



## Beyond the Roman Aristocracy

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #12

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## Upcoming Dates

- Monday, December 8  
Position Paper Due
- Tuesday, December 16  
Final Exam
- Sunday, November 30  
Responses for Week 12 Due

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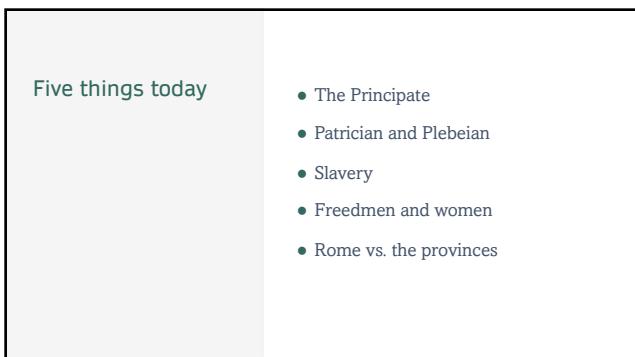


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### Quiz #9 | Beyond the Roman Aristocracy

1. In relation to gender, the Twelve Tables established all of the following [QUESTION](#)

- a. Women were not allowed to vote at funerals
- b. Women remained under guardianship into adulthood
- c. Sons could be sold into debt slavery up to three times, but daughters could not
- d. Women could escape uscopia (marital marriage) by drinking the husband's blood three nights in succession every year

2. Marriage among slaves in Rome

- a. was formally acknowledged and legally valid
- b. resulted in free children if the master was a slave
- c. was disliked and discouraged by masters
- d. sometimes involved multiple wives or husbands

3. Stories related in Ovid's Metamorphosis include all of the following [QUESTION](#)

- a. Daedalus, a nymph personified by Apollo
- b. The legend of the Trojan horse
- c. Unhappy lovers Romeo and Juliet
- d. Galatea, the sea nymph beloved of Acis and coveted by Polyphemus, the Cyclops

Extra Credit

EC: What aspect of the life of Roman slaves, freedmen, and freedwomen surprised you or stood out to you?

4. A female Roman slave could achieve manumission (release from slavery) through all of the following [QUESTION](#)

- a. Bearing four children
- b. Fasting for 60 days during the festival of the Good Goddess
- c. Repaying her purchase price with her personal savings from tips and gifts
- d. Marriage to a free man, which involved her prior manumission

5. According to Ovid, most freedwomen were

- a. dependent on gifts from lovers or the state
- b. skilled workers (shopkeepers, artisans or domestic servants)
- c. no longer in contact with their former owners
- d. initiates in a secret cult, the Fibiae (grateful)

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**Responses**

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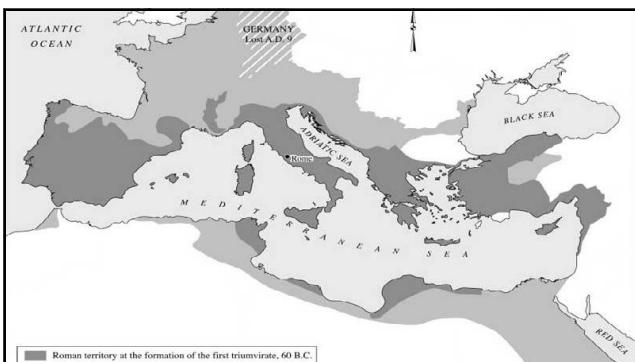
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## Questions about whatever



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# The Roman Empire



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Secondary Source Reading

Larissa Bonfante Warren  
"The Women of Etruria"

- Roman attitude toward public participation of women is a reaction to the older culture of the Etruscans
  - Overcome an inferiority complex by creating their own identity
  - Keeping those elements of Etruscan and Greek influence that they can adapt to a new path
- Etruscan culture empowers not women but couples
  - Many images we have of the husband and wife side by side
  - Joint public and private responsibilities
- Foreign to Indo-Europeans
- Romans were fascinated by Etruscans, but increasingly set aside Etruscan ways
  - Leads to a distinctive Roman sense of the maiden/matron




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**The Principate**

- Republic devolves into a series of civil wars
- Last warlord standing is Octavian, the great-nephew of Caesar
  - He becomes "princeps" = first citizen
  - Family name becomes Caesar Augustus

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**Livia**

- Augustus shared power with his wife
- Livia took on "private" aspects of the principate
  - Network of matrons, vestals, etc
  - Intelligence gathering among the nobility
  - Notes written in a secret code no one had access to
  - Moral review of the senate
- Given the name Augusta

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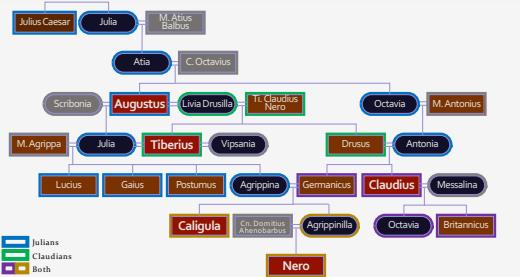
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## The Julio-Claudians



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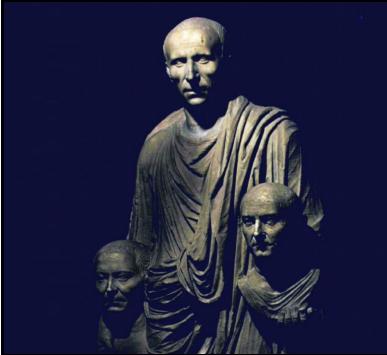
Secondary Source Reading  
Miriette Corbier  
“Male Power and Legitimacy Through Women: The Domus Augusta under the Julio-Claudians”

- Shortage of men and an excess of women
- Legitimacy of rule through women
  - Marriages
  - Adoptions
- Danger posed by women
  - Often more popular than the male rulers
  - Seen by public as honorable and admirable
  - Much harder to act against
- Domus Augusta was a closed circle entered through via women

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Beyond the Aristocracy

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**Patricians**

- Romans must consult the gods before any act of the state
- Empowers those few families who control the priesthoods
- Patrician families control Rome
  - The state religion
  - All offices with imperium
- Plebeians (non-patrician families) deprived of voice and agency

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**Primary Source Reading**

**Fragments**  
**The Twelve Tables**

- Six decades in, patrician abuses were worsening
  - Excessive interest on loans
  - Corruption in deciding court cases
- Demands for reform
- 10 lawgivers create a public law code
  - Justice is shared and transparent
  - Reinforcement of shared identity



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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

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### Finding the Roman lower classes

- 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"

- 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
  - To be a Roman citizen is to stand out
- Drives Rome's pursuit of dominion
- Drives Romanization
- Result: Roman society expands because the Roman economy rapidly expands

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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 obvious
  - The divide is different, and not necessarily in predictable ways

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Secondary Source Reading

Liisa Savunen  
"Women and Elections in Pompeii"

- 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, corralling, family influence

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## The Roman underclass

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### Roman slavery

- Romans depend on slaves and freed slaves
  - Most Roman military engagement is about keeping or protecting the lands they have
  - Large numbers of prisoners of war who enter into the slave system
- Skilled laborers and professionals from expansion into the Hellenistic east (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

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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
- 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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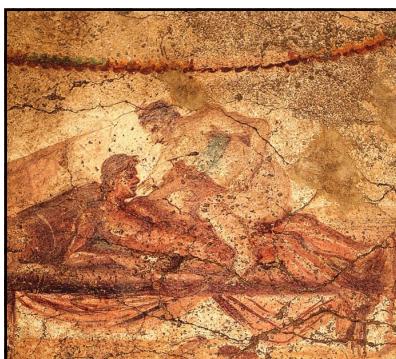


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### Exploitation

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

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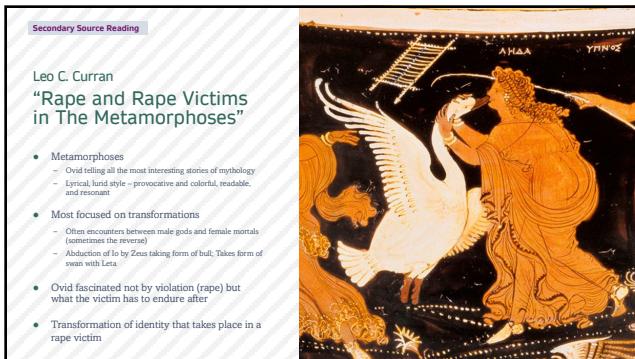
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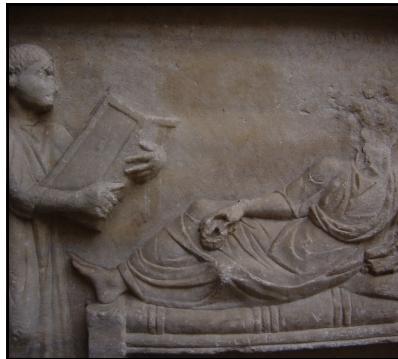
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### Freedmen and freedwomen

- 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"

- 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)
  - Fornightly self-sufficiency, unmaterial of Roman male




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**Marriage for the underclass**

- 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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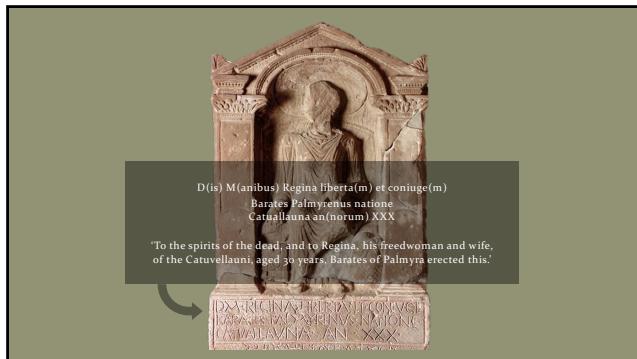


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