Classical Antiquity*, edited by, C.W. Marshall and Deborah Kamen, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press (2021), 189.

legitimate, the dominant.‟[242] It allows for exploration of other ways enslaved women were oppressed as mothers or potential mothers, such as: how their efforts were limited, controlled, or outright denied by their enslavers; how enslavement affected their ability to mother effectively; and, on a larger scale, how did it shaped Roman social relationships and reinforced the slave structure.

Ultimately, the application of both *lifeworlds* and queer theory leads to an opportunity to explore motherhood among enslaved women in classical Rome in a way that accounts for factors rarely brought together in studies of Roman slave women. Motherhood, occupation, enslavement, status differences among the enslaved, sexual use and abuse, and social relationships come together to help explain the distinctiveness of life as enslaved women (whether mothers or not) and distinguish their circumstances from the free and freed people who constantly interacted with them.

### Preparation for Motherhood

Preparation for motherhood among enslaved women in Rome is a vastly understudied topic.[243] As outlined in previous chapters, there is a presumption among both scholars and the public that women *would* become mothers (or at least they expected to do so). Consequently, the ways in which women came to learn about motherhood and prepare for its possibility (not inevitability) is commonly ignored, no less among enslaved women. Truthfully, it is also a difficult stage to capture in women's lives. Even though it is difficult to

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[242] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, OUP (1995), 62.

[243] In a survey of 779 digitized pieces of scholarship, only five contain the words "Preparation," "Rome," and "Motherhood" and use them in relation to motherhood. Of those five, *none* pertain directly to preparation for motherhood among Roman women. Among those five that do reference motherhood and preparation for it are three texts that focus on 19th and 20th century America or Europe. Of those three, one is a manual, *Preparation for Motherhood* by Elisabeth Robinson Scovil, Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company (1896). The remaining two pertain to contraception and a midwife's preparation for attending a birth.

identify, however, enslaved women did prepare for motherhood (or at least its potentiality).

Networking, direct and indirect socialization, observation, and specific training for those

who would become professionals in obstetrics or gynecology (largely midwives) were all

means of preparation for motherhood.

Some clues as to the modes of preparation come from medical manuals, such as

Soranus' *Gynecologia,* Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories,* in which he records folk remedies,

practices, and beliefs, Roman comedy, legal codes, the agricultural manuals of Cato, Varro,

and Columella, funerary monuments, and archeological remains from sites like Pompeii. Each

resource provides tools for evaluating the ways women prepared for the possibility of motherhood.

For the study of enslaved women, among the more fruitful resources is Roman theater. As noted

previously, referring to the possibility rather than the eventuality of motherhood is essential in this

study because not all women became mothers, whether by choice or not. In the case of enslaved

women, regulations were placed on their reproductive lives to the benefit of their enslavers.[244] These

regulations set enslaved women apart from all other women in the Roman world.

Further considerations for the study of enslaved mothers include the roles or occupations

the women engaged in. For example, many prostitutes were enslaved women thus adding yet

another layer of preparation for those women because their *lifeworlds* were very different from non-

prostitutes.[245] They probably were more frequently pressured to abort or regularly use contraceptives

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[244] Sandra Joshel, "Nurturing the Master's Child: Slavery and the Roman Child Nurse," *Signs*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1986), 5; Keith Bradley, "Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt," *Klio* 62, no. 62 (1980): 321.

[245] Plau. *Cistellaria* 43-45, 78-81; *Asinaria* 521-534*;* Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 2.1, 6.1, 6.4, 7.4 See Anise Strong, "Working Girls: Mother-Daughter Bonds among Ancient Prostitutes" in *Mothering & Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, University of Texas Press (2012), 125-129.

than other women. Undoubtably, if a prostitute were to have and raise a child, the process would have been much more precarious than for a housekeeper.

Conditions of sale indicate that the potential to bear children was an important consideration for buyers of female slaves of childbearing age (potentially between fourteen and thirty-five).[246] Scheidel argues on the basis of thirty-one census records from Egypt that Roman women were regularly manumitted at menopause, corroborating the suggestion that women were valued for their childbearing capacity.[247] Evidence for the significance of an enslaved woman's childbearing capacity include Vitruvius' comparison of a weak tree with a pregnant woman who cannot be considered a good investment until she had given birth, Ulpian's assertion that women who are barren, pregnant, or in labor were generally considered healthy—a set of conditions that suggest that these were common concerns among enslavers—as well as the reverse, attested by both Ulpian and Gellius, that a woman who is "too narrow to give birth" was considered unhealthy.[248] Thus, although women were not *always* bought with the intent to breed them systematically, sometimes they were. More generally, enslavers purchased women who were healthy enough to bear children so that even if they were not specifically purchased as breeders, they hoped that the women might become mothers by establishing relationships during their enslavement, all to the financial benefit of the enslaver.

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[246] *Ibid.*, 53. Bradley suggests that fourteen to thirty-five were considered childbearing years due to three factors. First, he identifies fourteen as a minimum age because Roman legal codes and medical literature suggest that Romans considered fourteen to be the age at which women achieved menarche (53, n. 27). Second, the oldest women in the papyri sample were thirty-five, suggesting that women became less valuable after that age, presumably because they were unlikely to bear children (see table on page 54). Finally, he notes that people tended to believe that menopause occurred between forty and fifty years of age (55, n. 30).

[247] Scheidel, 72.

[248] *Dig.* 4.2.9-10, 21.1.14.7, 21.1.15. See Gardner *Women in Roman Law* for an analysis, 206-207.

The conditions under which an enslaved woman was socialized to motherhood almost certainly shaped her approach to mothering. For example, if a young woman were born a *verna* or exposed and taken in as an infant, she would have grown up in a Roman slaving household. Her preparation for and anticipation of motherhood would have been shaped by her experiences within the household she was born and (probably) raised in. She would have been socialized by other, older slave women, her mother, nurse, and the various free women in the household. In that case, the young woman would know how the *familia* functioned, what the expectations were for her, and have the social tools she needed to shape her decisions. Whether motherhood was expected of her would have depended significantly upon her role in the household, her enslaver's temperament, and her enslaver's approach to managing her slaves. Female slaves worked as shopkeepers, weavers, fullers, nurses, housekeepers, shepherds, field slaves, and more. Although it is difficult to know which of these women were most often mothers and which were likeliest to raise their own children or at least maintain relationships with them, it is certain that women who worked in all areas of a *familia* were mothers and therefore had to negotiate circumstances peculiar to her own set of circumstances.

For prisoners of war, resocialization would have been necessary since they were ripped from their homes and transported to Rome. They may have brought with them practices common to their native homes but would nevertheless have experienced motherhood differently from *vernae*.[249] In short, the kind of preparation and therefore the expectations a woman had for motherhood would have varied based not only on her condition as a slave, her occupation, or her circumstances in each household, but also her ethnicity, and the time at which she became enslaved. The significance of varied ethnic groups' approaches to motherhood is supported by the likelihood that women were

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[249] Comparative evidence from the British Caribbean suggests that slave women brought traditions from their former homes with them. Sometimes, those traditions were used to subvert the wills of their enslavers. Bush, 204.

often taken as captives in war.[250] Katherine Huemoeller, through an analysis of Polybius'

and Livy's description of the distribution of captives after the Second Punic War, argues that

formerly enslaved men and women of defeated peoples were most likely to be trafficked as

private slaves in Rome.[251] The relevance here is that those women who were taken captive

might already have been familiar with a set of enslaved conditions and therefore socialized to

mothering under those circumstances. However, the difference in geographical and ethnic

regions likely meant that women were still subject to resocialization to Roman norms.

Enslaved women would have needed to be prepared for (or at least be aware of) the

possibility that their enslavers might remove their children from them against their will.

Pleading probably sometimes worked to keep their children with them but certainly not

always.[252] Holding important positions in the household or bearing children fathered by their

enslavers probably increased the likelihood that women would raise their own children.

While their children might have been sent away for training or nursing, those mothers were

likely to have had more involvement in decisions about their children's upbringing than

those of lower standing in a household.

In conclusion, preparation for motherhood among enslaved women was shaped first

and foremost by their enslavement. Evidence suggests that they were frequently expected to

produce children to benefit their enslavers and their sexuality was controlled by their

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[250] Katherine Huemoeller, in "Captivity for All? Slave Status and Prisoners of War in the Roman Republic," in *TAPA* 151 (2021): 104, argues that the default assumption that most captives taken in war were free is incorrect. Through her research she finds that many of those who were taken as slaves already held that status in the defeated regions, 105.

[251] *Ibid.*, 105ff., but see especially the table on 112. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters* (73-74), holds the view that there was probably an imbalance of men to women, with women in the minority. However, he does counter the view that male slaves outnumbered female slaves by as much as 2:1, which Susan Treggiari put forward in 'Jobs in the Household of Livia," 395.

[252] See the following section "Families Among Enslaved People" for an analysis of an enslaved mother interceding on behalf of her runaway son.

enslavers. Despite those expectations, women did not always bear children and even those who did were not likely to raise their children themselves. Significantly, they had to be constantly prepared for forcible separation through sale or other means. Second, the *lifeworlds* of women who were born *vernae* would have been different from those who were trafficked into Rome. For all of them, circumstances were shaped primarily by the lack of control enslaved women had. They and their children were subject to sale or other forms of separation that were outside the control of the mother as it was the prerogative of the enslaver to determine the use of her slaves. Thus, no matter the relative standard of living a slave enjoyed (or not), her preparation for motherhood, because of her status as a slave, was always different from that of free and freed women.

### Daphnis

Slave women sometimes identified as wives and mothers in pseudo-familial relationships. A particularly telling example comes from a North African funerary monument. The monument was found by Alfred Louis Delattre in 1897 in an *officiales* cemetery in Carthage, one of the places where imperial slaves were buried.[253] The excavations of the cemetery uncovered 776 funerary monuments.[254] Though I had hoped to avoid imperial slaves because their circumstances were so different from those of private slaves, Daphnis' monument is striking and deserves comment. It is difficult to interpret, and, in some ways, it raises more questions than it answers, but it provides an intriguing opportunity to explore enslaved motherhood in the Roman empire.

Although Daphnis could consider herself a wife and mother, it is essential to remember that she was not legally a wife and her status as a mother legally mattered only insofar as it confirmed that the child belonged to her enslaver rather than to any natural maternal right. In this case, it is

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[253] Originally cataloged in AE 1897.43, see also CIL 08. 24734.

[254] See discussion in Naomi Norman, "Death and Burial of Roman Children: The case of the Yasmin Cemetery at Carthage- Part II, The Archeological Evidence," in *Mortality*, vol. 8 no. 1 (2003): 39.

significant to note that Daphnis' enslaver was the emperor. He probably had no personal involvement in her life circumstances, especially given the fact that she lived in North Africa. If she were a private slave, however, it was much more likely that a woman like Daphnis would have had a personal relationship with her enslaver. In the case of private slaves, someone like Daphnis was very much subject to her enslaver's consent to a romantic relationship and a socially normative maternal role. Thus, although her personal identity as a wife and mother was established, the statuses were juxtaposed with her social position as an enslaved women who had no right to any autonomy over her relationships or her body.

Daphnis died either in childbirth or shortly thereafter from complications associated with parturition. The inscription is written in the first person, which creates poignancy, urgency, and potentially, a false sense of authenticity. Though written in the first person, it seems quite unlikely that she composed the message herself for a few reasons, not least of which is that she was very likely in considerable pain (or considerably weak) at the time of her death and may not have had the capacity to draft her own brief eulogy.[255] Because she was probably an imperial slave in Carthage and the likelihood that she had any connection with the emperor was small, the mentions of the *dominus* on the monument are probably perfunctory.[256] In short, while Daphnis monument is exceptional in its composition, it is nothing notable insofar as it relates to her relationship (or lack thereof) with her enslaver.

According to the monument, her partner, Hermes, was the slave whom the *dominus* "*vellet primum…liber,*" "wished to free first." By death, though, Daphnis was freed prematurely. Maybe unsurprisingly, the inscription is composed such that the emphasis is

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[255] Though the possibility that she dictated or requested that certain elements be included is possible. It is completely impossible, however, to know precisely why the epitaph was composed in the first person.

[256] There are over four thousand surviving inscriptions from the *familia caesaris* demonstrating that it is highly unlikely that Daphnis would have even been known to him at all, Weaver, 17.

ultimately on Hermes and his loss rather than on Daphnis. Collectively then, the evidence leads one

to the conclusion that the epitaph was not actually drafted by Daphnis but by her partner, Hermes.

> *Daphnis ego Hermetis coniunx sum libera facta / cum dominus vellet primu(m) Hermes liber ut esset / fato ego facta prior fato ego rapta prior / quae tuli quod ge<n=M>ui gemitus viro saepe reliqui / quae domino invito vitam dedi proxime nato / nunc quis alet natum quis vita<m=E> longa(m) ministrat / me Styga quod rapuit tam cito eni(m) a(d) super<i=O>s / pia vixit annis XXV h(ic) s(ita) e(st)*

> I, Daphnis, the wife of Hermes, have been made free, though her *dominus* wished to first free Hermes. By fate, I was taken first. By fate, I was torn away. Just as I give birth, I leave behind my husband, who continually sighs a lamentation, [and] an unwilling[257] *dominus* just after I gave life to a child. Now, who will nourish the baby? Who will care for the rest of his life? Styx,[258] to be sure, snatched me to the gods so soon.
> She lived dutifully for 25 years. Here she lies.[259]

There are several fascinating elements in this inscription. Daphnis identifies Hermes as her

*coniunx*, or husband, a relationship they could not have legally contracted. Clearly, however, both

Daphnis and Hermes considered their relationship, however it was understood legally, as marital.

Though a slave, Daphnis' relationship to her husband, rather than reference to the *dominus*, is

mentioned first. Among free people, the dedicator was typically someone who was responsible for

the deceased in life.[260] Although one might expect the *dominus* to be responsible for commemorating

a deceased slave, it is more often the case that someone close to her established the monument as

the person responsible for her.[261] Hermes may have been responsible in a social sense, but legally

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[257] *Invito* is ambiguous here, but I take it to mean that her death was against the will of the *dominus*, i.e., that she should not have died, not that he was unwilling to care for Daphnis' child (as some scholars have suggested- see Peter Kruschwitz's translation on his blog, "The Petrified Muse" for an example). In other words, her husband, Hermes, is mourning with sighs and her *dominus* is mourning as one who "unwillingly freed a slave." Link to Kruschwitz's post: https://thepetrifiedmuse.blog/2015/06/12/departure-abandonment-and-grief-latin-poems-about-death-in-childbirth/

[258] *Styga* is accusative, making this line difficult to translate. I follow Kruschwitz here.

[259] CIL 08, 24734.

[260] Elizabeth Meyer, "Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs," The *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 80 (1990), 74.

[261] Joshel, *Work, Identity and Legal Status*, 50. She finds that in only 1.4% of the cases she examined was the enslaver also the commemorator.

that designation belonged to their *dominus*. It is probable that because Hermes and Daphnis were

imperial slaves and Daphnis was buried in an imperial cemetery reference to the emperor was not

necessary to establish the relationship between her and her enslaver. Hermes, then, was most likely a

*de facto* dedicator because he was the unofficial husband of Daphnis, the closest living relation, and

therefore the person responsible for honoring her memory.

The irony of her death is mentioned several times. On two occasions in the passage her

*dominus* is portrayed as having been cheated by fate, first because he had wished first to free Hermes

and, second, because he was unwilling that Daphnis die. Another way in which the irony (or maybe

better, the tragedy) of her death is emphasized is in the juxtaposition of her just having brought life

into the world, only to die herself. The commonly expressed notion of fate having taken one away

too soon is exceedingly clear here. Though she died, her newborn baby, a son, lived.

Significantly, the child remained a slave of the emperor. Daphnis was the biological mother

of her child, but she had no legal right to him nor, for that matter, did Hermes. A third irony

is that concern for caring for the child is such an urgent question for those who survived

her. If Daphnis were not an imperial slave for whom a vast network of child-care providers

was almost certainly available, the questions may have suggested that a *dominus* considered it

difficult to raise *vernae*. Indeed, several scholars have implied that many considered it too

much of a burden based on the apparent prevalence of exposing infants.[262] However, the

privileged position of most imperial slaves and the well-organized mechanics of managing

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[262] Peter Hunt, *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery,* John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017, 111; Bradley*, Slaves and Masters*, 74; John Caldwell, "Fertility Control in the Classical World: Was there an Ancient Fertility Transition?," *Journal of Population Research* 21 no. 1 (2004), 8; William Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire," *JRS* 84 (1994), 1; Tim Parkin *Demography and Roman Society* (1992), 97. For examples of those who disagree see Michael Golden, "Did the Ancients Really Care when Their Children Died?," in *Greece & Rome* Vol. 35 no. 2. (1988), 158; and Walter Scheidel, "Human Mobility, II," 73.

hundreds (or thousands) of slaves simultaneously, would have almost certainly ensured that any

motherless child would be cared for by the community of imperial slaves.

The relationship expressed between Daphnis and her infant is notable, too, as she is

depicted as concerned for his welfare, even from the grave. Based on the network of

caretakers that were very likely well-established among imperial slaves in Carthage, the

questions must be rhetorical, suggesting the concerns she had (or should have had) as a

mother who could no longer be with her child to raise and protect him. Who will feed him?

Who will make sure that his needs are met, that he is looked after, that he grows up the way I want

him to? In theory, care for the child was cast as *her* responsibility. She should have been the one to

feed and raise him, but her death robbed them both of that bond.

Despite the care that the monument suggested Daphnis should have been able to provide

her son, many scholars of the Roman family assert that women, including slave women, did not

always care for their own children but rather sent them to nurses.[263] Rather, he argues on the basis of

wet-nurse contracts that the care was relegated to another slave who was required to take on the

menial and demanding work of raising infants. Furthermore, there are references in the *Digest* to

slave children being sent from urban contexts to rural estates to be raised.[264] For Daphnis, the

inscription suggests that even if she did not actually carry out the task of nursing and raising her

young son, she should have been able to and should not have died. I am not suggesting that the

inscription indicates that she would have raised her son, just that she should have been able to if her

*dominus* desired it. In other words, her death limited his options. It is also possible that the questions

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[263] Bradley, "Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 70. Bradley argues that slave children were sometimes sent away from their mothers based on Egyptian papyrological evidence that wet nurses were hired for slave children and that approximately 20% of funerary monuments dedicated to wet nurses were associated with enslaved persons.

[264] *Dig.* 32.99.3.

are an attempt to reframe Daphnis' death according to the idealized notion of motherhood, i.e., it was her role as a woman to care for her children and fate robbed her of that role.

Whatever the questions on the epitaph suggest, it is more likely that she at least would have shared that responsibility with others whose job it was to care for children as nurses or had Daphnis not been an imperial slave, however, her engagement with fellow slaves, nurses, or teachers in the care of her son was probably influenced by the size of the *familia*. In a multi-estate household,[266] the child may have been sent away to be raised by designated nurses at a country estate. If she were part of a smaller *familia*, maybe she would have been fully responsible herself or would have had others care for the child during the daytime, but it would ultimately remain his primary caretaker.

Daphnis' epitaph demonstrates some of the circumstances to which enslaved mothers were subject. Some women would not have had the opportunity to raise their children, either because their enslavers deemed it better to have the children brought up elsewhere or because they or their children were sold. On the other hand, Daphnis, even if her child were taken care of by a nurse, might have had close and regular contact with her son had she survived. While it is not possible to know which mode of motherhood Daphnis would have undertaken (provided she were permitted to keep her child), her monument provides a window into the range of possibilities that existed for enslaved mothers.

Families among Enslaved People

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[265] That is, if the questions are taken as serious rather than rhetorical. If they were rhetorical devices to suggest what she might have been thinking in death as a concerned mother rather than a description of what would have been her responsibilities as a mother, then they say nothing about who would have cared for the child had she lived.

[266] Susan Treggiari "Questions on Women Domestics in the Roman West," *Schiavitù, manomissione e classi dipendenti nel mondo antico* (1979): 189.

Slave families were markedly different from those of free or freed people. Although enslaved people could not marry because they technically had no rights or legal personhood, they *were* people with real (never mind what the law said) personhood who sometimes desired to form families. Enslavers permitted and sometimes encouraged them to establish committed relationships or families, although it is not known how frequently this occurred. Some of the best evidence comes from funerary monuments and from the writers of agricultural manuals such as Varro, and Columella.[267] Despite representing two distinct forms of evidence—epigraphy and literature—the sources together reveal details about the formation of families among enslaved people.

No matter the circumstances of a couple's living situation, whether they were under the control of an enslaver who encouraged family-making or one who discouraged it, enslaved people could never contract legal marriages, thereby limiting them in ways that free people never were. The terminology used to refer to the non-legal marriage among slaves was *contubernium,* "to reside together" rather than the ordinary word for legal marriage, *conubium.*[268] The term served as a clear indicator of the informality and legal illegitimacy of the relationship as well as a subtle indicator of enslavement.[269] Despites the technical nature of the words, however, there are indications that enslaved people considered themselves to be married and used the language of legal marriage to refer to one another.

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[267] Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books (1976), 196. Bradley "On Roman Slavery" n. 63, 74, 75.

[268] Treggiari, "*Contubernales* in CIL 6" *Phoenix*, Vol. 35 No. 1, (1981), 42-43. She defines *contubernales* as "tent-companions," derived from the word *tabernaculum*, following Lewis & Short. The word is transferred from a military context to a more general use to describe people living together as non-married couples.

[269] The word is also used to refer to breeding among livestock (Phaedr. 2.4.4 and Seneca *De Ira* 3.8.2). It is even used to describe sexual intercourse among bees (Pliny *NH* 11.16.11). Both uses suggest a lack of dignity as enslaved persons were owned just as livestock were.

On funerary monuments, including Daphnis', partners identified one another as *coniunx.* It is notable that slaves referred to themselves as husbands and wives because language marks differences in status and social roles. The use of formalized titles, like husband and wife, suggests an informal claim to raise the level of the relationship. As it pertains to relational socialization, the same usage indicates a relaxation of social expectations. Enslaved people used the legal language of marriage on funerary monuments, an act that demonstrates that average people were not particularly concerned about protecting the language of marriage for Roman citizens and that the humanity of enslaved people was recognized on some level by free Romans. Legally, slaves were denied marriage, but socially, at least among their fellow slaves, they were not.

As previously stated, children born of the union were legally the property of the mother's enslaver. Neither she nor the child's father could give their names to the children nor make any claims to parenthood. Enslavers could sell the children or the parents whenever and however they wished. Keith Bradley has argued on the basis of Egyptian papyri detailing the hire of wet nurses for enslaved infants and funerary monuments dedicated by formerly enslaved persons to their nurses, that children were often sent away from their mothers, even when the mother was available to care for them, as a matter of course.[270] Enslaved mothers, therefore, may have had little direct contact with their children even when they remained under the control of the same enslaver. Of course, the inscriptions might have also meant that the mother or father (or both) were not alive to commemorate their now deceased children or that one or the other had been sold and therefore there was little contact between parent(s) and children. Even on the same estates, families were probably divided by other circumstances: men and women worked in different capacities,

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[270] Bradley, "Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 70-71.

sometimes one or the other were sent away to serve in the traveling retinue of the enslaver or a family member, sometimes they worked on a different property, or were rented out to other enslavers for temporary work. In short, even though some slaves formed families, there is no indication that many could expect to remain together without interruption. Given the many reasons an enslaver might divide families, it appears most likely that families were regularly separated, complicating the concept of a "slave family."

Despite indignities and inconveniences, it seems that informal so-called slave families were relatively common and desirable. Enslavers may have encouraged such relationships to increase stability, loyalty, and the quality of slave labor.[271] For example, Columella asserts that *vilici* should be *adsignanda* (designated) a woman partner to *contineat eum et in quibusdam rebus tamen adiuvet* (restrain him and yet still at certain times support him). Thus, families were sometimes formed, perhaps arranged, by the enslavers to help ensure their compliance and loyalty to the *familia*.[272] On the other hand, there must have been others who used familial relationships as a subtle threat, believing that enslaved people were more likely to comply with their demands if they feared that their family members might suffer on their account.[273] Hunt asserts that "to separate a family was a severe punishment," although he does not reference any evidence for the rather strong statement.[274] The prospect that enslaved families were regularly divided is supported by the fact that there are no instances of entire nuclear families being sold together in the papyrological evidence.[275] There were

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[271] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 193; Hunt, 111-112.

[272] Columella *Res Rus.* 1.8.5.

[273] Henrik Mouritsen, "The Families of Roman Slaves and Freedmen" in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman World* ed. B. Rawson, Blackwell (2011), 136. See also Peter Hunt, *Ancient Slavery*, 99-100.

[274] Hunt, 112.

[275] Bradley, "Age at Time of Sale," 246. Nor is there any evidence of nuclear families being manumitted together in the Delphi records, Keith Hopkins and P. Roscoe, "Between Slavery and Freedom: On the Freeing of Slaves at Delphi" in *Conquerors and Slaves*, CUP (1978), 165.

other, more immediate methods, though. Whipping, in particular, was a tool used by enslavers to keep their chattel in line because it reinforced the social reality that slaves had no honor.[276] It was also a practice that distinguished the free from the enslaved. Slaves were subject to beatings regularly, it seems, while free people, except young children, were rarely subject to whipping.[277] It is difficult to suggest whether corporeal punishment or the psychological threat of losing family members was a more severe consequence for crossing an enslaver, but both express the exploitative nature of enslavement.

Whether as punishment or for some other reason, there was always the possibility that a slave woman might be sold with or without her children. It was always in the interest of the enslaver to ensure that their slaves could be sold. Thus, as noted previously, families were probably regularly divided to suit the interests of the enslaver.[278] Mothers were often separated from their children by being sold. Some sellers placed conditions on sales that might appear to benefit the slave, such as requiring manumission at a certain age [279] or prohibiting a slave from being prostituted,[280] but both sets of conditions were most likely to serve the seller's interests. Conversely, the seller might impose the condition that a slave is not to be freed.[281] Each of these conditions were actionable by law and their presence in the

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[276] Richard Saller, "The Hierarchical Household in Roman Society," in *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, edited by M. Bush, NY: Longman Publishing Group, (1996), 127. Honor is an important concept for Saller. Among his key arguments across his work is that dishonor, lack of dignity, and shame were the main psychosocial means of keeping slaves oppressed and distinguishing them from others with limited political or social power.

[277] Richard Saller, *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family*, CUP (1994), 147-148.

[278] Edmonson, 350; Hopkins and Roscoe, 165. Hopkins and Roscoe found that 80% of children freed according to the records at Delphi were freed without a parent. Bradley, "Age at Time of Sale," 243-244.

[279] *Cod.* 4.57.3.

[280] This condition of sale will be elaborated upon in the section, "prostitution" later in this chapter.

[281] *Cod.* 4.57.5.

*Codex* makes clear that, at least once, action was taken to ensure that the conditions were maintained. It is therefore clear that sales were intended to benefit the transactional parties, not the slaves, even if it meant separating family units.

These varied and challenging circumstances shaped mothers' relationships with their children, approaches to raising them, and their relationships with enslavers. In some instances, the women may have entreated the enslavers to facilitate more favorable familial circumstances. For example, Ulpian wrote that if a *puer* runs away to his mother, who is presumably in a different household, so that she might intercede on his behalf, he is not a fugitive. However, if the young man were to have run away with the intent to hide and not return, he would have been a fugitive. [282] In this case, the *puer* committed some offence that his enslaver intended to punish him for. It is curious that the *puer* could run away to his mother therefore avoid being classified as a fugitive. By running away to his mother, even if she were owned by a different enslaver, it seems that Ulpian held that his actions indicated that he did not intend to run away permanently but that he was somehow appealing to his mother for protection or support. The maternal relationship appears to be the key element in this case because it is only in that case that the *puer* could run away and avoid being considered a fugitive. There is no provision that allows a boy to run away to any other person who might plead on his behalf and avoid being treated as a fugitive. It is not at all clear whether his mother would have been able to intercede for him or if he were simply protected because he went to her rather than somewhere else. It is significant, though, that a child who runs to his mother is not a fugitive. Thus, the legal ruling is significant because it suggests that the maternal relationship was not only recognized for identifying who owned the child, but that the relationship somehow also provided some limited protection for a runaway slave.

Divided Families

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[282] *Dig.* 21.1.17.5.

All Roman families faced the very real possibility of losing one or more family members at a relatively young age. Mortality rates among all people were much higher than they are in modernized states and the average lifespan was much shorter. Models show that about 25-30% of all infants and mothers died within a few months of parturition. In his influential book *Patriarchy, Property, and Death in the Roman Family*, Richard Saller used demographic modeling techniques to show that young adults were likely to be fatherless in their 20s and that most people would have lost siblings or a parent by the time they were old enough to marry.[283] The early death of loved ones was a regular, probably devastating, eventuality for virtually all Romans, regardless of status.

There is no clear evidence for whether mortality rates were higher among enslaved persons, except for those who worked in the most extreme conditions at mines and mills.[284] Many enslavers worked to keep enslaved people reasonably healthy and content to maximize profits and maintain order, but certainly not all were so inclined. There is more than enough evidence to indicate that some were cruel masters, preferring to maintain order by fear and the threat of violence than by generosity or kindness.[285] Even when circumstances were "good" they were never ideal.

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[283] Saller*, Patriarchy*, CUP (1994), 20-21.

[284] Scheidel, "Human Mobility, II," 74ff. contends that mortality rates were not notably different between the free and enslaved populations.

[285] The existence of slave revolts and enslavers' fear of them are overt evidence of harsh treatment. The famous example of L. Pedanius Secundus, who was murdered by one of his more than four hundred slaves is telling. After the murder, there was an uproar among the senators who were divided on what to do. Many believed that the remaining slaves should be executed because they could no longer be trusted. The decision was ultimately made to follow that course, but because of a large protest, it could not be carried out. Tac. *Ann* 14.43-45. Another example of a cruel owner is Larcius Macedo, who ultimately was murdered by a gang of his slaves. Pliny the Younger, in his retelling, begins the episode with an account of Macedo's cruelty. Although Pliny ultimately expresses anxiety about the viciousness of some slave, his initial description indicates that it was Macedo's own cruelty that led to his demise. Pliny *Ep.* 3.14.

Comparative evidence derived from the antebellum American south reveal that the treatment of enslaved women during pregnancy and in the weeks immediately following directly correlated to infant mortality. Women who received more relief during their pregnancies were more likely to have surviving children than those who did not. Three-quarters of those children who died also died within the first month of life, suggesting a correlation between heavy labor and infant survival.[286] Additionally, John Campbell, a historian of Antebellum slavery, found through his quantitative analysis of infant mortality rates among enslaved women that enslavers who provided better diets, release from work while pregnant, and addressed illness promptly were likely to have higher infant survival rates on their estates than those who did not.[287] Although direct evidence for increased mortality among enslaved persons in Rome does not exist, the correlation between heavy labor and infant mortality among enslaved women in the American south provides some clues. For slaves who worked in harsher conditions, like shepherding or field labor, mortality rates were likely to be higher than average.[288]

Other conditions contributed to the unique circumstances slaves endured. Upon the death of a *dominus* or *domina*, wills often divided enslaved people up among various members of the *familia*.

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[286] John Campbell, "Work, Pregnancy, and Infant Mortality among Southern Slaves," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 14, no. 4 (Spring, 1984), 800-801, 806, 808.

[287] *Ibid.,* 811.

[288] Malaria also contributed significantly to higher mortality rates in certain parts of the Roman empire. Joan Stivala, "Malaria and Miscarriage in Ancient Rome," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (2015), 155ff; Vivian Nutton "Medical Thoughts on Urban Pollution," in *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, edited by Valerie Hope and Eireann Marshall, Florence: Taylor and Francis (2000), 65-67; Scheidel, 74; Robert Salleres *Malaria and Rome: A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy*, CUP (2002); Gregory S. Aldrete, "Hazards of Life in Ancient Rome: Floods, Fires, Famines, Footpads, Filth, and Fevers" in *A Companion to the City of Rome,* 1 ed., edited by Claire Holleran and Amanda Claridge, Wiley (2018), 365-381; Brent Shaw "The Seasonal Birthing Cycle of Roman Women," in *Debating Roman Demography,* edited by Walter Scheidel, Leiden: Brill (2001), 86; Julianna Schantz-Dunn and Nawal M. Nour, "MPH Malaria and Pregnancy: A Global Health Perspective" in *Expert Review of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2, no. 3 (2009), 189-190.

If the enslaver had multiple surviving family member it was likely that each member would receive a set number of slaves based on her or his status in the family or relationship with the now deceased enslaver.[289] Sometimes, owners freed all or a portion of their slaves and sometimes the will dictated that the slaves be put up for sale at the discretion of the executor of the estate. Alternatively, slave children might have been exposed by enslavers who were not able to sell but did not wish to raise a child. Still other enslavers might have taken in exposed children, cementing a separation initiated by another party. Mothers who feared what might become of a child exposed by her enslaver might have been compelled to hide a pregnancy and secretly give up the baby herself. The list of ways a mother and child could have been separated is extensive and varied. While the possibilities for separation were more widespread for slaves, including sale, rental, and division by testament,[290] tragedy was commonly felt among Romans as a consequence of disease, natural disaster, and premature death.

Even among slaves, though, separation was not always tragic. Temporary separation must have regularly occurred among the more stable families. For example, as wealthy women traveled with a large entourage of enslaved women who maintained their toilets, were hairdressers, seamstresses, serving women, nurses for children who traveled with her, and more, mothers may have been required to travel in the retinue of their enslavers with the understanding that they should return within a few months. [291] Or, women might be

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[289] Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 64-69.

[290] Treggiari, "Questions on Women Domestics," 197-199. Her assessment is intended to show that humanitarian views and approaches to families were present in the Roman world. Though true, it is just as important to keep in mind that while some slaveholders were thoughtful about keeping families together (whether for their own benefit or for that of the enslaved families), others were not. It would not have been in the purview of most slaves to influence the approach of their enslavers and, if the divisions occurred upon the enslaver's death, no matter what had been verbally agreed upon previously, the will would prevail, even if it were different from what the slaves expected.

[291] *Ibid.*, 188-189.

temporarily moved from one estate to another. Whatever the means of separation and for however long mothers and children were separated, finally, enslaved women lacked any social or legal power to keep their families together. Only the enslaver had that privilege.

For still other women, separation was probably sometimes welcome. It is important not to presume that all maternal and familial relationships were happy. Sometimes it must have been a relief for a child to be sent to a nurse or for the mother to be sent away on any number of assignments. More positively, a mother might have welcomed separation for the improvement of her child's circumstances. For example, maybe a son was sent to train with a tradesman who could provide him with a valuable skill that might eventually lead to his manumission.[292] Or maybe, as Susan Treggiari proposes, based on her understanding of the Roman medical advisements to seek fresh air for better health, children were sent from an urban to a rural environment for their younger years because enslavers believed that the children would be healthier.[293] There is little direct evidence of the practice, however, so any reference to the practice is suppositional. Of course, there was never any guarantee that such arrangements would be good or that mother and child would be reunited, so mothers must have worried about their child's safety, abuse or overwork, comfortable living spaces, sufficient food, and general health.[294]

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[292] Bradley, "Child Labor in the Roman World," *Historical Reflections*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1985): 320. I am presupposing manumission, but Bradley does not suggest manumission as a key possibility. Instead, he describes cases of children being bought by tradesmen, trained, and sold for a higher value. In the latter case, the separation might be quite difficult for the mother as she would have little chance of being reunited with her child.

[293] Treggiari, "Questions on Women Domestics," 189. Treggiari does not reference any specific medical texts. There are not any that directly recommend that young children be sent to the countryside for rearing, but there are regular references to fresh air and seasonal benefits, which might suggest that sending children to rural estates would be consistent with the medical advice otherwise. For example, Soranus does recommend that a pregnant woman take regular walks. As it pertains to the baby, he recommends weaning in the spring because of the agreeable climate, Soranus 1.14.46, 2.21.48[117]

[294] There are instances recorded in the *Dig.* of children being seriously injured while at an apprenticeship and of others being treated cruelly by the *praeceptor*. See Treggiari, "Questions," 191.

In all cases, mothers would have had to temper their responses to separation from their children since they were not free to make decisions independently. Their power was always limited by enslavement. Nevertheless, even when separated by sale, mothers were sometimes able to maintain relationships with their children, indicating that mothers employed whatever tools they had to shape maternal relationships, even when circumstances were unfavorable.

### Mothering while Enslaved

Beyond the generalities of mothering while enslaved, *lifeworlds* directly shaped women's experience. In this section, I explore some of the maternal experiences of women who worked in retail environments. There were also some specific circumstances, namely breeding, wet nursing, and being prostituted, that had a substantial influence on a woman's approach to motherhood, which will be addressed later in the chapter. For all enslaved women, however, it is important to keep in mind that women did not have much personal control over their reproductive bodies—although they very well may have subverted the expectations placed upon them— and they were always subject to the sexual control of their enslavers, which likely colored their approaches to motherhood.[295]

Despite the limitations of the evidence, there are ways to identify how occupations affected reproduction and mothering among enslaved women. For example, a queer reading of an often-cited legal decision from the *Digest* (*Dig.* 5.3.27), "*non temere ancillae eius rei causa comparantur ut pariant,*" (slave women are not heedlessly acquired for the purpose of breeding) indicates that some women were purchased specifically to produce children. Scholars have read the relevant lines differently. For instance, Gardner translates, "slave-girls are not

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[295] See the introduction to this chapter for comparative evidence from the American South.

generally acquired as breeders," Treggiari offers two possibilities: "not without due consideration are slavewomen bought for the purpose of breeding" and "only after carefully weighing the possibilities do people buy slavewomen specifically for breeding," and Harris translates, "since slave-women are not commonly acquired so that they may produce children."[296] All the readings hinge on the translation of one phrase, *non temere*. The phrase is only infrequently used by the jurists in both the *Codex* and *Digest*. When it is employed, it usually marks an interjection that suggests careful consideration or infrequency. In this case, the interjection is in a passage focused on whether the children and grandchildren of enslaved women are inheritable. The *non temere* clause is significant here because it justifies the decision. A woman, her children, and her grandchildren are inheritable because women are *non temere* purchased for breeding. That is, they were not livestock, purchased only for their produce but were valued more broadly for their services as well. The various readings suggest two opposing views: that breeding was uncommon and that some women were purchased specifically for their capacity to bear children. If *non temere* is taken as "not casually" or "not without care" rather than "not generally" (Gardner), then it suggests, according to the first reading, that women were rarely bought specifically to produce children. On the other hand, if it is taken to mean "not without due consideration" (Treggiari) or "not heedlessly" (mine), then the second potential meaning, that women who were expected to breed were carefully chosen for that purpose. Since even women who were chosen for the purpose of bearing *vernae* for their enslavers also provided other services for them, it seems likely that the phrase implies special care rather than infrequency since they would have wanted to ensure women were able to both bear children and complete other required labor.

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[296] Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 206, Treggiari, "Questions on Women Domestics," 188, Harris, "Demography," 66 n. 31.

How those enslavers who purchased the women as breeders compelled the women to bear children is not clear. The closest one can come to an answer comes from Varro's *Res Rustica*. In the manual, he describes sending women whom he deemed strong and suited to harsh conditions to work with his male shepherds and bear them children. There is no way to know whether he purchased such slaves with that purpose or whether they were *vernae* but it is clear that he carefully considered who would "breed" children with his enslaved shepherds.[297]

Such evidence for enslavers selecting women for men in particular circumstances or, at the least, arranging matches reveals that women were probably only infrequently given choices about their male partners. Rather, they were "given" (*oportet*) or "assigned" (*adsignada*) to male partners as rewards to keep them in line, or to provide a means of sexual release.[298] The handbooks on agriculture by Columella and Varro speak not only to the way women were sometimes chosen for male slaves, but also to how children were raised. In the same passage Varro also tells us that those women raised their children themselves, "usually, they are at the same time nurses and mothers."[299] Importantly, his need to emphasize that they would have to mother alone suggests that he rarely required his enslaved women to assume all the care for their children. Most of the time, then, it seems children were raised primarily by nurses, though near their mothers, sent off to be raised elsewhere, or sold at a young age.[300]

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[297] Varro, *Res Rus.* 2.10.6.

[298] Varro *Res Rus.* 2.10.6, 1.17.5, Columella *Res Rus.* 1.8.5, See the following section in this chapter on sexual use and abuse of slave women, specifically n. 96 and 97 for further explanation and analysis.

[299] Varro *Res. Rus.* 2.10.8. *easdem fere et nutrices et matres*, William Davis Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash, LCL, HUP (1933) translate the phrase: "in most cases the suckle them as well as bear them."

[300] Edmonson, 350.

Enslaved women who worked in retail contexts are somewhat difficult to find, and even more difficult to see as mothers.[301] Susan Treggiari and Sandra Joshel, however, found women who worked in a variety of trades. Following Joshel, the categories women worked in were manufacture, sales, professional service, skilled service, domestic service, and administration.[302] In Treggiari's collection, centering largely on textile workers, jewelry makers, and attendants, there are no instances of women being identified as slave, mother, and worker. There are a very few instances of women who commemorated their working daughters. For example, Aprodisia established a monument for her daughter, Logas, who was an attendant for a Messalina. The girl was just 16 when she died.[303]

There are at least two ways the absence of commemorations for women who were enslaved, employed, and mothers can be interpreted. One, which is highly improbable, is that employed women were not mothers. The other hinges on the so-called "epigraphic habit." Commemorators tended to identify themselves by their relationship to the deceased rather than by their occupation so women may have been employed, but that information was not relevant on a tombstone for their deceased loved one. Ultimately, it must be deduced that some enslaved women who worked in trades kept and trained their children in the same trades while others lost their children to one of the many means by which an enslaver could separate families. Still others would have lost their children at young ages due to premature death and some may have avoided having children altogether. The kind of work a woman did and the likelihood that she would have support for her children almost certainly influenced her decisions about childrearing.

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[301] Sandra Joshel's analysis of 1470 epitaphs with occupational titles finds only 208 for women. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, 69.

[302] *Ibid.*, 69.

[303] CIL 6.6335, as cited in Treggiari, "Jobs for Women," 81.

For many women whose work was demanding, children would have been only cursorily tended by them during the day. For the most part, though, nurses were likely to have provided the basic daily care a child needed. Evidence from funerary monuments of caretakers like *paedagogi*, *nutrices, mammae, tatae,* and *educatrices* who took charge of children at all stages of childhood suggest that enslaved children spent many years in the care of professional caretakers, likely alongside the free children of the household.[304] The children were tutored together and as they grew older were apprenticed to various trades.[305] Women, then, managed both mothering and occupation by making use of (or being compelled to make use of) childcare, which made it possible for them to complete their necessary work but also provide reasonable accommodations for their children. Importantly, not all mothers were able to keep their children as enslavers might sell either mother or child. Women might have experienced loss in other ways, too. For example, they may have lost their children through death as infant mortality rates were very high. Ultimately, enslaved mothers were challenged by their lack of control over their *lifeworlds* as enslavers sometimes arranged sexual partnerships between their enslaved men and women and controlled how and whether women raised their children.

### Enslaved Women as Caregivers and Wet Nurses

Enslaved, working mothers, from all social locations were usually busy with a multitude of tasks on any given day and would therefore have had to balance motherhood

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[304] These circumstances may have similarly applied to all children of enslaved women under some enslavers. Bradley "Slave Supply and Slavebreeding," 71-72. For evidence of slave and free children interacting regularly, including playing together, see Juvenal, Satire 10.116-117, 14.164-169.

[305] Even so early as the age of 10, enslaved children were trained for various occupations, *Digest* 7.7.1.5, Laes "Child Slaves at Work in Roman Antiquity" in *Ancient Society*, Vol. 38 (2008), 244. See note 15 for some of the trades children acquired.

(provided they were permitted to keep their children with them) and their occupations.[306] Some

enslavers complained of "lazy" urban slaves, but for the most part, it is safe to say that enslaved

mothers worked long hours and at immersive tasks.[307] Thus, their children were probably sent to wet

nurses regularly. Once the child was weaned, he or she was then sent to other caretakers such as

those previously mentioned or to an apprenticeship.[308] Depending on the proximity of the

caretakers, women may or may not have had regular contact with their children.

Wet nurses were therefore an essential part of any slaveholder's *familia* or workforce. There

were several factors enslavers and employers considered when selecting nurses. At the most basic

level, wet nurses would have been mothers of young children.[309] Once they were assigned the role of

nurse, however, they were prohibited from becoming pregnant again so long as they remained in the

role. Soranus, a physician from the second century AD and author of the *Gynecology*, says that

sexually active wet nurses were less inclined to care for their nurslings since they are distracted by

sexual pleasure. Moreover, their milk might become spoiled and they might cease producing if they

become pregnant again.[310] Thus, wet nurses should not only avoid pregnancy but should avoid

sexual activity altogether. Soranus further encouraged new parents to select a nurse who had two or

three children herself to ensure that she understood how to raise children.[311] Thus, women with only

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[306] Susan Treggiari, "Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy," *Florilegium* 1 (1979), 69.

[307] Columella (*Res. Rus.* 1.8.1 complains of slaves who indulged in the pleasures of city life. The reference is to men but given that free and wealthy women commonly were accused of similar laziness, it seems likely that enslaved women would have been perceived similarly.

[308] Bradley, "Sexual Regulations in Wet-Nursing Contracts from Roman Egypt," *Klio* vol. 62 (1980), 326. See n. 25 for a list of papyri that attest to enslaved children under the contracted care of a wet nurse.

[309] Bradley, 322.

[310] Soranus, II.19.

[311] *Ibid.*

one child were not likely to become wet nurses because they were too inexperienced while women who had more than three children were considered undesirable because Romans believed their milk became less nutritious.[312] Potentially parents or enslavers will have also confirmed that the nurse's children were well cared for as a means of ensuring that their own child would be provided for similarly well.

Many wet nurses were enslaved, so their roles as nurses implies that their status as mother was exploited for the profit of their enslaver. To quote Sandra Joshel, 'controlling women's biology was an important element of the coercion that surrounded the nurse's service."[313] It is not clear whether a woman was permitted to keep and feed her own child, however. On the one hand, women might have been separated from their children to avoid a mother favoring her own children or too many children competing for a limited supply of breastmilk. [314] On the other hand, if it were in the interests of the enslaver to keep her children with her to demonstrate to potential clients that the woman is a good caretaker and therefore a worthy nurse, then she might be expected to care for her own children and those of her clients, not to mention *vernae* enslavers likely also put under the care of enslaved wet nurses. How many of the children she would have been expected to feed personally must have been limited and, potentially, she shared her duties with other wet nurses and childminders. Whatever the case,

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[312] *Ibid.*

[313] Joshel, "Nurturing the Master's Child," 5.

[314] A parallel can be found in the enslaved wet nurses of Atlantic slave-holding societies where women were often closely monitored by their enslavers and separated from their own children so as to not be distracted from their charges. Incidentally, the same concerns Soranus had about sexual intercourse while nursing—that it might spoil the milk—remained concerns that white enslavers employed to justify separating enslaved nurses from their families. Camillia Cowling, Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado, Diana Paton, and Emily West, "Mothering Slaves: Comparative Perspectives on Motherhood, Childlessness, and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies," *Slavery & Abolition* 38, no. 2 (2017), 226-227.

the interests of the enslaver overrode any preferences the mother had about raising her child herself.

Not only did enslaved women serve as wet nurses to infants, usually until the child was around two years old,[315] but women also took care of older children in nurseries. They cared for both the enslaved and the free children of the *dominus* or *domina*. If they were permitted to care for their own children then they would have had to establish a three-level approach to nursing: caring for one's own child, caring for enslaved children, caring for free children. The triad required that the free children appropriate the most dedicated care while the enslaved, whether her own or those belonging other slave mothers, would receive more limited care.

The devotion of *nutrices* who had provided excellent care is evidenced by numerous dedications to *nutrices* from the children they cared for. Some nurses dedicated monuments to their charges, but the preponderance of monuments was dedicated by the former charges to their nurses.[316] These dedications reflect the child's sentiments for the nurse, saying virtually nothing about the nurse's sentiments for the child.[317] Intriguingly, Joshel found that of the few monuments which nurses dedicated to their charges, the children to whom the dedications were made were slaves or freedpeople rather than free children.[318] Based on the data, it is reasonable to conclude that free children nursed by enslaved women had more affection for their nurses than the nurses had for

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[315] *Ibid.*, 322.

[316] Sandra Joshel identified a collection of fifty-seven monuments dedicated to nurses. Of those, about 7% (4) were dedicated to enslaved nurses while another 15.8% (9) were dedications to "uncertain slave" nurses. In total, as many as 22.8% of all the dedications were made to enslaved nurses. "Nurturing the Master's Child," 14 n. 36.

[317] *Ibid.*, 19.

[318] *Ibid.*, 17.

them. Nurses seemed to have had a stronger connection with their charges who were enslaved or freed, commemorating them far more frequently than they commemorated free children.

Occasionally, the maternity of nurses was sometimes acknowledged in funerary monuments. Nurses represent one of the few exceptions to the "rule" that women who were commemorated by their occupation were generally not commemorated as mothers. In one such case, Verecundus established a monument to his mother, Volusia Felicula, the nurse of Torquata.[319] Verecundus' description of his mother pertains only to her role as nurse of Torquata, suggesting that her role as nurse and her relationship to Torquata were central to both his and his mother's life experience. Nevertheless, his dedication to his mother is notable since nurses are more often associated with the children they cared for than with their own biological children.

Enslaved wet nurses must have had multifaceted relationships with their charges and children. They were compelled to treat the children they cared for well and ensure their good health, even if it meant neglecting their own. Often, it seems, nurses were successful in fulfilling these obligations, garnering life-long affection from their charges. Nevertheless, the compulsion to care for another's children at the expense of one's own probably engendered some resentfulness for the loss of one's own children and reproductive freedom. Thus, while nursing might appear to have been a relatively comfortable position for an enslaved woman, it was probably emotionally challenging. Like other enslaved women, nurses were not permitted to mother as they liked but instead had their biological motherhood exploited. They first had to give birth to a child then were separated from them and made to prioritize

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[319] CIL 6.29550. *D(is) M(anibus) / Volus{s}iae / Felic(u)lae / Torquataes(!) nutri<ci=X>(?) / fecit / Verecundus / filius matri / bene merenti / f(ecit)* As referenced in Joshel, 15-16. Volusia Felicula was owned by the important senatorial family of the Volusii. The woman she nursed, Volusia Torquata, was the wife of a Roman senator named C. Calpurnius Crassus Frugi Licinianus during the reign of Domitian.

other's children. Enslaved nurses' reproductive lives were closely controlled by their enslavers, limiting their personal relationships and significantly impacting a mother's ability to care for her children.

### Sexual Abuse and Use of Enslaved Women and Mothers

Evidence for abuse among enslaved people comes from several different sources and like so much of the rest of the evidence I rely on, can be interpreted in different ways. Nevertheless, it is both valid and necessary to use evidence that suggests the range of possibilities within reasonable and established theoretical frameworks while identifying a few instances supported directly by the evidence. In this case, queer theory again is the most applicable of the social scientific theories for its ability to reach marginalized groups and to identify sexual behavior and sexuality in evidence that might otherwise obscure both. The results are sometimes contradictory, and often incomplete. Nevertheless, they are essential to helping move the field ahead in both the assessment of enslaved women as mothers and in the application of theoretical frameworks to Roman studies.

Enslaved women were by nature of their condition sexually available to their enslavers and to whomever else the enslavers allowed access.[320] A telling example of the exploitation of slaves for sexual use comes from Martial's *Epigrams.* In 3.33, he outlines a hierarchy of partners, "I prefer a freeborn woman, but if she is denied me, my next choice is a freedwoman. Last is a slave girl."[321] By naming a slave as the final option in the line of sexually available objects, he reminds his readers that she has no choice in partners. However attractive she was, she was not free to resist his advances as the others were. Ladies had choices and so did freedwomen, but not slaves. The legal sources, too,

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[320] Keith Bradley, *Slaves and Masters,* 116.

[321] *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.* Juvenal, in *Satire* 6.320-21 also hints at the sexual availability of slaves by suggesting that a promiscuous lady, Saufeia, poses a challenge to slave prostitutes. *lenonum ancillas posita Saufeia coronaprovocat et tollit pendentis praemia coxae.*

attest to the sexual availability of slaves. According to Aemilius Macer, husbands were

prohibited under the *ius occidendi* from killing an adulterer caught in the act except if the

person were a pimp or if he was previously:

an actor or performed on the stage as a dancer or singer or if he has been condemned in
criminal proceedings and is not yet restored to his former status, or if he is a freedman of the
husband or wife or of the father, mother, son, or daughter of either of them (and it is of no
consequence whether he was the sole property of one of them or was owned jointly with
someone else) or if he is a slave.[322]

Women who held the same statuses or who practiced any of the trades identified in

the *ius occidendi* exceptions were similarly separated from women of respectable status

because they were *infames* (if actors or criminals) and, in the case of slaves, persons without

rights. Furthermore, enslaved women could not technically be raped because they had no

right to their own sexuality. Rather, it was the role of an enslaved woman to be available and

there were many ways enslavers made that role clear, sometimes by the psychological threat

of sexual abuse even if women never experienced overt abuse.[323]

Edward Cohen has argued that the assertion that enslaved people would have existed

under the knowledge that they *could* be used sexually by their enslavers because of an ever-

present psychological threat is too strong because there were social constraints on free

people engaging in sex with enslaved people. He argues that enslaved women were

"protected" from most instances of sexual use or abuse on the basis of three things: first,

that the language of marriage and family relationships was used widely by poets and jurists to

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[322] *Dig.* 48.5.25(24). McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, 203.

[323] Levin-Richardson, 189, relates the possibility that the prevalence of sexualized art, including mythological
rape scenes at Pompeii and the presence of slaves at dinner parties that involved sex could be considered
sexual abuse because of the psychological implications of seeing the art regularly and witnessing others
engaged in sex acts with no opportunity to leave, even if the slave was not personally abused. For example,
frescos depicting erotic scenes and rape were found in several of the homes in Pompeii, which Levin-
Richardson interprets as a constant reminder of slaves' sexual vulnerability (195).

refer to slave; second, that while slave were sexually abused sometimes, there is a lack of direct

evidence so frequency cannot be determined; third, that enslavers were constrained by

"considerations of domestic tranquility."[324] While he is probably right that some women did

not directly experience sexual abuse, there is no reason to believe that only a minority of

women did or that the threat of potential abuse was not always present. Even if some

women never experienced sexual abuse themselves, they certainly felt the threat and knew

women who were abused.

Slave women were not only subject to the threat of abuse, but experienced it through the

actions of other slaves, their enslavers, family members of the enslaver, and others outside of the

*familia.* For example, women doing business in the markets, working in inns and taverns, or running

other retails shops might have been treated as if they were prostitutes, regardless of whether they

were, because of the presumptions of male patrons. Finally, many enslaved women were kept as

prostitutes, concubines, and performers, all of whom were regularly subject to sexual use and abuse,

because their statuses as slaves and occupation marked them as available. Even women who worked

in homes were subject to the overtures of their enslavers. Ultimately, enslaved women had to

contend with the ever-present possibility that they would be taken advantage of sexually. Then,

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[324] Edward Cohen, "Sexual Abuse and Sexual Rights: Slaves' Erotic Experience at Athens and Rome" in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities,* First Edition, edited by Thomas K. Hubbard, Blackwell Publishing (2014), 197-198. He bases his argument on the presumption that regular reference to slaves' marriages or status as wives and husbands indicate that "owner's acquiescence" to the relationships was readily given and that they respected the partnership. He further suggests that McGinn's assertion that the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* clearly did not include slaves in its provisions for punishing adulterers is impossible to substantiate because the law has come down to us only through fragments and there is no direct exclusion of enslaved women in the evidence we have. Both arguments, though, strike me as facetious. In the first place, the frequency of references does not correlate to the frequency of the practice and evidence for families being separated by sale or manumission seems to counterbalance the idea that enslavers respected familial relationships among their slaves enough to prevent sexual abuse. Second, McGinn's argument seems to be on much firmer ground as the law is clearly interested in protecting the honor of Roman citizen women. Since slaves had no honor, there would have been no reason to include them in the provisions.

because pregnancy was always a possibility, they would have to make difficult choices about how to address pregnancy if it occurred.

A powerful demonstration that slave women were considered open to sexual use comes from the *Declamationes Minores*, ascribed to Quintilian, no. 301 "Girl Raped as a Slave by a Rich Man."[325] The case is concerned with whether a poor man defrauded a rich man he had invited to dinner by telling the rich man that his daughter, who was serving their dinner, was a slave. Sometime after the meal, the rich man raped the young woman. After reporting the rape to her father, the woman decided to marry rather than prosecute the man, as was her right under the law. The rich man subsequently claimed to have been defrauded. As the author makes clear through the father's assertion that the man, "raped her as if she were a freewoman" (*rapuit tamquam ingenuam)*, the fact that the man chose to rape the girl demonstrated that he knew she was a free person.[326] If the rich man really believed that his daughter was a slave, the poor man alleges, he could have bribed her or otherwise compelled her to sleep with him and would have had no need to take her by force.[327] Notably, the father asserts that there would have been no reason at all to even attempt to rape a slave woman because taking her by force was negated by the fact that she had no right to agree or decline anyway. In short, the sexuality and by extension the reproductive capacity of an enslaved woman was entirely subject to the interests of her enslaver.

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[325] There is doubt that they were, in fact, authored by Quintilian, but whether that is true is immaterial here. What matters is the implications of the declamation. Michael Winterbottom, "*Declamationes pseudo-Quintilianeae*" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4 ed.), edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow OUP (2012).

[326] Quint. *Decl. Min.* 301.7.

[327] *Ibid.,* 301.8, 17-18.

Unwanted sexual encounters must have shaped the way women approached motherhood, especially in the context of slavery. As John Winkler and Craig Williams have convincingly argued, sex was primarily about social order. [328] Since slaves were at the bottom of the social scale, they were not permitted to reject any sexual relationship or advances their enslavers approved. Consequently, enslaved women must have often experienced forcible sexual advances. However, they retained no legal standing to prosecute any offenders because slave women could not legally be raped, even under the one provision that existed for prosecuting rape, the *lex Julia de vi publica*.[329] How enslaved women coped with the trauma of rape and approached bearing and raising children conceived in those circumstances is difficult to know.

Rape among Roman slaves could have been enacted from all quarters. Enslavers had regular and unfettered access to their slaves, they could offer them to friends, family members, and clients, and their enslaved men might also have regular access to enslaved women.[330] Thus, enslaved women were regularly subject to the possibility of pregnancy in non-consensual encounters. How women managed that risk and raised children conceived in rape is significant because it was likely to have

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[328] John Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, NY: Routledge (1990), 22. Craig Williams *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* NY: OUP (1999), 175-176, as cited by David Halperin in *How to do the History of Homosexuality* Chicago: UChicago Press (2002), 164 n. 21.

[329] Rape was not a legally defined crime at all until the *lex Julia de vi publica* was passed, probably during Julius Caesar's dictatorship. Gardner, 118. The only recourse that existed for enslaved women was entirely under the purview of their enslavers. The enslaver could claim a *stuprum* case under the *lex Aquilla*, (*Digest* 47.10.25) but that would require his/her support of the slave woman and would almost certainly exclude any abuse committed by someone within the *familia*, a consideration that would probably have meant that *most* instances of rape would not have been accounted for under any legal recourse for enslaved women. For a discussion see McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, 313.

[330] How open this access was is unknown, but presumably women were used sexually by their fellow male slaves, sometimes under the approval of their enslavers (see the unusual example of Cato charging men for access to women) and sometimes not. There is some evidence in Roman comedy for enslaved women's sexual availability to enslaved me. For example, in Plautus' *Casina*, the slave girl for whom the play is named is the sexual object of her enslaver, his son, and two of their slaves.

shaped a woman's approach to that child, potentially even leading her to treat the child born

of rape differently from children born under different circumstances. The identity of the

father might also have shaped her approach. For example, if the man were her enslaver, she

would almost certainly have had to defer to his wishes. Similarly, his identity might also be a

signal to those around her. If we continue with the example, the enslaver's wife might

become angry and the slave woman might be subjected to additional abuse from her.[331]

Conversely, the enslaved mother might gain special status in the family, signaling to fellow

slaves that she should be treated carefully and granting her some limited power. Despite the

quite dramatic experience of slave women, violence against them is treated matter-of-factly

by ancient authors, it was simply the way things were and there was no need to consider the

feelings, relationships, or consequences of pregnancy for enslaved women.

Rape was a frequently used plot device in Roman comedy. In Tara Mulder's analysis of it,

she found that raped women usually attempted to hide their pregnancies (rather than abort

the fetus) to avoid injuring the reputation of their families and to protect new marriages.[332]

Once the child was born, the women either attempted to or intended to expose the child. In

all cases, it is eventually revealed that rapist and the father of the child is the woman's new

husband or husband-to-be. The child is saved and the couple lives "happily ever after." [333]

To modern ears, it seems strange that the women should be pleased to marry their rapist, but

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[331] Serena Witzke, "Violence against Women in Ancient Rome: Ideology versus Reality" in *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (2016), 262.

[332] Tara Mulder, "Female Trouble in Terence's *Hecyra*: Rape-Pregnancy Plots and the Absence of Abortion in Roman Comedy" *Helios* vol. 46 no. 1, (2019), believes that abortion must have been relatively easy to come by as there were effective abortifacients and there is frequent reference to it in the ancient texts. Mulder cites some evidence from Plautus' *Truculentus* to suggest that abortion was a tool used by *meretrices* to protect their occupational interests as sex workers (39-40).

[333] Mulder, 35.

respectable Roman women were more concerned about their family's reputation and their own sense of honor than about being married to a potentially violent man. Once the woman was married, however, she was probably much better protected from violence as men who were inclined to such behavior likely turned their attention toward slaves.[334]

Presumably, enslaved women would have also had recourse to the same devices to deal with rape (hidden pregnancy, exposure, and abortion). Presumably, also, many women kept and raised the children despite the violence done to them. Comparative evidence taken from Andrea Livesey's analysis of interviews given by formerly enslaved women in Louisiana demonstrates that slave women, desiring to establish familial relationships and a sense of stability, found ways to maintain strong bonds with children conceived of rape, despite the sexual violence they experienced.[335] Livesey believed that by treating children born of violent and traumatic rape as carefully and lovingly as any other children they bore, enslaved women found a means of coping with sexual trauma and the complete lack of personal control over their bodies and sexuality.[336] On the other hand, there is significant contemporary evidence to indicate that rape is underreported and that mothers who bear children conceived of rape often struggle to care for those children as they care for their other children because of the trauma of the event.[337] The way enslaved Roman women would have responded is ultimately unknowable, though it is probably closer to that of enslaved

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[334] Witzke, 259.

[335] Andrea Livesey, "Conceived in Violence: Enslaved Mothers and Children Born of Rape in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana," *Slavery & Abolition* 38 no. 2 (2017), 374.

[336] *Ibid.*, 386. In contrast, Turner suggests that women did not cope well with sexual abuse, though she is not clear on how she believed rape affected mothering. Turner, 62ff.

[337] Frances Thomson Salo, Paul Campbell, Amanda Jones and Juliet Hopkins, "Infants Born of Rape" *The Signal* 16 no. 1-2, (2008), 1.

African women then it is to modern, free mothers.[338] Thus, Roman mothers may have also found ways to maintain familial bonds with children even if they were conceived under traumatic circumstances or separated by sale or some other decision the enslaver made.

Aside from the cases of obvious abuse, family arrangements were probably not all consensual. Although there is evidence of affectionate familial relationships among Roman slaves, there is reason to believe that many of those relationships were arranged by enslavers or others who had an interest in maintaining familial units within a *familia*. Varro suggests that he himself facilitated some such arrangements, both for his household slaves and those who traveled with the herds of cattle and sheep.[339] Columella says that overseers should be assigned *contubernales* to keep them from overstepping their boundaries.[340] Importantly, all the relationships were established to with an emphasis on the men, who either received a woman as a reward or was assigned on to keep him in line. Ultimately, the benefit was for the enslaver, who gained greater compliance among his slaves by prioritizing the desires of their male slaves.

Conversely, there is nothing to indicate that women were encouraged to choose men for themselves or that men were chosen for women in the same way that women were given to men. Still, it is probably true that women sometimes did select their own partners under more casual circumstances, as when the enslavers were not arranging the relationships. Even so, they were probably still subject to sexual use by their enslavers and others. Whether

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[338] Evidence from other sources indicates that enslaved women sometimes procured abortions in Atlantic slaving societies so that they might, "'avoid generating a race of human beings to be enslaved to [brutal] masters.'" Bush, "Hard Labor," 209.

[339] Varro *Res Rus.* 2.10.6.

[340] Columella *Res Rus.* 1.8.5. *Sed qualicumque vilico contubernales mulier adsignanda est…*" The word *adsignanda*, (must be assigned or designated) emphasized Columella's insistence upon partnering overseers. The language suggests that the neither the overseer nor the woman chose their partners. Rather, he seems to be encouraging enslavers to make that choice independently.

voluntary or arranged, encouraged or discouraged, some slave couples did establish companionate relationships, as evidenced by the tombstones honoring the lives of their partners.[341] The relative frequency of consensual or companionate partnerships and arranged ones is unclear.[342] However, Pliny the Younger indicated that he liked to allow his slaves to write and distribute their own wills, creating a "kind of citizenship" (*quasi civitas*)[343] thereby providing them with limited (or at least apparent) autonomy over their relationships, presumably including romantic ones.[344] There is much that remains unknown about romantic partnerships among enslaved people in Rome. One thing is certain, though, those relationships were always at the mercy of enslavers who monitored and sometimes even directly established them.

Wet nursing, irregular though indiscriminate sexual abuse, and familial arrangements were not the only ways in which slave women were used sexually. While wet nurses were prohibited from engaging in sexual intercourse, those who were purchased as breeders were compelled to the opposite. Breeding was a more insidious form of reproductive control and seems to have been practiced, even if only by a handful of enslavers. Thus, there were women who were not only compelled to have intercourse with other slaves whom they did not choose but were also inspected by *medicae* and *gynocologicae* upon sale and were compelled to give birth to any child conceived.[345]

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[341] Susan Treggiari collected over 260 inscriptions from CIL 6 bearing the term *contubernales* and found that 68 of the inscriptions refer to certain or probable slave couples. Among the remaining couples, most common are those free women partnered with enslaved men (65) and couples wherein both partners are free or freed (62). Treggiari, "'*Contubernales*' in CIL 6" *Phoenix* vol. 35 n. 1 (1981): 45.

[342] Turner describes the myriad ways enslaved women in Jamaica, especially newly imported ones, were forced into partnered relationships, with enslavers even going so far as to call the women who were given to men against their wills "wives." Turner, *Contested Bodies*, 62.

[343] Pliny, *Ep.* 8.16.2-3.

[344] Joshel disagrees. She believes that Pliny's emphasis on citizenship undermines any personal ties within the *familia*, 45.

[345] Provided their enslavers were aware of the pregnancy. See also Gardner *Women in Roman Law*, 206-207 for an explanation of the various legalities surrounding an enslaved woman's ability to bear children or virginity.

It is not possible to say how often women were purchased as breeders, but clearly they sometimes they were. Consequently, the ability of women to carry a child to term and have a successful birth was considered a key element of their fitness and therefore part of the general guarantee of health that was expected at point of sale.[346] If it was uncertain whether a woman could bear children and, if the seller did not want the sale to be dependent upon her fertility, slave women could be sold "without a guarantee," similar to a modern "as-is" clause. Women were sold "without a guarantee" if they were pregnant or if they had experienced known complications with childbearing.[347] The market transactions demonstrate just how important fertility must have been to enslavers. It is difficult to think that women were not often purchased as breeders or, at the very least, with the strong hope that they would produce children.

Once women were purchased, they were probably quickly assigned partners. Varro sent out women whom he deemed particularly suited to harsh conditions so that the men might have female partners and bear shepherds children.[348] Although it cannot be known whether the women he sent out were purchased specifically for that purpose, it is clear that

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She is careful to say that there is no evidence for whether inspectors were supplied by aediles in the markets or provided by sellers. Nevertheless, women were certainly inspected at some point during a sale.

[346] Gardner, 207.

[347] There is disagreement among both scholars and jurists on this point. According to Vitruvius *de Arc.* 2.9.1, a pregnant woman is like a tree in the spring which is "weak and feeble" (*vanae fiunt et raritatibus inbecillae*) and a slave woman in this condition should be considered unsound because the fetus takes too much nourishment from the mother for her to be well while she is pregnant. On the other hand, Aulus Gellius (4.2.9-10, *Dig.* 21.1.14.7, 15) reports disagreement between jurists on whether a barren woman is diseased or defective or neither. In both, the capacity to bear children is at least one of the factors that contributed to the value of a slave women. Whether that matters, however, seems to be relative to context and potential "use" on the part of the master.

[348] Varro *Res Rus* 2.10.6-8.

he selected the women specifically for their stamina, strength, and decent looks.[349] Whatever he did personally, enslavers who followed his advice probably did buy slaves with the requisite characteristics. The fact that the women were meant to produce children for the herdsmen is made clear in the first line of the relevant section: "As to the breeding of herdsmen…"[350] Thus, there does seem to be something of a "breeder" mentality here. That sense is reinforced by his expectations for the women and two anecdotes. First, as described previously, though in a different context, the woman he sent out must be prepared to care for their children on her own.[351] Notably, she might also have had to bear her children without the standard care of a midwife. Second, Varro relates two anecdotes about women from Illyricum and Liburnia. The women from Liburnia, he says, carried firewood and their children simultaneously[352] while Varro himself claims to have observed (probably while visiting Pomponius Atticus, the correspondent of Cicero who owned property in the region) women in Illyricum pausing work to bear children then returning to work so quickly that "you would think she had not given birth to it but had found it."[353] Both instances call to mind the stereotypes about African women perpetuated by white men in the 17th through 19th centuries who argued that Black women were able to continue working under difficult conditions while pregnant and even while in labor, because they apparently did not experience pain in birth.[354] Following birth,

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[349] *Sed eas mulieres esse oportet firmas, non turpes…" Ibid.*, 2.10.7.

[350] *Quod ad feturam humanam pertinent pastorum…" Ibid*, 2.10.6. Translated by William Davis Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash, LCL, HUP (1933).

[351] This is doubly important because it suggests that he did not generally expect enslaved women to nurse their own children.

[352] *Ibid.*, II.10.8.

[353] *"…nam in Illyrico hoc amplius, praegnatem saepe, cum venit pariendi tempus, non longe ab opera discedere ibique enixam puerum referre, quem non peperisse, sed invenisse putes…" Ibid.*, II.10.9.

[354] Jennifer L. Morgan, "'Some could Suckle over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770, in *William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, vol. 54 no 1 (1997): 189, 191.

some men even claimed that they saw women who were able to "suckle over their shoulder" while carrying a child on their backs.[355] In sum, Varro's assertions may well have been based on exoticizing assumptions about foreign women. Likely, his decision to name two ethnic groups shaped the purchasing decisions of his reader, especially if they were selecting women specifically for breeding with shepherds.

A second example comes from Columella's *Res Rustica*. Although it is not clear that Columella purchased slave women for breeding, he certainly saw value in childbearing. In fact, he suggests releasing women who bear three children from work and freeing women who have given birth to more than three. They were freed as a reward because they had been profitable.[356] Importantly, the children of the women almost certainly remained enslaved, which might very well have dampened any enthusiasm a woman had about achieving manumission. It is also possible, though not demonstrable, that some women avoided bearing enough children even with an incentive *because* she knew that she might be freed while her children were not. Despite Columella's confident, even bragging, tone his may have not been a very good practice; such incentives may have backfired for some enslavers who hoped to use the advice to increase their slave populations. Admittedly, Varro and Columella are likely not representative of enslavers as both were writing guides or advice books for fellow agriculturalists, but their ideas and suggestions must have been both understandable and palatable to enslavers who likely adopted much of their advice.

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[355] *Ibid.* See the image on page 185 and the quotation on page 188, citing John Atkins.

[356] Columella *Res Rus.* 1.8.19. Though Roth argues against the idea that women only had to give birth to three or more children to be freed. Rather, she believes that women were made to raise the children, thus making them work particularly hard for their potential release. Roth, 13.

Even when breeding was not a primary consideration, a woman's ability to bear children was one of the factors potential buyers considered. As Gardner outlines, the legal codes reveal a preoccupation with childbearing. In some instances, women were purchased for the ability to bear children, in others, childbearing was discouraged, not only for wet nurses but also to secure inheritances. A key example is related by Julian: a woman, Arethusa, was freed by testament on the condition she bear three children. An heir, attempting to keep her enslaved, prevented birth by administering a contraceptive or abortifacient. The jurist ruled that the woman should be freed immediately because she may have given birth to triplets, thereby fulfilling her obligation for manumission. Thus, while some enslavers encouraged childbearing, others apparently had incentives to force a woman to terminate a pregnancy, exerting yet another form of bodily control.[357]

In conclusion, the sexual use and abuse that slave women faced because of their subjugation was pervasive and undoubtably affected women's approaches to mothering and her relationships with her children. For wet nurses, their sexuality was first exploited for their milk and secondly suppressed to maintain the milk supply. For breeders, they were compelled to engage in sexual relationships with men of their enslaver's choosing to produce children that contributed to sustaining the enslaver's supply of slaves and to satisfy their enslaved men. For enslaved women generally, they were subject to the constant psychological threat of abuse, regular sexual use at the whim of their enslavers, and the challenges of raising a child born of traumatic circumstances or, conversely, the threat of losing a desired child at the decision of their enslavers. Although there is no direct evidence to suggest what the consequences of sexual use might have been, comparative evidence tells us that women's relationships with their children were informed by circumstanced. Some enslaved mothers found ways to create space and care for children who might otherwise have been constant reminders of abuse. Others may have struggled to find affection for children born of

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[357] Gardner, 209. *Dig.* 40.7.4.16.

the same circumstances. Conversely, some women were prevented from bearing children or had them taken away for the benefit of the enslavers. All enslaved women were open to sexual use by their enslavers and their sexuality was continually regulated according to the interests of their enslavers. As mother and potential mothers, enslaved women's subjection to sexual use shaped their relationships with their children and their ability to mother.

### Prostituting Slave Women

Enslaved women were probably prostituted quite often, though it is difficult to say just how frequently. Evidence exists for the presence of both slave and free prostitutes, but it is weighted toward suggesting that most prostitutes were enslaved.[358] McGinn, Levin-Richardson, Strong, and Treggiari all argue that prostitution was common and widespread in Roman cities. It is easiest to "see" prostitution in Pompeii, but probably the practice existed throughout the Roman empire. Even in places where there is virtually no direct evidence of the presence of prostitutes, like Roman Ostia, they were probably present, working out of regular homes, hotels, and other businesses that were not overtly labeled as brothels.[359] Because enslaved prostitutes were pervasive in Rome, control of their sexuality, bodies, and reproduction was subject to the will of their enslavers. Roman prostitutes were likely regularly compelled to avoid childbirth with contraceptives and abortifacients for the sake of maintaining bodies desirable for their customers. One piece of evidence for this practice comes from Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories*, where he asserts that prostitutes and

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[358] McGinn believes that most prostitutes were slaves. He bases his argument in part on evidence from Pompeian graffiti, advertising prices for services, which indicates that prostitutes were either "slaves, ex-slaves, or lived in in social conditions that were close to slaves." Further evidence comes from the known statuses of prostitutes, many of whom were slaves or freedwomen, suggesting that they were prostituted before they were freed. *Economy of Prostitution*, 59, 60. See also Treggiari, "Lower Class Women," 74, as cited by McGinn.

[359] McGinn, 230.

midwives had the same knowledge of contraceptives and abortifacients. [360] Thus, he suggests that prostitutes' use of both was common enough (or at least perceived to be common enough) to demand a vast knowledge of the various means by which one might prevent or end a pregnancy.

Although there are several important monographs and articles on prostitution, none spend much time addressing mothers.[361] In her book, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World,* Anise Strong chooses to avoid the subject of motherhood among prostitutes because, "it is dangerous to generalize either about the conceptualization of prostitutes as mothers or the outcomes of their reproductive choices."[362] Thomas McGinn, in his influential book *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* refers only to motherhood as it pertains to *matronae* and *mater familiae*. Both center their questions around respectability, honor, and social order. While significant, these concepts are tangential to my questions, so even if exploring motherhood among prostitutes is inadvisable from their perspectives, they cannot be avoided in this context.

Although enslaved women were regularly prostituted, certainly not all were. First, common household slaves and agricultural slaves served very different functions in the Roman slave economy. Those who were used as prostitutes were procured specifically for that purpose. In fact, the existence of a legal means of preventing a woman from being used as prostitute upon her sale supports the notion that prostitution was an occupation for which enslavers identified specific women. Enslavers sometimes also sold slaves with a *ne serva* clause, which prevented a buyer from prostituting an enslaved woman. The clause could stipulate that the current buyer and all future

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[360] Pliny *NH* 28.20.

[361] With the exception of Serena Witzke in "Mothers and Children in Roman Comedies: Social Realities," a conference paper presented at a CSC/WCC conference. n.d. insofar as it pertains to *lena* mothers in Roman comedy.

[362] Anise Strong, *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, CUP (2016), 24.

buyers are prohibited from prostituting the women or it could pertain only to that sale.

Variations of the clause required that if the buyer violated the limitation, the slave woman

would be freed, returned to the previous owner, or the buyer would be fined.[363] The

existence of the clause seems to suggest that enslaved women were given some protection

from prostitution, maybe regularly. Most likely, however, it was to ensure that slaves who

were intended for occupations unrelated to prostitution were purchased to fill those

economic needs.

Furthermore, there are reasons to believe that even in situations where women were

sold under the *ne serva* clause the purpose was not to protect the enslaved woman from

sexual use. Rather, as McGinn argues, the clause is intended to protect reputations of

enslavers, not the sexual purity of a slave women.[364] Furthermore, the slave woman, while

not legally subject to prostitution was in no way protected from other sexual abuse.

Enforcement may have been difficult when the buyer lived some distance from the previous

owner or there was little or no contact between the *familia* of her former enslaver and that of

the new enslaver anyway. So, although some slave women must have been able to avoid the

threat of prostitution according to the *ne serva* clause, most would have known that the

possibility of being prostituted (or at least used sexually in another capacity) by an enslaver

always loomed.

Women who were prostituted, like many others, were likely to have become

pregnant. Some probably were prohibited by their enslavers from bearing children, some

might have personally desired to avoid having children, and others would have borne

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[363] Thomas McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* OUP (1998), 292. Legal references: *Dig.* 18.7.6.1 18.7.10, 37.14.7. The penalty could even be extended to the original enslaver if he prostituted her himself 2.4.10.1.

[364] *Ibid.*, 312-314.

children regardless of her willingness or her enslaver's whims. For all prostituted women, however, motherhood remained a possibility. There were several known contraceptives and abortifacients in the Roman world. Debate on their effectiveness and availability remains spirited, but there are some reasons to believe that at least some women did have access to effective treatments. Some treatments were dangerous, [365] such as the insertion of sharp objects like pins to induce an abortion and herbal remedies that induced cramping or vomiting, but they were also often effective.[366] Similar methods are still used today in parts of the world where abortions are difficult to obtain because of legal or cultural limitations.[367]

There were various means for avoiding pregnancy or preventing birth. Most were herbal remedies of varying effectiveness. Many of them were also used as remedies for regulating menstrual cycles or treating other gynecological ills.[368] Some may have caused abortions unknowingly. Incidentally, it is also important to reiterate that there were (and still are) a large proportion of spontaneous miscarriages. They are estimated to affect about 30% of all pregnancies. Distinguishing between miscarriage and abortion was sometimes a difficult task. Consequently, abortion was not punishable by law except when a woman was caught deliberately aborting a child without her

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[365] Ovid *Am.* 2.13.1-3.

[366] There is much scholarly debate on how effective they were, but Roman authors certainly believed there were effective methods and that they were used regularly by Roman women, especially elite women who did not want to have children and prostitutes, for whom bearing children might be a liability. John Riddle argues that at least some of the techniques were successful in his book, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine*, University of Texas Press (1985), 59ff. and in *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, CUP (1992), 17-18. For a more complete discussion, see all of chapters 2, 5, and 7.

[367] Angus McLaren, *A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Blackwell Publishing (1990), 59. Surgical abortion was also possible, though it was exceptionally painful, so it was used rarely, usually in cases of miscarriage after which a woman was not able to expel the deceased child. Celsus has a long passage describing how to carry out the procedure, Celsus *De Med.* 7.20.1-10. See also Konstantinos Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, Duckworth (2002), 7ff. for an overview of the various methods employed.

[368] Soranus 1.63.

husband's approval.[369] Otherwise, it was legal (though there were certainly people who disapproved) in Rome and, apparently, somewhat widely practiced among women from all backgrounds. In the cases where women had children they could not or would not care for care for, women sometimes exposed children in the hopes that others might take them in or committed infanticide.

Prostitutes who had children could expect that they were likely to be separated from one another or that the children would be subject to the same kind of sex work they were engaged in. Literary evidence for the latter comes from Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesan*. In the passage, Crobyle, a prostitute mother tells her daughter, Corinna, that she was impatiently waiting for Corinna to grow up so that she could take on the same kind of work as her mother and support Crobyle as she aged.[370] Hence, a key concern for prostitute mothers was how to raise children. Though some were raised to become prostitutes themselves, it is easy to imagine that many mothers did so only because it was necessary to maintain basic living conditions for them both. Prostitutes worked not only in formal brothels but also on the streets, in inns and taverns, and among their own *familiae,* servicing fellow slaves and subject to the whims of their owners.

It is difficult to imagine how women who carried their children to term protected their incomes while pregnant and in the weeks following parturition, when they would have had significantly fewer or even no customers. Enslaved women may have been in a more secure position for carrying children to term and raising them than free women, however, because their enslavers were responsible for covering their living expenses. Thus, they might

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[369] Marcian *Dig.* 47.11.4. Although, Ulpian does not distinguish between married and unmarried women in 48.8.8.

[370] Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, 6.1. A caveat: Crobyle is freeborn and so is her daughter. They came into prostitution after Crobyle was widowed and, having lost her husband's income, was unable to support the two of them.

have lost money for the business, but were maybe less likely to fall into destitution at the loss of clients. Intriguingly, there is some evidence from Pompeian graffiti that *vernae* were prostituted. Sarah Levin-Richardson collected a list of the graffiti in Pompeii that contain the word *verna*. She identified 18 total graffiti and of those, 11 were related to prostitution either indicating a price or describing sexual acts.[371] The evidence suggests, first, that children born to enslaved women were prostituted themselves. Second, it seems likeliest that those children who were raised to become prostitutes were born of prostituted women. The reason some women were described as *vernae* is unclear. It may have indicated a special status, but, in general, the prices associated with them were not high, so it is unlikely that there was a premium associated with that status.[372] It is far from clear how pervasive the practice of prostituting *vernae* was, but unless these graffiti do not describe prostitutes, they reveal the presence of home-born prostitutes in Pompeii.

Thus, if there were in fact *vernae* who were prostituted, it is quite likely that at least some prostituted, enslaved women bore children who were raised to become prostitutes themselves. The circumstances of mothering while a prostitute must have been quite difficult, shaped by their status as enslaved women and their mode of prostitution, including their status among other prostitutes. Just as all enslaved women were subject to separation from their children against their wills, prostitutes were also. Enslavers might sell the children, take them to be raised elsewhere, or even expose them if they were too inconvenient to raise.

Working as a prostitute would have been a demanding role as women needed to be regularly available to customers, soliciting themselves (and others if they worked in groups), and sometimes running the brothels themselves. If enslaved women were permitted to raise their children, they

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[371] Levin-Richardson, "Sex and Slavery," 202, n. 49.

[372] CIL 4.3964, 3 asses; CIL 4.4023, 2 asses; CIL 4.4025 5 asses; CIL 4.4592, 2 asses; CIL 4.5105, 2 asses, CIL 4.5203 8 asses, CIL 4.5204, 5 asses; CIL 4.5345, 2 asses. All references follow Levin-Richardson's collection. Only those graffiti that mention prices are listed here.

would have had a difficult time keeping their young children with them much of the time and therefore likely relied on collective care or the care of nurses and wet-nurses (though I wonder if children of prostitutes would have been separated out from the other children because of the social stigma placed on the profession). As children who remained with their mothers grew, they would likely have been taught the trade so that they might also contribute. In the previously cited passage from Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesan*, the dilemma prostituted mothers faced is clear. Women who bore young girls may have known that their children would become prostitutes themselves and prepared both themselves and their children for the eventuality. That preparation included specific calculations about when a child was old enough to take on the responsibilities, how their inclusion in the business would affect income, and how they should be trained to behave and dress so that they might appeal to men.

The textual evidence for prostitute mothers comes almost exclusively from Roman comedy. There is no evidence in the corpus of Latin inscriptions.[373] The comedies do not portray life as it was and many of the girls raised to become prostitutes are ultimately found to have been of free birth and were therefore not *vernae* but exposed children taken in by *lenae*. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the concerns prostitute mothers raised. Chief among them are financial concerns. To address those needs, the children were expected to take up the profession to help support the mothers and their businesses. For example, in *Cistellaria*, by Plautus, is clear that the daughter needed to take clients to avoid starvation.[374] It is worth noting that in each of the plays in which prostitutes are mothers, the women are *lenae*

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[373] A search of the *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby* returns only two mentions of a *meretrix* (AE 2000, 582 and AE 1906, 1684), neither of which have any connection to motherhood, and none of a *lena* or *lenae*.

[374] Plautus *Cist.* 40-46; 80-88.

running their own homes and brothels.[375] Again, it is difficult to ascertain how close to life the comedies come, but the fact that only *lenae* have children (and they struggle to maintain living conditions that are acceptable to them) in the plays suggests that raising children as enslaved prostitutes must have been a very difficult task for an average woman to take on.

To conclude the chapter, then, enslaved women in the Roman period experienced innumerable challenges to motherhood. The uncertainty of enslavement was a particularly difficult aspect of their *lifeworlds*, which meant that women had much less control over their reproductive lives, sexuality, and bodies than women in other circumstances did. They were regularly subject to sexual abuse and enslavers limited and controlled their access to familial arrangements and decisions about bearing children. Enslaved women were also subjected to overt prostitution and more casual sexual use. It is hard to say how severe the circumstances were for the women who were prostituted, but comparative evidence is helpful. Women were probably subject to psychological distress at the awareness that they might at any time experience sexual abuse. They likely struggled to raise children. Whether they gave birth to them, used contraceptives or aborted pregnancies, women had difficult decisions to make about becoming mothers. Knowing that children might be sold or otherwise separated from them, sometimes permanently, must have had a significant impact on their decision making. Enslavement is itself a humiliating and dehumanizing institution. For women in Rome, that can only have been accentuated by their potential for motherhood and the limits placed on their ability to mother as they deemed appropriate.

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[375] Philocomasium in *Miles Gloriosus*, the Procuress in *Cistellaria*, and Clearate in *Asinaria*.

## Chapter 4: Anticipation and Preparation for Motherhood (or not) Among Freed Women

### Introduction

Current research on freedwomen has explored the ways in which their lives differed from those of freedmen as well as from those of all people of slave and freeborn statuses. Matthew Perry's book *Gender, Manumission and the Roman Freedwoman* argues that sexuality was a central defining characteristic of a freedwoman. Moreover, he argues that marriage was the primary means by which a freedwoman could legitimate her place in Roman society.[376] He makes a strong and clear case for recognizing the importance of gendered expectations among freedwomen in Rome but fails to distinguish between how evidence indicates freedwomen "*should* behave" and how they actually behaved.[377] The consequence is that the morality of the elite is conflated with the activity of ordinary Romans, when it is almost certain that these two aspects of social life were not at all the same.

Freedwomen stood between enslaved and freeborn women and thus they had to orient their lives in both directions. Although they were separated from freeborn and enslaved women by their status, their identities crossed these same status barriers in other ways. Wealth was one of them. For example, imperial freedwomen who lived very different, usually more privileged lives, were likely to hold values more like their enslavers than poorer freedwomen.[378] Similarly, occupations and geographical locations organized freedwomen into networks that connected them more completely with other women, freeborn or enslaved, whose lives were like theirs than with wealthier freedwomen. Often, the connections to former enslavers were strong, as were connections to

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[376] Matthew J. Perry *Gender, Manumission, and Roman Freedwomen*, Cambridge (2014), 93-94.

[377] *Ibid.*, 8.

[378] Weaver holds that imperial freedpeople had different values and the rules of status-mingling did not apply in the same way. Paul Weaver, "Children of Freedmen (and Freedwomen)," In *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, edited by Beryl Rawson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 177.

friends and family, including children, who remained enslaved after a woman was freed.[379] They were also regularly connected to fellow freedpeople in the shops and businesses they worked in. Sometimes they married freeborn men, including patrons, but more often they married fellow freedmen.[380] Familial connections, work, and friendships therefore, crossed status barriers frequently. In this chapter I explore those relationships and how they complicated a freedwoman's maternal identity, emphasizing intersectional relationships among freedwomen by employing the theoretical constructs of queer theory, socialization theory, and *lifeworlds*.

### Kinds of Freedom

The circumstances of manumission were quite varied, and, for many women, they were also made difficult by the variety of relationships that might be established with patrons. Since the late republic, there existed four forms of manumission, three formal—*manumissio censu, vindicta,* and *testamento*—and one informal, called *manumissio inter amicos*, which later was regulated during the reign of Augustus by the *lex Junia* of 19 CE, creating an entirely new category of freedpeople called Junian Latins.[381]

The three formal modes of manumission conferred full Roman citizenship upon the person. This meant that a freedwoman could expect to have all the rights of citizenship available to her, including the right to contract a valid will, inherit, and establish *conubium,* within which she could bear legitimate, citizen children. In 4 CE, Augustus passed the *Lex Aelia Sentia,* which prohibited formal, legal manumission before the age of 30 except in specified cases regulated by *manumissio*

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[379] 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. In her analysis of 1500 epitaphs, she identified 909 mixed-status parental relationships.

[380] Weaver finds that of 700 couples 38% of marriages of freedwomen were to freeborn men. Paul Weaver, *Familia Caesaris*. CUP, 1972, 172ff, as cited in Weaver. "Children of Freedmen," 182.

[381] Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic*, Clarendon Press (1969), 25, 29.

*vindicta*. In this form of manumission a patron brought a fabricated lawsuit claiming that the person was wrongfully enslaved, following which the enslaved person's freedom was "restored" by the decision of the court.[382] The conditions under which a person could be freed according to *vindicta* were limited to natural relatives of the manumitter (son, daughter, brother, sister), foster children (*alumnus/a*), a woman whom the manumitter would marry within six months,[383] teachers of the master's child(ren), and male slaves whom the manumitter desired to conduct specific business on his or her behalf.[384] In these cases, the person manumitted became a full citizen (although there were some limitations on their rights) but was bound to the relationship specified in the conditions of manumission provided by the enslaver. All freedwomen's children born after formal manumission were freeborn Roman citizens, whether she had *conubium* (citizen marriage) or not. If they were born before she was manumitted, they remained slaves unless they were manumitted separately.

Motherhood was complicated by Junian Latinity, the fourth, informal mode of manumission. After the passage of the *lex*, such a person was recognized officially as a *Latinus/a Junianus/a*, or a Junian Latin.[385] Junian Latins were somewhere in between slave and freed. Under both *inter amicos* and the *lex Junia,* manumitted people were granted personal freedom by their enslavers but were not

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[382] Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society,* Routledge (1986) 222-223. Although the fiction is that freedom was restored, it was not retroactive. Thus, they could not be considered freeborn, only freed from wrongful enslavement, Marc Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople: A Brief Cross-Cultural History," in *The Faces of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old and New World Slavery*, edited by Marc Kleijwegt, Brill (2006), 3.

[383] This provision was not allowed in the reverse, i.e., that a female could manumit a male slave for the purpose of marriage. Digest 40.2.13, 40.2.20.2. Weaver, "Children of Freedmen," 180.

[384] *Institutes of Gaius* 1.18, *Dig.* 40.2.

[385] They were counted as if they were natural, freeborn Latins, but not Roman citizens. See Paul Weaver, "Children of Junian Latins" in in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, edited by Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, Clarendon Press (1997), 57.

granted citizenship.[386] Though people freed under these circumstances had some of the privileges of citizenship, they could not make a valid will or become an heir in another's will. Instead, the property of Junian Latins reverted to their patrons. Furthermore, they could establish consensual relationships that were recognized under the law, but they could not contract marriages with *conubium*.[387]

Various combinations of mixed-status marriages determined the precise status children of Junian Latins held. Until Hadrian regularized the relationship between Junian Latin mother, father, and children, under a *senatusconsultum,* children's legitimacy and citizen statuses were ambiguous.[388] According to Gaius, before the *senatusconsultam,* if a Latin man married a Roman citizen before seven witnesses, and they declared their intent to bear children, they formalized their relationship within the context of a legal marriage (though it did not carry *conubium*). Any children born were legitimate, but they did not gain citizen status since the children took the status of their Latin fathers.[389] Whenever such a marriage was contracted, if the couple had a child who survived for at least a year, the father could achieve citizenship for himself, his child (and his wife if she were Latin) through a process called *anniculi probatio*.[390] If the parents were not married, but instead living in concubinage and the mother was a Roman citizen, the child was also a citizen but illegitimate since they were not

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[386] Treggiari makes clear that children born under the older informal manumission model, *inter amicos*, remained enslaved, 30. See also Gaius 3.56

[387] Weaver, "Junian Latins," 57-59.

[388] Paul Weaver, "Children of Junian Latins," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, edited by Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, Clarendon Press (1997), 57; Jane Gardner, "Legal Stumbling-blocks for Lower-Class Families in Rome," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, edited by Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, Clarendon Press (1997), 38-39.

[389] Gaius 1.29.

[390] Weaver, "Junian Latins," 59.

married and illegitimate children followed the status of their mothers.[391] After the Hadrianic

*senatusconsultam* was passed, however, it was determined that only the children of Roman citizen

women and Latin men were citizens, regardless of whether they were married.[392] Formally

manumitted freedwomen would have held citizen status. Thus, if they married Junian Latin men, the

conditions of the *senatusconsultum* might have applied to a noticeable segment of the freed population

and the children of that union would have been citizens.[393]  In contrast, children born of two Junian

Latins or a citizen man and a Latin woman, were free but they were not citizens. This legal disability

could be rectified through *anniculi probatio.*[394] Most likely, Junian Latins may have constituted a large

proportion of the freed population as would have their children.[395]

Further complicating the landscape of freed status, were conditional manumissions. The

most extensive records for the practice are at the temple of Apollo in Delphi. There is evidence for

similar activity elsewhere, largely but not exclusively in the Greek part of the empire, but the records

at Delphi are by far the most complete.[396] These were formal manumissions but for many, there

were significant conditions attached. If the conditions were not filled, the freedperson could revert

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[391] Gaius 1.30. Gaius based his ruling on the application of three separate laws. The *lex Aelia Sentia* together with the *lex Junia* and the *lex Minicia.* Applying the *lex Aelia* and *Junia* meant that the marriage conferred *conubium,* so the child took the status of the father and the *lex Minicia* that the non-legal relationship meant the child took the status of the father. See Gardner, "Lower-class Families," 38.

[392] Various possibilities for the pre-*senatusconsultum* practices are based whether one or more of the three laws Gaius employed were applied to a particular case. Jane Gardner explores the possibilities in "Lower-class Families," 38-39. In one scenario, she applies the *lex Minicia* to conclude that children were always Latins. For a second, she treats relationships between citizen women and Latin men as special cases (what the *sc* determined) and the children followed the condition of their mothers regardless of marital status.

[393] Gardner, 223.

[394] Weaver, "Junian Latins," 66.

[395] Weaver, "Children of Freedmen," 183.

[396] Keith Hopkins and P.J. Roscoe, "Between Slave and Freedom: On the Freeing of Slaves at Delphi," *Conquerors and Slaves,* CUP (1978), 133.

to enslaved status.[397] Depending on the conditions, a woman could remain conditionally released for several years. An important mark of their unusual social location was that those released under conditional enslavement could suffer corporeal punishment, a factor that distinguishes them from all other manumitted groups.[398] One of the key benefits of citizenship was corporeal integrity. Free people could not be beaten (although they occasionally were).[399] The liminal position of conditionally freed persons, however, seems to have negated this, essentially leaving them in a position of partial enslavement until the obligations were met. Frequency of the practice increased over the span of the hundred years the records were kept (the inscriptions extend from 201 BCE to 100 BCE).[400] The change left an ever-growing number of people living under conditional manumission. Despite this, the number of people freed conditionally were overall a tiny proportion of the freed population. Even so, their circumstances are relevant to a study on motherhood because the records tell us that some women were required to provide children to their former enslavers or leave their own children enslaved. Several factors shaped how difficult it would have been for women to agree to these conditions for their release. Ultimately, they must have found some way to negotiate an acceptable arrangement. Whether women were willing to meet the conditions was probably shaped by at least three factors. First, if a woman's manumission depended upon her child remaining enslaved, the blow may have been mitigated by remaining with the *familia* after manumission.[401] Under these circumstances, women were able to stay with their children, even

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[397] *Ibid.,* 135.

[398] *Ibid.,* 152.

[399] Richard Saller, "The Hierarchical Household in Roman Society: A Study of Domestic Slavery," In *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, edited by Michael Bush, NY: Longman, (1996), 127.

[400] C. Wayne Tucker, "Women in the Manumission Inscriptions at Delphi," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-2014)* 112 (1982), 233.

[401] Treggiari, *Freedmen,* 71, *Cod.* 6.3.2.1 and *Dig.* 7.8.2.1.

though they were freed and their children were enslaved. Second, if she were not able to live with her children, she might have anticipated being able to secure her children's freedom in the future, potentially leaving them with trusted relatives or friends until such time. Finally, some women may have been permitted to take in foundlings and raise them to specified ages for their patrons.[402] An unusual case which must have required such an arrangement, and that raises more questions than it answers is as follows:

> ... Euphoria sold to Pythian Apollo two bodies called Epiphanea and Epaphro
> for the price of six nanae [600 drachmae], and I have received the whole
> sum ... on the following conditions: they [the ex-slaves] shall remain with
> Euphoria as long as she lives and are to do everything she orders without giving
> cause for complaint. If they do not do what they are told, let Euphoria have
> the power to punish them in whatever way she wishes.
> And after my death, let Epaphro give to my grandson Glaukias, son of
> Lyson, three babies (*brephē*), each two years old. If she does not have any
> children, let her give 200 denarii (= 200 *drachmae*).
> and let Epiphanea give to my son Sostratos one three-year-old child. (*paidion*) after five
> years, and another three-year-old child to my grandson
> Glaukias after three years.
> And then let Epaphro and Epiphanea be free ...[403]

In this case, it seems very unlikely that the women would be able to bear the children as required without taking in foundlings. As far as I can tell, Euphoria was not concerned with where the children came from, only that they were old enough to be likely to survive. Epaphro was expected to give Euphoria's grandson, Glaukias, three two-year old children upon her death and Epiphanea was to give her son, Sostratos, a three-year old child upon manumission and another three-year old after five years to Glaukias. After these conditions were met, the women were fully free. Explaining the conditions reveals some significant complications. First, it would have been impossible for Epaphro to anticipate Euphoria's death (unless she orchestrated it, which in any case would almost certainly have invalidated the agreement) never mind the fact she could in no way

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[402] Hopkins and Roscoe, 158.

[403] *FD* 3.6.38, Translation by Hopkins and Roscoe, 156-157.

have produced three two-year old children of her own to give up at the same time at that point. Similarly, Epiphanea might have had a three-year old at manumission, but it is just as likely that she had to acquire the child. She would probably have to do the same later to meet the second deadline. Both Epaphro and Epiphanea's situations beg the question of the nature of exposure or even child sale in Delphi. There must have been enough children available to make the manumission conditions agreeable to Epaphro and Epiphanea. In any case, these women were spared the obligation to return their own children as a condition of the manumission.

There were more typical examples of women being required to bear children as a condition of the release. Sometimes women were required to return their children to their manumitters to secure freedom, other times the children were freed while the mothers remained under conditional enslavement.[404] It is not clear whether these women remained with their children in their enslaver's *domus*. It is notable that the condition of the release required sexual activity on the part of the manumitted woman, unless she were already pregnant. Free sexual use was a mark of enslavement. By requiring a woman to engage in sex as a condition of release, manumitted women were treated as if they were slaves, marking the precarity of their situations.

Sometimes the situation was reversed and only the child was freed. It may have been that it was more feasible for the parents to manumit children. Hopkins and Roscoe postulate that the price for manumission of children was less than the price of adults, encouraging parents to pay to have their children released first.[405] In these cases, children probably remained with their parents. There are two examples of such cases. In both, a child's manumission was secured by their enslaved parents but the child was required to remain them. Just as with other conditional releases, there were

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[404] Tucker, 233.

[405] Hopkins and Roscoe, 165.

strings attached. The children were required to return the favor to their parents through specific service.[406] In each of these situations, the blow of having to return children to the manumitter must have been softened by either keeping mixed-status families intact or the possibility of offering foster children rather than natural ones.

In addition to the complications of manumission, women also were usually obligated to their patrons after the manumission was completed, even in the cases of formal manumission under *censu, vindicta,* and *testamento*. These obligations were regulated by the rules of *obsequium* after the passage of the *lex Aelia Sentia* in around 4 CE,[407] which obligated freedwomen to a formal deferential attitude toward their patrons. They were required to help their patrons financially if needed, serve as guardians for their children, and were prohibited from taking legal action against a patron. In return, "Romans expected patrons to demonstrate proper behavior toward their former slaves."[408] The relationship was a matter of *fides*, i.e., appropriate reciprocal respect. Freedwomen were also regularly expected to complete *operae*, which required them to provide services to the enslaver for a set period of time. There were two kinds of *operae*, *officiales* (domestic labor) and *fabriles* (skilled labor).[409] At least some freedwomen were trained as skilled workers. Those women would have been required to take time away from their regular business to complete the work required by their patrons. Women who provided domestic *operae officiales* were probably not skilled workers. The terms of *operae*, like those of *obsequium* were regulated by the *lex Aelia Sentia*. According to the law, patrons could not require cash

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[406] Dominique Mulliez, "Familles d'esclaves dans la documentation delphique," in *Familles d'esclaves, esclaves dans la famille, dans le monde grec et romain (IVe s. a.C-IIe s. p.C.), Colloque international, Clermont-Ferrand, 15-16 novembre 2018,* edited by Richard Bouchon, Laurent Lamoine, Stéphanie Maillot, (forthcoming), 23. CID 5.304, 374, 1260.

[407] Weaver, "Junian Latins," 58.

[408] Perry, 73-74.

[409] Treggiari, *Freedmen*, 76.

in exchange for *operae* or hire out their freedpeople to third parties, except when he was unable to use the services himself.[410] Unlike conditional release, however, these obligations were a matter of respect and service in a stratified relationship between patron and freed person. A person's freedom was not predicated upon fulfillment of either *obsequium* or *operae*. Nevertheless, these obligations probably had some consequence for freed mothers. For example, *operae* likely had an impact on many freedwomen's finances. Established craftswomen and merchantwomen could probably do the work without much loss. Poorer women, however, might have suffered from the time lost as would have any children she had. Aside from the economics, depending on whether the freedwoman lived near or with her patron, she may have had to arrange for childcare while completing the obligations.

Overall, obligations to patrons shaped the social environment of mothers and potential mothers. They also shaped the nature of her relationships with her children. Women who were formally freed had the greatest ability to fashion their relationships with their children and ensure good outcomes for them as Roman citizens if they were born after her manumission. However, there was the chance that the women had children while enslaved and thus had free citizen, freed, and/or enslaved children simultaneously. Depending on the circumstances, manumitted women may have been separated from their enslaved children, potentially making the decision to seek manumission a difficult one, or they may have had to navigate both enslaved and freed social norms while raising their children in the *domus* of their patrons. The latter situation presupposes a relatively comfortable life both before and after manumission, though most freedwomen were probably not so lucky.

Junian Latins were more limited and the difficulty in determining what kind of legal relationship women had with their children before the passage of the Hadrianic *senatusconsultum* probably resulted in some ambiguity and instability for some mothers. Second, those who were freed

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[410] *Ibid.*, 76.

conditionally, as those in the Delphic records were, had the greatest handicaps not least because they were sometimes required to return children to enslavers, subjecting them to sexual use that was typically reserved for enslaved women, and the possibility that they could revert into slavery or suffer physical punishment. Each of the conditions placed these women in very precarious situations, which must have had consequences on their responses to motherhood. Ultimately, freed status was not at all uniform and women's relationships to maternity were directly impacted by the nature of their freed condition. Although other factors in their lives were quite like freeborn and enslaved women, the liminal space freedwomen occupied created circumstances unlike any the other two groups experienced.

A funerary monument found in northeast Italy demonstrates the complicated status structure of freed families was established by Titia Eutychia for herself, her two children, and her husband.[411] Eutychia's son is the legitimate, freeborn son of her husband, Lucius Maesius Terentius, indicated by his filiation which therefore indicates Titia Eutychia was freed or freeborn when she delivered her son. Her daughter, however, is named Valeria Vera, suggesting that she was born while Eutychia was enslaved and was freed by a different enslaver or perhaps had a different father. Because the son has a filiation and the father does not, it is also suggested that both parents were freed or freeborn. There is no certainty that Vera was the daughter of L. M. Terentius, but she was certainly an illegitimate child of her mother's.

In sum, the form of manumission and the obligations placed on freedwomen mothers and potential mothers were likely to have been significant. Freedwomen were in liminal categories, often straddling the line between slave and free, negotiating both spaces. Second, they were likelier than most free people to have illegitimate children. While illegitimacy was not a major handicap in Rome,

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[411] CIL 5.98 *Titia Eutychia / v(iva) f(ecit) sibi / et L(ucio) Maesio L(uci) f(ilio) Modesto / filio ann(orum) XVIII / Valeriae Verae / fil(iae) ann(orum) XVIII / L(ucio) Maesio Terentino / fabro pectinar(io) / coniugi dulcissim(o)*

it may still have affected mother's decisions. Third, and probably most important, was the debt

freedwomen owed their patrons for manumission. Sometimes this debt was relatively small, in the

case of *operae* or *obsequium* that was light. Sometimes it was quite heavy, as in the conditional releases

conducted at Delphi (though these are not attested in the city of Rome.) Rather than seeing

manumission as a gift to a well-deserving slave, it was a method for keeping the rest of those who

remained enslaved in check. Reminding the remaining slaves that obedience and loyalty paid off.[412]

In the end, freed mothers, whether their circumstances were relatively comfortable or not, occupied

liminal space in Roman society that impacted their approaches to motherhood.

### Families

Freedwomen's obligations to their patrons shaped their role in their *familiae* and as mothers.

Sometimes freedwomen remained in the households of their patrons, retaining the work they did as

slaves, and probably maintaining many of the relationships already established.[413] The place of

freedwomen in *familiae* was probably not very different from their places before manumission. They

would have been obligated to take on many of their own expenses but they might otherwise have

continued to live as they did before. Skilled workers might have continued in their own occupations

maybe transfering their skills from the private homes of the patrons to commercial contexts,

reframing their point of reference but nevertheless retaining their living circumstances and

relationships.[414]

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[412] Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople," 25-26.

[413] Treggiari, *Freedmen,* 71, n. 5. Although the evidence is thin (one literary reference and two legal ones) the summation is convincing. The *Dig.* 7.8.1 suggests that people regularly desired their freedmen to continue to live with them, though it was debated whether that were legal for some time. How often this occurred is still debatable, but it is clear from the legal references that it did occur and that patrons found it beneficial to keep their freedmen close.

[414] For example, in her study on lower-class women and their occupations, Treggiari found three examples of commercial hairdressers. All three were freedwomen, suggesting that they transitioned from their private

For women in large households, then, the main advantages of manumission—personal freedom and freeborn (sometimes citizen) status for their children—were probably not immediately felt by most women.[415] In the short term, at least, manumission was more psychological or conceptual, potentially leading women to reorient their expectations for their lives and, if they had them, their children's. Still, mothering, at least in its daily pattern probably remained consistent, at least until a citizen child was born. For those who were not mothers but who remained in their patron's household, the transition might have been even less memorable.

The women described in the previous paragraph, however, were the fortunate few. Women who were not in large households probably underwent some significant changes upon manumission. The most notable changes were likely experienced by women who were living under one of the four following conditions: 1. Married to her patron, 2. Married to a freedman from another estate, 3. Artisan or tradeswoman who established her own business., 4. Poor or unskilled freedwoman released from her former *domus*. In each of these conditions, even if the women remained in their patrons' household, their social locations in their *familiae* changed. For those who became the wives of their patrons, their positions changed dramatically as they went from slave to *mater familia*. Those who married freedmen from other households left their current *domus* and entered their new husbands' households. For businesswomen, they may have continued to work in the same shop but probably in a new, elevated role or if they established their own businesses, they would have been essentially starting over as entrepreneurs, taking on the risks of ownership but maybe also the

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work as a personal hairdresser to a wealthy enslaver to businesswomen. "Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy," *Florilegium* 1 (1979), 75.

[415] For those who were formally freed, freeborn citizen status, for women, came with full citizen rights for themselves and for children. Perry, 60. For Junian Latins, this was simply freed status, with virtually none of the benefits legally freedwomen enjoyed. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law,* 223-224.

exhilaration of making it on their own. Finally, those poor or unskilled slaves were likely to be left to figure out their next phase in life independently.

Although the impact on life circumstances may or may not have been substantial, family relations were undeniably distinctive for all freedwomen by the fact of manumission. A freedwoman might have continued to live with her former *familia* but she may have had to renegotiate relationships with those she was previously enslaved with because they no longer held the same statuses. Maybe more importantly, she might have had to reorient her attitude toward motherhood since a freedwoman's children could be of *any* of the statuses in Roman society. There is no other position in Roman society that required orientation to social realities more than motherhood among freedwomen.

When families were present, women tended to have one or two children (there were larger families, but they were infrequent).[416] Notably, Paul Gallivan and Peter Wilkins found in their study of 1430 monuments including information about families with children throughout Roman Italy that family size was shaped by regional differences. In Sabina, Samnium, and Picenum and the surrounding regions, families with three or more children were concentrated in slave and *liberti* families, with about 26% *liberti*.[417] Although there were more large families among *liberti,* the frequency of families with more than three children was proportionately small overall. One difficulty with a study like Gallivan and Wilkins is that, despite the data generated for attested families, it cannot estimate how many couples had no children at all nor situate the information in the full social environment. The overrepresentation of freedpeople also complicates results of this study and the many other valuable epigraphical studies conducted. Despite the difficulties, their data reveals

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[416] Paul Gallivan and Peter Wilkins, "Familial Structures in Roman Italy: A Regional Approach," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space,* edited by Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, OUP (1997), 241.

[417] *Ibid.,* 248. However, the total number of large families is small, only 117 in the entire sample.

the spectrum of family sizes that existed in Roman Italy, showing that, while large families existed, small family sizes predominated among those who commemorated their family members.

While these data are important for many reasons, they cannot offer any information about the social implications of family size and maternal behavior. Freedwomen mothers of multi-child families were maybe, like Titia Eutychia, navigating new circumstances and balancing mothering freeborn and enslaved or freed children. Unfortunately, there is virtually no evidence on how the statuses of children affected motherhood. I know of no literary references to the nuances of motherhood among freedwomen. Funerary monuments attest to the fact of mixed-status families, but only a little can be drawn from them about maternal relationships with children. I intend to use them as fully as possible, but there is still quite a lot left to the imagination. Thus, the theoretical frameworks adopted for this project become all the more essential to developing a coherent description of motherhood among freedwomen.

Among the factors that were consequential for mothers and potential mothers was marital status. The arrangements women contracted are not important here to establish legitimacy or material and fertility rates, rather they are important because marital relationships are locations of primary socialization. Women's decisions about motherhood were shaped by their decisions to marry or not and negotiated within the relational context of those relationships.[418] In the next sections, I'll evaluate how different marital arrangements might have shaped a freedwoman's approach to motherhood.

### Marriage to Patrons

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[418] John Robb, "Beyond Agency," *World Archaeology* 42, no. 4. (2010), 494-495, "the key insight here is that 'human nature' is relational: people develop their capacity for acting through participating in social relations. As these social relations vary, their consciousness varies. Human activity, therefore, has two distinct products: externally, it produces an economic product and, internally, it shapes…consciousness as a specific kind of person capable of acting within the system of social and economic relationships."

It is well-known that some enslavers manumitted slave women to marry them. It is less clear whether those relationships were mutually affectionate and whether women were likely to become mothers after manumission and marriage. In all patron-*liberta* marriages, the question of consent hovers. Some women might have desired to the marriages, but there should be no assumption that the freedwomen cared for their husbands. It is impossible to know how many patron-*liberta* slave marriages were mutually affectionate. On funerary monuments, *bene merenti* is often used to describe the deceased patron/spouse.[419] The phrase is regularly used as a general formula for kind remembrance of a deceased person, so, given that these were stratified relationships, and the living partners would have been obligated to provide monuments to their patron/spouses, the phrase does not necessarily denote affection. Rather it denotes appropriate respect. Still, there are a handful of examples of freed wives expressing care for their deceased husbands.[420] These expressions of affection, however, should not be mistaken as representative of patron/enslaved relationships. Indeed, they could suggest just the opposite: an unlikely celebration of the rare, caring relationship between patrons and their freedwoman wives.

It is difficult to ascertain how common marriages between patrons and freedwomen were. Paul Weaver and Beryl Rawson's evidence seems to suggest that they occurred only infrequently as they were not able to identify a significant number in their samples of funerary inscriptions. In his study of 700 marital inscriptions of non-imperial slaves and freedpeople, Paul Weaver found just 143 of them were patron-*liberta* marriages.[421] In some ways, it seems that such a union would not have

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[419] Examples in the epigraphical record include CIL 6. 21531, 9. 811, 10. 2325, 3091.

[420] Patrons are sometimes called *karissimo/carissimo* (CIL 6.13670, 13.2308) and *cara* (CIL 11.4584).

[421] In his study of 700 non-imperial inscriptions from CIL 6, parts 1-4, Paul Weaver found only 15 *patrona-libertus* marriages. Weaver was careful to include only those instances in which freedperson status was certain. He also only included those inscriptions that named both husband and wife. Thus, his count likely underrepresents the totally number, but adequately suggests a more modest number of patron-*liberta* marriages compared to other marriage patterns among freedpeople, although patron-*libertus* marriages are by

made much economic or social sense. A slave woman could bring no dowry and she had no family reputation to accentuate his own reputation. However, there were two main benefits for patrons, which probably outweighed the disadvantages. The first was legitimate children, maybe most important when they could not find wives or were widowers.[422] A possible rationale for the argument that children might have been a central reason for a patron to marry his freedwoman is given by Beryl Rawson in her doctoral study analyzing the CIL 6 for the statuses of named children and parents. She suggests that patron-*liberta* marriages were established for the sake of legitimate children, contrasting the marriages with the establishment of freedwomen as concubines, who would not produce legitimate children.[423] Katherine Huemoeller, also believes that legitimate children were among the more important benefits for the patron and has proposed that the six-month grace period that was permitted before a marriage had to be completed could be understood as a conditional release period, something like a fertility trial-period.[424] However, I think it is unlikely that the six-month period would have been used in that way. Since the woman was enslaved by the man already, he could have initiated a "trial period" before her release.

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far the least common. A phenomenon that is unsurprising given the stigma against such unions. Paul Weaver *Familia Caesaris*, CUP (1972), 181. Beryl Wilkinson, "The Names of Children in Roman Imperial Epitaphs: A Study of Social Conditions in the Lower Class," diss. Bryn Mawr (1961), 116-121. Huemoeller supposes that production of legitimate children was one of the main reasons for patron-*liberta* marriage, 134.

[422] Treggiari, *Freedmen*, 213-4, for example, believes that women freed by their patrons for marriage may have been regularly under 20, however, she provides no evidence for the claim. Huemoeller, 128-9, sees the manumission of enslaved women for marriage as a "a rational strategy for the acquisition of a legitimate spouse and legitimate offspring." She bases her argument on the monument to Acte, who was cursed by her patron-husband for deserting him (see n. 427) suggestion that there is implicit reference to anger about the loss of potential offspring. There is, however, no clear reference to such a frustration in the inscription.

[423] Beryl Wilkinson, "The Names of Children in Roman Imperial Epitaphs," 118. Huemoeller supposes that production of legitimate children was one of the main reasons for patron-*liberta* marriage, 134.

[424] Huemoeller, 131.

Second is spousal control. Patron-husbands would have had more financial and personal control over their wives than if they had married free citizen women since divorce was difficult and deeply disadvantageous to the freedwomen, whose property was not separate from their patron-husbands'.[425] Moreover, patron-husbands did not have to gain the consent of their wives-to-be as the jurists held that a patron could force a slave released for the purpose of marrying him.[426] So, if an enslaver were having a difficult time finding a willing wife, he could compel one of his slaves to the role through manumission. Furthermore, all the parties who might have had an interest in her well-being (father, patron, tutor, husband), were contained in her patron-husband, thereby preventing her any recourse should the relationship be exploitative.[427]

Unsurprisingly, it is likely that these relationships were not especially beneficial to the wives. If they were exploited or abused while enslaved, that might continue after their release since they had no recourse to external supports. On the other hand, women may have gained more comfortable living situations, greater influence in their children's lives, or more power in their households as *matres familiae*. These may not have outweighed the essentially captive situation they remained in, though. Although manumitted, freed-wives were limited in ways other freed people

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[425] Kleijwegt, "Deciphering Freedwomen in the Roman Empire," in *Free at Last!: The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire*, edited by Sinclair Bell and Teresa Ramsby, Bristol Classical Press, (2012)," 117; Katherine Huemoeller in "Freedom in Marriage? Manumission for Marriage in the Roman World," *JRS* 110 (2020), 134.

[426] Huemoeller, 131. *Dig.* 23.2.29, 37.14.6.3

[427] *Ibid.*, 134. Although there is at least one example of this failing spectacularly in CIL 6.20905. On the front of the monument is a dedication to a daughter who died at 8. The mother's name is erased. On the back is a curse against a woman named Acte who was freed to marry her patron then, at some point in their marriage, ran off with another man and two slaves. The case was first discussed by Beryl Rawson in her dissertation, "The Names of Children," 119-120, later by Judith Evans-Grubbs in "*Stigma Aeterna:* A Husband's Curse," in Vertis in Usum: *Studies in Honor of Edward Courtney*, edited by John F. Miller, et al., De Gruyter (2002), and still later by Huemoeller who summarized it neatly on pg. 137, "It is possible, then, to read Acte's actions as an assertion of free will in precisely the arena denied to freed-wives: choice of partner and choice of kin." Treggiari, *Freedmen,* 209-210. Treggiari finds this to be an advantage for *liberti* who were previously enslaved together. I am not sure I agree as the lack of a third party would preclude access to any person who had the legal right to intervene should something go wrong for the wife.

were not. As already indicated, they could not dissent from the manumission, they could not leave the company of their patron-husbands without serious financial consequence, and they could not turn to others for support or help. Although is it possible that some patron-*liberta* relationships were mutually affectionate, it should not be automatically assumed that they were.

As for motherhood, it is difficult to ascertain how patronal marriages shaped women's attitudes toward it. Given the oppressive nature of the relationship, women may have had little choice in bearing children. As they had limited options for abandoning the situation, and no ability to refuse the marriage in the first place, sexual coercion must not have been uncommon. Rawson identified two certain instances of freed-wives having children before marrying their patrons. In one case the child was freed as well and in the other the woman had one slave (later freed) and one freeborn son.[428] In six other instances, she identified women who had children after they were freed.[429] Although a very small number overall, there is a preponderance of children born after manumission. Based on Rawson's sample, then, it seems that freed-wives were more likely to have children after manumission than before.

For those who became mothers, they must have had to re-orient themselves to their new reality as *matronae* and mothers of the (legitimate) children of the head of the household. This would be especially true for those who had children before they were manumitted. Raising children while enslaved and raising them as female heads of the household was probably different in many ways, not least was the mode of socialization mothers must have engaged in for their child. If they expected the children to remain enslaved, they might have encouraged obedience and careful behavior. If they expected the child to be freed, they might have encouraged obedience and careful

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[428] Rawson, "The Names of Children," 116, 118. CIL 6.15548, 23848.

[429] *Ibid.*, 117-121.

behavior still but also prepared them as best they could for life as a freedperson. Given their limited

experience with freedom as it was, this must have been a challenging task.

If they had been concubines before manumission, the freed-wives may have already had

some power in the household. If they had children fathered by their patrons, the mothers must have

already had an unusually privileged place inside the household. Their new statuses as *matres familiae*

would have probably allowed them to exercise even more power in the *familia*. As it pertains

specifically to motherhood, freed-wives would have had the ability to direct the maternal behavior of

the slaves of the household, even if they did not have children of their own. They would have had

some control over how children were raised: whether together in a nursery by designated slave-

nurses or sent out to hired wet-nurses. They might have even been permitted some decision making

in the sale or separation of parents and children. Although the decisions were very likely predicated

upon the size of the household, they would still have been able to direct behavior and practice in a

way that no slave women (except maybe a *vilica* in certain circumstances) could. In a comparison

with freedmen who were not always sympathetic to their own slaves,[430] it is quite likely that women

who became freed-wives were not either. While it is true that the women in question may not have

been exceptionally wealthy, there is no reason why they may not have used their newly elevated

positions to exert some power over the household, especially as they had virtually none in their

marriages.

Freed-wives may also have adopted the affect of freeborn women whom they had

encountered. Although there is no direct evidence of women attempting to assert themselves in their

new circles by adopting the behavior of freeborn women, there is evidence that elite freeborn men

believed rich (usually imperial) freedmen tried to mimic them, but to no avail as they were mocked

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[430] Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 10.5.22, Seneca, *de ira* 3.23.4-8, *Epistulae Morales* 91.13

by those who exerted real social power. For example, Licinus, freedman of Augustus, apparently paraded his wealth, using it as leverage to get what he wanted from whomever he wanted it.[431] Hypothetically, women might very well have attempted to do the same in their circles, though, just as the men were mocked, freedwomen were probably not very welcome either since their formerly enslaved statuses would have been well-known. Thus, even with new power to wield, freed-wives may have been isolated both from those they used to be enslaved with and within their new social circles. There seem to have been few advantages of marriage to patrons for freedwomen.

### Marriage to *colliberti* and Other Freedmen

Far more common than marriages to patrons was marriage to fellow slaves. In analyses of the funerary monuments that mention freedwomen and marital relationships, most of them indicate that freedwomen married freedmen from the same *familia*, with the second largest practice being marriage with freedmen from different households.[432] There was a distinct incentive for freedwomen to marry. Upon manumission, freedwomen were obligated to complete regular *operae* for their patrons. However, once a *liberta* married, he could no longer exact the required services. Marriages from within the same household might have indicated that there was a relationship between the two before they were manumitted. Supporting this supposition is the funerary evidence of freedwomen who had *contubernium* with slave men. They were probably trying to bide the time until their partners were freed also. But time was not in their favor.[433]

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[431] Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54.21.3-8; Juvenal, *Sat.* 1.102-116

[432] Weaver, *Familia Caesaris,* 181. See also Glenys Davies, "Viewer, I Married Him: Marriage and the Freedwoman in Rome," in *Ancient Marriage in Myth and Reality*, edited by Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars (2010), 185.

[433] For example, CIL 6.26514.

Since *collibertus* were freed from the same household, it is sometimes presumed that they probably already had an established relationship with one another before manumission and marriage.[434] When that did occur, the marriages were likely established in large households (small slave holders probably did not have sufficient enslaved populations to support marriages within the *familia*). For women who had children before manumission and who were already partnered within the household, raising children was probably not too dissimilar from before they were manumitted and married. It should not be assumed that *colliberti* were always previously partnered, though. If they were not already in a relationship before manumission, there would have been opportunity to establish one afterwards.

More than likely these marriages were between Junian Latins rather than between formally freedpeople.[435] So, if parents wanted to achieve citizenship for themselves, they would have had to swear their intent to bear children as a condition of their marriage then, once they had a child who lived to be one-year old, take him or her before an official to be granted *anniculi probatio.[436]* Another possibility is that a woman could seek *iteratio,* or a repeat manumission at the age of thirty after which any freeborn children would have also become citizens. The latter, however, was probably relatively difficult to obtain as the mother would have had to reach the age of 30 and her patron would have had to be living and agree to the process.[437] Thus, most children of *colliberti* would have been freeborn but not citizens because their parents were not full legal citizens.

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[434] Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World,* CUP (2011), 152.

[435] Assuming that Junian Latinity was more commonly conferred that formal manumission. Weaver *"*Children of Freedmen," 183.

[436] Gardner, *Women in Roman Law*, 223.

[437] Weaver, "Junian Latins," 67.

If couples were freed according to the formal process rather than as Junian Latins they may have been less likely to have had freeborn children together because they were probably freed later in life.[438] To be formally freed and granted Roman citizenship, an enslaved person had to be over 30 unless the conditions previously outlined were met. As fertility begins to decline around the age of 30, women became less likely to bear children. Children could have been born while the mothers were enslaved, so they may have had slave or freed children even if they did not have any freeborn ones.[439] For example, Faustilla, on a monument to her daughter, Lyris, is the only person with a single name. Her daughter's father (and presumably her partner), Eucomus and Lyris are both explicitly identified as freedpeople. Therefore, Faustilla was a slave when her daughter was born and remained enslaved after her daughter was freed. Beryl Rawson suggests that Eucomus was the patron and owner of both Faustilla and Lyris when Lyris was born, but there is no way to know for sure.[440]

While in Lyris' case, there is no doubt that Eucomus and Faustilla were her parents, that was not always the case. Some children had different fathers than the one a freedwoman eventually married. Mortality rates were high, and it is not unlikely that a woman's partner died while they remained enslaved or that she was freed and he was not. Relationships might also have been broken off upon manumission. Furthermore, enslaved women were subject to sexual use by their enslavers and those whom they sanctioned; thus, children may have been conceived and born from those encounters, too.

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[438] Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1992), 33.

[439] CIL 6.19969 *C(aius) Iulius Postumi l(ibertus) Eucomus / Iuliae Postumi l(ibertae) Lyridi f(iliae) et / Faustillae matri eius* Eucomus, freedman of Gaius Julius Postumus to his daughter, Lyris, and Faustilla, her mother.

[440] Rawson, "The Names of Children," 82.

### Concubinae

Another group of women were *concubinae*. They were long-term partners of freeborn men, sometimes their patrons.[441] Most *concubinae* were freedwomen in both Rome and elsewhere in Italy. Importantly, concubinage did not carry the same sexualized connotations as it did in later eras, rather, it existed as an alternative to legal marriage. It seems to have been a relatively common arrangement among the middling and upper classes and is a well-attested practice among emperors.[442] In a sample of 35 inscriptions, Treggiari found 19 freed and 9 concubines of uncertain status in Rome, demonstrating that freedwomen may have been more frequently taken as concubines than other status groups.[443] (Though it is necessary to again draw attention to the small sample size and the overrepresentation of freedpeople in nearly all epigraphy.) According to Ulpian, it was considered more respectable for patrons to establish informal, though permanent relationships with their freedwomen as *concubinae* than to marry them. [444]

Although concubines are attested in several contexts, they are not represented as mothers in the literature or legal codes and in the epigraphical record of Rome and Italy there are only a handful of certain *concubina* mothers. Keeping in mind that one of the reasons that some people took a *concubina* was that they did not want to have more children and disadvantage their children from a previous marriage, it is not surprising that few *concubinae* seem to have become mothers. There were three couples in the Italian provinces with children and one in Rome with a *deliciae* identified on the

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[441] Treggiari found three examples in Rome. CIL 6. 9443, 38623, 35879. Treggiari, "*Concubinae,*" *Papers of the British School at Rome* 49 (1981): 78.

[442] Suet. *Nero* 50 with Acte; Suet. *Vesp.* 3, CIL 6.12037 Vespasian with Caenis; *HA* Pius 8.9, CIL 6.8972, Antoninus Pius with Galeria Lysistrate.

[443] Susan Treggiari, "*Concubinae,*" 66-67.

[444] *Dig.* 25.7.1.

monument.[445] In two of the three, there are illegitimate children of the concubine, while in the other the child is the son of the male partner. It is not possible to know whether the children of the women were the illegitimate children of each woman's partner or if they were hers from another relationship. If they were the children of the male partner, he did not choose to recognize them as his own. How that might have affected the mothering practices of the women is uncertain, but presumably there were some differences between the way they interacted with the children of their partners and with their own children.

A potential comparison might be found in stepmothers who were famously derided in Roman literature. Concubines might have acted as stepmothers to their partners' children in practice since the relationship was long-term and they lived with their partners.[446] However, one of the primary stereotypes of stepmothers is that they were constantly scheming to elevate their sons and secure better inheritances or political positions for them.[447] Concubines would have had no such motivation as any children they brought to the relationship would have been illegitimate. Though not ostracized or severely mistreated by society, illegitimate children did not have the same opportunities as legitimate children. Furthermore, there are no literary stereotypes of bad or wicked concubine mother-substitutes.[448] Thus, it can be assumed the *concubinae* were not generally regarded as bad mother-figures.

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[445] *Ibid.,*" 68 (CIL 6.9375) and 69 (5. 4153, 9.2346, 10.4246). Rawson finds two probable couples with children in Rome, n. 49 (CIL 6.28431, 14706). The *deliciae* may have been a slave or alumnus rather than a child of the couple.

[446] Dixon, *The Roman Mother,* 169.

[447] David Noy, "Wicked Stepmothers in Roman Society and Imagination," *Journal of Family History* 16, no. 4 (1991): 349.

[448] Although, Seneca the Elder records an epigram of Fabius Maximus, "the whore constantly comes to the house, she won't go away, she is virtually my step-mother." *venit adsidue in domum meretrix, non recedit, paulum abest quin noverca sit.*

While concubines might have acted as mother-figures to their partner's children and brought their own children into the relationship, concubines were not likely to have children within the relationship. Sometimes, they were taken as alternatives to second wives after men had been made widowers, presumably to avoid adding legitimate children and potentially simplifying their arrangements. It may have been that women avoided becoming pregnant as illegitimate children would have been of no benefit to the male partner since the child was legally hers alone. Furthermore, concubines were probably more dependent upon their partners than wives were as they brought no dowry to the relationships and would therefore have likely struggled to separate themselves from their partners' financial support. Thus, if the male partners did not want children, then the concubines might have been obligated to avoid motherhood to retain their relationships.

Conversely, it is possible that there were more children produced in these relationships than appear in the inscriptions. First, women might have borne children then given them up, either by exposing or directly delivering a child to another person to raise as an *aluma/us*. Second, the children might simply not be commemorated with their parents, maybe they died young and were commemorated singly or maybe they married and were commemorated by their spouses. Third, the epigraphical sample is very small, so just as the inscriptions that exist for patron-freedwomen marriages are not representative, neither are those of *concubinae*.

Concubinage was a reasonably secure relationship and may have been comfortable for some freedwomen. Though they might have brought children with them to the relationships, it was not likely that they would have any during it. They might also have taken on a mother-figure role for their partners' children and would have had to ensure that their engagement with her partners' children was appropriate and did not overstep any bounds, shaping their approaches to motherhood. However comfortable the arrangement, their positions remained liminal both as freedwomen and concubines.

## Unmarried

It is generally held that freedwomen were married informally to slaves with whom they had once been enslaved, to fellow freedmen, or to their patrons. There is rarely admission that they may not have married at all. The emphasis is always on marriage and family. Of course, this study is no different in that respect, generally, but there is no presumption of marriage and children in this study. The clearest indications that some women remained unmarried are occupational epitaphs. As most of these were established by or for freedwomen, there was probably a noticeable proportion of women who were unmarried and favored their occupational status over other relationships. There were, of course, many reasons occupation may have been the only descriptor offered. For example, Asyllia Polla, a physician, was commemorated by her freedmen. She was identified by her occupation and her father's name.[449] Poblicia Aphe is another potential example of a single, childless, employed woman. Her monument identifies her as a freedwoman of a woman and a midwife.[450] Among the reasons beyond singleness or childlessness are evidenced by Hygia Marcellae l., an *obstetrix* and Aucta Liviae l., the *ornatrix*.[451] Both women were buried in imperial *columbaria*. They, therefore, may have been identified by their occupation as a matter of form rather than because they were single or unmarried. Furthermore, these women (along with many others, surely) were possibly freed only just before their death, suggesting that their value to their enslavers was found in their occupation.[452] Of course, none of the examples definitively demonstrate that the women were unmarried or childless. What they do suggest, however, is that their occupations were essential

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[449] CIL 8.24679

[450] CIL 6.9723

[451] CIL 6.4458, 3993.

[452] Marc Kleijwegt, personal correspondence 6/11/2022.

elements of their identities. Thus, even if these women were married and had children, in the commemorations of their lives that have survived, they were most importantly professional women.

To contextualize unmarried freed mothers, it is important to think about the way *liberti* are generally believed to have behaved. A preponderance of familial monuments was established by slaves and *liberti*. The high frequency of commemoration leads to the suggestion that those two groups had the most children overall. The next logical step is to presume that most, if not all married and had children. To return to a previous observation, then, it is very likely that the freeborn population looks larger than it was[453] and, I think, it looks more family-oriented than other groups because of the commemorative practices. Frequency of family and size matter less than evidence of a range of behavior, though. *Colliberti* may have been more likely that other groups to have children, but they were certainly not without their share of childless couples.

At the same time freedpeople are overrepresented in the occupational inscriptions of Rome and the surrounding areas.[454] Most of these inscriptions are dedicated to people with the same occupation or record relationships among *liberti* and their patrons. In many cases, children are not mentioned. These two categories of inscriptions, familial representations among slaves and freedpeople and occupational monuments, are in contradiction. The familial monuments suggest that freedpeople were more likely to be parents than others. Occupational inscriptions suggest that they were employed in artisanal and retail occupations more than others.

There are a couple of possible explanations for this tension. First, it is possible to explain the absence of children on occupational monuments by supposing that the children they did not survive or they were married and were commemorated by their spouses. This, I think, is the favored explanation because it reinforces the notion that Roman women were primarily interested in

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[453] Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople," 24.

[454] *Ibid.,* 44.

marrying and having children. Alternatively, the over-representation of freedpeople in both bodies

of evidence can suggest that we simply have a more complete picture of the group, and that the

population was quite varied. There was a significant population of *liberti* who did marry and have

children. There was also a significant population that did not. In short, the balance between those

married with children and those who were not was maybe more equitable that it has long been

believed. If this is correct, then many *colliberti* prioritized careers over family, bucking the expected

norm of Roman marriage and motherhood may not have been a priority among those women.

People were not always unmarried because they chose not to be, however. There was

undoubtably a significant number of widows and widowers, divorcees, and people who were

disincentivized to have children because of their professions. In these three groups, women may

have been mothers, raising children alone. An example of such a situation comes from Umbria.[455] As

there is no paternal commemorator, it is not clear what the situation of his birth was, but there is no

doubt that his mother, Sabinia Iustina, was raising him as a single mother at the time of his death.

Unmarried, freed mothers must have required significant networks of people to support

them in their maternal role. G. Sabinius Valerianus' epitaph suggests that his uncle, Sabinius

Victorianus, was an integral part of that network. The relationship between brother and sister was

clearly strong and there is no doubt that G. S. Valerianus was an important person in both her life

and her brother's. Ultimately, her unmarried status was probably a disadvantage in many ways, not

least in the lack of structural support in raising a child within a marriage, but she was fortunate to

have a brother who filled in.

### Mothering while Working

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[455] CIL 11.6575 *D(is) M(anibus) / C(ai) Sabini Valeriani vixit / ann(is) XVII m(ensibus) VII diebus XVI / Sabinia Iustina mater et Sabi/nius Victorinus av<u=O>nculus*
To the shades, Gaius Sabinus Valerianus lived 17 years, 7 months, 16 days. Sabinia Justina, mother and Sabinius Victorianus, uncle.

As I have already indicated, freedwomen are well represented in the epigraphical record of artisans and tradeswomen. They tend to be commemorated either singly or with partners but less frequently are children attested in the monuments. An intriguing inscription comes from Samnium, dedicated to a young freedwoman by her mother, father, and sister.[456] Jucunda Pexsa was 17 when she died and a laundress. Her mother, Phyllis, father, Jucundus, and sister, Chrone, all have single names and none of them indicate whether they had occupations. Out of the four members of her family, then, it seems that Jucunda Pexsa's family were enslaved, and she was the only one who had been freed at the time of her death.[457] Since she was commemorated by her natal family, she was unmarried (though she was still relatively young when she died and might have married had she lived longer). Significantly, her family chose to memorialize her according to her profession although it was not glamourous, suggesting that she was skilled at her work and that her family was proud of it. Thus, although her family is identified, the emphasis is on her work suggesting that her identity was at least partially shaped by it.

A different kind of example of a freedwoman foregrounding her occupation is a monument from Rome, established by Cameria Iarine to her patron, his patron, and her own freedman and husband (*viro*), Lucius Carius Onesimus.[458] Iarine emphasizes their connections as successive

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[456] CIL 9.3318 *Iucundae / Pex{s}ae v(ixit) a(nnos) XIV / vestiplica(e) / Iucundus pater / Phyllis mater / Chrone soro[r] / p(osuerunt)*

[457] It is irregular that she shares a name with her father, though. Typically, a Roman woman only took her father's name if she were a freeborn, legitimate child. I can think of just three possible explanations. First, her parents named her Jucunda in imitation of the practice among freeborn people, to indicate familial connections that naturally, but not legally, existed. Second, it is possible that the family is all free but single names were used to save space as it is a fairly small monument. Third, Jucundus was given the *nomen* of his enslaver and when Jucunda was freed, she took the feminine version of the name, thus creating a coincidental connection. Of the three, it seems most likely that her family was enslaved, and she simply shared her father's name.

[458] CIL 6.37286 [Camer]ia L(uci) l(iberta) Iarine fecit / [L(ucio)] [Cam]erio L(uci) l(iberto) Thrasoni patrono / [et] L(ucio) Camerio L(uci) l(iberto) Alexandro / patrono eius et / [L(ucio) C]amerio Onesimo lib(erto) et / [vi]ro suo posterisque omnibus / [vest]iariis tenuariis de vico Tusc(o)

"generations" of freed people who made fine clothing (*vestiariis*). She leaves open the possibility for future generations to also be buried alongside those listed but makes no reference to the way in which those future people might become part of the "family." The key relationships among those listed is their official patrimony via successive manumissions and their shared occupation. There is no mention of children, though the possibility is left open with *posterisque*. Given emphasis on patronal relationships, however, it would seem more likely that the descendants would be the next generation of freed men and women.

A final example is Veturia Flora's monument for herself, her *collibertus* husband, their patron, and another freedman, whom she co-manumitted.[459] Flora is the commemorator and the link among all the men listed. She established the monument from her own resources, suggesting that she was successful and wanted to make that known to those who read the inscription. All of them, including her, were purple dyers. As with Iarine, Flora does not make any reference to children and identifies herself by her relationships with the men she commemorates and her occupation. In this case, there is no provision for future internments, so it seems even more likely that she was not a parent.

Though it is not possible to say for certain whether these women were mothers, it is nevertheless significant that they chose to commemorate themselves, their patrons, and their *colliberti* as members of a particular occupational group rather than as a discreet family unit. Maybe even setting aside any attempt to determine their maternal status, the inscriptions are meaningful. These two women and others who either established or were mentioned in similar monuments, chose to make their public-facing identity an occupational rather than familial one. These break the expected mold of female commemorations as familial. Consequently, they demonstrate that at least some

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[459] CIL 6.37820 V(ivit) D(ecimus) Veturius D(ecimi) l(ibertus) Diog(enes) / |(obiit) D(ecimus) D(ecimus)
l(ibertus) Nicep(h)or / v(ivit) Veturia D(ecimi) l(iberta) Flora / de sua pecunia faciund(um) coer(avit) / sibi et
patrono et conlibert(o) / et liberto / Nicep(h)or conlibertus / vixit mecum annos XX / purpurari(i) a
Marianeis / viv(it) D(ecimus) Veturius D(ecimi) |(mulieris) l(ibertus) Philar[g]ur(us)

women, whether they were mothers or not, did not make their maternal identity their primary one. In sum, it is a clear indication that they did not strive to be "wives and mothers" above all else but, instead, they strove to be notable in their trades. Cameria Iarine and Veturia Flora wanted to be remembered as dyers and tailors.

If, in fact, maternity remained a social ideal for artisan freedwomen, Iarine and Flora either did not achieve that status, or rejected the social norm. Maternal identity was not the only identity that women could claim. Further reinforcement for this perspective comes from the fact that both Iarine and Flora erected the monuments on which they are names. Therefore, it is only reasonable to presume that the voices expressed therein are their own. They self-represent as artisans and freedwomen, in a network of freedpeople who worked together. This act of self-representation indicates that maternal identity, at least for them, was presumably less important than their occupational identity. It is therefore possible that these women, and others like them, did not hold aspirations to the status of *matrona* as an essential part of their worth in their communities. It was instead important for them to clearly identify their connections to fellow artisans and to identify the trade within which they specialized.

Several scholars doubt that women, especially wives, actually worked in the trades that are identified on their monuments. Rather, they believe that the women sold the product while their husbands manufactured it.[460] This seems to me to be a gendered stretch, however, based on modern prejudices against women taking on legitimate labor. For example, John Evans argues that Cornelia Venusta, a libertine *clavaria*, commemorated with her husband, P. Aebutius, was not actually a nail-maker but the face of the business, selling the nails.[461] And this despite her clear designation as

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[460] Susan Treggiari takes this position, "Lower Class Women," 76 and Cameron Hawkins follows her *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy* CUP (2016), 252 n. 145. See also n. 80.

[461] John K. Evans, *War, Women, and Children in Ancient Rome*, Routledge (1991), 120.

*clavaria*, alongside her husband, a *clavariaus*. Why it should be accepted that the man's designation was legitimate and the woman's was a kind of front for working in a lesser capacity is completely unclear to me. If scholars wish to deny working women their claimed roles, then it is imperative that they demonstrate clearly that women did not undertake the occupations they said they did. I suspect that the women who worked in these trades were active in their work and thus the inscriptions that indicate spouses working in the same trade with no children mentioned were probably childless couples and the women's sense of identity was wrapped up in her occupation, not her designated role as housekeep or wife and mother. These women did not represent all Roman freedwomen in the urban environment, but it is important not to discount their roles or sideline them as exceptions to the rules.

In other cases, freedwomen did represent themselves as wives and mothers. Sandra Joshel conducted a key study on inscriptions of Roman women and collected data on those that contain clear occupational reference and provide information about familial relationships on the monuments.[462] In Joshel's evaluation of 1,470 occupational inscriptions from the CIL VI, she identified 404 inscriptions for which the freed status of the deceased could be clearly ascertained by information on the monument. More than half make no mention of familial status and only 14 mention mothers or children.[463] It is notable that there is as significant a paucity of these inscriptions as there is of those that represent women only by their occupation titles. Although few, these examples are valuable because they indicate that at least some women were both dedicated to their professions and to their children. Whether they were as rare a group in life as they are in the epigraphical record is difficult to know. However many there were, these women both worked and

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[462] Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1992), 42-45.

[463] Joshel, Table 2.2, 44.

raised children, and their lives were shaped by both identities. An example of such a woman was Cania Urbana, a *vilica* who died at 51 years old. She was commemorated by her daughter, Cania Ursina and her son-in-law, Attius Verecundianus.[464] Both mother and daughter were likely freedwomen and Cania Ursina was illegitimate. There is no mention of a father and Ursina's illegitimate status does leave open the possibility that Urbana was a single mother, though. If she was, she both managed an estate and raised her daughter independently. As a *vilica* she probably had access to nurses and educators, as well as other help on the estate, so raising Ursina independently does not mean she raised her alone. Her circumstances were likely much less onerous that other working freedwomen mothers might have been. Nevertheless, the monument demonstrates that she was both committed to mothering and maintained a career.

In the *Digest*, Gaius indicates that children were often used to sell the products of the businesses they were associated with.[465] Mothers could have easily taken advantage of this opportunity to balance their careers with their occupations. Older children might have been apprenticed while younger children could have remained in their parents' shops. In either case, the clear indication is that children, not wives, often took on these jobs. If that was so, it may have been a successful strategy for women who needed (or wanted) to retain their professional roles and raise children simultaneously.

The *lifeworlds* of urban freedwomen who were childless and those who were not would have been very different despite their similar statuses as their structural and social supports, occupational responsibilities, and maternal responsibilities intersected differently. Women with children had to divide their attentions between their families and work while those who were childless could focus

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[464] CIL 3.2118 *D(is) M(anibus) / Caniae Ur/banae vilicae q/uae vixit ann(is) LV / Cania Ursina fili/a et Attius Verec/undianus gener / matri incompa/rabili*

[465] *Dig.* 14.3.8

on their occupations. Given that there were no politically sanctioned supports for working mothers, it cannot have been an easy task for women to take on these responsibilities. Even with an extensive network of personal support, there were no schools to send children away to for the day or childcare centers. Unless women had direct access to nurses and wet-nurses or older children were apprenticed, they would have been personally responsible for childcare. Although local networks in the community almost certainly offered support to one another. Ulrike Roth argues this was the case among enslaved women on rural estates. [466] It is not a stretch to suppose that that urban slavewomen were not also generally expected to care for their children and that freedwomen continued the practice of rearing their children on their own upon manumission.

Working freedwomen, then, were a varied group. Some women identified primarily as professionals, eschewing motherhood or at least not mentioning it on the monuments that preserved their memories. At the same time, other women like Cania Urbana raised their children while working. Although it is impossible to know if Urbana was a single mother while her daughter was young, the possibility exists and no doubt there were single mothers, some probably never married and others were widows, who raised their children while carrying out the responsibilities of their occupations. Some of these women would have had support networks built into their patron's *familia* or their natal families, like Sabinia Justina (though it is not known whether she had an occupation), but others did not.

### Mothering while Poor

Thus far, the women discussed in this chapter were at least moderately well-off. Their families did not live at or near subsistence most of the time. They were generally able to provide for

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[466] Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery, Between Evidence and Models*. London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007, 17. There is one notable difference between what I am arguing and her position, however. I hold that women were sometimes working in high-demand roles that required specialized attention and long hours. She contends that women were generally completing work that was "easily interrupted" and domestic in nature.

basic needs. These women were primarily from large patronal *familiae,* and thus had social supports

from family, co-workers, or within their *familiae.* However, they are not representative of the lives of

most freedwomen who were probably poor and did struggle to maintain a minimal standard of living

for themselves and their children.[467] Those women were usually not from large urban households

but were rather freed by small slaveholders who would have been less able (and maybe less inclined)

to offer the kinds of supports that the wealthier enslavers did. Agricultural labors might similarly

have been left with few resources unless part of their *peculium* was a plot of land to work.[468]

There is no evidence for the rationale lower class enslavers had for manumitting their slaves,

but it was probably somewhat different from those in the upper or middling classes. In these cases,

it is likeliest that women were manumitted when enslavers could no longer afford to keep them. In

many of those cases, the women were probably old or maybe ill and therefore unsalable. These

women were unlikely to have been mothers and would have struggled to maintain themselves

without community support. In other cases, the women were reasonably young and healthy but their

*familiae* no longer needed their services, so they were released. As most manumitted slaves had to pay

for their release, it might have been more economical for an enslaver to release an enslaved woman

than to sell her. Evidence from the Delphi manumission records suggest this to be the case, with

slaves often paying market prices for their release.[469] Moreover, enslavers could require *operae* upon

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[467] Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople," 51.

[468] A distinct possibility as Caius Furius Chersimus had to defend himself against charges of witchcraft because he was prospering as a small landholder. Pliny, *NH* 18.8.41-3. Of course, having a plot of land to tend to may not have been an advantage as small landholders often struggled to make ends meet, as the frustration expressed by other landholders who were not as successful as C. F. Chersimus suggests.
[469] Hopkins and Roscoe, 134.

manumission, thereby ensuring that some of the work that the freedpeople had previously complete

continued to benefit their patrons.[470]

Although the consensus is that most freedpeople continued to live in the *domus* of their

patrons, it seems less likely when small landholders or business owners are the manumitters.

Furthermore, the *peculium* slavewomen in lower-class households might have had was probably fully

or mostly used to pay for their manumission, leaving them with few resources.[471] If that were the

case, then women were sometimes turned out of their patrons' homes and needed to establish

themselves elsewhere. Women who were manumitted and subsequently turned out of their former

homes would have immediately become responsible for necessities which had previously been met

by their enslavers. Unless they had skilled trades, it was probably difficult for women in these

circumstances to find work that paid enough to support themselves or their families, especially if

they were mothers and had to take their children with them. In such cases, manumission may not

have been a desirable outcome

It is likely that the wage-laboring women—stall-managers at local markets, and wet nurses,

for example—were from this category of freedwomen.[472] They were probably also quite capable of

working as seamstresses, laundresses, and *popinae*, or fast-food restaurateurs.[473]  These women were

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[470] *Ibid.*, 150. Of course, in these cases women were conditionally released. However, women who were manumitted under more standard circumstances, either formally or as Junian Latins were also subject to *operae* if their enslaver required it.  *Dig.* 38.1.1. For discussion see above, in the section, "kinds of manumission," as well as Treggiari, *Freedmen*, 75-76 and Perry, *Freedwomen*, 79.

[471] Kleijwegt, "Freedpeople," 51. Notably, Gaius specifically indicates that slave women, not just men, were given *peculium*. Thus, she could have paid fully for her own release. *Dig.* 15.1.3.2.

[472] Hawkins, 258. Gaius rules that women who took out loans were liable. The specific occupations Gaius names are sewing and weaving, maybe not surprising, but suggesting clearly that women were engaged commercially in these activities and may have need to take out loans to cover costs incurred. *Dig.* 15.27.1.

[473] For *poinae,* see Thomas McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World, A Study of the Social History & the Brothel*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, (2004), 243, n. 10.

less likely to have been trained as skilled laborers. More often working as domestic or field slaves before their manumission, they likely had few "marketable" skills. Consequently, they had few resources, either material or social, and were vulnerable. If women were manumitted with partners or had a partner in another household, they were probably better able to stabilize their circumstances, but it still would not have been easy. If they were single, with no partner or prospects, they probably took whatever wage labor they could find to get by. Their vulnerability could have meant that they were worse off as freedwomen then enslaved.

As mothers and potential mothers, then poorer freedwomen were in precarious positions. Children were likely not a help but a burden as they were also unlikely to be able to acquire a trade that would support their families once they reached adulthood. Consequently, they, too, were likely to take on work from a very young age.[474] Poor women, then would have had few options to care for their families. As I more thoroughly address in the chapter on Roman freeborn women, women in these positions must have relied extensively on personal support networks, provided they were available, and suffered stigmatization for their poverty. To retain some personal dignity, these women had to take on wage labor of the kind indicated previously to avoid falling into *infamia* or destitution. If they could not, and they lived in urban environments, they were likely to become prostitutes, barmaids, or waitresses, all of which were considered shameful professions.

It seems more likely, however, that poor women avoided having or raising children as a survival mechanism. While contraceptive, abortifacients, and surgical abortions would have cost them something, women could abandon their children without any financial burden. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that these women were among the groups most likely to abandon their children. As is the case with so much in this study, evidence for single-mother abandonment is rare.

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[474] *Dig.* 7.1.55, 7.7.6.1. Although both refer to the ability to assess value or require *operae* from children under five, they make clear that those children were sometimes put to work. Women in desperate positions were almost certainly also putting their young children to work to support their needs.

The body of evidence consists of two cases of divorced women claiming illegitimacy since the child was born after the divorce and subsequently abandoning the child[475] and Roman comedy, in which raped women carried their children to term and either exposed or intended to expose their children before their situations were rectified by the identification of the rapist and their subsequent marriage.[476] Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that for women who could not afford to have and raise children, exposure was among the few options available to them.

### Women on the Outside

For women on the outside, those tainted with *infamia*, motherhood must have been especially difficult. They carried a status that denied them legal privileges and placed them on the margins of society. A person with *infamia* was "a person without reputation."[477] The status applied only to free people (freed and freeborn) since slaves had no reputation to corrupt, but it prevented all prostitutes, gladiators, actors, pimps, and procuresses from participating in several aspects of citizen life. [478] Males in these professions were stripped of their rights to vote, run for office, bring cases to court, sit on juries, and serve in the army. They were also subject to corporal punishment even though it had long been the case that Roman citizens could not be punished corporally.[479] Women who were *infames* were prostitutes, actresses, tavern keepers, barmaids, innkeepers, and adulteress, all of whom received *infamia* because of the use of their bodies. For those who were not

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[475] *Dig.* 22.3.29.1; 40.4.29. William Harris, "Child Exposure in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 12

[476] See the section, "Rejecting Motherhood" in the chapter on Roman freeborn women.

[477] *Dig.* 23.2.43.9, Catherine Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome," in *Roman Sexualities*, edited by Judith Hallett and Marilynn Skinner, Princeton University Press (1997), 66.

[478] Thomas McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome,* OUP (1998), 51-52.

[479] Catherine Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome" in *Roman Sexualities*, edited by Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner, 70ff.

prostitutes, their jobs (or the perception of their jobs, in the case of barmaids and innkeepers) labeled them tantamount to prostitutes. In the *Digest*, Ulpian wrote "*si qua… in taberna cauponia vel qua alia pudori suo non parcit.*" "Any woman in a tavern or inn… or any other woman who does not spare her sense of shame" openly prostitutes herself.[480] Such women were denied privileges under the law and denied honorable status in their local communities.

Catherine Edwards, in her discussion of *infamia,* argues that those who worked to bring others pleasure, especially through the use of their bodies, and who were paid for that work suffered indignity and *infamia*. The pleasures that prostitutes, gladiators, and actors sold were *voluptas* or, as she translates, low pleasures. Her work is convincing as these do appear to be linked in both the official definition and in literature. She further asserts that visiting taverns was among the low pleasures, based on her reading of Horace's *Epistle* 1.14.14ff.[481] In the poem, Horace describes his desire for the simple country life while his *vilicus* longs for urban pleasure.[482] Although Horace never makes a direct reference to *voluptas*, he interweaves the pleasures of taverns and cookshops with those of brothels and flute-playing *meretrices*. In so doing, he suggests that they are all connected to seeking bodily pleasure.[483] The people who provided all these pleasure-giving commodities were legally shunned via the moralizing and stratifying legal status of *infamia*.[484]

Although their legal *infamia* prevented women who worked as actors, prostitutes, gladiators, or in inns and taverns from achieving a respectable place in Roman society, it did not prevent them

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[480] McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, 127. Translation by McGinn.

[481] *Ibid.*, 84.

[482] Horace *Epistles* 1. 14.14ff.

[483] Edwards, 85.

[484] *Dig.* 48.5.25(24).

from taking on the distasteful work nor did it prevent people from making use of their services. As McGinn argues, the status simultaneously marginalized and legitimized these "low-pleasure" by creating a legal category that isolated practitioners but allowed the professions to remain active, thereby separating them from respectable people and occupations.[485] Infamous persons must have constituted a large proportion of the Roman (urban) population to meet the needs (and desires) of Roman pleasure-seekers (and those who had legitimate need of inns and taverns for shelter and food). Some of these women were also mothers or potential mothers and they would have required methods for negotiating the taint of their status.

### Prostitution

Prostitutes were probably in a very different position from most Roman women. They constituted the defining group of those who suffered *infamia*.[486] Therefore, while other poor women would have been disadvantaged compared to more financially well-off women, prostitutes found themselves in a different category altogether. Furthermore, freedwomen probably made up a large proportion of prostitutes in Rome. Having been prostituted while enslaved, and lacking other options, many likely continued their earlier work.[487] For example, they were not permitted to marry free men (though they could marry freedmen).[488] During the reign of Severus, legislation was passed to protect those who were made to prostitute themselves as slaves but left their dishonorable work upon manumission, ensuring that they were not made *infames*.[489] The suggestion is that women who

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[485] McGinn, 17.

[486] *Ibid.*, 65.

[487] Treggiari, *Freedmen*, 142. For contrasting possibilities, see Perry, *Freedwomen*, 79 and *Dig.* 38.1.38

[488] *Digest* 23.2.43.

[489] *Digest* 3.2.24. However, the lateness of the rescript indicates that women may have previously been considered *infames* no matter when they practiced prostitution, even if it they were compelled by the condition of slavery.

were made to work as prostitutes while enslaved sometimes had other options upon manumission, and while that may have been the reality for a few, it must have been far out of reach for most.

Children of prostitutes or tavern and innkeepers who suffered *infamia* would have been affected by their mother's status since she was limited in her capacity as a Roman citizen. In fact, they suffered their own limitations. Due to their mother's *infamia*, the were not permitted to marry into the senatorial order. Consequently, the social and legal limitations placed on them and their offspring may have limited their interest in bearing and raising children. Women who were unable to prevent or eliminate a pregnancy might have been inclined to expose their children, not for their personal benefit of remaining unencumbered by children but to create the hope, however far-fetched, that their children might be raised by others in better circumstances. If it was not possible, or desirable to expose a child, a mother might simply raise her children into her profession, as the prostitutes in Roman comedies sometimes did.[490] Alternatively, they may have avoided having children altogether, making use of contraceptives and abortifacients to prevent or end a pregnancy.[491] Ultimately, the impact a prostitute's limited status had on her legal and social standing was very likely to have had a direct influence on her decisions concerning motherhood.

One potentially positive, though unlikely, example of a prostitute who decided to raise her child is found in Seneca's rhetorical and moralistic defense of a prostitute mourning her lover in his *Controversiae,* section 2.4. Although the woman was a prostitute, her devotion to her lover softened the man's father and led him to desire to adopt the son of his son and the prostitute woman. Seneca suggests that he should be permitted to do so since the woman behaved respectably even though her

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[490] Plautus, *Asinaria, Cistellaria.*

[491] Pliny suggests that they were likely to have the necessary knowledge to make successful use of them. *NH* 28.20.71.

work was *ignominiosus*.[492] The woman, with the consent of her partner who agreed to recognize him, clearly chose to raise her child.[493] Unless the son was a freedman, he could not legally marry the woman as marriage to a prostitute was forbidden to freeborn men, but he could agree to raise the child and eventually adopt it himself. It appears that he had planned to do just that, as upon his death bed he pleaded with his father to adopt the child himself. Though the mother of the child was a prostitute, his grandfather decided that she behaved respectably and thereby was deserving of the dignity of a respectable women, justifying his decision to take the child in. Since the father of the boy had decided to recognize the child, it was up to him to make arrangements for its care. The woman might have agreed to it, but it was ultimately his decision. Once the grandfather decided to adopt the boy, then the mother no longer had any claim to him and presumably returned to her profession.

Interestingly, one of the parties who dissented against the grandfather's decision to adopt the child, Porcus Latronius, suggested that it would have been more honorable for her to expose the child than to raise him.[494] The statement, though incidental suggests not only that prostitute women were likely to abandon their children, unlike the prostitute in the story, but that it was apparently expected that they would do so rather than attempt to raise them. P. Latronius, then seems to reinforce the notion that exposure was among the frequently employed options by prostitutes who had children. Although the case of the woman who nursed her partner and thereby secured her son's adoption and that of the mother who abandoned her child were distinct, the outcomes were

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[492] Seneca *Controversiae* 2.4. Notably, the exchange is rhetorical and may not have reflected a real case. However, it does reveal that it was not inconceivable for prostitutes to have children and seek ways to negotiate their promotion in status by the prospect of adoption and legitimation.

[493] *Ibid.* 4.2.1.

[494] *Ibid.*, 4.2.5 "*Quem honestius subiecit meretrix quam peperit. Pater istius incertus est; bene cum ipso ageretur si et mater.*"

the same: neither woman raised their child and both, presumably, retained their professions and their livelihoods.

Other evidence for prostitutes as mothers comes primarily from Roman comedy. Plautus and Terence both wrote several plays that featured mother-daughter pairs among prostitutes and *lenae*. Sandra Witzke, in "Harlots, Tarts, and Hussies?: A Problem of Terminology for Sex Labor in Roman Comedy" collected examples of prostitutes in the plays of Terence and Plautus. Among the examples are Acroteleutium and Philocomassium in *Miles Gloriosus*, the procuress and her daughter Gymnasium in *Cistellaria,* and Clearata and Phillaenium in *Asinaria*.[495] Although fictional, they, like Seneca's reference to a "respectable" prostitute, point to the presence of women who bore children with the intent to raise them. Unlike the woman in the *Controversiae,* however, these women did raise their children. The daughters were expected to become prostitutes themselves to continue to support the family finances. Just as artisan women were likely to employ their children in their businesses, prostitutes were likely to have done the same. Of course, comedy is not a direct reflection of lived experience, so these women may have been stereotypes or exceptions to the rule, but they suggest a strategy for childrearing that was not unlike the strategies other working women employed.

The prostitute who cared for her son's father and those who raised their children to work in the same profession reveal women who made deliberate choices on behalf of their children and attempted to provide for them in the ways they knew best. That artisan women seem also to have raised their children to adopt the same or similar work closes a conceptual gap between infamous prostitutes on the one hand and respectable artisan women on the other. The main difference between the two was not callousness or unseemly behavior, it was profession. Prostitutes were

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[495] Serena Witzke, "Harlots, Tarts, and Hussies?: A Problem of Terminology for Sex Labor in Roman Comedy," in *Helios* vol. 42, no. 1 (2015): 16.

derided because they sold pleasure with their bodies. That does not mean, however, that they were not decent mothers who cared for their children.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Roman freedwomen were probably not as large a group as they seem, but they did contribute significantly to the economy as artisan women and, just like women from other groups, were sometimes mothers and sometimes not. Their *lifeworlds* played a considerable role in determining their modes of motherhood. All freedwomen had the potential to have children who straddled status barriers, complicating their roles as mothers who needed to prepare their children for adulthood. Women who were married to their patrons were among the most constrained as both women and mothers. Those who married *colliberti* or other freedwomen probably constituted the largest group of freedwomen and these were probably also more likely to become mothers. Further, *concubinage* was a common practice as freeborn men were generally discouraged from taking *liberta* wives. They may also have used the practice as a strategy for avoiding legitimate children.

Nevertheless, epigraphical evidence shows freedwomen as not just mothers but also, and maybe only, professionals. The epitaphs of women who were commemorated or who commemorated themselves according to the occupations with no reference to children are among the likeliest groups to have been childless. *Concubinae* and prostitutes joined them in this category. Working women, however, were not always childless and therefore had to navigate motherhood and occupation. Artisan women and prostitutes were not much different in this respect as they had to consider the options and determine which was better for themselves and their children.

Mothers who were poor were often faced with survival or childrearing. This group of women was probably among the most likely to expose their children, though women from all social groups did too, for various reasons. Poor women were also likeliest to have to take low-paying wage work in unsavory conditions, further complicating their ability to successfully raise children who

were likely to have no better prospects than themselves since they would not have been able to afford apprenticeships and since their reputations were very low among the wider population.

In short, motherhood for freedwomen was in some ways not dissimilar from motherhood among enslaved women (provided the women remained in or near the household of their patrons) or freewomen (for those who married outside of their familia or established their own businesses). It was distinct in one significant way, however, and that was the liminal status they were subject to. Mothers of mixed-status children often had to cross back and forth between the expectations of the one and those of the other. In short, freedwomen mothers straddled the line between slavery and freedom, endeavoring to meet their own needs and those of their children.

Chapter 5: Anticipation and Preparation for Motherhood (or not) Among Freeborn Women

Introduction

In her introduction to *Roman Motherhood,* Suzanne Dixon makes the point that freeborn

Roman mothers were not the gentle, nurturing mothers modern people expect they should have

been by referencing the way Roman moralists, authors like Seneca, Cicero, Plutarch, and Pliny,

described their mothers, wives, or their ideas of what mothers and wives, in general, should be.[496] In

these sources, mothers are disciplinarians, protecting the interests of her familial estates and honor

but demanding children adhere closely to her expectations.[497] To such men, these were good

mothers because they ensured that their husbands and sons were prepared for civic engagement.

Moreover, they were good women because they took their duties as wives and mothers seriously.

Not all women were so focused on politics and social or economic advancement, though. In truth,

many of the accounts that exist, like Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam* or Plutarch's *Consolatio ad Uxorum*

are as much political tracts as they are praise for mothers and wives. Seneca's *Consolatio* was written

from exile. His consolation was at his mother's loss of *him* while he was compelled to be away for

his political (real or supposed) infractions.[498] Thus, it is difficult to accept that their descriptions are

widely applicable to most Roman women.

But the elite evidence that scholars turn to for information on Roman society sometimes

leads them to hold onto those elite perspectives, as do our societal biases.[499] In his *Consolatio ad*

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[496] Suzanne Dixon, *Roman Motherhood*, Routledge (1988), 1.

[497] *Ibid.,* ii. Seneca. *De Consolatio ad Helviam,* 16.4-5. Plutarch *Consolatio ad Uxorum* 4. Gunhild Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature: Attitudes of Authors Under the Early Empire*. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1993, 131.

[498] Elaine Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement: Seneca's Consolations to Helvia and Polybius," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond*, edited by Jan Felix Gaertner, Brill (2006): 175-176.

[499] Eleanor Windsor Leach, "Venus, Thetis and the Social Construction of Maternal Behavior," *The Classical Journal* 92, no. 4 (1997): 364-367.

*Uxorum*, Plutarch praises his wife, Timoxena, for her restraint in grieving the loss of their infant daughter and not submitting to excess. He indicates that women who restrained themselves, as he learned she did at their daughter's funeral (he was not present because he did not receive notice of her death until after the funeral had been held)),[500] "must hold that the tempest and tumult of her emotion in grief requires continence no less, a continence that does not resist maternal affection, as the multitude believe, but the licentiousness of the mind."[501] Indeed, her measured behavior is a better mark of her love and affection than another woman's wailing, which Plutarch asserts is just an exercise in vanity.[502] Although he praised Timoxena for her restraint, he and those in his circles still clearly expected mothers to deeply mourn the loss of their children at any age.

All the elite authors were philosophers and statesmen, and their notions of marital and maternal values are distinctly upper-class and ideological. They were not often describing things as they were but rather things as they wanted them to be. In these cases, they were describing stoic mothers and wives, encouraging them to behave according to their stoic precepts and highlighting their proper displays of grief and motherhood. Most Romans, however, were not practicing stoics nor, it seems, did they behave like Helvia and Timoxena. Rather than taking the ideal interpretations of motherhood from these sources, we should read them for information about the regular and more realistic behavior in their criticism of other women and praises for the women to whom the consolations are addressed.

For example, in Seneca's consolation, common women are described as unrestrained in grief (unless one regularly experiences grief, then it becomes easier to suffer misfortune with "strength

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[500] Seneca, *ad Helviam*, 608B.

[501] Plutarch, *ad Uxorum*, 609A translated by Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, LCL, HUP (1959). τὸν ἐν πένθεσι σάλον καὶ τὸ κίνημα τοῦ πάθους ἐγκρατείας δεῖσθαι διαμαχομένης οὐ πρὸς τὸ φιλόστοργον, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ ἀκόλαστον τῆς ψυχῆς.

[502] *Ibid.*, 609F.

and unalterable perseverance" (*forti et immobili constantia*)),[503] unchaste, desirous of jewels and riches, hiding or eliminating pregnancy and immodesty.[504] Of course, his descriptions are stereotypical and polarizing but they reveal important information about the range of behavior and attitudes for Roman women. They were not all staid, matronly, and maternal. Women sometimes deeply mourned the loss of their children[505] and at other times rejected motherhood altogether. Sometimes they focused their attentions on their own desires, while at other times, they simply endured the hardships of life.[506] While Seneca's consolation cannot tell us anything about the specifics of womanhood in Rome, it can reveal the range of possibility, one of the central themes of this study. Women seem to have been relatively free to make their own choices about what to prioritize and, most significantly for the purposes of this study, whether to become mothers. Even in his praise of his mother, he suggests that restraint was *her* choice.[507]

Freeborn women among the lower classes in Rome are hard to find, harder to find than either slaves or freedwomen as most inscriptional evidence points to one of the latter. For those inscriptions that do pertain to freeborn women, the vast majority are simply records of their names or highlight their relationships or wifely and maternal virtues.[508] In the cases where neither slave or freed status is mentioned, it is often impossible to verify status.[509] In short, freeborn women who are

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[503] *ad Helviam*, 3.1.

[504] *Ibid*, 16.4, 5.

[505] CIL 6.3771, 19159, 9.4255, 10.4915, 13.7113.

[506] Poverty and disease were widespread in Rome. Women and children seem to have been especially susceptible. Nathan Pilkington, "Growing Up Roman: Infant Mortality and Reproductive Development," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 1 (2013): 11.

[507] *Ad Helviam,* 16.3-5.

[508] Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press (1992), 98 n.61, 100.

[509] *Ibid.*, 38. Of the 1470 inscriptions Joshel analyzed, more than half (801 or 54.5%) had no status indicators.

not from the elite classes are among the most "silent" women in Rome, especially freeborn rural women.[510] In this study, therefore, as with all the chapters, careful inference and supposition are necessary. There is no way to count how many freeborn women had jobs, suffered from illness, abuse, or poverty, and who also became mothers. Nevertheless, it is certain that there were women who experienced all these circumstances and more. By exploring ways in which freeborn, lower-class women prepared for motherhood and presented themselves as wives, mothers, professionals, or otherwise, I hope to demonstrate that motherhood among lower-class freeborn women was at once distinct from and similar to motherhood among other lower-class populations. Just as I have previously indicated, motherhood is not uniform among any on group of people, so I also aim to show the variations in maternal behavior among lower-class freewomen.

### Preparation for Motherhood

As the first and second chapters have already outlined, preparation for motherhood among Roman women involved negotiating networks, considering the dangers and promises of mothering and evaluating the compatibility of motherhood with one's lifestyle, geographic location, occupation, and the established social constraints, including values, norms, and policy. Women never approached motherhood as an isolated fact of life, thus I argue that the study of motherhood cannot be isolated from the study of other aspects of a woman's life.[511] *Lifeworlds* must be considered for each possible scenario. Women also negotiated health problems and economic instability. Walter Schiedel and Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller argue that most Romans lived at or near subsistence,

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[510] Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Rome, I," *Greece & Rome* 42, no. 2 (1995): 202-217.

[511] As I have previously noted, there is a rich body of scholarship on women and their roles in numerous aspects of Roman social life. However, with few exceptions, motherhood is rarely considered alongside these factors. One of the most prominent exceptions is Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery, Between Evidence and Models*, London: Institute of Classical Studies (2007), 9-17, wherein she outlines the possible occupations taken up by (or assigned to) enslaved women so that they could work and mother simultaneously.

the latter of whom base their argument on the basis of comparative evidence and the risk of both

small business and agriculture, suggesting that their ability to feed themselves and their families were

always strained.[512] On the other hand, scholars like Kyle Harper have argued that subsistence is

probably too extreme a way to describe the economic circumstances of most Romans.[513] The study

of motherhood, then, is complicated by modern understandings of life in Rome. Women living at

subsistence and those with more economic and nutritional stability likely had very different factors

influencing their approaches to motherhood.[514]

To complicate things further, Roman, lower-class freeborn women tend to be harder to find

in the historical record. Much of the epigraphical evidence for working women point to freedwomen

and slaves.[515] Conversely, freeborn people were more likely to mention children and parents than

freed or enslaved people were.[516] More than 50% of epitaphs that Sandra Joshel studied that

mention children are attributed to freeborn or uncertain freeborn Romans.[517] Does this mean that

the freeborn were more likely to have children or is it simply a matter of form? More than likely, it

suggests that the ideals of familial relationships were felt more strongly among the freeborn. Some

scholars have proposed that freed and enslaved people were more inclined to include their

occupations on monuments because it was a mark of pride, a sign of some success when other

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[512] Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women, I," 207. Garnsey and Saller, 72.

[513] Kyle Harper, *Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, Princeton University Press (2018), 10-11. However, he argues that disease ran rampant in Rome, thus contributing to high mortality rates and the later dissolution of the empire. See also Roth, 44-45.

[514] Caitlyn Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, Princeton University Press (2019), 25.

[515] *Ibid.,* 256.

[516] Joshel, 98. Although she does notice a parity in mention of spouses.

[517] *Ibid.,* 100.

dignities were denied them.[518] If so, then the converse may have been true for freeborn people, who might have tried to differentiate themselves by emphasizing familial ties. Even if their lives were substantively similar to lower-class freedpeople and slaves, their representations in death are more likely to replicate the normative familial values.[519] The funerary practices of freeborn people, then, might reveal an ideological or cultural divide between themselves and freed or enslaved people, even if their lived circumstances were not very different.

### Networking

While young women in the Roman period were much closer to the ups and downs of physical health and birth than modern women in developed countries usually are, they would nevertheless have needed some social introduction to pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. Women would almost certainly have needed to learn about motherhood through social channels. Observing the behaviors of their own mothers and other women who were mothers, playing with dolls or otherwise imitating mother figures, and receiving explicit instruction from mothers, caretakers, and influential educators were all means of socialization for young Roman women.[520] The social channels women navigated to learn the answers to complex social questions about motherhood were varied. Predictably, there is little in the extent literature that directly indicates ways women communicated key social information. The reasons for the omission are not difficult to come by: sources are limited, primarily elite, and primarily male. Social networks, especially those among women, were

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[518] Natalie Kampen, *Image and Status: Roman Working Women in Ostia* Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag (1981), 132.

[519] Cameron Hawkins, *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy*. CUP, 2016, 247.

[520] Fanny Dolansky, "Playing with Gender: Girls, Dolls, and Adult Ideals in the Roman World," *Classical Antiquity*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (October 2012), 268, 277-78, 281. Dolansky's article focuses on surviving dolls, of which there are few, that are made of high-quality materials and seem to invoke upper-class notions of beauty and social roles. Although dolls that lower-class women played with have not survived, Dolansky's essay provides a means of thinking about the kinds of toys young girls from a variety of social statuses were likely to have played with and the implication of such play.

generally unremarkable to the Roman author. As is nearly ubiquitously stated, only those topics

which directly pertained to the purpose, reputation, or philosophy of the Roman authors made it

into their texts. Nevertheless, there is evidence of the networks women engaged in, visible in several

contexts.[521] Understanding these networks can contribute to a modern understand of Roman

maternity.

For women, social and professional networks were at least one of the ways women exerted

personal control in their lives and in the lives of other women in their networks. They were also a

means of traversing social status demarcations.[522] Networks were not divided according to slave,

freeborn, or freed, rich or poor. Rather, women (and men) interacted with one another across these

lines. Within the *domus* of larger, slave-holding families, slaves, freedpeople, and freeborn people

lived among one another, intermingling on a regular basis. In public spaces, *collegia* were often made

up of slave and freed persons, *obstetrices* were often slaves or freedwomen who served freeborn and

freedwomen,[523] women traveled with soldiers and traders (or as traders themselves), interacting with

people from completely different ethnic and social backgrounds, while religious festivals often

required interactions across social lines to carry out the rituals. In short, networks were multi-layered

and reveal social intersections that are otherwise hidden.

Networks meant that women were interdependent agents and that relational exchanges

shaped interests, needs, desires, and expectations. Insofar as these networks pertained to

motherhood, they transmitted ancient descriptions of birth, myths, remedies, magical incantations,

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[521] Greg Woolf, "Female Mobility in the Roman West," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, edited by Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf Brill (2013), 354, 356.

[522] Taylor, 703.

[523] In a collection of all the known Latin inscriptions that mention *obstetrices* (31), Christian Laes finds that 42% were freed and 29% were probable slaves. In all, 70% began their careers in slavery. Interestingly, he finds that not one midwife can be securely identified as freeborn. That midwives were trained while enslaved is clear from the *Digest* 7.7.1.5.

and gynecological knowledge. They worked by conveying experience, sympathy, support, encouragement, and, of course, the negative versions of each of those: judgement, jealousy, divisiveness. It is difficult to know what, exactly, women discussed in their social and professional circles, but there are clear indicators that motherhood was among the topics.

Some key evidence comes from Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories,* women's religious festivals like the *Matronalia, Nonae Caprotinae,* and the *Matralia*, *collegia*, and Plutarch's *de amore prolis*. Pliny's records of folk medicine reveal agreement among medical practitioners in rural areas about remedies. Midwives and medical doctors shared similar approaches to some ailments[524] and prostitutes and midwives shared similar information for women.[525] At religious festivals, like the *Matronalia* slaves and respectable freeborn women (*matronae*) played specific roles in the rituals as the *matronae* serve the slaves a feast and gifts were exchanged among family and friends while women young, old, married, unmarried, mothers (and those who were not), freeborn, freed, and slave probably all interacted.[526] The *Nonae Caprotinae* was celebrated in honor of the slave women who legendarily saved the chastity of freeborn women by dressing as matrons and voluntarily giving themselves to Latins who demanded intermarriage as a condition for ending the war between them.[527] In contrast, the *Matralia,* celebrated a month before the *Nonae,* slaves were beaten by *matronae* as punishment for sexual indiscretion.[528] Within the local networks Pliny describes,

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[524] Pliny, *Natural Histories,* 28.23.84, 86.

[525] *Ibid.* 28.20.71.

[526] Fanny Dolansky, "Reconsidering the Matronalia and Women's Rites," in *The Classical World* 104, no. 2 (2011): 195, 197-198.

[527] Fanny Dolansky, "Strained Relations: Gender Differences and Domestic Ideals: The Significance of Two Roman Family Festivals," in *Women in Antiquity*, edited by Stephanie Lynn Budin, Milton: Taylor and Francis (2016), 911.

[528] *Ibid.*, 908.

information was transformed as women's experiences interacted with the professional and informal dialogues among local communities about various treatments, preventative prescriptions, and behavior, used to treat pregnancy and childbirth related complications, prevent bad birth outcomes, or eliminate a pregnancy. Through the religious festivals, social order was reinforced either through inversion (*Matronalia* and *Nonae*) or overt expressions of social superiority (*Matralia*).[529] Women renewed their strong ties and developed new weak ties through the rites. All the rites were connected to familial relationships, thereby socializing women, especially young or new participants, to the norms of life in a *familia*.

In the preface to *Natural History,* Pliny the Elder tells the emperor, Vespasian, to whom the collection is dedicated, that "it was written for the common herd, the mob of farmers and of artisans, and after them for students who have nothing else to occupy their time."[530] Although the "common herd" is derisive, Pliny nevertheless suggests that it is intended as a guidebook for "average" people (probably economically stable groups, like the *plebs media*). Even as the book almost certainly never made it into the hands of lower-class men and women, at least not *in toto*, observations that pertained directly to their work, needs, or interests probably did. In those cases, the information would have necessarily spread among people at markets and other common sites. It would have been transformed by the relators and the listeners, combined with other information, debated, and sometimes put into action. For potential mothers, the information that related directly to gynecological and obstetrical information would have been the most relevant. They were likely to share among themselves or, as previously suggested, learn from their *obstetrices* and *medicae.*  The

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[529] *Ibid.*, 912-913.

[530] Pliny, *NH*, Preface 6, translated by H. Rackham LCL, HUP (1938), *humili vulgo scripta sunt, agricolarum, opificum turbae, denique studiorum otiosis…*

networks here are quite obscure, but they are present and suggest transmission of key information through both strong and weak networks, shaped by *lifeworlds*.

The sources Pliny references are relevant, too. They were varied: some were established Greek and Roman authorities, but some were magi, *obstetrices*, and *medicae* with whom he spoke while compiling the contents of the work. In book 20, he discusses remedies peculiar to women, indicating that he learned them from both midwives and prostitutes.[531] Thus, not only did people share Pliny's compilations among themselves, but they also shared information already well-established in their circles. Pliny must have interviewed some of the men and women from whom he gathered information, suggesting that they were confident in details they conveyed and accustomed to communicating it with others. Much of the information was probably localized and shared only within those local communities, but those who transmitted it were nevertheless part of a network, or multiple networks, of people who both had and needed information about women's health.

Religious rites, too, were practices among local communities, reinforcing personal and social relationships. Many cults and rituals, like the three described previously, differentiated people based on social status and maternal role. For example, plebian women from all economic status were forbidden to visit the shrine of Patrician Chastity.[532] Such exclusions made clear to careful observers the social places of women in their local communities.

Another important example of female religious roles and the networks they created is the expiation of prodigies in the cult of Juno Regina. In this particular case, Maria-Leena Hänninin has surmised that the *matronae* in the city of Rome participated in "some kind of matronal organization recognized by the state" and "may have had an autonomic cult-like community… [they] met each

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[531] *Ibid.*, 20.70. *…non obstetrices modo verum etiam ipsae meretrices prodider.*

[532] Celia Schultz, *Women's Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press (2006), 139.

other regularly in their annual religious festivals and thus would have known each other and have had experience in organizing ceremonies together."[533] These particular women were wealthy matrons, who had a clear presence in the local environs, but it also suggests that women who organized or played specific roles in other religious rites were similarly connected and organized according to the social location, thus reinforcing differences and, at the same time, bringing the community together in their joint efforts to worship the deities to the benefit of the whole people. As maternal status was also a key factor in shaping the cultic activity, women were also clearly identified by their maternity. Ultimately, these demarcations must have had a profound impact on personal relationships and the networks women moved in during the rest of the year.

*Collegia* were probably at least as important socially as they were professionally, illustrated by the inscriptions which tend to focus less on economic activity and more on social expectations for members.[534] People used the organizations to protect and shape their professional networks while also advancing socially, creating a social hierarchy among its members, and engaging with the community through religious and funerary rites.[535] Joshel finds a large proportion of the members of *collegia* to be freeborn or uncertain freeborn.[536] Thus, it is reasonable to place this mode of social organization in this chapter as a means of explaining how freewomen were likely to interact with one

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[533] Maria-Leena Hänninin, "Juno Regina and the Roman Matrons," in *Female Networks and the Public Sphere in Roman* Society, edited by Päivi Setälä and Liisa Savunenm, Institutum Romanum Finlandia (1999), 48. She also indicates that the group of matrons that expiated the goddess were an exclusive group, the *gens casta*, 51.

[534] Jonathan S. Perry, "Organized Societies: *Collegia,*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, edited by Michael Peachin, OUP (2011), 503, outlining the classic perspectives Ramsay MacMullen and Géza Alföldy, relates that *collegia* were more important socially than professionally. In response, Onno van Nijf, "*Collegia* and Civic Guards. Two Chapters in the History of Sociability" in *After the Past: Essays in Ancient History in Honour of* H.W. Pleket, edited by Marc Kleijwegt and Willem Jongman, Brill (2002), 311, n. 32 has more recently argued that they were important both economically and socially.

[535] Perry*,* 505.

[536] Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, (1992), 100.

another and their communities. So, how did these organizations affect Roman mothers? While not ostensibly formed for them (women were officially excluded from most organizations), women did sometimes participate directly in establishing tombs and indirectly in other capacities. [537] The interactions between the men in official *collegia* functions, as well as the apparently familial nature of burials within the organization very likely contributed to friendships and broader social relationships among the wives, mothers, and daughters of members, as they were likely to have regularly spent time together.  Similarly, one of the key aspects of *collegia*, organizing communal meals and supporting one another socially and financially at funerals, created a sense of community and order,[538] which women were likely to benefit from. Although it is impossible to know what topics the women discussed, it is almost certain they would have discussed things relevant to their lives— occasionally including childbirth, mothering, and remedies for health concerns—as the elite women in Plutarch's circles and those Pliny interviewed did. Such women were likely to support one another in child rearing and more, thus establishing practical networks.

Some women were probably also professionals alongside their husbands, friends, freedmen, or sons,[539] creating their own professional connections through their personal networks. These women may not have focused their attentions on learning about motherhood, but rather gave attention to building their professional networks as well as personal ones. Still, it seems likely that motherhood-work concerns and personal conversations also regularly occurred.[540] Examples for

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[537] Van Nijf shows that women were sometimes active in establishing tombs and were also sometimes buried in the funerary plots set aside for the *collegia*. *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East*, 47.

[538] Van Nijf "*Collegia* and the Civic Guard", 326.

[539] Claire Holleran, "Women and Retail in Roman Italy," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, edited by Greg Woolf and Emily Hemelrijk, Brill (2013), 315.

[540] This subject will be further explored in the section on working moms.

these kinds of networks come from funerary monuments. Friends and coworkers buried together and commemorating one another reveal the connections people had with those in their professional circles.[541]

One woman, Babbia Asia (a freedwoman) established a monument for herself and five others, all men and all *gemmarii* (jewelers) on the Via Sacra.[542] There is no overt suggestion that she was married to any of the men.[543] The only explicit links are professional and shared patronage as both Babbia Asia and Gaius Babbius Regillus were freed by a woman, another Babbia, while the other men were freed by a Quintus Plotius. In this case, it seems likely that the emphasis on the relationship with coworkers denotes that she was an unmarried and childless women.[544] Alternatively, it is possible that she established the tomb as she did because these were the relationships and social locations she was most proud of, or yet another possibility is that she had lost her partner and children and therefore needed to rely on other members of her personal circles, in this case her colleagues, to establish a posthumous identity. In any case, her most important personal connection at the time she established the monument were her fellow jewelers and freedpeople. Other connections may have produced relationships across professional and gender lines. For example, Pollia Urbana and Marcus Calidius Apollonius both worked in the Aemilian

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[541] Joshel, 30.

[542] CIL 6.9435 *V(iva) Babbia |(mulieris) l(iberta) Asia / v(ivus) C(aius) Babbius |(mulieris) l(ibertus) Regillus / |(obiit) Q(uintus) Plotius Q(uinti) l(ibertus) Nicep(h)or / v(ivus) Q(uintus) Plotius Q(uinti) l(ibertus) Anteros / v(ivus) Q(uintus) Plotius Q(uinti) l(ibertus) Felix / gem(m)ari(i) de sacra via{m}*

[543] Although Hawkins, 254, does suggest that the patrons Babbia and Q. Plodius were married, while possible it is far from certain. Sandra Joshel, 134-135, in contrast, is careful to avoid suggesting they were married, "Babbia and Q. Plodius may have had no close association…"

[544] Most scholars, however, tend to either avoid addressing the relationship or suggest that she was married to one of the men. Larsson Lovén, "Women, Trade, and Production in Urban Centres of Roman Italy," in *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*, edited by Andrew Wilson and Miko Flohr, OUP (2016), 204 and Holleran, "Women and Retail in Roman Italy," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, edited by Greg Woolf and Emily Hemelrijk, Leiden: Brill, (2013), 314, refer to the inscription only to identify her as a woman who worked in a trade.

district cutting or styling hair, but she worked exclusively with women (*ornatrix*), while he worked with men (*tonsor*).[545] The inscription provides no indication of marriage between the two, although it is sometimes assumed.[546]

In other cases, women commemorated women, suggesting strong female networks and hinting at the presence of unmarried and childless women. Julia Agale, a resin producer, was commemorated by her freedwoman Julia Irene, who establish the tomb for the two of them and for Julia Agale's family and their descendants.[547] It is notable that Julia Irene does not suggest that she had, or expected to have, any relatives or descendants to bury with them, signifying a strong possibility that she was unmarried and childless. There were also female owners of brick and tile shops who employed female managers, for example, Memmia Macrina and Procillia Gemella, as well as Julia Albana and Procilia Phila.[548] It is not known whether Julia Agale or any of the women who ran and were employed in the brick and tile shops were freeborn or freed.[549] If they were freeborn, then these might reveal the presence of successful freewomen, running or working in established shops whose primary groups consisted of other women. In short, these and other inscriptions like them can help to reveal social connections that contributed to women's professional and personal roles, even though they do not necessarily speak specifically to freeborn women.

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[545] CIL 6.37811, *Pollia C(ai) |(mulieris) l(iberta) / Urbana ornat(rix) de / Aemilianis ollas II / M(arcus) Calidius M(arci) l(ibertus) to(n)sor / Apol(l)oni(us) de Aemilianis*

[546] Emily Hemelrijk, *Women and Society in the Roman World: A Sourcebook of Inscriptions from the Roman West*, CUP (2021), 142. She not only presumes that they were a married couple but also proposes that they ran a shop together, though neither is clear from the inscription.

[547] CIL 6.9855 *D(is) M(anibus) / Iuliae Agele resinariae / quae vix(it) an(nos) LXXX / Iulia Irene patronae / b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit) et sibi et suis / posterisq(ue) eorum*

[548] CIL 15.1302 *Ex fig(linis) Memmiae L(uci) f(iliae) Macrinae / of(f)ic(i)n(a) Procill(iae) Ge/mellae (there are 5 such stamps)* and CIL 15.1217 *Ex pr(aediis) Iuliae Albanae / Prociliae / Philae (also 5 stamps).*

[549] Often scholars suggest freed status on the basis of Greek names, but it is possible that freeborn people, who were descendant of freedpeople or were immigrants to the city carried those names as well. Hawkins, 211.

Finally, in Plutarch's *De amore prolis,* Plutarch reveals how some women's networks shaped women-centered approaches to commonly held ideas. In chapter 4 of the treatise, Plutarch employs the lines of a homerid, who, he asserts, wrote the verses

> As when a sharp pang pierces a woman in labour,
> A pang which the Eileithyiae of child-bed send,
> The daughters of Hera, who bring the bitter pangs[550]

The lines are familiar as they are found in *Iliad* 11.269-271, describing the pain Agamemnon felt as continued to fight, after having been shot through the arm with an arrow. Plutarch, however, makes a point to say that the women in his circles did not think these lines were Homer's, but instead an unnamed female poet's, a *homerid.* Plutarch gives no indication that he doubts female authorship. Instead, he allows the attribution to stand and accepts the women's testimony. In so doing, he unmistakably provides evidence of reliable female networks engaged in conversation about birth and the early stages of motherhood.

It has been argued that Plutarch (and the women) was either mistaken or dishonest in the attribution of the lines to a female homerid.[551] Though there is debate about Plutarch's use of poetry and the authenticity of *de amore prolis*, this point does not undermine my argument. Authentic or not, the mention of women's perspectives on Homeric verse and their sense that the lines (pseudo) Plutarch quotes accurately describe the phenomenon of childbirth unveils important evidence of women's strategies of communicating about birth and motherhood.[552] Certainly, both the assertion

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[550] ὡς δ᾿ ὅταν ὠδίνουσαν ἔχῃ βέλος ὀξὺ γυναῖκα,δριμύ, τό τε προϊᾶσι μογοστόκοι Εἰλείθυιαι,Ἥρης θυγατέρες, πικρὰς ὠδῖνας ἔχουσαι, Plutarch, *On Affection for Offspring,* translated by W. C. Helmbold, LCL, HUP, 1939, 348-349.

[551] *Ibid.*, 349, n. e.

[552] For the debate on *de amore prolis*, see Geert Roskam, "Plutarch Against Epicurus on Affection for Offspring: A Reading of *De amore prolis*," in *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics*, edited by Geert Roskam and Luc Van Der Stockt, Leuven University Press (2011), 175-201; F.H. Sandbach, "Rhythm and Authenticity in Plutarch's Moralia," *The Classical Quarterly* vol. 33:3/4 (1939), 194-203; David A. DeSilva, "The Perfection of 'Love for Offspring': Greek Representations of Maternal Affection and the Achievement of the

that a woman wrote these lines and that they shared them with him are part of his rhetorical

argument. There is no reason, however, to be concerned with whether he or the women were

correct in their attribution. Instead, the central aspect of value in this passage is that they reveal that

women discussed Homeric poetry, debated its authenticity, and used arguments about the realism of

the lines to support an alternative authorship. These discussions were multi-dimensional, engaging

with the poetic lines on several levels while using emotive and experiential evidence to support their

critical re-interpretation of the lines. They were conversations among friends and social equals, too.

Plutarch is clearly implying that women considered the lines powerful enough to suggest that they

can only have been written by a woman because they so clearly express the pain of childbirth.

Plutarch regularly engaged with educated women philosophers, even dedicating several of his

works (*Isis and Osiris, Consolation to Timoxena, Advice to the Bride and Groom*) to some of them, showing

female involvement in networks that were active among the elite circles Plutarch moved in.[553]

Among those to whom he wrote were his own students—*Advice to the Bride and Groom* was a wedding

gift to two of his former pupils—whose perspectives he clearly respected and with whom he

enjoyed conversation.[554] These conversations must have included both social and intellectual threads

that were interwoven. Though as others have shown, he was convinced that women needed more

education than men to curb weak tendencies.[555] Nevertheless, Plutarch's engagement with these

women indicates robust conversation about Homeric poetry, social issues, and life experiences that

Heroine of 4 Maccabees," *New Testament Studies* no. 52 (2006), 251-268; and Ewan Bowie, "Poetry and Education," in *A Companion to Plutarch*, edited by Mark Beck, Wiley (2014), 177-190.

[553] For a discussion of friendship networks, though in a Greek context, see Taylor, "Women's Social Networks."

[554] Pomeroy, "Commentary on Plutarch: *Advice to the Bride and Groom*," edited by Sarah Pomeroy, *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife*, OUP (1999), 34, 38.

[555] Ann Chapman, *The Female Principle in Plutarch's* Moralia, Dublin: University College Dublin Press (2011); Pomeroy, "Commentary" 33-58.

pertained particularly to women and those conversations seem to have had some influence, prompting Plutarch to incorporate the women's literary interpretation into his own philosophical treatise.

This study is about non-elite women, however. So, how does Plutarch's reference to an elite-women's network fit in? Although it is not direct evidence of non-elite networks, it is evidence of networks as such. Confirmation for these kinds of relationships and modes of communication are quite rare. Most literary contexts would have no place for it, neither do epitaphs nor civic dedications very often fill in the gaps.[556] It is only in this indirect way that one can get a glimpse of the way women shared important information with one another. This passage is an example of the kinds of knowledge that prospective mothers would have gleaned from conversations with fellow women, potentially those who had more experience than they. Conversations that related the difficulty of birth, while also indicating the tenderness one might expect to feel, shaped women's expectations for birth, gave them references to which they could compare their own experiences, and provided opportunities for conversation with one another.

It is not possible to know if lower-class women also encountered the lines. If they did, it likely would have been through networks in the *domus* where women cared for the children of the elite—*nutrices, mammas, obstetrices* and the like—might have overheard or interacted with the *matronae*. Even if they did not, they almost certainly had networks of their own to transmit emotive information about motherhood and childbirth. Pliny's records of folk remedies reveal underlying anxiety about childbirth and desire for healthy mothers and infants.[557] Although the networks

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[556] Though the latter can be used to help identify some aspects of social relations, such as the organization of large *familiae* through *columbaria* and professional relationships through *collegia* and group tombs dedicated to people who worked together.

[557] For example, he is very precise about a pregnant woman's use of a hyena's foot. …[Concerning] the touch of an hyaena's feet… the left foot, drawn across a woman in labour, causes death, but the right foot laid on

through which he worked seem to have been mostly authorities on the remedies they would have been obligated by the nature of their work to share that information with their clients. Thus, thorough a complicated web of professional and social relationships, women were likely to learn something about potential motherhood.

The impact of these relationships for mothers from different social contexts would have been distinct because they navigated different networks, but the social context of their interactions was likely shaped by a longer tradition of communication, personal experience, and support structures. Although most women were probably connected via friendly networks like the one the women discussed Homeric poetry within, not all would have access to well-informed women or at least women who were forthcoming about maternity.[558] The example of the singing girl (addressed more fully in chapter 2), who learned about the signs of conception from overhearing others talk about it is a good example.[559] In general, networks are somewhat more visible among enslaved women, professional women, and sex workers, but it is less clear what they looked like for lower-class freeborn women. It seems likely that most were connected via networks like those Pliny and Plutarch recorded, religious festivals, or via professional networks like *collegia*.

### Concerns and Desires

Concerns and desires are two sides of the same coin. The things desired lead to concerns about how to achieve them, considerations of dangers and challenges along the way, and anxiety about whether it is possible to succeed. For potential mothers, those concerns and desires can manifest in myriad ways. For those women who desired to become mothers, concerns about the dangers of

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her eases delivery. (28.24.104) *pedes tactu [hyaenae] sinistrum pedem superlatum parturienti letalem esse, dextro inlato facile eniti.*

[558] Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Outcast Mothers in London, 1870-1918*, OUP (1993), 99-100.

[559] *On the Nature of the Child*, 2.1.

pregnancy and childbirth, anxieties about miscarriage and children's health, and efforts to shape these outcomes through medical, religious, and social methods all shape how they approached achieving motherhood. For those who did not desire to become mothers, some of the same concerns and anxieties might present but rather than motivating one to find methods to cope, they motivated to find ways to avoid or reject motherhood. For still others, ambivalence about motherhood might have entailed reframing yet again the balance of concern and desire. For Roman lower-class women, there are virtually no direct references either in the literature or in the epigraphic record to the concerns and desires that surround motherhood. There are, however, several indirect references that can what women might have contended with and how they responded.

Women would have been quite aware of the dangers of pregnancy, birth, and infancy, and their concerns were reflected in several historical contexts. In the literary contexts, these concerns were communicated through *consolationes*, poetry, and catalogues of natural remedies, among other genres. Though colored by their elite statuses and the purposes of their works, these sources reveal social anxieties, men's and women's concerns, stereotypes, and means of responding to the possibility of motherhood. In the epigraphical record, there are numerous references to mothers who died in birth, demonstrating just how real the dangers of maternity were. Added to this evidence are votive offerings, which tell their own stories about concern and desire. As each body of evidence demonstrates, death was an ever-present possibility, but so was anticipation and affection for children. While it would have been impossible for Roman women of any class to avoid coming to terms with the dangers, whether they sought to become mothers themselves or not, many of them determined that the balance was in favor of braving the dangers to achieve motherhood. Importantly, many others chose to avoid the dangers and thus avoid motherhood, while still others lacked much choice in the matter, becoming pregnant when they did not want to and failing to conceive or give birth when they did.

Sometimes, married women were socialized to marriage and maternity, so they aimed to meet the interests of their husbands and families to have children. Others may have been pressured by those same family members to pursue motherhood against their wishes. Of course, not all women were married and not all were expected to become mothers. These women were likely socialized to motherhood differently. For example, women in disreputable professions like prostitution, were less likely to have and raise legitimate children as marriage to Roman citizens was forbidden to them upon the passage of the *lex Papia Poppaea*.[560] By nature of their exclusion, they were doubtlessly socialized either to reject children or raise illegitimate ones for either prostituting or as a means of economic protection.[561] Other women who were artisans, worked in low-wage occupations, poor farmers, and performers were socialized in yet other ways. Issues like status, economic need, time, energy, and career shaped their interest in motherhood. Of course, these modes of socialization did not force women's choices, they simply indicate how different *lifeworlds* were, what considerations women had to account for, and offer suggestions for what course they were most likely to adopt. In short, social norms that applied to more economically established groups may not have extended to lower classes, in part because life circumstances (*lifeworlds*) were so different. Contrasting research on nineteenth century France by Christine Adams supports this possibility.

In her study, Adams shows that values of elite mothers were transmitted to the lower classes primarily through maternal societies that worked directly with poor mothers to meet "two goals: the preservation of children, and the encouragement of women's maternal role."[562] The state had a

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[560] Thomas McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, OUP (1998), 72.

[561] This might be best illustrated by prostitute mothers. Anise Strong "Working Girls: Mother – Daughter Bonds among Ancient Prostitutes," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Patricia Salzman-Mitchell and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press (2012), 128.
[562] Christine Adams, *Poverty, Charity, and Motherhood: Maternal Societies in Nineteenth-Century France,* Baltimore: University of Illinois Press (2010), 83-84.

distinct interest in shaping maternal behavior among the lower classes in France. There was no such interest in Rome, therefore there were no such organizations in Rome to transmit elite values to lower-class free women. Because there was no state support for lower-class Roman mothers and no state-sponsored programs for educating them, women were dependent upon their own networks for information, support, and socialization to motherhood. In fact, the Roman elite seemed to have little concern for lower-class mothering at all… except, of course, when those people were caring for their children. For example, Quintilian advised that nurses should be well-spoken and well-educated as he was aware of how formative maternal relationships could be.[563] But there was a divide between those who could afford to be choosy about their nurses, like Quintilian, and those who had to care for their children on their own. The nature of circumstances was sufficient to warrant different approaches and there was no concern on the part of the elite, it seems, to shape lower-class approaches to parenting their children.

A comparison that might illustrate general social attitudes toward bearing and raising children in Rome comes from early modern Japan. In the 17th century, Edo was the most densely populated city in the world at about one million. So was Rome in the first century. As Josef Ehmer summarizes in his challenge to the predominating views of pre-modern fertility, namely that birth rates were high but that populations remained stagnant only because of naturally high maternal and infant mortality rates, early modern Japan was characterized by "high urbanization, small families, and widespread birth control…the link between sex and marriage as a cultural norm was weak and (male) extra-marital sex was not seen as sinful." [564] Many of these characteristics are reminiscent of Roman social

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[563] Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 1.1.4-5.

[564] Josef Ehmer, "The Significance of Looking Back: Fertility before the 'Fertility Decline,'" *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 2:136 (2011), 11-34, John C. Caldwell, "Fertility Control in the Classical World: Was there a Fertility Transition?," *Journal of Population Research*, 21, no. 1 (2004), 29, 30.

organization and seem an apt comparative example since they had similar social compositions. Both had households with few children, one to three on average, men regularly engaged in sexual relations outside of the home.[565] Of course, there are important differences, most notably, the cultural homogeneity of Japan and the contrasting cosmopolitan nature of Rome. As it pertains directly to motherhood, it seems that abortion and infanticide were commonly used to limit family size in Japan and that there is no evidence for contraceptive use among the Japanese. [566] On the other hand, Romans seem to have made ample use of contraceptives and avoided infanticide. If Japan is any indication of what might be expected among Romans, then the anxieties expressed in elite literature and Augustan family legislation about singleness, avoidance of children, and the use of abortion and contraceptives to preclude motherhood (and fatherhood) were likely reactions to the real attitudes toward pregnancy and childbearing that many people held.

Aside from efforts to control family size, natural circumstances contributed to the composition of Roman families and thus their concerns and desires. For example, women who had contracted malaria, a common malady in Roman Italy and elsewhere, which contributed to as much as 30% of the total mortality in areas where the disease was endemic,[567] were at a much higher risk of miscarriage, premature birth, and slow intrauterine development.[568] They themselves were also more

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[565] See McGinn, chapters 5 and 6 on adultery.

[566] *Ibid.*, 30.

[567] Robert Salleres, *Malaria and Rome: A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy* CUP (2002), 117. There is a debate about the significance of malaria in Roman death rates. Shaw has argued that gastro-intestinal diseases were the deadliest and that malaria accounted for just over 2% of deaths per annum. Salleres, however argues that he did not accurately assess the data because he ignored localized populations. For those populations where malaria was endemic, Salleres finds very high mortality rates attributed to the disease. See Brent Shaw, "Seasons of death: aspects of mortality in imperial Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 86 (1996): 133.

[568] Citing a study from early 20th century America, Salleres proposes that the rate of miscarriage in women infected with malaria is as high as 60% (68), compared to the nearly universal average of 30% miscarriage rate in pregnancies.

susceptible to maternal death, often triggered by severe anemia, than women without the disease.[569]

Those who carried their babies to term were likely to have frail infants, sometimes transmitting

malaria to their newborns, putting their infants at higher risk of death. In Pliny's *Natural Histories*, he

directly references miscarriage 34 times, in 22 of them he describes recipes for preventing them or

provides warnings against herbal and magical compounds that cause them.[570] Undoubtably, these

serious complications weighed on the minds of many young women who desired children. Those

who hoped to bear children must have made use of some of his many prescriptions to protect

themselves from miscarriage.

Malaria was not the only disease that contributed to miscarriage, higher maternal and infant

death rates, and the anxiety that potential motherhood brought to some women.  Other factors that

were often out of the control of a woman were her nutritional health, gastro-intestinal diseases,

parasites, and rickets.[571] Each of these diseases contributed to difficult pregnancies, difficult births,

frail infancy, and high maternal, fetal, and infant deathrates. A clear testament to the dangers of

illness comes from a funerary monument from Albe in central Italy. Aedia was "cheated by a dismal

illness" (*morbi [sed fraudibus atri]*) and died while pregnant, visiting her father's house.[572] The dangers

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[569] Julianna Schantz-Dunn and Nawal M. Nour, "MPH Malaria and Pregnancy: A Global Health Perspective" in *Expert Review of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2, no. 3 (2009): 189-190; Joan Stivala, "Malaria and Miscarriage in Ancient Rome," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (2015): 155ff.

[570] Pliny *NH* 14.19.110, 21.84.147, 21.69.116, 24.92.143, 27.55.80, 27.86.110, 28.23.81, 28.27.98-99, 28.37.139, 28.77.247, 30.53.124-125, 30.54.129, 30.63.128, 30.64.130, 30.69.142, 31.7.10, 32.1.6, 32.3.8, 32.66.131, 32.66, 133, 34.59.151, 36.60.153.

[571] Some of these, like the gastro-intestinal diseases compounded the mortality rates attributed to malaria, Salleres, 129.

[572] CIL 9.3968. *D(is) M(anibus) [s(acrum)].*
*Aediae [- – -].*
*Haec tenet exanimam [tellus natalis, in urbe]*
*quae nupsit Roma, morbi [sed fraudibus atri]*
*post annos ueniens uisum La[ris arua paterni]*
*incidit infelixs pregnax, sa[luamque puellam]*
*enixa est misera acerbaq[ue decidit ipsa]*

of pregnancy and childbirth were quite high and must have been obvious to Roman women. Pliny's collection of folk medicine and Soranus' gynecological treatise points to just how serious concerns about pregnancy and childbirth were among the Roman population.

While funerary monuments do not tell us much about the anxiety women probably experienced in anticipation of birth, they do suggest just how much people felt that death in childbirth was an unjust fate. For example, Rusticeia Matrona [or the matron] died in childbirth at the age of 25. Written in the first person, her tombstone reads that she died of "childbirth and spiteful fate" (*partus fatu[mque malignum]*).[573] Similarly, Candida was tormented (*cruciate*) in her four-day labor and died, never having given birth to her child.[574] Two examples from literature are useful as well. Seneca, in his consolation to his mother, Helvia, describes her difficult childhood, beginning on the day of her birth when her mother died.[575] Ovid, in his retelling of Alcmene's thwarted labor with Heracles, has her saying, that retelling the story of the birth created "cold horror…to remember is part of the

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*lugentesque suos miseros [cum prole reliquit]*
*et tulit Elysium uiginti e[t quattuor annis].*
*Eutyches et Hi[- – -].*

[573] CIL 8.20288. *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum).*
*Rusticeia*
*Matrona*
*v(ixit) a(nnos) XXV.*
*causa meae mortis partus fatu[mque malignum].*
*set tu desine flere mihi kariss[ime coniux]*
*[et] fil(ii) nostri serva com[munis amorem].*
*[- – – ad caeli] transivit spi[ritus astra]*
*[- – -] maritae [- – -].*

[574] CIL 3.2267 *D(is) M(anibus). | Candidae coniugi bene me|renti ann(orum) p(lus) m(inus) XXX qu(a)e me|cum vixit ann(os) p(lus) m(inus) VII | qu(a)e est cruciata ut pari|ret diebus IIII et non pe|perit et est ita vita fu|ncta. Iustus conser(vus) p(osuit).*

[575] *Ad Helviam* 2.4-5.

pain" and that during the birth she, "longed to die."[576] These fictional and real stories point to just how deeply many women suffered during pregnancy and in childbirth.

There were plenty of mothers who lived but were unhealthy after the birth of their child, too. Those mothers, especially those of the lower classes who did not have large staffs to attend to their and their babies' needs, must have had a difficult time managing without a dedicated nurse and must have been at greater risk for maternal death in the weeks and months following birth. Raising children takes considerable personal and economic resources. For some women, one or both were difficult to come by. They had to make choices about how many children to raise, sometimes accounting for space between children and their ability to contribute to the family economically, socially, and emotionally. Women were not always able to control these aspects of their lives, however.

A modern-day comparison of the challenges illness brings is illustrative. In her essay, "Reconceiving Motherhood" Kristin Lindgren describes her own experience as a mother suffering from chronic illness. After giving birth to her second child, she was too weak to accomplish anything more than feeding her newborn baby. To make it possible for her family to continue to function effectively, they had to hire a nurse to care for her, the baby, and the older child.[577] Though she and her husband were economically stable, the cost was difficult to manage. Even with the extra care, her husband took over many household and familial tasks that would have otherwise been shared by the two of them. She alludes to feeling inadequate at the time and, though she does not

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[576] *Quoque frigidus artus…horror habet…parsque est meminisse doloris* (9.290-1) and "*cupioque mori*" (9.303-4). Translations by Mairéad McAuley, *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius*, OUP (2016), 124.

[577] Kristin Lindgren, "Reconceiving Motherhood" in *Disability and Mothering,* edited by Jen Cellio-Miller and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Syracuse University Press (2011), 93.

say so directly, the circumstances must have caused some stress in their household.[578] Of course there are innumerable differences between contemporary motherhood and motherhood in Rome, but the basic needs of a mother and her new infant are ultimately the same. Poor mothers who had few or no resources to rely on, difficult births, chronic illness, or post-partum weakness, must have felt it nearly impossible to attend to themselves and their newborns. In a less-happy comparison from Victorian England, a working-class mother with chronic pain slowly descended into alcoholism as she grappled with the pain and tried to make ends meet by working long, thankless hours.[579] Given that poor nutrition and several chronic illnesses were endemic in the Roman period, the proportion of women who suffered from difficult pregnancies and births must have been quite high.

Potential mothers must have witnessed circumstances like these, and those experiences must have affected the perception of motherhood young women developed, shaping their fears and desires. They would have needed to account for their health when considering how and whether to have or raise children. Like with the homerid's passage in the *Iliad,* women had to balance the pain of birth with the potential for joy in motherhood. Not all women found the potential joy to be enough of an incentive. As I have stated elsewhere, the decision to keep children has often been cast as primarily an economic one by scholars and a vanity by Roman elite, but a woman's health and the presence of social supports must have contributed significantly.[580] A poor woman with few social supports (and no structural supports) who was also suffering from chronic illness and physical weakness might have struggled to mother effectively as the Victorian woman did or she may have

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[578] *Ibid., 93, "*As a mother, I was akin to a dairy cow; my job was to make milk."

[579] Emma Griffin, "The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture, and Poverty in Victorian Britain," American Historical Review, (Feb 2018), 82-83.

[580] Interestingly, none seem to suggest that pregnancy- or birthing-related complications were a factor in women's efforts to avoid pregnancy or motherhood.

been inclined to give up her child in the hopes that both she and the child would survive. She might even have decided it better not to have children at all. It is unfortunate that there are, again, no records of these circumstances. Inference from comparative evidence, like Kristin Lindgren's story, and the few records on funerary monuments of women who ultimately were not able to survive difficult pregnancies and labors give us some insight.

For those women who did choose to have and raise the child, social supports were essential. Personal networks of friends and family, as well as medical care, were required to help sustain her and the child as she recovered from the birth. In one instance, the deceased and her husband clearly did not find the medical support sufficient as Prisca Iulia, presented as the speaker in her commemoration, wrote, "I would deplore the deplorable failure of the doctor forever if kings were not also snatched away to the underworld" (*deflendam semper medici [deflerem ego culpam] si non et reges idem raperentu[r ad orcum]*).[581] It is clear from Prisca Iulia's lament that she expected the doctor to be able to help her through a difficult labor. When she did not survive, he was probably the easiest to blame. Despite the alleged failure of the doctor, Prisca was fortunate enough to have a doctor and some social support in her husband and most likely other family. Other women, particularly those who were not economically stable enough to have had a monument established for them were likely to have had weaker support systems.

Ironically, lower-class freeborn women were probably more susceptible to weak networks and poor nutritional health than either enslaved or freedpeople were, primarily because they had no built-in patron to whom they could appeal. Ulrike Roth calculates that the average, rural enslaved

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[581] AE 1952.16
*Prisca Iulia I[- — -]*
*ann(orum) XX heic si[ta est].*
*deflendam semper medici [deflerem ego culpam]*
*si non et reges idem raperentu[r ad orcum].*
*deserui coniunx una pat[rem virumque]*
*[qu]em lugere [decet thalami consorte carentem].*

family (who lived on the large estates of the Roman elite) had their basic caloric needs more than met by the combination of rations and *peculium*.[582] Although, it is essential to point out that their diets were very likely unbalanced, just as it appears most Roman diets were, thereby contributing to poor nutritional health even when the caloric needs were met, they were at least not living at the edge of starvation.[583] The freeborn poor, with their limited resources, probable lack of patronage, and certain lack of formal structural supports were at a significant disadvantage. Their concerns about motherhood, then, were somewhat distinct from those of freed and enslaved women. Enslaved women had to contend with the fact that they and their children were owned. Freed people had new social locations to adjust to and navigate, introducing their freeborn children to lives they never would have been able to experience personally as Roman citizens with full rights, and trying to ensure that their children's lives as freeborn citizens were better than their lives were as enslaved persons. For freewomen, especially poor freewomen, basic health and networks likely overshadowed many other concerns. In short, all three groups of women had overlapping concerns, but those that predominated were different for each of them.

On the other side of the concern/desire continuum, women's desires about motherhood are the subject of a long debate about whether parents loved their children. Philipe Airès in, *The World of Children,* argued that parents must have been emotionally distant from their children since mortality rates in the pre-Modern period were high.[584] For Ariès, distancing was a necessary protection from

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[582] Roth, 45-47.

[583] Nathan Pilkington, "Growing Up Roman: Infant Mortality and Reproductive Development," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44, no. 1 (2013): 21-22. Though Roth argues that rural enslaved persons might have had access to personal livestock and small gardens, which supplemented their grain rations, through their *peculium*. She even goes further to say that "I would not want to exclude that for at least some slaves, reproduction was not at all impaired by nutritional deficits," 45. This, I think, is far too optimistic, however.

[584] Philipe Airès, *The World of Children*, London: Hamlyn, (1966); Michael Golden, "Did the Ancients Really Care when Their Children Died?," *Greece & Rome* 35, no. 2. (1988): 152-163; Peter Sterns and Carol Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985), 813-836.

the mental anguish caused by the loss of children. For others like Michael Golden, writing in response to Ariès, there is sufficient evidence to argue that parents did not distance themselves emotionally from their children but instead cared just as deeply as modern people would expect. Neither, however, sufficiently accounts for myriad factors that would have influenced a mother's love or emotional display to her children or a woman's decision not to raise a child.

Peter Sterns and Carol Stearns, in "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," offer a corrective to the debate and encourages scholars to revise notions of parental love by considering social-emotional norms and the emotions people actually experience to better understand the circumstances that shape a mother's relationship with her children. They remind historians that "…formal ideas cannot be automatically equated with wider social values, much less with actual feelings, without a good bit of independent verification."[585] It is particularly difficult to independently verify emotional norms and how far they extend into the actualized emotions among mothers in Rome since the kinds of data that are necessary—diaries, autobiographies, and other personalized accounts—do not exist. However, we can explore the possibilities through comparative emotionological research. The comparison is imperfect and there are obvious points of contrast, but Emma Griffin's research on motherhood among lower-class women in early modern London is useful for thinking about motherhood among similarly disadvantaged groups in Rome. She asks,

> "What happens to emotional life when mothers do not enjoy access to adequate food, decent housing, healthcare, or an effective means to limit their family size? Hunger, tiredness, cold, physical discomfort, lack of privacy, and lack of peace and quiet do not constitute part of a society's cultural codes or emotional regime; nor are they the same as the emotions themselves. But it is, at the very least, reasonable to ask whether such things affect the ability of a woman to mother her children. How, for example, does a family maintain loving ties when its members are forced to compete to fulfill their basic human needs for food, space, and rest? How does a mother experience love when she is hungry and those she is supposed to love have a claim on her own limited rations? Unpacking the emotional experience of life within the working-class

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[585] Stearns, 824.

family opens up a raft of questions about the interplay of the cultural and the emotional and invites a reconsideration of our subdiscipline's conceptual frameworks."[586]

By evaluating the autobiographical accounts of people who described their childhoods, Griffin draws several conclusions about mothering among poorer women. First, some mothers demonstrated affection and care for their children by providing them with material goods that made life a little less difficult. Second, many others worked hard, but their children did not equate their hard work with love. Instead, they often felt their mothers saw them indifferently or as a burden. Still other mothers did not maintain their homes well but were kind and caring mothers. Third, corporal punishment was common, and some mothers were particularly violent and seemed uncaring of their children's physical and emotional injuries. Finally, though the social expectation for mothers was that they loved their children and managed well-kept homes was present, many mothers were far from meeting those normative expectations.[587]

In Rome, the only normative expectations for motherhood we see are binary: the severe, authoritative, and effective mothers of elite men and the loving mothers of funerary epitaphs, like Helpis who, along with her husband, Faenomenus, mourned their little daughter, whom they described as a "sweet, talkative little bird" with the sweetest little voice.[588] In reality, though, these must have been the bookends and public faces, not illustrative of the regular behavior of most mothers. The *lifeworlds* of poor mothers who had to work long hours, sometimes raise children alone, and do both while ill or hungry must have often been far difficult leading them to be less

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[586] Griffin, 64.

[587] *Ibid.,* 68, 70-71, 74-75.

[588] CIL 6.34421 *Anthidi Chrysostom(ae) / suavi loquaci av(i)c(u)lae garru/lae quae vixit annis III men/sibus V diebus III Faenome/nus et Helpis parentes / infelicissimi filiae caris/sima(e) vociclae me<l=I>[l]i[t(issimae)] bene / merenti titulum fecerunt / Porcius Maximus et Porcia / Charita et Porcia Helias / et Sardonux et Menophi/lus qui eam nutrierunt / in diem mortis eius*

affectionate or focused on their children's long-term social advancement than either model indicates since immediate needs and anxieties were likely to overshadow both. Probably, they were more often like the hardworking but emotionally cold or volatile mothers of Victorian England. Roman mothers who navigated socially and emotionally difficult circumstances almost certainly struggled to mother as the social-emotional norms dictated because their *lifeworlds* did not easily permit it. Griffin notes that "family life consisted in a material and emotional element..." both of which shaped mothering and children's experiences at home.[589] The same was most likely true among lower-class women in Rome who also worked long hours and had similarly difficult circumstances to navigate.

However, there are some important differences between those Victorian mothers and poor Roman women. Victorian culture severely limited access to contraceptives and abortifacients, forced those who had become pregnant outside of marriage into difficult marriages, and expected women to bear large numbers of children. Aside from social pressure to marry once pregnant (which may very well have been a practice that did not extend to all social groups), these were not the conditions in Rome. Women from all social locations, it seems, did have regular access to contraceptives and abortifacients which, even if they were only sometimes effective, probably did constrain fertility, and large families were apparently not common. Roman women, therefore, likely had more control over their reproductive lives than Victorian women did,[590] a reality that probably checked some of the abuses that appear to have been present in Victorian England. However, it is not at all easy to see these circumstances in Rome since we lack personal documents. Nevertheless, *lifeworlds* must have shaped the anxieties and concerns of mothers, as well as their responses to motherhood and parenting.

### Families

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[589] Griffin, 78.

[590] *Ibid.,* 84.

Women who were biologically capable of bearing children were not always willing. Nor did women always adhere to a standard of feminine that would be recognizable by contemporary society. The circumstances of class, age, geographical location, social status (freeborn, freed, enslaved, foreign), marriage, occupation, and more shaped a woman's response to motherhood. *Lifeworlds* shaped maternal behavior. By employing queer and feminist readings of the material available, both textual and material, it is possible to identify how those intersections shaped the way a woman identified with the maternal.

Families are usually considered only within the context of marriage. Marriage, however, was only one of the ways in which familial relationships were formed. In the following paragraphs, I review the ways marriage, divorce, widowhood, remarriage, and remining unmarried affected maternal behavior and relationships with children. I also explore the absence of children in these contexts and the reasons why, focusing primarily on the woman's perspective. Since a woman's marital status might have affected her desire (willingness) to bear and raise children, this section of the chapter evaluates the ways in which marital status affected the range of potential responses to motherhood among non-elite woman in Rome.

Married women were notionally expected to bear children as part of the central purpose of marriage. Even the rituals of marriage and the word itself, *matrimonium*, have childbearing as the theme.[591] During a formal wedding ceremony, the bride had a belt, *cingillum*, tied around her waist, which the husband untied after the ceremony was complete. Later, if she carried a baby to term, when a woman was ready to deliver, the husband tied his own belt around her, said a magical phrase,

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[591] Maurizio Bettini, *Women and Weasels: Mythologies of Birth in Ancient Greece and Rome*, University of Chicago Press (2013), 76-80, discusses the rituals, which I will outline in the sentences than followed, based on his interpretation, and Susan Treggiari explains the etymology of the word *matrimonium* indicates that the purpose of marriage is to make mothers in *Roman Marriage*: iusti coniuges *from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 5.

and then left. At the moment of birth, the belt and all other knots were untied. The belt (and its knot) was symbolic of the tightening and loosening of the uterus. In the first instance, it protected her from violation before the wedding, second it symbolized opening for conception, then it represented protection again from difficult or premature birth, finally the belt and all other knots were released to support the ultimate opening of her womb for birth. The rituals point to the purpose of marriage in the Roman mind. However, these rituals were not always practiced, especially if a marriage was contracted via *usus,* the common-law version of Roman marriage whereby a couple became married because they lived as if they were.[592] The point of the ceremony was to highlight the significance of marriage for legitimate childbearing, even if children were never ultimately produced. Surely many women took this purpose seriously. For example, there is a well-known fragmentary *laudatio* to an unnamed woman, usually called Turia. According to the inscription, she could not bear children and offered to divorce her husband so that he could remarry and have legitimate children. He refused though he celebrated her selfless commitment to their marriage and his need for heirs. [593]

According to the ideal, marriage was the most natural and respectable site for childbearing. The ideology of marriage has had quite a long after life, as Robert Knapp, in *Invisible Romans*, demonstrates: "Fundamentally, the vast majority of women were committed to making a household and family successful… every girl was taught from the youngest age that marriage was the future to be expected and desired, along with children."[594] In short, Knapp asserts that it of the upmost importance for girls to marry so that Roman men, especially in the upper and middling classes, might have legitimate children. Importantly, Knapp accepts the traditionalist assertion that women's

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[592] Karen Hersch, *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*, CUP (2010), 52.

[593] CIL 6.41062, lines 48-51.

[594] Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, HUP (2011), 58.

lives were dominated by marriage and children. As Suzanne Dixon shows in "The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family," there is clear evidence that parents often cared for their children and that there was a kind of expectation for parental affection in Roman society.[595] Funerary epitaphs and literature, like Pliny's epistles, presume that readers will find their sentimental expressions of affection appropriate.[596] In sum, there were people who genuinely desired to conform to this version of married life and wanted children for their own sake, even if not all did.

Nevertheless, there should be no presupposition that marriage always meant that women did bear children, or even that they intended to. By the imperial period, there was concern among the senatorial class that members of their own order were not marrying and having enough children. Examples come from Augustus' family legislation but also from philosophers and statesmen like Plutarch who angrily condemned those who refused to raise their children and Pliny who, in a letter to Trajan, raises the concern that many freeborn parents were exposing their children and those who took them up were raising them as slaves.[597] Marriage, then, though idealistically a woman's ultimate desire because it permitted her to become a mother of legitimate children, was not always a central location for childbearing. Despite the ideal, people married for many other reasons and, in the protection of wealth among the rich at least, avoided motherhood even within the bounds of marriage.

Scholars agree that Roman families were usually small, with fewer than three children in most household. Some attribute the small family size to high mortality rates but presume high

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[595] Although Keith Bradley suggests that there was much great ambivalence in the emotional ties between parents and children. Keith Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," in *Historical Reflections* 14, no. 1 (1987): 50-51.

[596] Suzanne Dixon, "The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family," *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, edited by Beryl Rawson, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1991), 110-111.

[597] Plutarch, *De amore prolis* 5.497 d-e, Pliny *Ep.* 10. 65-66.

fertility,[598] thereby reinforcing the notion that Roman women sought to become mothers and were willing to try numerous times to achieve it. Others argue that the small family sizes are indictive of lower fertility. In other words, families were small because women did not have that many children in the first place suggesting again that behavior did not always match the ideal.[599] In contemporary studies of declining fertility in the modern world, scientists propose that practicality, emotional and mental strain, physical exhaustion, desires to use wages in ways that would have been previously impossible and that would be hampered by a large number of children, and effectiveness in maintaining a "work-life balance" have contributed to a modern fertility decline.[600] Although different in many ways, Roman women, too, seem to have been active enough in non-domestic contexts to suggest that bearing many children was sometimes impractical. Women had at their disposal tools for limiting pregnancy and birth, which probably contributed to smaller family sizes whereas women in societies where access to contraceptives and abortifacients were either difficult to come by or highly stigmatized, like those in Emma Griffin and Christine Adam's studies, had larger family sizes.[601] This and other evidence strongly suggests that women exercised agency in

[598] Richard P. Saller, *Patriarch, Property, and Death in the Roman Family*, CUP (1994), 23.

[599] Ehmer, 1-17.

[600] Shenk, Mary et al. "A Model Comparison Approach Shows Stronger Support for Economic Models of Fertility Decline" in *Proceedings in the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* vol. 110 no. 20 (May 14, 2013), 8045-8050.

[601] Suzanne Dixon, in *The Roman Mother*, 93, acknowledges that "the ancient sources are in accord in their assumption that the number of children in a family was determined by choice" but is uncomfortable with the idea that women made those choices. She resists Hopkin's statement that women restricted fertility (1983, 95), noting that there is no "evidence for respectable matrons aborting legitimate issue without the knowledge of their husbands." Even so, women might have restricted fertility via means other than abortion and, of course, since elite authors clearly considered abortion base, a practice reserved only for the promiscuous or vain, then evidence for the practice would necessarily be hard to come by. Furthermore, it is quite possible that her assertion holds for elite women while it may not have for the lower classes. In short, it should not be assumed that the two responses were the same as the *lifeworlds* of women in both circumstances were quite different.

reproductive matters.[602] In short, I tend to agree with those scholars who favor lower fertility rates as an explanation for small family sizes as the comparative evidence supports the view.

### Divorced, Widowed, Remarried

Marriage was easily dissolvable in the Roman period. It appears that women who were divorced often remarried and therefore had different relationships with former spouses, children from earlier marriages, children from subsequent marriages, and children of their new husbands. Hence, mothering was affected by all these circumstances, reorganizing families and maternal roles. When a couple divorced, the children normally remained with the father as they were legally his alone.[603] It was possible, though for children to be placed in the custody of a third party if neither the mother nor father appeared fit to raise them.[604] This latter point is particularly telling since it reminds us that parents were not always good parents and that juridical intervention was sometimes necessary to protect the interests of the child. Divorce probably had some impact on children and maternal relationships, the extent of the effects is debated, however. Centering around the strength of the ties between mothers and children in the Roman world, the debate hinges on emotional ties between the two. Since it was apparently common for mothers to employ nurses (or assign slaves to the duty) children may have developed stronger affective ties with those caretakers than with their mothers thereby limiting the emotional stress caused by divorce. Thus, Bradley argues on the basis of

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[602] Dixon, *The Roman Mother,* "Resistance to marriage was in any case not the same as resistance to having children. Ancient authors assumed that even married couples avoided procreation" 22.

[603] *Dig.* 25.3.5; There are very limited references to children remaining with their mother after divorce. When they did, they were usually very young children who were presumably being breastfed by their mothers. Cicero relates that Oppianicus' son remained with his mother Papia after divorce in *Pro Cluentio*, 27 (I think it is advisable to be very careful with this document, though, as it is mostly a smear against Cluentio's accuser). A later decree by Antoninus Pius suggested that children were better served to stay with their mothers after divorce. It is not clear whether the order reflected existing practice or was in line with changing attitudes towards maternal fitness. D 43.20.1.3, See Beryl Rawson *Children,* 228.

[604] *Ibid.,* 228. *Dig.* 43.30.3.4

Cicero's *De Amicitia* (20.74) and similar elite texts that emotional distress was probably low[605] On the other hand, Dixon believes that mother-child relationships were more seriously affected by divorce because there was a "typical intimacy and affection between the mother and the young child."[606] Most likely, both responses were present and were shaped by the *lifeworlds* of a given family. It is notable that both Bradley and Dixon are referring to upper-class families, too. How those attitudes translated to lower-class women who may not have had access to full-time nurses or educators is unclear. Probably, mothers with limited relationships were less likely to experience emotional distress than were those who regularly interacted with their children.

Furthermore, emotionology would suggest that the ambiguity in the emotional connections between mother and child in the case of divorce would have been strongly influenced by cultural emotional norms. Inscriptions suggest relatively strong ties between many mothers and their children and, of course, an emphasis on maternity. While deep affection for children and adherence to the social norms was probably not held by all women, maybe especially those in the lower classes, it would stand to reason that when emotional ties were weak mothers and children might have felt that their relationships were abnormal.[607] If so, then those maternal-child relationships that were weak were less common than the inverse.

Under typical circumstances a divorced mother was entitled to visits from her children, and there is the sense that many couples remained on good terms following the dissolution of their marital relationships.[608] Importantly, again, these accounts are peculiar to the upper classes, the

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[605] Bradley, "Dislocation," 56. Dixon, on the other hand seems to think that the emotional burden was somewhat higher.

[606] Dixon, *The Roman Mother,* 130.

[607] Stearns and Stearns, 833. However, if these expectations did not extend to the lower classes, then people may not have felt the shame (?) of poor relationships between parents and children so strongly, Stearns, 832.

[608] *Ibid.,* 15, 202, 227.

senatorial order in particular. It is not clear whether these were the circumstances for lower-class women. Still, it is likely that there were mixed reactions to divorce and that the mother-child relationship remained intact. In fact, funerary evidence points to those relationships that were maintained. Among scholars, Dixon suggests that funerary monuments established by mothers alone may have been put up by divorced women.[609] Of course, this is not at all certain, but it is a possibility that should not be ruled out. If that is the case, then mothers may have retained custody of their children in some circumstances. This would be especially likely if the father had died following the divorce and there were no suitable caretakers for the child in his family.

The frequency of divorce among lower-class members of Roman society is almost completely absent from the historical record. There are just two inscriptions probably pertaining to divorce of which I am aware. On both, erasure of names in places that were reserved for wives constitute the evidence. Lucius Mindius Dius established a monument to his two (maybe three) wives and concubine. The suggestion for the potential third wife is an erasure over which the name of the concubine was inscribed.[610] It has also been suggested that a description of the second wife, rather than the name of a third, was removed to make room for the concubine.[611] In another instance, Gaius Livanius Autas erased a name and replaced it with the name of his wife, Cornelia Maxuma. The word *coniux* was part of the original inscription, a relatively clear suggestion the that original name was also that of a wife.[612] In the case of each, it is probable that the divorce was not totally

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[609] *Ibid.,* 213.

[610] CIL 14.5026 *L(ucius) Mindius Dius / fecit sibi et Genuciae / Tryphaenae coniugi / incomparabili cum qua / vixit annis XXIIII mens(ibus) III / et Lucceiae Ianuariae ma/rit«ae et Anniae Laveriae contu<b=V>er»na/li suae sanctissimae / et libert(is) libertab(usque) suis poster(is)q(ue) eor(um) / h(oc) m(onumentum) e(xterum) h(eredem) n(on) s(equetur) / in fronte p(edes) XXX in agro p(edes) XXXXI*

[611] Hemelrijk, *Women in the Roman World*, 37.

[612] CIL 12.4949 *V(ivit) / C(aius) Livanius Maximi l(ibertus) Auctus / sibi et Corneliae Sex(ti) f(iliae) / Maxumae(!) uxori*

amicable, given the complete removal of the original names on the monument. In these instances, any children were likely to have suffered from the acrimony between their parents, potentially limiting their connections to their mothers until adulthood or their father's death.[613] Although the evidence is limited, the couple of monuments that exist point to divorce among the lower classes. At least some were antagonistic, but they reveal a behavior that is otherwise not visible in the historical record.

Divorce could also be amicable. Marriages were dissolvable unilaterally by either party or mutually.[614] Because there were potential financial penalties for undertaking a divorce, the practice may have been somewhat curtailed among the lower classes. On the other hand, in amicable divorces, those monetary difficulties may have been limited by a couple's agreement to negotiate or even forgo their financial entitlements for the sake of a former partner or children. In these situations, mother-child relationships were likely to remain as strong as they were before the divorce because they were likely to be able to regularly interact with one another thanks to the continuing relationship between their parents.

Unless a couple was willing to make mutually-beneficial financial arrangements (gifts were typically prohibited between married couples, but the prohibition was lifted upon divorce, thereby making is possible for a wife to leave part of her dowry with her former husband or for a husband grant financial resources to his former wife after the dissolution of marriage was complete)[615] the

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[613] Susan Treggiari "Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and Frequent Was it?" in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, edited by Beryl Rawson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, (1991), 41.

[614] Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," 37-38 asserts that most marriage and divorces were undertaken with limited emotional investment since they were arranged primarily to secure heir and inheritances. This, however, seems like to apply primarily, if not exclusively, to the highest echelons of Roman society.

[615] Treggiari*, 40-41. *Dig.* 24.1.60-62.

economic consequences of divorce could be substantial, potentially leading both parties to remarriage as soon as possible. Legally, husbands were entitled to 1/6th of the wife's dowry if she initiated the divorce. On the other hand, if the husband divorced the wife, she was entitled to retain her full dowry. Among the upper classes, as Treggiari suggests, these were probably large but ultimately negligible amounts. For middling couples, like shop owners and artisans, however, dowries might have been a substantial proportion of the resources a couple lived off; thus, making divorce financially difficult for a couple. These financial disabilities might have made middling couples less inclined to divorce.[616] While that is certainly plausible, it is also possible that a disgruntled spouse might be willing to take the financial hit to remove themselves from an unhappy marriage or was unconcerned with the economic damage done to a former spouse.

The financial consequences of divorce might have been most profound for lower class couples who were already in difficult financial straits. If a bride's family had to work hard to scrounge up a dowry sufficient to induce her groom to marry her, the loss of any portion of that dowry if she were to initiate the divorce might have been significant. Similarly, if the husband initiated the divorce, the complete loss of her dowry may have been too much to sustain. Maybe more important would be the division of any other property or businesses. Small landholders or business owners might have found the loss of access to property and the income from it to be more significant than the loss of any dowered funds. Unfortunately, lower class divorces are unaccounted for in the historical record therefore making it impossible to speculate too seriously on frequency or motivation. Still, the possibility that life circumstances shaped divorce practices remains strong.

Another way in which a mother might become a single mother after having been married is through the death of her spouse. Mortality rates were quite high in Rome and many women were

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[616] *Ibid.,* 39.

widowed at relatively young ages.[617] The death of a spouse might seriously complicate the role of a

mother in a Roman context. Her options would be to remain unmarried and return to her paternal

home (provided she married *sine manus*), remain unmarried but under the direction of a *tutor*

appointed by her deceased husband or other family member (if she married *manus*), or to remarry.[618]

Post 9 BC, she might have been permitted to remain unmarried and without the supervision of a

male *tutor* if she met the requirements for *ius liberorum* under the *Lex Pappia Iulia*. In any case, these

situations would all mean a change in her relationship with her children, not to mention whatever

grieving she and they might have experienced as well. Furthermore, there would very likely be

financial consequences, especially if her husband died intestate. Such circumstances would have

impacted a woman's ability to maintain support for herself and any responsibility she had for her

children, thereby driving her into remarriage as a means of coping with the loss of finances. Of

course, *lifeworlds* would have significantly impacted women in these situations and the decision-

making process, suggesting that the rate of remarriage after widowhood were shaped by wealth,

status, occupation, and social relationships.

Whether a woman divorced or was widowed, if she remarried, her existing children would

have a stepfather (though the children of a divorced woman would most likely remain with their

father and therefore have a more direct and regular relationship with a stepmother if he remarried)

and she might become a stepmother to her new husband's children, in addition to having children

with him. In all those situations, the relationships a woman had with her children altered her role as

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[617] Dixon*, The Roman Mother*, 17.

[618] Scholars tend to agree that Roman women were likely to remarry, Bradley "Remarriage and Family Structure," 95, Saller "Men's Age at Remarriage and its Consequences in the Roman Family," *Classical Philology* 82, no. 1 (1987): 30, n. 22. Although, Saller seems to suggest the opposite in *Patriarchy and Property*, "The propensity of women not to remarry was one means of limiting fertility."

a mother.[619] If remarriage was common, then stepfamilies must also have been quite common. It is difficult, once again, to see them in the lower classes, but inscriptional evidence suggests that they were formed, at least among the groups who were well-established enough to have funerary monuments. Notably, these monuments also suggest some affection, at least in the direction of the commemorator to the deceased. For example, Julia Felicissime was commemorated by Catili[3] Aggripini[3], a stepparent.[620] This example is the only one in that corpus that might have a maternal commemorator. Unfortunately, in the entire CIL corpus as cataloged in the EDCS, there are only eleven commemorations of stepdaughters and three of stepsons.[621] There are two other examples from the IPOstie corpus, but one is particularly relevant. It is the only certain instance of a stepmother establishing a monument to a stepchild. Albia Urbica set up a monument to her ten-year old stepson, Marcus Octavius Aerius. In this latter case, it is presumable that the boy's father had died since he is not named as a co-commemorator.[622] That only two stepmother to stepchild monuments remain is maybe the most telling. First, it suggests that stepmothers were unlikely to be the responsible party in the death of the child. In these cases, it is very likely that they were the only surviving relatives of the deceased. Second, rather than implying that poor relations were most common between stepmothers and their stepchildren, it demonstrates at least a few affectionate relationships.

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[619] Bradley, "Dislocation in the Roman Family," 48.

[620] CIL 06, 05600 *Iuliae / Felicissim[ae] / q(uae) vixit an[n(os)] / IIII m(enses) IIII d(ies) [3] / Caltili[3] / Agrippin[3] / filiastrae / b(ene) m(erenti) fec(it)*

[621] CIL 6.3447, 5600, 13101, 13317, 15585, 16934, 22308, 23968, 25726, 26271, 32880, 10.2201, 13.1829, 14.3744; IPOstie-A 64.

[622] IPOstie-A, 10, *D(is) M(anibus) / Albia Urbica / filiastro M(arco) / Octa<v=B>io Aerio / dulcissimo fe/cit qui <v=B>ixit an/nis X me(n)s(i)bus VII / die(bu)s XIX*

Of the fourteen inscriptions pertinent to stepfamilies, there are just seven commemorations to stepmothers in the EDCS collection.[623] What these limited numbers say is difficult to discern, but it seems to suggest that, if possible, biological families established monuments rather than stepfamilies and that there was a sense of duty or affection within stepfamilies when biological relationships were not present. In these few instances of commemoration by a stepparent or child, the biological relatives were presumably either dead or not in contact with the deceased. Despite the low numbers, they do demonstrate that there were at least some instances of affection for stepmothers and stepchildren. Despite the limited number of monuments, however, they do not suggest that the evil stepmother stereotype predominated or that stepmothers did not have meaningful relationships with their stepchildren. Clearly, Albia Urbica cared for her stepson, which led her to commemorate him upon his untimely death.

### Unmarried

Unmarried women had different maternal relationships with their children and may have been at the highest risk of using contraceptives and abortifacients or giving up their children. There are three groups of unmarried mothers with a place in this study. The first is unmarried women who had never been married and were not in a monogamous, committed relationship of any kind. The second is women who were in monogamous, committed relationships that were not socially recognized as marital, such as *contubernales* or *concubinae*. The final is those who were previously married but opted to not remarry after divorce or upon widowhood. As the final circumstance has already been addressed, it will not be evaluated here again. Unsurprisingly, evidence for single mothers who were never married is hard to come by. Nevertheless, a full understanding of motherhood in the Roman period requires consideration of women in these positions, however

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[623] *AE*1668, 74; 2003, 1138; CAG-30-03; CIL 2.5008, 4.4768, 6.30123, 12.810.

limited the evidence. Their social status, relative wealth, networks of support, and occupations

would have had further consequences on their motherhood.

In the first grouping, women who never married, there are at least a few possibilities that

shaped their responses to potential motherhood and created the most immediate circumstances for

becoming a mother. Probably the one that is most obvious is sex work. This, however, is an entirely

different category, and since it seems to have been a profession dominated by enslaved and

freedwomen, it is discussed in those chapters. Aside from that, there seem to be three distinct

categorized of women who might find themselves single mothers: women who had been in casual

relationships that ended before the child was born, abandoned women, and raped women. Although

I can identify no direct evidence of the first, it is possible that some of the monuments from

mothers to children who carry her name represent this category of women. Abandoned mothers and

raped mothers are more often evident in Roman comedy and poetry. Rape figures prominently in

some Roman comedy (as discussed in the chapter on enslaved women) and epic poetry like Ovid's

*Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti,* Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Livy's *History,*[624] abandonment is most evident in the

latter. There are problems with both bodies of material for this particular purpose, though. First, in

the comedies, the raped women are all virgins who ultimately marry their rapists. Second, in the

Ovidian poetry, the cases are all mythical or legendary. There are no "real" instances of rape or

abandonment in either collection and none that pertain to lower-class freeborn women, either. Still,

I think it is possible to say something.[625]

First, although the stories of rape in Roman comedy all end in marriage, they suggest that

rape did occur, especially at religious festivals where the crowds provided some cover and

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[624] Though the last is not epic poetry, it conveys most of the legendary rape stories like Lucretia, Virginia, and the Sabine women.

[625] As with many of the topics in this chapter, rape is studied far more extensively among enslaved women than among freeborn lower-class women.

anonymity.[626] Lower class women who were mistaken as slaves or prostitutes and women who worked in inns and taverns were probably the most susceptible. A powerful example, already analyzed in the chapter on enslaved women is in the *Declamatio Minores*, no. 301 "Girl Raped as a Slave by a Rich Man," ascribed to Quintilian. A brief recap of the story is in order. A poor man invites a rich man for dinner. He is embarrassed by his poverty, so he has his daughter pretend she is a slave and serve them. After the meal, the rich man rapes the girl. Later, the poor man reveals that the woman was his daughter, and she requests a marriage, as was her right. The rich man subsequently claims that he did not know she was freeborn but believed she was a slave, which is why he took advantage of her (and consequently should not have to marry her). The key portion of the story here is that the young woman was susceptible because she was mistaken for a slave, or so the rich man claims. If it were possible to make such a mistake, there must have been something similar about the dress and behavior of enslaved women and lower-class freeborn women.

Rape was not a legally defined crime in Rome until *the lex Iulia de vi publica* was passed, probably during Julius Caesar's dictatorship,[627] and it protected free women only. Enslaved women were still subject to sexual used and abuse, except if the enslaver felt his or her rights were violated, in which case the offender might be punished according to the *stuprum* laws.[628] For all women, rape must have been a traumatizing event and pregnancy was always a possibility. Raped women, therefore, had to determine how to handle any pregnancy that ensued. In the comedies, women typically hid their pregnancies then bore the children and planned to expose them.[629] In reality,

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[626] Tara Mulder, "Female Trouble in Terence's *Hecyra*: Rape-Pregnancy Plots and the Absence of Abortion in Roman Comedy." *Helios* 46, no. 1 (2019), 37.

[627] Gardner *Women in Roman Law and Society* (1986), 118.

[628] *Digest* 47.10.25.

[629] Mulder, 37.

women may have taken different approaches. First, women could choose to keep and raise the illegitimate child. This was not precluded by a sigma on illegitimacy, as previously discussed, rather the challenges would have most likely come from other quarters—economics, family life, and personal ability or interest in raising a child. Second, a woman could make quick use of abortifacients to attempt an elimination of a pregnancy before it moved very far along. Third, she might or might not have attempted to hide the pregnancy then exposed the child or gave it to another woman to be raised as an *alumnus/a*. Finally, she might have taken the most extreme route and commited infanticide. Undoubtably, the rape must have influenced the way a woman approached motherhood and, if she chose to keep the child, how she mothered.

Abandoned women presumably were left with the same set of options. In both instances, women were confronted with the problem of figuring out how to negotiate a pregnancy in an environment where she had no structural supports, no partner, and her social supports depended entirely upon her personal circles. Comparative evidence from the nineteenth century London underclass suggests that women with illegitimate children sometimes found temporary support for births and childcare in neighbors, family members, and coworkers.[630] Such networks were probably used by all Roman mothers among the lower classes, though they would have been particularly important to single women. Their circumstances must have been shaped by *lifeworlds* and seem to have regularly been desperate. Whatever choices they made were predicated upon a set of personal realities that either made it possible for them to manage raising a child or pressed them to avoid motherhood. As it stands, the evidence is far too limited to say anything definitively, but the exploration of possibilities nevertheless creates opportunity to begin to think more expansively about the plight of lower-class Roman women.

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[630] Ross, 116, 123, 134, 136.

The third category, women who were not legally married but who lived in monogamous relationships with committed partners, are by far the best documented and most extensively studied group of the three. The form of cohabitation that pertained to freeborn persons was *concubinatus*. *Contubernales* relationships were usually contracted between enslaved persons.[631] In concubinage, one or both partners did not consent to marriage or were not legally permitted to marry.[632] It was usually a long-term committed relationship and permitted those who could not otherwise (or who chose not to) marry to live together respectably. Both unions produced only illegitimate children. Thus, the children followed their mother's status and came under the power of her *paterfamilias* or a *tutor*.

Legally, *conubium* was only permitted to certain members of the Roman empire, namely, free citizens. Among free citizens, there were still groups that could not legally marry, either at all or across defined social status lines. Soldiers, for example, were legally not allowed to marry until ca. 197 AD, when Septimius Severus officially recognized their marital unions.[633] In general, persons who were not free and citizens did not have the "legal capacity" or *conubium*, to contract a Roman marriage.[634] Although, non-citizen *peregrini* did contract marriages according to their ethnic or regional customs. There were legal and customary restrictions on marriage between freeborn and freedpeople, patricians and plebians, freeborn Romans and *peregrini*, and within the Roman citizenry for people of different statuses. In most of these instances, stable, monogamous (?), relationships were established, but by non-marital means.

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[631] Although the legal sources only use it when both partners are slaves. Treggiari, "*Contubernales* in CIL 6," *Pheonix* 35, no. 1 (1981), 43.

[632] *Dig.* 24.1.32.13 and 39.5.39.1.

[633] Herodian 3.8.5. Sarah Elise Phang, "The Families of Roman Soldiers (First and Second Centuries A.D.): Culture, Law, and Practice," *Journal of Family History* 27, no. 4 (2002), 353.

[634] See Gardner, 31-32.

Soldier's unions are the best documented of the extra-legal marriages. As only officers were

allowed to be legally married, it will be necessary to define what a "marriage" looked like for those

enrolled in military service but who were not permitted wives. Whether married or not, they did live

with women and have children. So long as soldiers were active, their children remained illegitimate.

However, it seems that once a soldier was discharged from service, his partner was pronounced his

legal wife and he could petition to have his children be legally recognized as his own. The formula

announcing these changes, as cited by Sara Elise Phang is as follows:

> The emperor grants to them and to their children and their posterity, the citizenship
> and the right of marriage (*conubium*) with their "wives," the women whom they had
> when the citizenship was granted to them, or if they were unmarried, with those whom
> they married afterwards, limited to one woman for each man.[635]

An important implication for my purposes is that families meant women were raising

children under circumstances that were quite specific to military life. For those forts that were

permanent, they would have constituted a significant community of people providing services and

families of soldiers were among them. Archeological evidence directly connects women with many

of the industries inside the forts: metalworking, cloth-working, and commercial industries. The

mode of connection is uncertain, but it seems clear that women were active in the various industries

at the forts, working in or running shops.[636] There is also evidence that women were present as

cooks, slaves (who were sometimes the partners of their enslaver-soldiers), and prostitutes.[637] Many

of the businesses, like the metalworking and textile shops might also have served as living quarters—

probably with the business on the street and the living quarters behind or above the shop, like in

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[635] Phang, 357.

[636] Penelope Allison *People and Spaces in Roman Military Bases*, CUP, 2013, 330.

[637] David D. Leitao, "Sexuality in Greek and Roman Military Contexts" in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, edited by Thomas K. Hubbard, Blackwell (2014), 235-236.

Herculaneum—which means that women at the very least lived and went about their daily activities in the presence of whomever worked in the shops and the immediate environs. [638]

One problem is positively identifying women in these contexts based on class or citizen status. Slave, free, freed, and *peregrini* were all present at military forts. Some were wealthy wives of officers, others were the *de facto* wives or slave *concubinae* of rank-and-file soldiers, while still others were daughters, people working at the fort, and more. However, the limited evidence that exists does not point directly to statuses outside of the officers' wives. Still, freeborn Roman women must have been present, probably accompanying their soldier partners (maybe they had already established relationships before enlisting) or traveling with the legion as part of the civilian workforce.

If women were both present and active in the region, some working in industry and conducting personal business and living in the communities, how did that affect their approaches to motherhood? These women seem to occupy a space like urban artisan women. Thus, they were probably juggling children and work obligations. Many of the women were likely to have traveled or could expect to travel if their partners were transferred to another fort or if their work took them elsewhere. A set of valuable wax tablets called the Vindolanda tablets suggest that the wives of officers, at least, traveled throughout the region to maintain contacts with friends and family who had been transferred elsewhere. It is probable that some lower-class women did, too. Military communities tend to be close-knit, which might have encouraged people to maintain relationships even after transfers.

Although the children of *de facto* soldier unions were illegitimate, these women would have been in a different position from many mothers of illegitimate children. The children were not enslaved nor was one of the parents (in at least some of the cases), which meant that the child was

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[638]Allison, 328-329.

not disadvantaged by his or her illegitimate status. Neither were the mothers caring for their children alone—although their partners may have been gone and they were certainly at risk of dying if they were actively deployed from the fort. While the soldiers were present at the fort, it seems likely that families lived together, and a strong network of women was almost certainly active, maybe stronger and better established than in other contexts.[639] Those networks provided personal support, friendship, and made it possible for women to maintain their families and their various other responsibilities. Mothering, then, might have been eased by these networks of women.

In sum, there were numerous contexts within which women mothered outside of marriage. Some contexts were more difficult than others. Women who were unmarried might have been thus for many reasons—divorce, widowhood, abandonment, unrecognized partnerships—sometimes they mothered entirely on their own and at other times they were partnered but remained unmarried either by choice or because circumstances would not permit them legal marriage. In many cases women chose to bear and raise children they conceived while others rejected motherhood. Personal *lifeworlds* had significant influence on their decisions-making process. Women whose lives were relatively stable, who were married or permanently partnered, seem to have been more inclined to have and raise at least some of their children. Those who were in more precarious circumstances, abandoned or otherwise facing single motherhood were probably more likely to reject motherhood. Ultimately, women had to choose what they would do as potential mothers. In any case, motherhood was not confined to marriage. Women from all marital statuses contended with the possibility or reality of motherhood and her decisions were shaped at least in part by the intersections of marital relationships and status.

### Mothering while Working

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[639] Elizabeth M. Greene, "Female Networks in Military Communities in the Roman West: A View from the Vindolanda Tablets" in In *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West,* edited by Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf. Brill, 2013, 376.

Freeborn people were far less likely that freed or slaves to mention occupations titles in their epigraphical records. According to Joshel, only 43 of the 1470 epitaphs she evaluated belong solidly to freeborn people. Another 332 belong to "uncertain freeborn" people. Still, together these constitute less than a quarter of the total.[640] Moreover, only 208 of the 1470 inscriptions were women,[641] which is consistent with the general pattern for epigraphical data pertaining to women.[642] Thus, the proportion of working women recorded in Roman epigraphy is miniscule. Consequently, it is very difficult to identify freeborn women as professionals.

The lack of inscriptions, however, does not necessarily mean that they did not work. There are a few possible explanations for the absence in the record. First, they may have prioritized familial relationships over professional ones, thus masking their occupational roles in the Roman economy. Second, they may have only worked in menial or temporary jobs to make ends meet, thereby not justifying a mention of their occupations on their funerary monuments. Third, they may have worked alongside their husbands and his designation was to count for both of them. Fourth, they may not have worked at all (this possibility seems most likely among the *plebs media* or wealthier group of urban artisans as their partners were likely to own shops or businesses and manage a household of slaves and freedpeople who completed the daily work). Finally, the record might simply be an inaccurate representation of the kinds of jobs freeborn women held because only a fraction of inscriptions survive and they may have been preserved unevenly. In this section, I will explore the first two possibilities, as the third is a variation on the theme of prioritizing familial relationships, the fourth pertains to women who may not have worked and thus are not really part of this section on "working women," and the fifth is simply a postulate and it is not possible to

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[640] Joshel, 43.

[641] *Ibid.,* 148.

[642] Hemelrijk, 5. I have borrowed several of the following inscriptions and translations from her collection.

assess. Keeping in mind that at least some women were represented by each of the first four of

possibilities, I'll consider how each affected Roman women's approaches to motherhood, partly

through by evaluating the evidence for mothers who worked, and, finally, I will explain how

connecting these possible work circumstances with motherhood can affect the study of Roman

women.

As I and many others have frequently observed, Roman womanhood and Roman

motherhood are often treated as synonymous. According to the ideals expressed in the literature and

on some epigraphical records, women were supposed to be wives and mothers and the virtues that

are associated with those roles (*pudicitia, castitas, obsequium, pietas, sanctitas*) are regularly used to

describe women who are commemorated by family members.[643] In such inscriptions, the priority is

to portray the women as wives and mothers, even if they were active professionals. Of course, there

is no doubt that there were women who, if they could afford to, did not work outside of their

homes. While this study aims to highlight the range of possibility and demonstrate that the

wife/mother motif was not applicable to many women in Rome, it is also important to recognize

that it *did* apply to some women. It is problematic, however, to read inscriptions as accurate

representations of the people they commemorate. In the case of funerary inscriptions established by

husbands for wives, a husband might desire to elevate his own sense of authority by bragging about

his wonderful, dutiful wife.[644] How likely it is that these women behaved as the men who described

them say is hard to know.

An unusual tombstone from Pisa might serve as an example of women who are

commemorated according to the formula but who were also active as professionals. Publius

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[643] *Ibid.*, 12-13.

[644] Examples include CIL 6.26192, 11602, 34606, AE 1987.179.

Ferrarius Hermes established a monument for two wives and a son (presumably the wives were not

co-wives but successive ones). The inscription reads:

> Publius Ferrarius Hermes set this up for Caecinia Digna, his dearest wife, for
> Numeria Maximilla, his well-deserving wife, and for his son Publius Ferrarius
> Proculus and for their descendants.

> *P(ublius) Ferrarius / Hermes / Caeciniae Dignae / coniugi karissimae / Numeriae Maximillae / coniugi
> bene / merenti / et P(ublio) Ferrario Pro/culo filio et poste/risque suis*[645]

Alone, the inscription is just as one might expect a dedication to a wife (wives) and son to be. The

accompanying relief, however, adds an entirely new layer. There are two panels. On the left are

implements for a mason and on the right are beauty items—a mirror, comb, perfume bottle, and

hair pin—and sandals. Hemelrijk has suggested that P. Ferrarius Hermes was a mason based on the

implements and that the items on the side representing the wives are symbols of their beauty.[646]

Other monuments with similar items of a woman's *toilet* do exist and they are also usually interpreted

as symbols of the woman's beauty. In this case, though, it seems strange to make that presumption

when there are clear indications of a masculine occupation right next to them.

Therefore, I think there are at least two other ways to read this which point to professional

women. First, P. Ferrarius Hermes was a mason (*cementarius*), one of his wives was a hairstylist

(*ornatrix)* and the other a shoemaker (*sutrix*).[647] The second possible reading is that only the

occupations of the deceased are recorded in the images. So, P. Ferrarius Proculus was a *cementarius*,

one wife was an *ornatrix* and the other a *sutrix*. If either of these readings is correct, then this is a rare

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[645] CIL 11.1471, translation by Hemelrijk.

[646] Hemelrijk, 35-36.

[647] This word is also translated as "sewing women" (Lewis and Short) but scholars also tend to read it as a shoemaker based on the reconstruction of an inscription to Septimia Stratonice. The inscription is accompanied by a seated woman holding a shoelast, thereby leading scholars to read a fragmentary "s" as *sutrix*. CIL 14, 4698.

example of two women commemorated in writing according to the standard formula for husband-to-wife epitaphs, while their occupations are identified in relief. The approach would have allowed P. Ferrarius Hermes to follow conventions while also revealing something else meaningful and important to the women: their jobs.

There are yet two problems to address. First, it is not clear whether Caecinia Digna or Numeria Maximilla was P. Ferrarius Proculus' mother. In a certain way, it does not matter which woman was his mother, but in another, it is strange that neither is identified as such. He was clearly a legitimate child, so he is most likely the son of one of the women unless there was a third woman previously or the son was adopted. Even if he was neither the son of Numeria Maximilla nor Caecinia Digna, the women must have played an important role in his life as stepmothers. Thus, the women were, in some capacity, mothering and working simultaneously. Second, the monument is elaborate, so it is likely that the family was relatively well-off. Given their probable economic stability, the women might not have had to devote much time to childcare as they were likely to be able to employ nurses and then, when he was old enough, send him to an apprentice to learn a trade, presumably masonry. In this way, then, the dedication is probably not representative of the lower-class women in Rome. Nevertheless, if my reading is correct, the inscription illustrates how the conventions of family dedications might shape an inscription which, read alone, would prevent one from considering the possibility that the women were also employed. However, when read alongside the relief, it becomes possible to see two multi-dimensional women: wives, professionals, and mothers.

Among the more famous examples of a working woman who was proud of her occupation but who did not announce it in the inscription she commissioned, is Scribonia Attice from Ostia. She commissioned a tomb for herself, her husband, mother, and freedmen and women.[648]

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[648] IPOstie-A, 222 = ISIS 133.

[All evil devices] shall stay away from this monument. To the Shades. Scribonia Attice made (this monument) for herself and M. Ulpius Amerimnus, her husband, and for Scribonia Callityche, her mother, and for Dioces and for her freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants, except Panaratus and Prosdocia. This monument is not to pass to an unrelated heir.

*"H(uic) M(onumento) D(olus) M(alus) A(besto) // D(is) M(anibus) / Scribonia Attice / fecit sibi et M Ulpio Amerimno / coniugi et Scriboniae Calli / tyche matri / et Diocli et suis / libertis libertabusque poste/risque eorum praeter Panara/tum et Prosdocia(m) H M H E N S."*

In this case, too, the inscription tells the reader nothing about her occupation. However, the reliefs that flank the inscription on the tomb include one of an *obstetrix* attending a birth and another of a *medicus*. It is likely that the relief depicts her at work as an *obstetrix* and her husband as a *medicus*.[649] Among the various aspects of this inscription that are telling are that there are no children mentioned who might later occupy the tomb, only freedmen and women. Scribonia commissioned the tomb while she was still living and, though it is unknown why she did so, the fact that children go unmentioned altogether is intriguing.[650] There are three possibilities: she never had children, she had them, but none survived to adulthood, or they preferred to be buried in a different location. Whatever her status as a mother was, what is important here is that she evidently did not need to invoke her maternity to make clear her social place. As the image she had mounted next to her inscription suggests, it was her profession that was worth communicating, not her (possible) maternal identity.

Together with the monument of Caecinia Digna and Numeria Maximilla, Scribonia Attica's tomb demonstrates that women might sometimes have negotiated two worlds: the idealized one that insisted that women were wives and mothers, and the realistic one within which women were active

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[649] Alternatively, the scene could be her own birth, herself giving birth, or herself as the attendant rather than the midwife. While these possibilities indeed exist, it seems most logical to accept that standard interpretation that Scribonia Attice was the midwife.

[650] See Kathryn McDonnell "A Gendered Landscape: Roman Women's Monuments, Patronage, and Urban Contexts in Pompeii, Isola Sacra, and Aquileia," dissertation University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (2005), 85 for a possible interpretation.

in the world, had trained and established themselves as professionals, and were proud of their accomplishments. To successfully navigate the gap between the two, it was necessary to separate them, even on funerary monuments. That gap, however, can reveal a lot because it is the space that women actually lived in. They were usually not idealized women. Usually, they were much more active and engaged in their communities. Monuments like these reveal complicated *lifeworlds*, shaped by social norms, relationships, economic needs, and personal interests. They show that Romans were socialized to accept the maternal ideal, expressing it in funerary epitaphs, even as they chose not (or were not able) to follow it in their daily lives. They took an opportunity to represent themselves visually according to their daily identities rather than only according to the social rule.

The second possibility is that many of the women who worked were not well-off enough to establish monuments that have survived. These women probably did work menial jobs and may not have been inclined to memorialize themselves as barmaids or street hawkers. They took on these roles because they were necessary. These women, however, do not answer for the inscriptions that focus on marital and maternal virtues because they were no more likely to have epitaphs expressing these sentiments than those related to their occupations. In short, these women were not professionals, they were unskilled laborers. Lower-class freeborn women may not have had the kind of access to training that (eventual) freedwomen who were trained as slaves in large households did. Those women received their training to benefit their enslavers. There was no one to front the cost of an apprenticeship or other forms of professional training for freeborn women. Consequently, freeborn women would have had to develop different approaches to mothering than those women who were able to establish themselves professionally or who stayed home because they had the privilege of doing so. There are a few inscriptions dedicated to working women by family members, including children and parents. So, despite the limited evidence, what does remain indicates that at least some working women were also mothers.

The third possible explanation for the paucity of occupational epitaphs dedicated to freeborn

women is that they did not have regular occupations to celebrate, preferring to prioritize their

homelives. Cameron Hawkins argues that wives were not usually prepared to take on the work of

the shop. Instead, they were trained in household management and took on paid labor only when

necessary. He believes that the gendered expectations for Roman women were too strong for them

to overcome on a regular basis.[651] Furthermore, and more importantly for him, the maintenance of

the household was a large and necessary task. Women, therefore, needed to allocate their time and

labor to those responsibilities since men were more often engaged in paid work and therefore unable

to successfully manage the household. For him, then, women did not take on paid work unless it

were necessary and even then, the work was temporary.[652] Other scholars similarly argue that women

not only were expected to manage the homes but that they preferred to.[653] If women were therefore

only taking wage labor when it was necessary, they might not have desired to put that information

on a permanent monument.

However, I find this last explanation unsatisfactory and influenced by gendered expectations.

There is evidence, which I have already highlighted, that reveal women as active participants in many

segments of the economy, specifically trained in several skilled trades. The suggestion that, as a rule,

women would only work when necessary or only as supports to their husbands disregards this

evidence. There does seem to be some truth to the supposition that the bulk of household

maintenance fell to women. However, homes that were connected to shops, access to food shops,

childcare, slaves, freedpeople, and other networks probably helped mitigate the intensity of the

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[651] Cameron Hawkins *Roman Artisans and the Urban Economy,* CUP (2016), 242.

[652] *Ibid.,* 245, 255.

[653] Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, HUP (2011), 56.

work. Women were likely to take on significant economic obligations outside of the home and worked to balance those with household responsibilities via social support.

Licinia Primigenia, a perfumer from Puteoli was commemorated by her son, Licinius Amomus.[654] It is notable that her son has the same nomen as his mother, indicating that he was not a legitimate child. This complicates the reading of the inscription as it could mean that Licinia was a freedwoman, or it could mean that she was freeborn but had an illegitimate son.[655] I place it here because it is possible that she was a freeborn woman since the main reason for suggesting she was a freedwoman is her name—though it has been shown that naming conventions are not always as clear cut as they appear—and it is a clear example of a working mother. The inscription suggests that she worked right up until her death at seventy-one years old. Her son likely not younger than 40 and, judging from the emphasis on her occupation in the epitaph, she likely worked throughout his childhood and into his adulthood.

Ulrike Roth has argued that rural enslaved women often worked in various textile roles, cooking, or tending to crops and livestock, because the work was, "characterized by highly repetitive activities that could easily be interrupted and resumed at any one point…."[656] While perfume-making is not quite the same as textile work or food work, it is a job that has a repetitive nature to it. Perfume making requires some precision, but each bottle is relatively quick to make, so it would have been possible for Primigenia to take breaks as needed. Thus, her career may have been conducive to raising a son, provided she could keep him from the oils and tools of her trade. Nevertheless, that may have slowed her production. It is also possible that she had several people

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[654] CIL 10, 1965 *D(is) M(anibus) / Liciniae Primigeniae / unguentariae / Lic(inius) Amomus f(ecit) matri b(ene) m(erenti) / vix(it) a(nnos) LXXI.*

[655] Hemelrijk suggests she was a freedwoman, 148.

[656] Roth, 17.

who worked with her or were under her direction. If that were so, then the decline in production rates that she would have experienced if she were working on her own may not have been as severe.

Working women, like those who were unmarried or were otherwise encumbered with life circumstances had to balance motherhood with occupation. It seems that many women were successful at meeting a balance that was at least sufficient to both raise children and maintain their professions. Their circumstances may have been quite difficult, and "balance" does not necessarily mean that the responsibilities were equally distributed or that one or the other activity did not suffer sometimes in favor of the other. Rather, it simply means they made it work. Other women, for whom we have little or no certain evidence, may not have been able to strike a satisfactory balance between work and motherhood. Those women are the subject of the next section.

### Rejecting Motherhood

Both men and women seemed to have desired to find ways to limit the birth of children. Reasons vary, but those put forward in the literature generally revolve around the distribution of wealth among those in the higher classes. The question remains: who among lower-class people also attempted to limit births, for what reasons, and by what means. Whether some Roman women actively limited the number of children they bore and how hard others worked to conceive are important questions for a study on motherhood. It is not possible to know how many women used these means to control their fertility and, in truth, the numbers are less important than the behavior. What matters here is that it was possible for women to actively modify their fertility and that the available evidence suggest that they did, even belying an underlying fear among elite men that women might be inclined to be *too* active in controlling their fertility.

The primary champion, arguing based on the pharmacological possibility that the herbal recipes and medical remedies could have worked, asserts that contraception and abortion were used extensively and to good effect, is John Riddle. Though his assertions are vehemently countered by

Bruce Friar, who argues that Riddle ignored demographic realities in his study, suggesting that it

would not have been possible to sustain a population if people regularly employed contraceptive

measures.[657] The demographic modeling generally used to describe Rome, however, is debated[658] and

Riddle's background in pharmacology and the continued use of some of the medicaments described

in the ancient texts suggests that his postulates are reliable and, at the very least, plausible. Exposure

and infanticide constitute another pair of modes for disposing of unwanted children. Exposure is

widely believed to have been relatively common while infanticide is generally downplayed (at least

deliberate infanticide is as some exposed children probably died whether the exposers hoped the

child would be taken in by someone else or not) though there is deep disagreement about this,

too.[659] The main reasons put forth for exposure in the literature include finances, the infant's sex,

disability, and illegitimacy.[660] There is wide agreement on some points, but the debate is by no means

settled. Though the frequency with which infanticide and exposure were employed is controversial,

the key point here is that they were used by some women, however many that may have been. In

this section, I outline the relevant demographic arguments than transition to attempting to answer

who was likely to reject motherhood, why they did it, and how. I also respond to some common

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[657] John Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West*, HUP, 1997; Bruce Frier, "Natural Fertility and Family Limitation in Roman Marriage," *Classical Philology* 89, no. 4.

[658] For a brief discussion of the debate, see the paragraphs immediately below.

[659] The most intense debate was initiated by Donald Engles, "The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *Classical Philology* 75, no. 2 (1980), 112-120, who argued based on simplified demographic modeling that high rates of infanticide was statistically impossible. William Harris countered the argument in "The Theoretical Possibility of Extensive Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World." *The Classical Quarterly* 32, no. 1. (1982): 114-116 on the grounds that Engles' mathematical calculations were reductive and misleading. Harris later recalls the debate in "Child Exposure in the Western Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994), 1-22.

[660] Eleanor Scott, "Unpicking a Myth: The Infanticide of Female and Disabled Infants in Antiquity," *TRAC 2000: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, London 2000,* Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001, 143.

stereotypes about the various methods of rejecting motherhood. I hope to fill an important gap between elite sources, scholarship, and lived experience among lower-class Romans.

Demographers tend to agree that birth rates among lower-class rural populations were relatively high. Most argue that the fertility rate was around 5 to 6 children per married woman.[661] However, only a fraction of those children was likely to survive into adulthood, thereby keeping population growth low. Among families with legitimate marriages, children were usually accepted and raised for economic reasons and to support their parents in old age.[662] In short, most married Romans aimed to have as many children as possible to ensure survival of at least a few to adulthood. The one exception to this rule is upper-class couples, a group which demographers tend to accept had lower birthrates that the general population.[663] Scholars accept the testimony of the Augustan marriage law as well as the complaints of several elite authors,[664] which suggests that people were not marrying and nor were those who were married having enough children to sustain the senatorial class.

Trends in researching the elite populations of Rome and efforts to create a demography of the Roman family leads to a natural tendency to assume economy as the primary reason for placing any limits on maternity among the lower classes. When one takes economic interest to be the prevailing factor in determining family size, then there are two possible conclusions: parents might decide to have several children to provide themselves with future support or they may limit family

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[661] Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History* vol. 2, CUP, 1983, 73-74.

[662] Saskia Hin "Family Matters: Fertility and its Constraints" in *Demography of the Greco-Roman World: New Insights* (2011), 113-114. Although she uses a method distinct from those typically used by demographers of the Roman period, she reaches the same conclusions.

[663] John Caldwell, "Fertility Control in the Classical World: Was There an Ancient Fertility Transition?," *Journal of Population Research* 21 (2004), 4, 7.

[664] *lex Papia Poppaea* and the *lex Julia de adulteriis*, Pliny, *Ep.* 4.15.3, Tac *Ann.* 3.25.2, Sen. *ad Helviam* 16.3.

size because of the cost of raising children.[665] These arguments then lead scholars to reductive

answers for both high fertility rates and few fertility limitations. As Robert Woods argues in

"Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding," such binary approaches

"emphasize structure over agency" and therefore suggests very limited reasoning on the part of

parents. I agree with his assertion that "it is doubtful whether Greek and Roman societies should be

thought of in such simple terms."[666] While economics must have been among a woman's or a

couple's preoccupations as they anticipated having and raising children, there were (and are)

numerous aspects of life that colored the ways in which women approached maternity.

Another problem with the debates, from my perspective, is that there is a strong emphasis

on legitimacy. Most of the studies do not take illegitimate pregnancies and births seriously.[667] The

argument is that most births occurred in legitimate contexts therefore the most important factors in

determining birth rates and limitations on birth were age at marriage and age at menopause.[668]

Funerary monuments supply the bulk of the evidence for age at marriage, however, which is

problematic because the epigraphic record is notoriously uneven and generally not considered

representative of the wider Roman population. As it pertains to illegitimacy, the number of

monuments dedicated to illegitimate children is significantly smaller than the body of inscriptions to

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[665] These kinds of claims tend to be made by demographers who seek a rational answer for why people have children and whether they limit the number of children they have or attempt to maximize it. For a response to this method from within the field of demography, Hin, 100-102.

[666] Woods, Robert. "Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding" in *The Economic History Review* New Series vol. 60:2 (2007), 392.

[667] The two exceptions are Ehmer, 27ff., who focuses most of his argument in early modern Europe and suggests that a focus on social concerns, including singleness and illegitimacy, rather that purely demographical lead to a fuller understanding of fertility in the pre-modern world, and Scott, 143, argues that Victorian morality that shaped presumptions about exposing or killing illegitimate children.

[668] Ehmer, 20.

legitimate children.[669] While most citizen children were probably born within marriage and legitimacy was certainly important for many Romans, stigmatization against illegitimate children was limited compared to other pre-modern populations. There were undoubtably large numbers of illegitimate children among slaves and freedpeople[670] and, though the evidence for them among freeborn people is much scarcer, the scant funerary records that we have testify to their presence. It is more difficult to count unmarried women who bore illegitimate children but ignoring them in demographic studies of fertility ignores too large a segment of the population. By not including unmarried women in fertility studies, numbers are no doubt skewed. Although most scholars qualify their work with phrases like "marital fertility" or "legitimate children," they nevertheless give the general impression that they are counting the whole population, in fact, the phrase "total population" is regularly used to describe results. The implications of exclusion are not only demographic, but they are also socially significant. More importantly, those women who bore illegitimate children become virtually invisible in the historical and demographic record.

In general terms, all the above-mentioned methods of limiting family size were legal and presumably acceptable even within marriage, provided the husband approved. While scholars of the family and motherhood do not deny that Romans were knowledgeable about modes of limiting the number of children a woman might give birth to or raise, there is significant debate about whether mothers would have undertaken such measures and whether she could have done so without a significant social consequence.[671] One approach to settling the question marshals the demographic models as evidence. Popularly used demographic models, namely the Princeton Models, puts the

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[669] Rawson, "*Spurii*," 29, finds 184 inscriptions that refer to *spurii*, illegitimate freeborn children.

[670] Evans-Grubbs, 'Making the Private Public," 120-121, Rawson, "*Spurii*," 10, 30.

[671] E. Van de Walle "Toward a Demographic History of Abortion" *Population: An English Selection* Vol. 11 (1999), 116 and John Riddle *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (1997) for conflicting answers to the question.

estimates for infant mortality at roughly 50% in the first week of life and 20-30% in the year thereafter.[672] These numbers are, however, highly debatable and the application of different models yields different results.[673] As it pertains to the possible use of contraception, abortion, exposure, or infanticide among Romans, the argument is that since mortality was high, parents would not have wanted (nor needed) to use contraceptives or abort pregnancies.[674]

Coupled with the mortality rates are estimates of fertility levels. Insofar as the evidence allows for assessment in the Roman period, particularly in Roman Egypt, scholars argue that fertility rates were relatively stable. From this point, the argument follows that if a statistically significant proportion of women practiced abortion, had effective contraception, or committed infanticide (all with or without the help and support of the men with authority in their lives) the birth rates would reflect the artificial constraints on fertility.[675] Since there seems to be no such impact on birth rates, some demographers assert that families did not limit the number of children they raised in artificial ways.[676] It is worth iterating here, though, that these data are based on married families. So, even if they are correct about married women, women who were unmarried might have made frequent use of the methods for avoiding motherhood, but they are not accounted for in these models.

There were, and are, several life circumstances—occupation, disease, harsh living conditions, poor family relations—that made motherhood a very challenging endeavor. Women who worked in

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[672] Saller, *Patriarchy and Property*, 23 and Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations," *The Journal of Roman Studies* vol. 77 (1987), 31-32.

[673] R. Woods, "Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding" in *The Economic History Review, New Series* Vol. 60 No. 2 (2007), 394.

[674] Tim Parkin, "Demography of Infancy and Early Childhood" in Oxford Handbook of Early Childhood and Education edited by Evan Grubbs, Parkin, and Bell, 43. He notes that "spacing" of living children over a mother's reproductive career [?] would typically be greater, quite aside from any intended contraceptive effects (which would have been minimal in my view)."

[675] See Woods "Ancient and Early Modern," 389-390 for a discussion of the faults with this argument.

[676] Van de Walle, 116; Engles, 120.

more labor-intensive industries, were slaves, sex workers, or concubines and mistresses, were in difficult positions to raise children. These women were among the most likely to reject motherhood, but they were certainly not the only ones. Married women and the wealthy almost certainly did, too. Women might have regularly used contraceptives of variable effectiveness to prevent pregnancy in the first place[677] but when that failed, then women may have adopted one of the other three methods.

Social and political context further shape maternal obligations and responsibilities. Rome's focus on preservation of the social order and the senatorial elite shaped women's responses to motherhood and the resources they had at their disposal to support efforts at childrearing. State resources were concentrated in urban centers and toward the middling to upper-class citizen. Rural, poor, *peregrini*, and enslaved people were left to their own devices and whatever community support they could muster as the Roman elite saw poverty as a mark of moral corruption.[678] Hence, when women became pregnant in unseemly circumstances, families suffered from lack of food or shelter, or women had to raise children while taking on difficult or shameful labor, the state was uninterested because those were simply the plights of the (morally) poor who, "were subject to every vice."[679] Thus, women (and men) who were outside of the state's benevolence were left to manage the prospect of raising children on their own. When there were difficulties, lower-class Romans had to resort to other means for maintaining a semblance of stability. Sometimes, that meant limiting the number of children one raised.

### Contraception and Abortion

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[677] Soranus recommends contraceptives over abortifacients because, "it is much more advantageous not to conceive than to destroy the embryo…" 1.19.61.

[678] C. R. Whittaker, "The Poor." in *The Romans,* edited by Andrea Giardina, The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 294.

[679] *Ibid.,* 274.

Contraception and abortion were two of the options available to many Romans. The effectiveness of the first is often debated, as previously noted, but even if efficacy were low, contraceptive use likely reduced the number of conceptions.[680] Modern people have come to expect contraception to be very effective, with most forms promising 95-99% efficacy. Ancient contraceptives, even good ones, were almost never so reliable.[681] Both statistics and modern social expectations lead many scholars to discard the importance of limiting even a small proportion of pregnancies. While 30-40% efficacy is a much lower than people today would be willing to accept, even such a relatively small chance of prevention must have had some effect on the frequency of pregnancy. For women who wanted or needed to avoid pregnancy, that small chance was likely worth the effort.

Angus McLaren suggests four motivations for the use of birth control: sexual activity for pleasure rather than procreation, protecting women from too frequent births, economic concerns, and concerns about personal illness and accidents or unruliness among children.[682] Ultimately, women did sometimes aim to prevent or eliminate pregnancies and alleviate themselves of children born. Reasons for undertaking these efforts include those McLaren outlines but they are not limited to them. *Lifeworlds* influenced decision making as they contributed to the desire to control births. Not all who used birth control, though, aimed to avoid all pregnancies or raising any children. Some needed to prevent pregnancy for a particular period in their lives—before marrying, while caring for another small child, when economic or social circumstance were particularly poor—but did have or

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[680] Ehmer, 26.

[681] *Ibid.*, 26.

[682] *Ibid.*, 25.

plan to have children when circumstances changed.[683] Significantly, women who aborted or used

contraceptives from other historical contexts like early modern Europe, indicate that prevention of

some births did not mean that they were interested in preventing them altogether.[684] In some cases

women wanted to limit the total number of children or space them out. They did not necessarily

reject motherhood entirely. Although, there were certainly women who did. Each woman's *lifeworld*

influenced her decision at a specific time in her life. Since there were no structural supports,

personal circumstances must have made a significant impact. In these cases, shifting intersections

reframed motherhood for women.

When contraceptives failed or a woman was unable to use contraceptives during a particular

sexual encounter (this latter situation seems especially significant in cases of rape or incest), women

did have recourse to abortion. The methods varied from herbal to surgical to magical, and, as might

be expected, had varying levels of effectiveness and safety for the woman.[685] Abortion was practiced

on some level by members of every social stratum. The reasons most often cited for abortion were

prostitution, adultery, vanity, and economic strain. These, however, are stereotypes which were used

to isolate both groups of women as morally repugnant and potentially dangerous. As Cicero, albeit

sarcastically, asserts in his *Pro Cluentio*, women whose livelihoods and reputations depended on their

bodies were at least suspected of aborting unwanted pregnancies.[686] While these all contributed in

some measure to the frequency of abortion in Rome, they were far from the only reasons women

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[683] Michael Golden reminds that the practices of exposure or abortion does not preclude care for children
that parents did choose to raise. Golden, "Did the Ancients Really Care when Their Children Died?" *Greece &
Rome* 35 no. 2. (1988), 158.

[684] Ross, 102-103.

[685] Konstantios Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, Duckworth, 2002, 7-33.

[686] *Pro Clu*. 11.32.

might have desired to eliminate a pregnancy. A woman's health, as previously outlined, probably

significantly contributed to her willingness to bear children. This issue is almost never addressed by

modern scholarship except to say that birth control or abortion might have been a means for

protecting women from too frequent pregnancies.[687] Of course that was certainly the case for some

and has historically been a reason for limiting births in other contexts.[688] Women were also

sometimes chronically ill, weak, or mentally unable to cope with raising children. In these

circumstances, abortion was likely a recourse many took.

Another deciding factor was personal life circumstances. There is no doubt that women

suffered spousal abuse or abuse from other members of her family.[689] Those women, too, might

have sought out abortions because of the context in which the child was conceived (incest or

spousal rape, though the latter would not have been recognized as a crime, though a woman might

have felt the violation personally) or the sense that the children would grow up in an abusive

household, which the mothers hoped to spare them from.[690]

Accepting vanity as a rationale for abortion might be the most problematic of all. Of course,

there were and will always be women (and men) who consider their beauty to be their most

important asset, but most have far too many other things to worry about. Even those women who

relied on their bodies for income, like prostitutes, mistresses, and entertainers, did not protect their

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[687] Ehmer, 25.

[688] Ross, 98; Griffin, 84.

[689] For a detailed study of one woman's experience with abuse in Rome, see Sarah Pomeroy's *The Murder of Regilla: A Case Study of Domestic Violence in Antiquity*, HUP (2007).

[690] There is a similar argument about enslaved women desiring to avoid childbirth so that their children might not also have to grow up enslaved. I have yet to see any argument extend the idea of a life of abuse or exploitation to freeborn women, however.

physical bodies from pregnancy simply for beauty's sake. For those women, it was their livelihoods that were as stake.[691]

Furthermore, for the average woman, pregnancy not only affects the way a woman's body looks, it also affects the way it functions. Women who are accused of avoiding pregnancy for vanity might be better described as women who aimed to protect their bodies from physical damage. Certainly, Roman women would have been aware of some of the complications pregnancy and childbirth could bring.[692] It is not inconceivable that they might fear those complications and thus aim to avoid giving birth. Pliny the Elder seems to have recognized the potential dangers too as he once recommended that women make use of one of the many contraceptives and abortifacients he describes to "protect prolific women."[693] Ultimately, the reasons women undertook abortions were varied and usually taken quite seriously. Women were often thinking seriously about their own and their potential child's health or were thinking about the child or potential child, other children, and their wider social contexts when they made the decision to use birth control or procure an abortion.

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[691] Kapparis, 108.

[692] Intriguingly, Kapparis puts "abortion for the sake of beauty" in the chapter on women's concerns. This is problematic for many reasons but there are two that stand out. First, it indicates that he accepts men's assertions that women's vanity is a driving factor in choosing to abort children, even that women are particularly prone to concerning themselves too much with beauty. In fact, "looks have always been important for women, perhaps more so than for men" is the sentence that opens the section (113).  Second, it ascribes a kind of shallowness and flippancy to the decision to abort a child (117). Abortion was dangerous and undoubtably it was a difficult decision to end a pregnancy. It seems very unlikely that women regularly decided to abort a child simply to keep their beauty intact. Also notable is his glossing of Dixon's commentary on abortion. On page 23 of *The Roman Mother*, she writes, "there are sober, casual references to the economic and emotional burdens of child-rearing which suggest that parenthood was not universally viewed as desirable." Rather than reading this for what it is, an admission of the difficult choice women sometimes made, he writes that there was a "dislike of childbirth," again suggesting that abortion was not undertaken with any kind of seriousness by women who undertook abortion for vanity's sake (117).

[693] Pliny, *NH* 10.83.172, Emiel Eyben, "Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *Ancient Society* 11/12 (1980/1992): 47.

In short, the reasons for making use of birth control and abortion are many and are not always (or even often) induced by moral degeneracy or vanity.

### Infanticide and Exposure

Infanticide and exposure were different means of alleviating oneself of parenthood after a child was born. Infanticide refers to the intentional killing of an infant. In Rome, this was probably most often accomplished by drowning or suffocation.[694] Conversely, exposure seems to have been undertaken to avert the death of the child while at the same time avoiding raising it. There is evidence that exposed children were sometimes taken in by others, usually enslavers, who raised them. It is debatable whether children were regularly taken in or whether most died from the elements.[695] Both must have been undertaken as last resorts for many women, although there must have been a small population who simply did not want children and thus used one or the other as a means of getting rid of them. Comparative evidence, however, suggests that even when it appears that women killed or exposed their children because they did not want them, they frequently had other reasons like shame, depression, and mental impairment.[696]

In the scholarship, four reasons are usually given for infanticide: poverty, sex of the child—many postulate that female infanticide and exposure occurred at higher rates than male—illegitimacy, and disability. Not all scholars think that these reasons predominated, however. Eleanor Scott, for example, has argued that the last three are "myths." There are several cemeteries filled almost exclusively with infants, many of which have been interpreted as local sites for burying

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[694] *Ibid.*, 14-15.

[695] Harris, "Child Exposure," 9-10, 18; Ann M.E Haentjens, "Reflections on Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World," *L'Antiquité Classique* 69 (2000), 264.

[696] Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, 113-115.

murdered children.[697] At one of these sites, Ashkelon in Israel, scientists have tested the remains to determine the infants' sex. In the tests, a preponderance of male infants was uncovered.[698] On the basis of the findings from Ashkelon and other sites, she makes the argument that male infanticide may have been more common. It seems a little strong to simply reverse the argument, however. It is probably more accurate to presume a largely equal distribution of infanticide among male and female infants.

Second, she responds to the presumption that illegitimacy was a prime reason for infanticide by arguing that the presumption is based on Victorian ideas about the shame of illegitimacy rather than historical evidence. She is probably right about this as she also points out that, while historians tend to hold on to the idea that infanticide was largely reserved for female, illegitimate, and disabled children, there is generational change in the explanations they provide.[699] However, Rawson's and Evans-Grubbs' evaluations of illegitimacy in Rome indicate that it was not nearly as heavily stigmatized as in many other pre-modern societies, thereby countering the argument that shame or anxiety about others discovering the illegitimacy was a primary reason for exposure.[700] Although I must concede that incest and adultery were likely exceptions to this rule, they were probably relatively uncommon and therefore would not have accounted for a large proportion of infanticides.

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[697] This assumption, however, is problematic. There is no skeletal or circumstantial evidence to support the idea that these were burial grounds specifically for infanticides. Rather, they were probably burial grounds for infants in general. Evidence for the latter possibility is found in Pliny's *Natural History* wherein he explains that it was the Roman custom to bury rather than cremate infants (7.72).

[698] Eleanor Scott, "Unpicking a Myth: The Infanticide of Female and Disabled Infants in Antiquity," *TRAC 2000: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, London 2000,* Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001, 147.

[699] *Ibid.,* 143.

[700] Rawson, "*Spurii,"* and Evans-Grubs, "Making the Private Public." See also n. 173 and 174.

Finally, disabled children might have made up a significant proportion of infanticides, but again, little evidence seems to exist. Scott points out that modern disability studies have demonstrated that disabled children and adults were noticeably present in Greek and Roman society and that "fear of difference" rather than disability was a more likely reason, citing the stigmatization of twins and triplets.[701] She concludes that infanticide was not reserved for specific, unwanted groups of infants but that it was "a type of contraception." While an unusual way to say it, the point is taken that infanticide was undertaken by Romans for a range of reasons beyond sex, illegitimacy, and disability and that it is even possible that these were not reasons at all.

Exposure was maybe a less direct means of killing a child, although some children were taken in by other people who raised them either as their own children, *alumni*, or as slaves. Just as with abortion and infanticide, there were many reasons a woman (or a couple) might have chosen to expose a child. For some, it may have been the hope that someone who could better care for the child would take them in, a practice which Harris calls, "Exposure A." His second category, "Exposure B" suggests that death was expected but that parents wanted to distance themselves from the act. Ultimately, however, he concludes that exposure was probably an ambiguous decision and that, while many hoped for their children to be taken in by another, they understood the child might not survive. Furthermore, in his analysis he surmises that there were five predictors of survival: the child's physical condition, how well it was protected from the elements, community investment in raising exposed children, demand for slave labor, and sex.[702] I would add the location where the child was left to the list as putting the child in an socially agreed upon location or at the feet of a particular person would have increased the probability of survival. In any case, exposure was a risk

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[701] Scott, 148.

[702] Harris, 9-10.

some mothers took (or were compelled to take) when it was not possible for them to raise their children.

Given that it is widely held that the upper classes were the guiltiest of limiting family size, it is maybe ironic that elite authors criticized most of these practices.[703] Of course, these criticisms could also be explained by the fact that the elite authors were among the men who were critical of men in their own social circles who preferred not to marry and have children. Thus, it is probable that the reproaches represent an ideological divide rather than a hypocritical disapproval. Although most of the literature is targeted at men, women must also have played key roles in suppressing the birthrate through their use of birth control and abortion. Maybe the most important person to reference this role is Juvenal who accuses upper-class women of visiting the abortionists while poor women give birth to their children.[704] Sometimes their criticisms extended to the lower classes, such as in the case of Musonius Rufus who asked:[705]

> But pray, whence do the little birds, which are much poorer than you, feed their young, the swallows and nightingales and larks and blackbirds?... Do these creatures surpass man in Intelligence? You certainly would say not. In strength and endurance, then? No, still less in that respect. Well, then, do they put away food and store it up? Not at all, and yet they rear their young and find sustenance for all that are born to them. The plea of poverty, therefore, is unjustified.

Musonius, however, seems an exception for raising concerns about the poor. In general accusations are directed at the wealthy. When women are the target, it is either because they are depriving their husband of a legitimate heir,[706] they are hiding adultery, or they are concerned about their figures.

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[703] Seneca *ad Helviam*, Ovid *Amores* 2.14, NA 12.1 8-9, Cicero *pro Cluentio* 32, 34, 125, Juvenal *Sat. 6*.

[704] Juv. 6.592ff.

[705] Musonius Rufus, translated by C. E. Lutz, as cited by Eyben, 42.

[706] *Ibid.*, 32.

In sum, rejecting motherhood was not a straightforward or easy choice for most women. Nor did rejection of one child necessarily indicate complete rejection. Rather, women responded to their immediate circumstances and made their decision based on their current *lifeworlds*. Moreover, women from all social strata made use of contraceptives, undertook abortion, exposed their infants, or committed infanticide, these were not practices restricted to the vein and selfish upper-class women or prostitutes.[707] The reasons for rejecting a child were not determined because of just a few factors like sex or disability, but they were numerous and specific to each woman. Women whose lives simply could not accommodate a child seem to have been the most likely to reject motherhood on some level, but poor health and anxiety about birth or motherhood were also relevant. In the end, the study of rejection of motherhood cannot and should not be reduced to the reasons proffered by the elite dissenters nor expectations for which groups of children were most likely to be rejected. Rather, it should include consideration of the myriad other factors that shaped a woman's life.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, lower class freeborn women are maybe the most difficult social group to evaluate in motherhood studies as they are vastly underrepresented in the historical record. However, comparative evidence and the theoretical frameworks I have adopted help to uncover some of the possibilities for mothering among lower class Romans. Life for many women was in flux and challenging. Difficult *lifeworld* circumstances, including poverty, poor health, work conditions, and family life, in addition to social and structural supports all shaped the likelihood that women would raise children and, if they chose to, how they might undertake the obligation. When freeborn women rejected motherhood, it was not for the sake of preserving beauty, or a culture-

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[707] Incidentally, I should note that another means of removing oneself from parenthood was selling a child. I have not discussed this, however, as it would seem to require a section of its own.

wide rejection of female, illegitimate, or disabled children, it was because life circumstances moved them to make the choice. Freeborn Roman women were not interested in only a handful of behaviors, like marriage and motherhood, and cannot be understood monolithically. They were shaped by their personal circumstances and the social milieu, which in turn shaped their responses to motherhood.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In the introduction, I first drew attention to a funerary monument that is frequently cited to support the notion that Roman women focused their lives, almost exclusively, on marriage and motherhood. It turns out that it is very likely a forgery. Claudia's monument is emblematic only of western ideals of classical motherhood projected back into a past that was far more complex. Roman women did not all strive to become wives and mothers, though they all had to prepare for the biological possibility of it. Throughout the dissertation, I explored Roman motherhood through the lenses of queer theory, socialization theory, and *lifeworlds*, arguing that Roman women did not always aim to become mothers and, when they did, their approaches to it were not consistently within the bounds of idealized marriage and motherhood.

A key aspect of the project was organization. I ultimately organized the chapters according to one of the most important social organizers in the Roman period—citizen status. A woman's status as slave, freedperson, or freeborn Roman citizen formed the parameters of motherhood and setting boundaries for the range of approaches a woman could take toward it. Throughout, I have argued that there was a spectrum of approaches to motherhood: women sometimes embraced it, adopting idealized marriage and motherhood. At other times, women became mothers but not within the confines of legal marriage, adopting strategies to meet their circumstances. Still others accepted motherhood only within specified contexts, raising children when it seemed possible and rejecting them when it did not. Finally, women sometimes avoided motherhood altogether, adopting one of the four strategies for doing so: contraception, abortion, exposure, or infanticide. In the process, I have worked to demonstrate that motherhood was not a universal role adopted by every woman who was biologically able to achieve it.

In the first chapter, I made the case for asking questions that do not have ready answers in the evidence. The approach was risky because it requires that I fill in gaps with external

evidence or through inference, controlled by the theoretical frameworks I have adopted. Despite the risks, the strategy allowed me to explore motherhood outside of the upper classes and without an emphasis on demographical modeling. Instead, I emphasized that structural contexts and social intersections shape the opportunities, desires, and approaches women took toward motherhood, revealing the range of social behavior that was possible among women who are largely invisible in the historical record.

In the second chapter, I thoroughly outlined the theoretical frameworks, their limitations, and the evidence that I employed throughout the study. I then explored the concerns and desires women likely had about motherhood, the networks they engaged in to help them better understand the contours of motherhood, and steps they might have taken to prepare themselves for the possibility and the reality of motherhood. Next, I studied the significant phase of becoming a mother for the first time, the choices a woman had before her, and the potential outcomes. Throughout the chapter, I discussed how occupation, social location, status, wealth, and relationships shaped the decisions women made. I concluded that many women accepted the challenges of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood but that others made different decisions, exercising agency in their reproductive lives.

In the third chapter, I evaluated motherhood among enslaved women. I argued that motherhood was distinctive among enslaved women because of their enslavement. They were subject to conditions free mothers did not have to contend with such as the sale of a child or unfettered sexual use and abuse. Through a close analysis of the funerary monument dedicated to the slave woman, Daphnis, who died in childbirth, I showed that slave women were shaped by the ability to form familial relationships in enslavement, the prospect of manumission, and the ideas they and those around them held about motherhood. I also showed how those ideas were heavily influenced by an individual's experience of enslavement and that sentiments expressed on funerary

monuments do not always reflect lived experience. I then evaluated the various familial circumstances and work circumstances enslaved women might have experienced and put them to bear on whether and how a woman mothered. The chapter showed that enslaved women's reproductive capacity was often, though not always, controlled by her enslaver. However, even when it was not, the children were the enslavers' to do with what she wished. Mothers, then were constrained by the knowledge that they would have little power over many decisions a mother in other circumstances would have made. It further showed the motherhood among enslaved women expressed itself in diverse ways.

In the third chapter, I explored motherhood among freedwomen. Their social position, between slave and freeborn, shaped their approaches to motherhood. I argued that freedwomen had to mother within both slave and free contexts, a circumstance that neither enslaved nor freedwomen encountered. Women mothered, or could potentially mother children, all her own, whose status matched any of the three major status categories in the Roman period—slave, freed, and freeborn. Negotiating that line complicated the ways they raised their children, which children they were able to have relationships with, and how their marital relationships influenced mothering. In the chapter I contended that freed mothers were not only negotiating motherhood and their children's prospects, but they were also being resocialized to their new realities. Some freedwomen, however, avoided motherhood, prioritizing other aspects of their lives like their careers or partnered relationships over motherhood. I concluded that freedwomen and freed mothers' liminal status were the main factors shaping their decisions to become mothers and their approaches to it.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, I evaluated the life circumstances of freeborn women. Their approaches to motherhood were in some ways like those of slave and freed women because there were some aspects of motherhood that affected all women: general health, environment, complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and high mortality rates. However, freeborn women of

the middling classes had better established lives and were able to make decisions about motherhood that did not depend upon the whims of an enslaver or the complicated web of mothering across status lines. On the other hand, I argued that poor freeborn women might have experienced some of the most difficult *lifeworlds* because their supports and networks were exceptionally limited.

Ultimately, I concluded that citizen status was a significant factor shaping women's approaches to motherhood but that there were other factors that cut across those lines, defining the specific *lifeworlds* of women. Women from each status category were socialized to motherhood differently, but they all contended with the same environmental challenges and had to make decisions about whether and when to have children. The small family sizes in Rome, information about contraception, abortion, exposure, and infanticide, and relative independence of women in society suggest that women were more in control of their reproductive lives than it may have seemed. It also suggests that the idea that women were predominantly wives and mothers, preparing all their lives for the eventually, is a fallacy. Many women became mothers and happily so. Others tried to become mothers and were unable to achieve their goals. But there were more women who mitigated motherhood. Some of these women chose to avoid motherhood altogether but they did not always. Women made important and difficult choices about whether and when to raise children, choices that were shaped by their citizen statuses and complicated by liminal statuses, occupations that were incompatible with motherhood, familial statuses, and social networks. Motherhood was far from a monolithic, easily defined role for Roman women. It was as diverse and messy as motherhood is today, probably even more so.

Although contemporary concerns were not part of the dissertation, per say, they very much influenced the choice of subject and the questions I asked. I found that the idealized notions of motherhood that color political and social debate today have their roots in an inaccurate understanding of motherhood in classical Rome. Women in Rome, though contending with

significant environmental limitations, lived diverse lives, made personal decisions about their occupations, familial relationships, and about becoming mothers. They were not socialized to think that "there were no alternative lifestyles and aspirations [to motherhood and marriage] either offered or considered – no inkling that Romano-Grecian women ever conceived of a world different from the one they were born into, ever had a thought-basis from which to consider alternative arrangements," as one scholar put it.[708] Rather they were active agents in their own lives, shaping their realities and, in fact, aspiring to goals outside of motherhood, "conceiving of a world" that met their needs and shaping their environments with the hope of accommodating those needs.

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[708] Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans,* HUP (2011), 56.

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