


Women in Antiquity  
SPRING 2024

MEETING 12

### Beyond the Roman Aristocracy

- The Principate
- Patrician and Plebeian
- Slavery
- Freedmen and women
- Rome vs. the provinces



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### Five things today

- 1 The Principate
- 2 Patrician and Plebeian
- 3 Slavery
- 4 Freedmen and women
- 5 Rome vs. the provinces

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### Upcoming dates

- Monday, May 13      Position Paper
- Tuesday, May 21      Final Exam (6:15 to 8:15 p.m.)
- Monday, May 27      **Ultimate Deadline**
  - No late papers or resubmissions for reversible deductions after this date
  - No exceptions
  - Any incompletes owing to personal emergencies must be mutually agreed before this date

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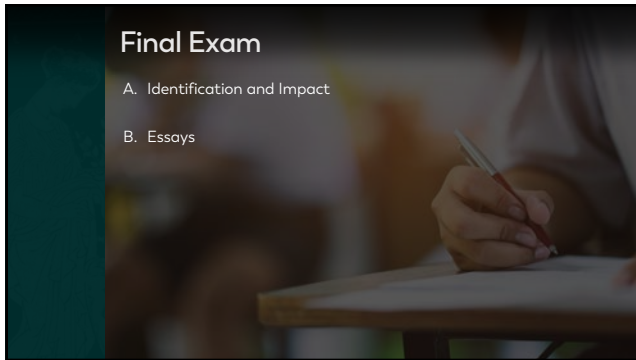
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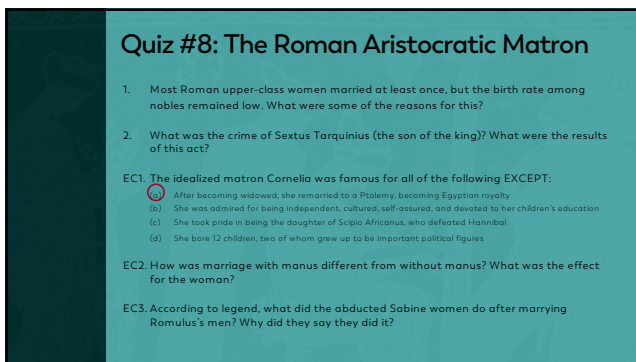
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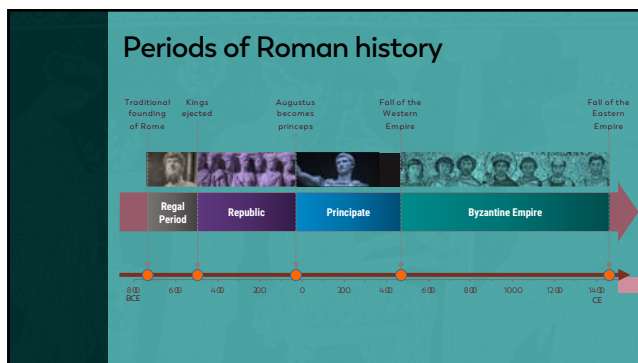
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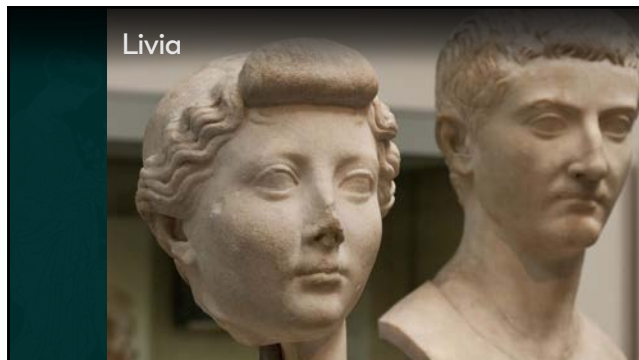
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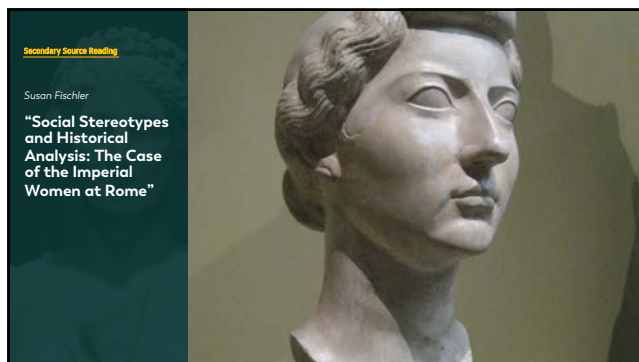
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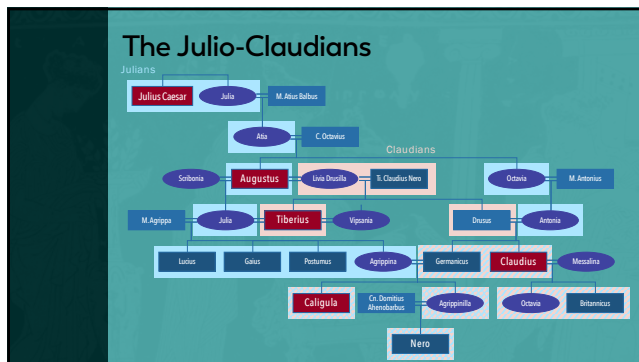
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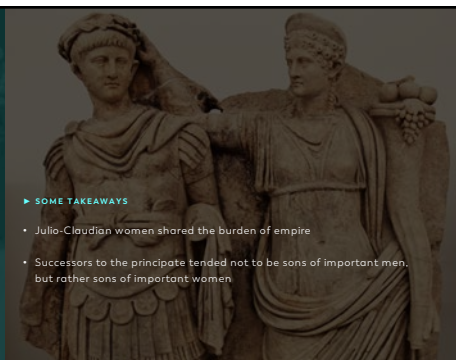
Secondary Source Reading

Mirielle Corbier

**“Male Power and Legitimacy Through Women: The Domus Augusta under the Julio-Claudians”**

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Julio-Claudian women shared the burden of empire
- Successors to the principate tended not to be sons of important men, but rather sons of important women



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**Beyond the Aristocracy**

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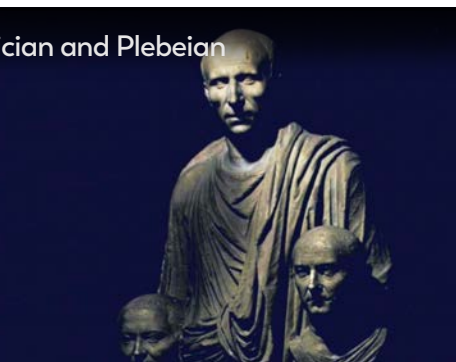
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**Patrician and Plebeian**



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Primary Source Reading

Fragments

The Twelve Tables



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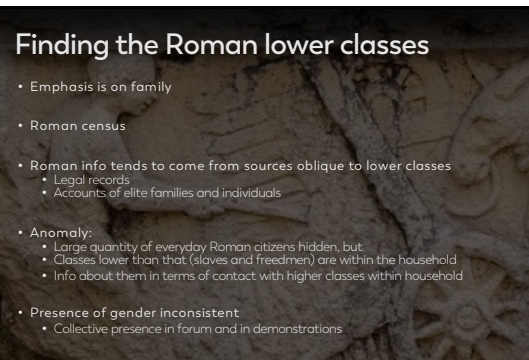
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Finding the Roman lower classes

- Emphasis is on family
- Roman census
- Roman info tends to come from sources oblique to lower classes
  - Legal records
  - Accounts of elite families and individuals
- Anomaly:
  - Large quantity of everyday Roman citizens hidden, but
  - Classes lower than that (slaves and freedmen) are within the household
  - Info about them in terms of contact with higher classes within household
- Presence of gender inconsistent
  - Collective presence in forum and in demonstrations



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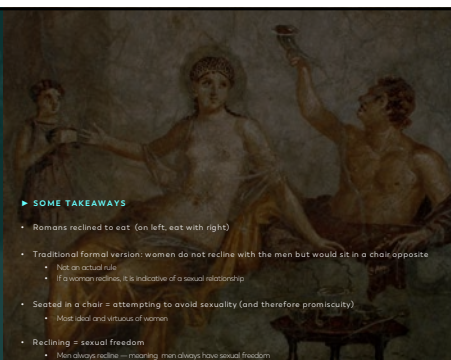
Secondary Source Reading

Matthew Roller

“Horizontal Women: Posture and Sex in the Roman Convivium”

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Romans reclined to eat (on left, eat with right)
- Traditional formal version: women do not recline with the men but would sit in a chair opposite
  - Not an actual rule
  - If a woman reclines, it is indicative of a sexual relationship
- Seated in a chair = attempting to avoid sexuality (and therefore promiscuity)
  - Most ideal and virtuous of women
- Reclining = sexual freedom
  - Men always recline — meaning men always have sexual freedom



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### Roman economy

- Wealthiest economy — Very high standard of living
  - Preeminence among surrounding peoples they engage with and over peoples they rule over
  - To be a Roman citizen is to stand out
- Secret of understanding Rome's pursuit of dominion
  - Romans develop their empire
    - partly to protect their home territory
    - partly out of commercial enterprise and trading aggression
  - Armies follow to reinforce and protect trading interests and territory
  - Purpose of empire is always to gain control over distant resources
- Roman economic power is also a secret of Romanization
- Result: Roman society expands because the Roman economy rapidly expands

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### Roman slavery

- As Roman economy expands, Romans depend on slaves and freed slaves
  - Most Roman military engagement is about keeping or protecting the lands they have
  - Generates large numbers of prisoners of war who enter into the slave system
    - Captured soldiers
    - Large numbers of civilians from places that resisted Roman dominion and are paying a penalty (women and children + male civilians)
- Skilled slaves
  - Expansion into Hellenistic east brings skilled laborers and professionals (doctors, teachers, midwives, etc.)
  - Performed skilled functions within households as slaves
  - Very likely to be freed and able to operate as freedmen in what they did
  - Women as well, though Roman aristocratic matrons worked as well (e.g., spinning/looming)

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### Rome and the Empire

- Romanization via colonies and other Roman cities
- Miniature Romes become Roman in culture but mixed in ethnicity
- Less of a physical difference between lower and upper classes
  - In Rome, slaves are foreigners
  - In the rest of the empire, the distinction may be less
  - The divide is different, and not necessarily in predictable ways

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Secondary Source Reading

Liisa Savunen

### "Women and Elections in Pompeii"

**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- Can directly discuss female participation in the political scene
- Graffiti and posters include endorsements of prominent women valuable
- Women participating in the political process in a tangible way
  - Can assume vote-getting, corraling, family influence

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### Slavery in the household

- Considerable presence of slaves and ex-slaves in Roman aristocratic households
  - Women more likely to end up as domestics
  - Men might end up in households, fields, mines, etc.
- Domestics used as indicators of family's status
  - Well-kept, healthy, elegant and well-dressed
- Children growing up in aristocratic family would have constant contact
  - Intimate knowledge of what it is like to be a slave woman or a freedwoman

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### Exploitation

- Limited number of restrictions on men exploiting female slaves
- Normal to have mistresses because of arranged marriages
- Also true for women with male slave (greater risk)
- Virtue precluded cruelty against women

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Primary Source Reading

Ovid

**Selections from Metamorphoses**

Pyramus and Thisbe

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Secondary Source Reading

Leo C. Curran

**“Rape and Rape Victims in The Metamorphoses”**

**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- **Metamorphoses**
  - One of the most interesting stories of mythology
  - Unlike most Greek epics, it is a collection of smaller, individual stories, and focuses on
- **Most focused on transformations**
  - Other accounts of rape are quite rare in Greek mythology (even in the case of Proserpina)
  - Absorption of it by Ovid taking form of his “Tales from the Metamorphoses”
- **Ovid fascinated not by violation (rape) but what the victim has to endure after**
  - Transformation of identity that takes place in a rape victim

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**Freedmen and freedwomen**

- **Generous with manumission**
  - Can accumulate savings over this time – purchase
  - Gain after many years of service or after master retires
- **Large population of ex-slaves, male and female a crucial part of the Roman economy**
  - Low-level managerial in businesses and factories
  - Household staff of an aristocrat includes a quantity of freedmen and women
- **Best-known example: Julio-Claudians**
  - Romans have no civil service
  - Governors used their own household staff – their own freedmen
  - Emperors had to do the same thing
- **Large population of freedmen/women as important layer of society**
  - Member of household as a sort of adopted noncitizen
  - Freedman takes the name of his old master’s family
  - Part of society even if not a citizen, depending on patronage of family

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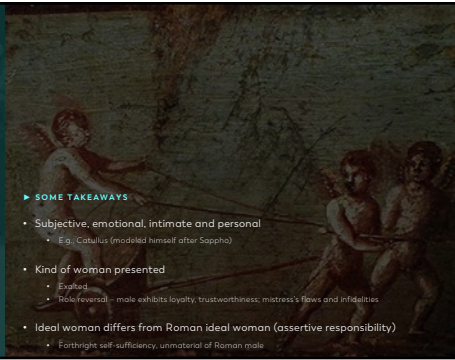
Secondary Source Reading

Judith P. Hallett

### "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism"

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Subjective, emotional, intimate and personal
  - E.g., Catullus (modeled himself after Sappho)
- Kind of woman presented
  - Exalted
  - Role reversal – male exhibits loyalty, trustworthiness; mistress's flaws and infidelities
- Ideal woman differs from Roman ideal woman (assertive responsibility)
  - Forthright self-sufficiency, unmaternal of Roman male



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### Marriage

- Slaves: Not "official" but done with permission
- Freedmen/women: recognized and binding
- Child can be citizen
  - Only possible if born to two free parents within precincts of Rome
- Mostly domestics within city household or rural estate (not mines or harvesting gangs)



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D(is) M(anibus) Regina liberta(m) et coniuge(m)  
Baratae Palmyrenus natione  
Catuallauna an(norum) XXX

"To the spirits of the dead, and to Regina, his freedwoman and wife, of the Catuvellauni, aged 30 years, Baratas of Palmyra erected this."

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**Secondary Source Reading**

Larissa Bonfante Warren  
**"The Women of Etruria"**

**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- Roman attitude toward public participation of women is a reaction to older culture of Etruscans
  - Overlap of different systems: Etruscan, Greek, and Roman
  - Etruscan culture empowers not women but couples
    - Many engaged her (wife of husband and wife) role by men
    - Joint public and private responsibilities
- Foreign to Indo-Europeans
- Romans were fascinated by Etruscans but increasingly set aside Etruscan ways
  - Leads to universal Roman sense of the male-dominated

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