
Roman Polygyny

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Marriage in Rome was monogamous; *mating* was polygynous. Powerful men in the Roman empire, as in other empires, probably had sex with more women. To make that case I look, first, at the Latin sources. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio suggest that Roman emperors, like other emperors, were promiscuous; that they had privileged access to other men's women; and that they sometimes had women procured for them. I look next at the modern studies. Literary, legal, and inscriptional data suggest that Roman men kept as many slaves as they could afford—often hundreds and sometimes thousands; that many of those slaves were women; and that slave women were often bought as breeders. They also suggest that masters, who had unrestricted sexual access to their slaves, were often the fathers. Some slave women's children were brought up with, and in the style of, legitimate children; they were freed young; and they were given wealth, position, and paternal affection.

KEY WORDS: Sex, Reproduction, Slavery, Mating, Family, Roman history

Sir Ronald Syme, in a paper on "Bastards in the Roman Aristocracy," asked where are they? Plenty of illegitimates were talked about, he pointed out, in early modern Italy, England, France, and Spain, but ancient Romans kept quiet about them. As Syme complained, "there is a singular dearth of evidence about aristocratic bastards. . . . It is not easy to produce an authentic bastard anywhere, let alone the bastard of a *nobilis*" (1960: 324).

Weren't there any? Most historians seem as skeptical as Syme. From Juvenal's second-century satires through Augustine's fourth-century sermons, there was praise and disgust for blue bloods' lust (e.g., Juvenal, *Satires* VIII 181–2; Augustine, *Sermons* 153: 5–6). Most historians take that much for granted, some go so far as to refer to Roman "harems" (e.g., Carcopino 1940: 101–2, Veyne 1987: 76, 204). Roman marriage was unquestionably monogamous: no man took more than one wife at once. But Roman mating might have been polygynous: a majority of women might have mated with

Received December 31, 1991, revised June 18, 1992

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Ethology and Sociobiology 13: 309–349 (1992)
© Elsevier Science Publishing Co., Inc., 1992
655 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10010

0162-3095/92/\$5.00

a minority of men (see Kleiman 1977, Wittenberger and Tilson 1980, Daly and Wilson 1983: 152 for definitions of monogamy and polygyny)

There are two good reasons to suspect they did. The first is Darwin's theory of sexual selection. Darwin argued that for the vast majority of species males should have evolved to compete for mates, men were no exception. The reason has become clear in the last hundred years. Most males can raise their reproduction by mating with many females, few females can do the same by mating with many males. If Darwin was right—if we've evolved *to* reproduce—then men can be expected to compete for women (Darwin 1871: 571, 581, Bateman 1948, Clutton-Brock and Vincent 1991). The Roman empire, like every other empire, was filled with competition, and the men who won came off with spoils enough to attract and support many more women and children than the many who lost.

The second reason to suspect polygyny in the Roman aristocracy is the comparative record. If powerful Roman men weren't polygynous, they may be the only powerful men in any preindustrial society who were *not*. The evidence across cultures is consistent. In the simplest societies, like the !Kung in Botswana or the Yanomamo in Venezuela, the strongest men typically kept up to ten women, in medium-sized societies that organized above the local level, like the Samoans and other Polynesians, men at the top kept up to a hundred women, and in the biggest societies, including the "pristine" empires in Mesopotamia and Egypt, India and China, Aztec Mexico and Inca Peru, and in many empires that came later, powerful men kept hundreds, or thousands, or even tens of thousands of women—along with one, or two, or three at most, legitimate *wives*, lesser men kept progressively fewer women (Betzig 1982, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1992a, see too Dickemann 1979a, b and van den Berghe 1979).

Was Roman mating, like Roman marriage, monogamous? Or was monogamous *marriage* in Rome, like monogamous marriage in other empires, a way that polygynously *mated* men passed harems on to their sons? It may not be a trivial question. Polygyny, or reproductive inequality, requires economic and political inequality: a man with ten times as many women and children must either work ten times as hard to support them, or take what he needs from other men (Chagnon 1979). Across space and time, polygyny has overlapped with despotism, monogamy with egalitarianism (Betzig 1982, 1986, 1992). The Roman empire was not marked by egalitarianism (e.g., Garnsey 1970, Duncan-Jones 1982, Garnsey and Saller 1987). How much was the economic and political inequality in the Roman empire matched by reproductive inequality, or polygyny?

This paper uses two kinds of evidence to answer that question. First are some original sources. Most of the Roman historians, including Tacitus, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, the Greek writer Herodian, and the compilers of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, had a lot to say about emperors' lives, including their personal lives. Second are studies. To get at how most other men and women, rich or poor, lived and reproduced, modern historians have

looked at other kinds of evidence, including literary, legal, and especially inscriptional—at epitaphs. Both the Roman and modern historians are asked: how polygynous *were* Roman aristocrats?

SOURCES

More than half a century ago, Otto Kiefer was the first to try a systematic survey of the Caesars' sex lives. The funny thing is, he wasn't interested. He had little respect for Tacitus' or Suetonius' "malevolent gossip," and went on, "besides, are we better off for knowing that the great man gave his love to this or that woman outside the confines of his marriage?" He found it "much more interesting and important to learn that Caesar was an epileptic" (1934: 298). The problem wasn't that the Latin historians weren't credible otherwise: Tacitus was a senator under the emperor Vespasian, consul under Nerva, and governor of Western Anatolia under Trajan late in the first and early in the second century; Suetonius was chief secretary to the emperor Hadrian early in the second century, and Dio was a senator late in the second century under the emperor Commodus. The problem was that little could be known of personal affairs—even emperors' personal affairs—*except* through gossip (Momigliano 1971: 56–57).

On that basis, most modern historians before and after Kiefer have discounted these sources altogether. Syme, for instance, suggests that the tradition of slanderous rhetoric in Rome was strong. He says "the best of arguments was personal abuse. In the allegation of disgusting immorality, degrading pursuits or ignoble origin the Roman politician knew no compunction" (1939: 149). More recently, Richard Saller looked at a sample of 52 anecdotes from Suetonius and found, compared to other versions of the same stories in other sources, the time, place, supporting cast, and subjects all changed more often than they stayed the same (1980). For three reasons, though, I'm unwilling to disregard Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio entirely. First, there *is* consistency across authors: the punch lines in the stories stay the same. Second, there is consistency across emperors: though there are variations, they turn around a few themes. Third, and most important, there is consistency across authors on *other* empires: from the *Rig Veda* and other Indian texts, to Chinese sex handbooks from the Sui and other dynasties, to reassembled Egyptian temple reliefs, to a half-bred Inca's accounts of his ancestors, to Franciscans' accounts of conquered Aztecs, and beyond, the gossip about emperors is stunningly often the same (see Table 1).

There is no doubt, of course, that one or two or more Romans' slander is worth what hundreds of modern historians—who have had access to the full range of surviving sources, literary, legal, and archaeological—have written. For that reason, I've kept these "sources" apart from their "studies." But, because the Roman sources have so much in common with sources on other empires, and because they're consistent with much in the

Table 1. Polygyny in the First Six Civilizations, and in Rome (after Betzig 1992a, 1986, and text)

Empire	Place	Focus in Time	A Focal Emperor	Number of Women	How Recruited	Who Recruited	How Kept Chaste	Rights to Others Women	Number of Wives
Babylonian	Mesopotamia	1700 BC	Hammurabi	1000s of slaves ^{??}			In fortified palace. eunuchs present ^{??}	Temple prostitution ^{??}	One wife. 'secondary' slave wives
Egyptian	Egypt	1300 BC	Akhenaten	317 plus droves	Procured as tribute	Very beautiful women	Behind a battlemented enclosure watched by overseers	All the wives of his subjects were his ^{??}	One 'Great Wife' and many concubines and consorts
Aztec	Mesoamerica	1500 AD	Montezuma	4000 concubines	Procured as tribute	Young and pretty women	On Tenochtitlan a natural fort	Social structure rested on sexual licence by noble Aztecs	One <i>cuatlanilli</i> asked for woman, "many concubines and consorts"
Inca	Peru	1500 AD	Atahualpa	1500 in each 'house of virgins'	Inca asks	Of good lineage beautiful under age 8 at admission	In last recesses down narrow passage guarded by 'mama cunas'	Inca asks	One queen concubine cousins commoners who mothered 'bastards'
Indian	India	From 500 BC	Udayama	Up to 16 000		Young women free from disease or menstruation	In inner apartments ringed by fire guarded by eunuchs	A Brahmin's right by ancient custom	One Maharani, several raris, many consorts
Chinese	China	From 700 BC	Fer-ti	10 000	Palace agents would scour the empire	Young women whose breasts have not yet developed "fifth day after menstruation"	In innermost part of palace, guarded by eunuchs	Married women debauched ^{??}	One queen three consorts nine wives of second rank etc
Roman	Mediterranean	From 27 BC	Augustus	Women of rank 1000s of slaves [?]	Livia procured some	Virgins	Eunuchs present ^{??}	Married women divorced debauched, and or prostituted	One

modern studies, I can't leave them out. Just how "malevolent" are they? Are some Roman emperors—or even most Roman emperors—supposed to have held harems? Or did they "radiate marital propriety"? How often are they said to have lived up to model speeches in which writers were advised, as in Menander's *Epideictica*, to add "Because of the emperor, marriages are chaste. As for the rest of womankind, he does not so much as know that they exist" (11.1.396, in Brown 1988: 16)? How often are they not?

Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio all wrote about the first twelve Caesars, that is, about Julius Caesar and the first eleven Roman emperors. What follows sums up what they had to say about their personal lives. These Caesars had sex with many women, preferred rich and pretty women, and had a privileged right to other men's wives. Many emperors seem to have been studied in sexual selection: they drove chariots, fought wild beasts, cultivated the arts, and covered themselves with make-up and fancy clothes, and they showed off a lot of the food and protection that might be spent on some of their women and children.

Collecting Women

Again, Roman emperors, like other emperors, liked sex with many women, liked rich and pretty women, and liked to have women procured for them.

Here's what Suetonius says of Julius Caesar: "His affairs with women are commonly described as extravagant." He elaborates: His women included many queens—Cleopatra, who might have got her son Caesarion by him, the most famous of them (but see Syme 1980). They also included many provincials. Caesar's soldiers got up this verse on his behalf:

Home we bring our bald whoremonger,
Romans, lock your wives away!
All the bags of gold you lent him
Went his Gallic tarts to pay.

But Caesar's greatest honor, or indictment, was Helvius Cinna's. Cinna, in Caesar's absence, had a bill drawn up for the commons to pass legitimizing his union "with any woman, or women, he pleased—for the procreation of children" (Suetonius, *Julius Caesar*, 50–52, see too Dio, *History*, xlv.7.3).

So much for Julius Caesar. What of his great-nephew, the first emperor? Augustus is often remembered for his simplicity and humility: he often walked rather than rode through the streets of Rome, and he was "horrified and insulted" to be called "my Lord" (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 53). He is remembered, too, for his devotion to Livia, his third wife. But devotion didn't necessarily involve exclusion. Augustus' second wife, Scribonia, had been divorced for her "moral perversity," specifically, for her failure to tolerate *his* adultery; Livia was much more accommodating (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 62, Balsdon 1962: 68). Suetonius says, "the charge of being a womanizer stuck, and as an elderly man he is said to have still harboured a passion

for deflowering girls—who were collected for him from every quarter, *even by his wife*” (*Augustus*, 71, italics mine) Augustus was a great adulterer, like Caesar his predecessor, and like several of his successors, he had women requisitioned from far and wide “His friends used to behave like Toranius, the slave-dealer, in arranging his pleasures for him—they would strip mothers of families, or grown girls, of their clothes and inspect them as though they were for sale” (*Augustus*, 69)

The third Caesar, Rome’s second emperor, Augustus’ step-son Tiberius, was much more notoriously lascivious Dio writes, “his sensual orgies which he carried on shamelessly with persons of the highest rank, both male and female, brought him ill repute” (*History*, lviii 22 2) Tiberius followed Caesar and Augustus’ precedent in having sex partners procured for him, in this case, the service was done by his slaves To Tacitus, Tiberius’ “criminal lusts” were “worthy of an oriental tyrant” He liked freeborn children best “He was fascinated by beauty, youthful innocence, and aristocratic birth” The slaves who searched them out “rewarded compliance, overbore reluctance with menaces and—if resisted by parents or relations—kidnapped their victims, and violated them on their own account It was like the sack of a captured city” (*Annals*, v 10) According to Dio, when one father high in imperial favor, Sextus Marius, sent his “strikingly beautiful” daughter away “in order to prevent her from being outraged by Tiberius,” both he and his daughter were killed (*History*, lviii 22 2–4) Tiberius closed his career on the isolated island of Capreae, as Tacitus points out, its climate was mild, its views were exceptionally lovely, and all of its landings could be controlled by sentries “On this island then, in twelve spacious, separately named villas, Tiberius took up residence His former absorption in State affairs ended Instead he spent the time in secret orgies” (Tacitus, *Annals*, iv 66–67) Tiberius preferred a private “sporting-house” for his “sexual extravagances,” the whole scene is extremely “oriental” Suetonius says “A number of small rooms were furnished with the most indecent pictures and statuary obtainable, also certain erotic manuals from Elephantis in Egypt; the inmates would know from these exactly what was expected of them” Outside was also nice There were, “little nooks of lechery” in the woods, “beviest” of girls and boys would dress up as nymphs and Pans in Capreae’s caverns and grottoes (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 43) Tacitus says Tiberius’ lusts didn’t abate until death (*Annals*, vi 47)

If Tiberius was notorious, Caligula, the great-nephew who succeeded him, was infamous Caligula began his short but spectacular career under his uncle’s tutelage Tiberius had him brought to Capreae at eighteen, “yet even in those days he could not control his natural brutality and viciousness” (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 11) He loved executions by day, gluttony and adultery by night Was Tiberius pleased? “I am nursing a viper for the Roman people” he is supposed to have said (*Gaius*, 11) According to Dio, Caligula “not only emulated but surpassed his predecessor’s licentiousness and bloodthirstiness” (Dio, *History*, lxx 4 1) Unlike Augustus, Caligula was glad

to be called a god, he liked to say he'd copulated with the moon, and to pose as Neptune, Bacchus, Apollo, and Jupiter, "he made this a pretext for seducing numerous women, particularly his sisters" (ix 26 5) According to Suetonius, he made it a "habit" to commit incest with all three of his sisters, he "ravished" one, Drusilla, before he came of age; later he took her from her husband, "openly treating her as his lawfully married wife" (*Gaius*, 24) The rights of other husbands were no better respected, Caligula "had not the slightest regard for chastity, either his own or others' . He made advances to almost every women of rank in Rome " They would be invited to dinner with their husbands, and "he would slowly and carefully examine each in turn while they passed his couch, as a purchaser might assess the value of a slave " Then he'd send for whatever woman he liked best, take her out, and come back "commenting on her sexual performance " Now and then he'd register divorces in their husbands' names (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 36).

After Caligula's excesses provoked his assassination, the fifth Caesar, his uncle Claudius, succeeded him. Claudius, like Augustus, is remembered as relatively benign. His ambition might have been muted in childhood by diseases that left him, in Suetonius' words, "stumbling," "stammering," and "slobbering." In spite of that, he became emperor at fifty, "by an extraordinary accident;" and then he was a humble one, for instance, turning the title "Imperator" down (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 2, 10, 12, 30) But he was bold enough to follow a few precedents with respect to sex Suetonius says "his feelings for women were extremely passionate;" Dio writes of his "insatiable" inclination to sexual intercourse and of his "many amours with women" (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 34, Dio, *History*, ix.2.5-6). Again, these women were sometimes procured for him; and, after Augustus' example, the procuring was sometimes left to his wife. Dio says Messalina "took care" of her husband "by giving him sundry housemaids to lie with" (ix.18 3). And when Claudius finally became aware of Messalina's own infidelities, it was through Calpurnia and Cleopatra, two "favourites" among many mistresses (Tacitus, *Annals*, xi.29)

But the best, or worst, of the Julio-Claudian dynasty came last The sixth Caesar was Claudius' great-nephew, his step-son, and his son-in-law, Nero Tacitus says this about the young emperor about town: "Disguised as a slave, he ranged the streets, brothels, and taverns with his friends, who pilfered goods from shops and assaulted wayfarers . Rome by night came to resemble a conquered city" (*Annals*, xiii 24, cf Suetonius, *Nero*, 26) At home, Nero liked to tie naked girls and boys to stakes, put on the hide of a wild beast, and "satisfy his brutal lust under the appearance of devouring parts of their bodies" (Dio, *History*, lxii 13 2). In making ready for war, his main concern was with "arranging for the concubines who would accompany him to have male haircuts and be issued with Amazonian shields and axes" (Suetonius, *Nero*, 44). Even en route his needs would be met "Whenever he floated down the Tiber to Ostia, or cruised past the Gulf of Baiae, he had

self" (*Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxxii 5, xxix 2) On the other hand, men like Severus Alexander, Elagabalus' immediate successor, were said to have been "temperate" in love "His chief amusement consisted of having young dogs play with little pigs" (SHA, *Severus Alexander*, xli 5)

Collecting Other Men's Women

Roman emperors, like other emperors, could be great adulterers. From Lucretia's rape at least, heads of state took liberties with their subjects' wives (Livy, *History of Rome*, 1 57–60). Sometimes they took other men's wives and married them, sometimes they took other men's wives and had sex with them, sometimes they took other men's wives and prostituted them to third parties. None of these acts of "adultery" seem to have been committed infrequently.

Augustus took his third and last wife, Livia, from her husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, when she was nineteen years old, mother of a four-year-old son, and six months pregnant with her second child. That Claudius "gave her away" when she married Augustus (Balsdon 1962, 68–71, cf. Suetonius, *Augustus*, 4, Tacitus, *Annals*, 1 10). If Suetonius is right, she might already have been given up for a night—like other wives Augustus had had provisioned—at least. Suetonius writes, "when, three months after her marriage to Augustus, Livia gave birth to Decimus (later Nero) Drusus—the father of the emperor Claudius—people naturally suspected that he was the product of adultery with his stepfather" (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 1). Another epigram was got up:

How fortunate those parents are for whom
Their child is only three months in the womb!

Suetonius makes this sound at least a little plausible. Augustus seems to have left the empire to his first step-son, Tiberius, with regret, he is reported, for instance, to have pitied "poor Rome, doomed to be masticated by those slow-moving jaws" (*Tiberius*, 21). But for Livia's second son, Drusus, Augustus is supposed to have felt "so deep a love" that he considered him no less an heir than Gaius and Lucius, his only legitimate grandsons. "Nor did he think it enough to have an adulatory inscription carved on Drusus' tomb, in verses of his own composition: he also wrote his biography in prose" (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 1). Augustus picked Drusus, not his elder brother Tiberius, to wed Antonia, daughter of his sister Octavia, and when Drusus died he forced Tiberius to adopt Germanicus, Drusus and Antonia's eldest son (see Hallett 1984: 324). Drusus was not just father to Germanicus and Claudius, he was grandfather to Caligula and great-grandfather to Nero.

Other emperors followed Augustus' precedent. Caligula took Ennia, wife of his Commander of the Guards, swearing in writing to marry her if he became emperor, he took Livia Orestilla from her husband, Piso, on their wedding day, telling the groom "hands off my wife!" and divorcing her a

few days later, and he took Lollia Paulina, wife of a provincial governor, “because somebody had remarked that her grandmother was once a famous beauty,” but soon divorced her as well (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 12, 25; Tacitus, *Annals*, vi 45) Domitian took Domitia from her husband, Aelius Lamia, made her “one of his mistresses,” and then his wife, later Titus took Domitia from his brother (Dio, *History*, lxxv 3.4; lxxvi.26 4) After Domitian had taken Domitia from her husband, Titus encouraged Lamia to marry again “What? You are not wanting a wife, too, are you?” was his reply, it cost him not a wife, but his life (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 10)

Most emperors followed Caesar in having sex with other men’s wives, some might have got children by them Caesar notoriously enjoyed, according to Suetonius, the wives of Servius Sulpicius, Aulus Gabinius, Marcus Crassus, and Pompey, “but Marcus Brutus’ mother Sevilla was the woman whom Caesar loved best” (*Julius Caesar*, 50) In that case, Caesar’s murder may have been a parricide (Syme 1980). Otho’s father, who was brought up in Livia’s house, “was generally supposed to be a bastard of Tiberius, to whom the boy was very dear, and bore a close resemblance” (Suetonius, *Otho*, 1) Hadrian, who was “addicted” to adulteries with married women (SHA, *Hadrian*, xi 7), but left no legitimate issue, adopted Aelius and appointed him his successor, he also adopted Antoninus Pius on condition that he in turn adopt Lucius Verus, Aelius’ son To Balsdon, Hadrian’s devotion to Aelius’ family was “inexplicable,” “unless,” as he added in a footnote, Aelius was his bastard son (1962, 140–141) According to Carcopino, he was (1958 143–222, but see Syme 1980) Finally, Herodian and the *SHA* agree that Elagabalus’ mother’s affair with Caracalla was so well known that he was commonly assumed to be the emperor’s bastard (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, ii 1, Herodian, *Macrinus, Elagabalus*, iii 10)

But the most amazing thing Roman emperors did with other men’s women was to pimp them Caligula turned quite a profit Dio says he set apart rooms in the palace, and shut up “the wives of the foremost men as well as the children of the most aristocratic families . . . , using them as a means of milking everybody alike ” Some women were willing, others were not, most “rejoiced” at the emperor’s “licentiousness, and in the fact that he used to throw himself each time on the gold and silver collected from these sources and roll in it” (Dio, *History*, lix 28 9–10) Nero seems to have done the same Tacitus describes a spectacular feast on an artificial lake, the quays covered with brothels “stocked with high-ranking ladies;” they included “the most beautiful and distinguished in the city” of the oldest families, both “virgins and married women” (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv 37, Dio, *History*, lxxii 15 4) Nero, other nobles, gladiators, and an “indiscriminate rabble” of men “had the privilege of enjoying whichever one he wished, as the women were not allowed to refuse anyone” (Dio, *History*, lxxii 15 5) The *SHA* are terse about Elagabalus, but they make the same point “He opened brothels in his house for his friends, his clients, and his slaves”

(*Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxiv 2) Messalina seems to have made money and friends the same way (Dio, *History*, lx 18 1–2, lxi 31 1)

Showing Themselves Off

Roman emperors were studied in sexual selection (see Darwin 1871) That is inevitably so in one sense they had what it took to win at *intrasexual* selection Emperors had, by definition, won the imperial power struggle, they'd outcompeted everybody else for the title that got them the right to more riches—and so, perhaps, to more women—than any other man in Rome But sometimes they also excelled at *intersexual* selection They made ostentatious efforts to attract members of the opposite sex, showing off their intellects, their athleticism, and their good looks

Most Roman emperors, like emperors all over the world, were devotees of the arts Some practiced rather than watched Hadrian was a poet and flautist, Elagabalus sang, danced, and played the organ (SHA, *Hadrian*, xiv 8, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxxii 8) On the day Caligula died, he'd meant to make his stage debut He'd already rehearsed in private Suetonius says he asked three men of consular rank to a stage in the palace one night, burst onto it "amid a tremendous racket of flutes and clogs," did a little song and dance, and disappeared (*Gaus*, 54) But the most artistic emperor must have been Nero He was exceedingly interested in music, and from an early age loved to sing He "conscientiously undertook all the usual exercises for strengthening and developing his voice " He'd lie on his back under a slab of lead, use enemas and emetics to keep his weight down, and abstain from apples and other edibles that might hurt his vocal chords (Suetonius, *Nero*, 20) Unlike Caligula, Nero actually made a stage debut—in an earthquake, after that he performed in public contests whenever he got a chance He was a jealous competitor, ordering busts of earlier winners "be taken down, dragged away with hooks, and hurled into public lavatories" (*Nero*, 22, 24) Most infamously of all, when Rome burned in a six-day fire, he "watched the conflagration from the Tower of Maecenas, enraptured by what he called 'the beauty of the flames,' then put on his tragedian's costume and sang *The Sack of Ilium* from beginning to end" (*Nero*, 38)

Other emperors were athletes Some of the more modest were avid hunters, Marcus Aurelius among them (SHA, *Marcus Antoninus*, iv 8) Others, Caligula for one, were charioteers (Dio, *History*, lxi 17 3–5) But the most daring, like Commodus and at least seven others, were gladiators Commodus, according to Dio, devoted his life "to combats of wild beasts and of men " Once, with his bare hands, he was supposed to have done two elephants and five hippopotami in (*History*, lxxiii 10 2–3), according to the *Scriptores*, he fought 735 bouts in all (*Commodus Antoninus*, xi 12) Roman women loved a gladiator At Pompeii they were commemorated as "heart-throbs" and "netters of young girls by night," an excavated terracotta hel-

few days later; and he took Lollia Paulina, wife of a provincial governor, “because somebody had remarked that her grandmother was once a famous beauty,” but soon divorced her as well (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 12, 25; Tacitus, *Annals*, vi.45). Domitian took Domitia from her husband, Aelius Lamia, made her “one of his mistresses,” and then his wife; later Titus took Domitia from his brother (Dio, *History*, lxxv.3.4; lxxvi.26.4). After Domitian had taken Domitia from her husband, Titus encouraged Lamia to marry again. “What? You are not wanting a wife, too, are you?” was his reply; it cost him not a wife, but his life (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 10).

Most emperors followed Caesar in having sex with other men’s wives; some might have got children by them. Caesar notoriously enjoyed, according to Suetonius, the wives of Servius Sulpicius, Aulus Gabinius, Marcus Crassus, and Pompey; “but Marcus Brutus’ mother Sevlia was the woman whom Caesar loved best” (*Julius Caesar*, 50). In that case, Caesar’s murder may have been a parricide (Syme 1980). Otho’s father, who was brought up in Livia’s house, “was generally supposed to be a bastard of Tiberius, to whom the boy was very dear, and bore a close resemblance” (Suetonius, *Otho*, 1). Hadrian, who was “addicted” to adulteries with married women (SHA, *Hadrian*, xi.7), but left no legitimate issue, adopted Aelius and appointed him his successor; he also adopted Antoninus Pius on condition that he in turn adopt Lucius Verus, Aelius’ son. To Balsdon, Hadrian’s devotion to Aelius’ family was “inexplicable,” “unless,” as he added in a footnote, Aelius was his bastard son (1962; 140–141). According to Carcopino, he was (1958: 143–222; but see Syme 1980). Finally, Herodian and the *SHA* agree that Elagabalus’ mother’s affair with Caracalla was so well known that he was commonly assumed to be the emperor’s bastard (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, ii.1; Herodian, *Macrinus, Elagabalus*, iii.10).

But the most amazing thing Roman emperors did with other men’s women was to pimp them. Caligula turned quite a profit. Dio says he set apart rooms in the palace, and shut up “the wives of the foremost men as well as the children of the most aristocratic families . . . , using them as a means of milking everybody alike.” Some women were willing, others were not; most “rejoiced” at the emperor’s “licentiousness, and in the fact that he used to throw himself each time on the gold and silver collected from these sources and roll in it” (Dio, *History*, lix.28.9–10). Nero seems to have done the same. Tacitus describes a spectacular feast on an artificial lake, the quays covered with brothels “stocked with high-ranking ladies;” they included “the most beautiful and distinguished in the city” of the oldest families, both “virgins and married women” (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv.37; Dio, *History*, lxxii.15.4). Nero, other nobles, gladiators, and an “indiscriminate rabble” of men “had the privilege of enjoying whichever one he wished, as the women were not allowed to refuse anyone” (Dio, *History*, lxxii.15.5). The *SHA* are terse about Elagabalus, but they make the same point: “He opened brothels in his house for his friends, his clients, and his slaves”

(*Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxiv.2). Messalina seems to have made money and friends the same way (Dio, *History*, lx.18.1–2, lxi.31.1).

Showing Themselves Off

Roman emperors were studied in sexual selection (see Darwin 1871). That is inevitably so in one sense: they had what it took to win at *intrasexual* selection. Emperors had, by definition, won the imperial power struggle; they'd *outcompeted* everybody else for the title that got them the right to more riches—and so, perhaps, to more women—than any other man in Rome. But sometimes they also excelled at *intersexual* selection. They made ostentatious efforts to *attract* members of the opposite sex, showing off their intellects, their athleticism, and their good looks.

Most Roman emperors, like emperors all over the world, were devotees of the arts. Some practiced rather than watched. Hadrian was a poet and flautist; Elagabalus sang, danced, and played the organ (SHA, *Hadrian*, xiv.8; *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxxii.8). On the day Caligula died, he'd meant to make his stage debut. He'd already rehearsed in private. Suetonius says he asked three men of consular rank to a stage in the palace one night, burst onto it "amid a tremendous racket of flutes and clogs," did a little song and dance, and disappeared (*Gaius*, 54). But the most artistic emperor must have been Nero. He was exceedingly interested in music, and from an early age loved to sing. He "conscientiously undertook all the usual exercises for strengthening and developing his voice." He'd lie on his back under a slab of lead, use enemas and emetics to keep his weight down, and abstain from apples and other edibles that might hurt his vocal chords (Suetonius, *Nero*, 20). Unlike Caligula, Nero actually made a stage debut—in an earthquake; after that he performed in public contests whenever he got a chance. He was a jealous competitor, ordering busts of earlier winners "be taken down, dragged away with hooks, and hurled into public lavatories" (*Nero*, 22, 24). Most infamously of all, when Rome burned in a six-day fire, he "watched the conflagration from the Tower of Maecenas, enraptured by what he called 'the beauty of the flames;' then put on his tragedian's costume and sang *The Sack of Ilium* from beginning to end" (*Nero*, 38).

Other emperors were athletes. Some of the more modest were avid hunters, Marcus Aurelius among them (SHA, *Marcus Antoninus*, iv.8). Others, Caligula for one, were charioteers (Dio, *History*, lix.17.3–5). But the most daring, like Commodus and at least seven others, were gladiators. Commodus, according to Dio, devoted his life "to combats of wild beasts and of men." Once, with his bare hands, he was supposed to have done two elephants and five hippopotami in (*History*, lxxiii.10.2–3); according to the *Scriptores*, he fought 735 bouts in all (*Commodus Antoninus*, xi.12). Roman women loved a gladiator. At Pompeii they were commemorated as "heart-throbs" and "netters of young girls by night;" an excavated terracotta hel-

met is shaped like a phallus; even the word *gladius*, literally “sword,” meant “penis” on the street (Hopkins 1983: 6–7, 20–3; cf Geertz 1973)

Many emperors were fancy dressers. For instance Caligula, in his chariot, wore the breastplate of Alexander “(or so he claimed),” a purple silk mantle covered with precious stones, a tunic embroidered in gold, and an oak leaf garland (Dio, *History*, lix 17 3–5, cf Suetonius, *Gaius*, 51). Commodus, in combat, wore a lion’s skin and gold and purple robes and called himself Hercules, son of Zeus (Herodian, *Marcus Aurelius and Commodus*, xiv 8). Elagabalus, at home, wore jewels on his shoes, tunics made of purple or gold or studded with stones, and a gemmed crown, “at such times he would say that he felt oppressed by the weight of his pleasures” (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxiii 4–5, xxxii 1, cf Herodian, *Macrinus, Elagabalus*, v 3, vi 10).

Showing Money Off

Roman emperors didn’t just show off their personal attractions, they showed off their provisions. Men are, of course, among the males of many species who offer more to their mates than sperm, collecting a harem often involves defending, and displaying, resources as well as bodies (e.g., Emlen and Oring 1977). Consumption can get to be conspicuous (e.g., Codere 1950). Roman emperors could be cases in point.

They ate wonderfully. Consider generous Augustus whose banquet, “The Feast of the Divine Twelve,” in the midst of a famine caused a public scandal (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 70). Hadrian, another generous emperor, loved to eat “tetrastemonum” made of pastry, pheasant, sow’s udders, and ham (SHA, *Hadrian*, xxi 4). Elagabalus fed his dogs on goose livers, Caligula offered golden barley to his horse (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxi 1, Dio, *History*, lix 14 7).

They lived in nice houses. The nicest of all was, no doubt, Nero’s Golden House. It stretched from the Palatine to the Esquiline, across landscaped gardens, vineyards, pastures, and woods stocked with menageries, around a pool “like a sea.” Parts of the house were overlaid with gold, pearl, ivory, and precious stones, panels slid back to let in showers of flowers, baths were filled with sulphur water. How did he pay for it? Nero told his magistrates “‘You know my needs! Let us see to it that nobody is left with anything’” (Suetonius, *Nero*, 31–32).

They didn’t work hard for the money. Roman aristocrats, like most aristocrats, led a leisurely life. Domitian is the most stupefying example. He “hated to exert himself” but hit, early in his reign, on a way to pass the time. “Domitian would spend hours alone every day doing nothing but catch flies and stabbing them with a needle-sharp pen” (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 19, 3).

Collecting Men

Again, in all these respects—in collecting lots of women, in having sexual access to other men's women, in showing themselves off, and in showing their money off—Roman emperors were very much like emperors everywhere else, and in all these respects they seem to have been striving, consciously or not, to reproduce (cf. Betzig 1982, 1986, 1992a). But in another respect Roman emperors stand out. They apparently liked, very much, to have sex with men. It is not clear how few or many precedents that follows. Bisexuality seems to have penetrated aristocracies in Polynesia and Greece at least, in ancient India and China, on the other hand, semen conservation was a religious concern, and nobles took trouble to limit their emissions to women likely to conceive (Sagan 1985: 204–210, Dass 1970: 22, van Gulik 1974: 46, 339–345). Neither is it at all clear that bisexuality in the Roman aristocracy follows from Darwinian theory. Given a choice, and Roman emperors apparently had one, sex with men seems less likely than sex with women to result in reproduction.

In a couple of cases, sex among men in Rome seems to have had something to do with political advancement. Early in his career, for instance, Caesar “wasted” so much time at King Nicomedes' court that people suspected an affair (Suetonius, *Julius Caesar*, 2). Vitellius is supposed to have been among Tiberius' “male prostitutes” at Capreae (Suetonius, *Vitellius*, 3). And Otho is thought to have become Nero's favorite by what Suetonius calls their “decidedly unnatural” involvement (Suetonius, *Otho*, 2).

In many other cases, it just seems to have been the thing to do (see Veyne 1985). Suetonius calls Galba a “homosexual invert” (Suetonius, *Galba*, 21), Dio says Trajan was “devoted to boys” (Dio, *History*, lxxviii 7.4), and the *Scriptores* refer to Hadrian's “passion for males” (SHA, *Hadrian*, xi 7). Suetonius takes the trouble, on Claudius' behalf, to point out that “boys and men left him cold” (*Claudius*, 33). Most emperors seem to have collected boys as well as girls.

Some were flamboyant about it. Nero was a groom, and then a bride, to a pair of young men. He tried—or managed—to turn Sporus, the first, into a girl by castration. Then he gave him a dowry, put him in a veil, invited a crowd to the ceremony, and “treated him as his wife.” Afterwards, he dressed Sporus up like an empress and took him to fairs, “kissing him amorously now and then” (Suetonius, *Nero*, 28, Dio, *History*, lxi 28.2–3, lxi 13.1–2). Nero later became a bride himself to his freedman Doryphorus, making the “screams and moans of a girl being deflowered” on his wedding night (Suetonius, *Nero*, 29). Elagabalus' interest in his own sex was even more amazing. The *Scriptores* say “even at Rome he did nothing but send out agents to search for those who had particularly large organs and bring them to the palace in order that he might enjoy their vigour.” He had the city, the baths, and the wharves scoured for “*onobeli*,” men who resembled asses. Elagabalus preferred to play Venus to Anchises, particularly to Zo-

ticus, the athlete from Smyrna whose bride he became (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, v 3–4, viii 6–7, x 5; cf Dio, *History*, lxxx 16) According to Dio, he went to the extent of asking his surgeons to make him a vagina by incision, according to the *Scriptores*, he went so far as to “infibulate” himself (Dio, *History*, lxxx 16.7, SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, vii.2). “Indeed, for him life was nothing except a search after pleasures” (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xix.6)

STUDIES

There is enough in these sources to make a case for polygyny at the top of the Roman aristocracy. But what about everybody else? There is an enormous amount of evidence on the Roman family—in literary sources, from letters to love poems; in legal sources, like Justinian’s *Digest*, and in the thousands of epitaphs left on the tombs that line the roads from Rome. And there has been an enormous number of studies

How right was Livy? How much did wealth bring “sensual excess” to Rome (*History of Rome*, 1 1)? In other empires, social status was matched by sexual access to women—and so, arguably, by the production of children (e.g., Betzig 1982, 1986, 1992). How much did power parallel polygyny in the Roman aristocracy? There is plenty of evidence, of course, that wealth in Rome bought access to at least one kind of women—to slaves. Slaves were a part of the Roman family—neither word commonly used for family in Rome, *domus* or *familia*, excluded slaves, in fact, the word *familia* itself is derived from *famel*, or “slave;” the word *puer*, “child,” took in all the children of a household, slave or free; and many Romans, like Cicero, commonly referred to their families by the simple adjective, “my (people),” *mei* (see Saller 1984, Corbier 1991: 129; Wiedemann 1989: 33; Bradley 1991b: 97). There is a consensus that slaves were more concentrated in Italy than in the rest of the empire, in Rome than in the rest of Italy, and in the most powerful households in Rome. How much did Roman polygyny involve slavery?

The literature on Roman slavery is huge (e.g., Wiedemann 1987). There’s enough there, I think, to suggest: that rich Romans kept as many slaves as they could afford, often hundreds and sometimes thousands, that many of those slaves were women; and that slave women could be picked and praised for their ability to bear children. So much is only a little controversial, it has often been said that slave women were bought to breed slaves (e.g., Biezunska-Malowist 1969, Kolendo 1976, Bradley 1984). But to most who have made that case, slaves were bred for economic reasons. I think another case can be made that slave women were kept to breed their masters’ bastards. Why? Because there is so much evidence that rich Romans had sexual access to their slave women, punished other men who sought sexual access, invested heavily in slave children, freed so many slaves

and freed them so young, and provided them with great wealth, high position, and paternal affection

How Many Slaves?

How many slaves might a rich man have? Most estimates are large. P. A. Brunt guessed there were about 2,000,000 slaves in a total population of around 5,000,000 in Italy in 225 BC, William Harris guessed there might have been about 10,000,000 slaves in a population of around 50,000,000 in the whole Roman empire in the first century AD (Brunt 1971: 121, 124, Harris 1982: 118). How evenly distributed were they?

Tacitus tells how Lucius Pedanius Secundus, one of the richest men in Rome, was killed by a slave at home while another 400 failed to act in his defense (*Annals*, xiv 42–3). Many more slaves, as Brunt points out, may have lived on Secundus' farms, earning the income he needed to live so well in town (1971: 125). Augustus' *lex Fufia Caninia* of 2 BC limited the number who could be freed by will to 20% for holders of more than 100 slaves. That law also limited the absolute number of slaves freed by will to 100 (e.g., Westermann 1955: 89), suggesting that holdings of 500 and more might not have been rare. Pliny the Younger, whose fortune was thought to be "modest" probably had around 500 (Brunt 1971: 125). Susan Treggiari counted 204, 634, and 642 slaves and freed slaves from surviving inscriptions in tombs of three noble families of the first century AD (1975a: 395). Again many other slaves—like those on country farms—may not have earned an inscription, the last of these three tombs, Augustus' wife Livia's, held 3,000 burial urns, most for her freedmen and slaves (Hopkins 1983: 216). The biggest holding on record comes from early in the fifth century AD, the Christian noblewoman Melania is said to have freed 8,000 of her 24,000 slaves (e.g., Finley 1980: 123). But the biggest *familia* of all was probably the imperial *Familia*. "It is beyond doubt that thousands of slaves, scattered throughout the empire, were owned by the emperor, who was himself the greatest slave-owner of all" (Bradley 1984: 16). Over 4,000 imperial slaves and freedmen are listed in the inscriptions, their numbers grew over time (Weaver 1972: 3, 32). After the third century AD, the emperor's house is supposed to have held 1,000 cooks, 1,000 barbers, more than 1,000 cupbearers, "hives" of table servants, and many other slaves (Friedlander 1980: v 1: 66). There's undoubtedly hyperbole here, but the numbers were undoubtedly large. In Rome, as in other empires, households varied enormously in size (e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 1991). Bigger houses housed more slaves.

Descriptions put meat on figures like these. Rich Romans squandered their slaves' labor just to show off their numbers. Slaves served as torch-bearers, lantern-bearers, and chief sedan-chair bearers. The emperor kept a slave for every piece in his closet: a *veste privata* for what he wore at home, a *veste forensi* for what he wore in the city, a *veste triumphali* for what he wore on parade, a *veste gladiatorial* for what he wore to the show.

There was an imperial slave assigned to every type of utensil—some for silver, some for rock crystal, some for gold. Some slaves kept track of time, some kept track of names, others were kept to remind people to eat or sleep. There were thousands of slaves in a senator's palace. Some cost 100,000 or 200,000 sesterces or more—1,000,000 qualified a man to enter the senate (Friedlander 1908 v 1 114, v 2 219–221, Carcopino 1940 70–1).

How Many Slave Women?

But harems are filled with women, and many of these slaves were men. In the inscriptions, in fact, males outnumber females by about two to one. Treggiari counted 129 males and 75 females in inscriptions for the Volusii family, 421 males and 213 females for the Statilii, and 440 males and 212 females in the *Monumentum Liviae* (1975a: 395). Interestingly, Beryl Rawson found the same sex ratio, 276/139, in inscriptions for *alumni* in the city of Rome. *Alumni* were, loosely translated, foster children. She found a similar sex ratio, 381/183, among *vernae*, slaves born and bred in their masters' homes (1986a, 173, 179). In the emperor's family, P. R. C. Weaver found 440 male and 290 female children born to imperial slaves and freed slaves, counting just those children who lacked any formal status indication. But in the *Familia Caesaris* proper, that is, among children with formal imperial status, he found a much smaller proportion of girls—in Italy, just 6% (1972: 172–173, 177). Sex ratio biases like these have made Treggiari wonder, more than once, where all the women went (1975a: 400–401, 1979: 201, see also Pomeroy 1975, Oldenziel 1987). They might have been killed more often, they might have been bought less often, they might just have been less apt to leave their names inscribed in stone (see Hopkins 1966 on selective commemoration, see Trivers and Willard 1973, Alexander 1974, and discussion in Betzig, this volume, on how male bias might raise reproduction).

The evidence suggests women were at least as likely to be bought and sold as men. As Harris among others points out, the major source of slaves in the republic was by capture in war (1980: 121–122; cf. Westerman 1955: 84–85, Hopkins 1978: 102). Across cultures, war captives tend to be women rather than men (e.g., Chagnon 1983, 1988; Manson and Wrangham 1991). The Latins agree. Livy, for instance, in his *History of Rome* of the first century BC, notes a consistent female bias in captives, Sallust and Tacitus say that at Capsa and Volandum men were killed and women captured and sold, and Augustine says that in a raid on an Algerian village slave-dealers killed the men and took the women and children. This habit persisted, according to Gregory of Tours, in his sixth century *History of the Franks*, soldiers were advised to kill “everyone who could piss against the wall,” and capture the others (in Bradley 1987: 51, Whittaker 1987: 98).

After the empire was established, slaves were less likely to be recruited by capture. At that point, other than slave breeding, the most important source may have been foundlings (Harris 1982). According to John Boswell,

as many as 20–40% of children born in Rome might have been abandoned during the first three centuries AD, and most were probably girls (1988: 135). The axiom “‘everyone raises a son, including a poor man, but even a rich man will abandon a daughter’” was 800 years old when it was quoted by Stobaeus in the fifth century AD (pp. 101–102). In other words, more female slaves should still have been bought and sold.

What Were Slave Women For?

Slaves are often economic assets. That fact is so obvious that it’s seldom been asked if they might be good for anything else. If slaves are valued mainly for manual labor, it makes sense that men should be valued more than women. But then why keep slave women at all? Several historians have answered that question in order to breed more hard-working men (e.g., Biezunska-Malowist 1969, Kolendo 1976, Bradley 1978). From the republic into the empire, the slave population grew by leaps and bounds. An arguable proportion—perhaps most of them—were slave women’s children (e.g., Westermann 1955: 86, Brunt 1971: 131, Bradley 1987: 42). How many might have been? Homebreeding was arguably the most important source of new slaves under the empire, it was a significant source of slaves under the republic as well (e.g., Harris 1982, Bradley 1987). Bradley’s guess is that for late republican Italy roughly 100,000 new slaves were recruited annually, for the whole Roman empire around the first two centuries AD more than 500,000 new slaves may have been needed every year (1987: 42). Even if a minority in each case were homeborn, the numbers must have been very large. In Roman Egypt, the word *oikogeneis* is listed with “‘great frequency’” on papyri, the term *vernae* is listed on inscriptions outside of Rome, both mean homeborn (e.g., Westermann 1955: 86, Rawson 1986a).

Other evidence suggests slave breeding, too. In the inscriptions, slave women are seldom ascribed other jobs. In literary, legal, and medical sources, and in Egyptian papyri, slave women are sometimes bought with their breeding potential in mind and rewarded for having borne children. And in legal and especially literary sources, slave women are sent to the country to gestate and give birth on their masters’ estates.

Susan Treggiari has looked at the jobs ascribed to female slaves in Rome. There weren’t many. On Livia’s staff, “‘one striking factor in the job structure is the low proportion of women,’” only 18 of the 79 slaves who were specifically attested as having worked for Livia were female, and only 3 of the 75 freed slaves who worked for her were women (1975b: 58). In aristocratic households, there are no job titles for women who worked outdoors, and women rarely seem to have worked in the public parts of houses. Administrators, reception room staff, and dining room staff were all male. Slave women, when jobs are attested at all, usually seem to have waited on other women. They were dressers, hair dressers, clothes menders, clothes folders, massagers, midwives, and wet-nurses, sometimes, they were spin-

ners and weavers. But “there are many women in the *columbaria* whose jobs are not known” (Treggiari 1976: 94). What did they do? Maybe they bore and brought up children.

Suetonius says Julius Caesar would pay top dollar for a pretty slave (*Julius Caesar*, 47); he wasn’t the only one. Martial refers more than once to the high price friends paid for nice-looking slaves (*Epigrams*, II 63, IX.21), and evidence from Egyptian papyri suggests that “physical attractiveness” was taken into account in determining a slave’s price (in Westermann 1955, 100). To Ulpian, the *Digest* jurist, “slave-girls are not generally acquired as breeders,” on the other hand, evidence from other jurists suggests that sterility might have been considered a defect in female slaves at the time of their sale (*Digest*, 5 3.27 pr., see Gardner 1986: 206, Wiedemann 1981: 120).

Keith Bradley did a systematic study of the ages at which slaves were sold in Roman Egypt. He looked at twenty-nine records from papyri, and found an age range from 4 to 35 years, with a mean, for the twenty-two “adult” women 14 or older, of just over 22 years. Bradley concludes that such evidence “seems to indicate a correlation between the ages of adult female slaves at time of sale and the period of expected female reproductivity.” He adds, “this can hardly be an accident,” and, even more strongly, that the data suggest “that female slaves were bought and sold with their potential for breeding acting as a prime consideration for buyers and sellers” (Bradley 1978: 245–246, see too Dalby 1979). But it is important to note that Bradley’s own data on ages of *male* slaves at time of sale, from another twenty-one Egyptian records, follow a similar pattern. In this case the range is from 2 to 40 years, with a mean, for eleven “adults” 14 or older, of less than 27 years (Bradley 1984: 57). It makes sense to invest in young breeders, but it makes sense, too, to invest in young workers.

Other evidence, from medical texts, suggests that Romans placed a premium on fertile women—in spite of the notorious fact that they made strenuous efforts to limit *legitimate* family size (e.g., Dio, *History*, Ivi 5). This was anticipated by Greek tradition. According to Aline Rousselle, every book in the *Hippocratic Collection* on female illness has to do with the uterus. Rousselle writes, “conception and pregnancy were thought of as the remedy for all female ailments, for a pregnant woman was a healthy woman” (1988: 24, 28). Keith Hopkins, in a study of Roman contraception, looked at 22 ancient medical writers and found that though only 11 suggested contraceptive methods, 18 mentioned methods of aiding conception (1965: 132–133). Soranus, the best-known medicine man in Rome before Galen, called a section of his *Gynecology* “What is the best time for fruitful intercourse?” He answers: when menstruation is ending, appetite for coitus is present, and “a pleasant state exists in every respect” (I x 36). There was a preoccupation with gynecological disorders in discussions of disabilities affecting female slaves (Treggiari 1979: 187). The *Digest* refers to love potions and fertility drugs (*Digest*, 48 8.3 2, 48 19 38.5, see Gardner 1986: 159).

Both Columella and Varro, writing on Roman agriculture, advised that

female slaves be encouraged to breed, incentives included exemption from work for mothers of three children, and manumission for mothers of four or more. Evidence from the *Digest* also suggests that some slave women were given freedom on condition of having borne a specified number of children. Arethusa, freed after the birth of her third child (who was, as it turned out, one of twins or triplets), offered the “textbook” case (*Digest* 1.5.15, 16, 34.5.10(11) 1, see Gardner 1986: 208–209).

The best evidence that Romans valued female slaves’ fertility may be literary. Horace, in a bucolic passage, attributes the “joy” of seeing sheep, oxen, and “home-bred slaves (the swarm of a thriving house)” to Alfius, a moneylender turning farmer (*Epodes*, II 62–67). Martial criticizes Linus’ cheap country life, where home-bred slaves wait on his table, but he advises Publius to keep pages “fresh from the farm,” the “sons of your herd reeking from the stable,” and he loves his friend Faustinus’ Baian villa for its corners packed with grain, stalls stocked with bulls, and “young slaves born on the farm, with skins as white as milk, set in a circle round the bright fireside” (*Epigrams*, IV 66, X 98, III 58). Tacitus, in his *Annals*, refers to slaves “born on the same estates, in the same homes, as their masters, who had treated them kindly since birth” (XIV 44). And in Petronius’ *Satyricon*, the best-known example, Trimalchio’s accountant interrupts the party to let him know that on July 26th 10,000,000 sesterces had been deposited in his strong-room, a fire had started at his Pompeian estate, and, on his estate at Cumae, there had been 30 male and 40 female births (XV 53).

Sketches like these are matched by legal and inscriptional evidence. Two passages in the *Digest*, by Paulus and Marcianus, refer to slave accouchements taking place on country estates as a matter of course (*Digest*, 32.99.3, 50.16.210, see Treggiari 1979: 189). And Rawson, in her study of 564 inscriptions of *vernae*, found over three-quarters of those of specified age to be between 1 and 14, very few were over 20, and only 2% were infants of under one year (1986a: 191). Where were the babies? Maybe at Baiae, at Cumae, or on some other estate in the Roman countryside. Treggiari suggests, and Rawson and others concur, that slave women—who had few jobs to do in town—may have spent much of their lives gestating, birthing, and nursing children in the country. Treggiari writes,

The Romans realised the importance of fresh air, exercise and a healthy diet for pregnant women and small children. It would be better for their *vernae* to be born and brought up in the country. Besides, it would be cheaper and easier to feed them on a farm, and it would save overcrowding the limited accommodation of a town house. So we might guess that some of the pregnant women in the urban *familia* would be packed off to bear their children at a villa, and that then, for some time at least, the children might be reared in the country (1979: 189).

But Whose Children Were They?

That is, I think, the critical question. If slave women are bred for economic reasons, then it shouldn’t much matter to masters who are the fathers. If,

on the other hand, slave women are bought and bred for the sake of their master's own reproduction, then paternity becomes a huge concern (e.g., Trivers 1972, Alexander and Borgia 1979). Most historians seem satisfied that slave men fathered slave women's children (e.g., Rawson 1966; Flory 1978, Treggiari 1981b). But at least three facts mitigate against that. First is masters' concern with chastity in slave men, second is masters' concern with chastity in slave women, third, but not least, is masters' own use of slaves for sex.

There is plenty of legal and inscriptional evidence of "slave families" in Rome. Though Alan Watson suggests that "it is not easy to find legal texts that show slaves as holders of family relationships," there are *Digest* references to slave women bringing slave men "dowries," to slave families given together as legacies, and to incest avoidance and parricide among slave fathers and children (e.g., *Digest*, 23 3 39 pr, 33 7 12 33, 33 7 20 4, 23 2 14 2, see Watson 1987: 78–80, 96). Though slaves couldn't legally marry, hundreds are listed as *contubernales* in the inscriptions, and others listed as *collibertus* and *colliberta* were legally married after they were freed (e.g., Flory 1978: 92 n. 18, 23). Inscriptions refer to slave children with slave mothers and slave fathers, for instance, *CIL* 6 6698 says simply, "set up to Narcissus, who lived 2 years, 4 months and 13 days, by Tychus his mother and Narcissus his father," all of them slaves (thanks to Jane Gardner, personal communication).

But what sorts of slaves were most likely to have become fathers? Beryl Rawson put some of the first work on slave families into a paper on life among the Roman "lower class." In a sample of 1572 freed or freeborn children commemorated in the inscriptions, she found 73 had two slave parents, 591 had two free parents, and 751 had one free and one slave parent (1966: 73). In another paper, on slave "marriages," Treggiari found 260 inscriptions (of a sample of 39,340 in *CIL* 6) listing a man and a woman in *contubernium*, an informal union. In 68 of these cases, both partners were probably slaves, in another 37, the man was a slave and the woman free (1981b). But the slave "husbands" and fathers in these two studies are unlikely to have been "lower class" in the sense of lacking influence or wealth or both. Since both samples were drawn from inscriptions, they left out the mass of people too powerless or poor to be remembered in an epitaph, many of whose remains were thrown into *puticuli* pits outside Rome (e.g., Hopkins 1983: 208). Many of the fathers in these inscriptions were, or are likely to have resembled, slaves in the emperor's house, that is, the *Familia Caesaris*. When Rawson found 184 inscriptions of freeborn Romans who inserted the term *spuri filius* in their names—children of male slaves and free women—she concluded that "most of the slaves in these relationships are imperial slaves" (1989: 30). Similarly, Treggiari concluded of her *contubernales* that most men in the mixed unions "were imperial civil servants or belonged to women of the imperial family or dependents of the emperor" (1982: 15). P. R. C. Weaver, in his detailed study of the emperors' families, found 462

wives of imperial slaves, most of them free or freed (1972 114) Of all slaves in the inscriptions, men in the *Familia Caesaris* were most likely to marry, and their wives were most likely to be freeborn (Weaver 1972 114, 1986. 115)

But what of the others? Certainly, some humbler slaves had "wives" and were fathers (e.g., Flory 1978) But the majority might not have been offered sexual access to women or encouraged to have children Most male slaves, especially the "barbarians" not lucky enough to have been home-grown, did not live comfortably with their masters in town They lived and worked on the farms, and in the mines (e.g., Treggiari 1969 9) Women were rare in both spots In the mines, the work was dangerous, the mortality rate was high, and women were next to none "None of these conditions favoured the formation of family units" (Bradley 1984 77). On the farms, Columella's "humanitarian" recommendations included attention to the sick, availability of a large kitchen, and sturdy clothes On the other hand, the housing was not conducive to family living. "The individual cells in which chained slaves are housed should be built so as to admit some sunlight, while the *ergastulum*, although subterranean, should be well lit and as healthy as possible," so long as the windows were kept out of reach (*De Re Rustica*, 1) Hopkins says that "agricultural slaves were usually male and celibate" (1978 106), exceptions, according to Varro and Columella, were foremen, each of whom was to be rewarded with a woman (see Westermann 1955 119) Even in town, where slave men were surrounded by women, they might have been made to mind their manners As far as Juvenal was concerned, "if a slave takes a lick at a tart, we give *him* a licking" (*Satires*, ix 5–6) Slaves seem very seldom to have been accompanied by fathers when they were sold in Delphic manumission records, mothers are freed with children 29 times, father with child only once, and in records from Roman Egypt, the overwhelming majority of sales concern individual slaves, mothers are rarely sold with young children, and no man on record is sold with a wife or child (Gardner 1986 213, Bradley 1978 246) Cato, according to Plutarch, let some of his slave men into his "female slave quarters," but charged them a fee for admission (Plutarch, *Cato*, xxi 2) Again, slaves had no "*conubium*," they were legally barred from marriage (e.g., Watson 1987 77)

Slaves weren't the only men kept away from slave women Martial, in a well-known epigram, said a slave girl "whose reputation one could smell from here to her street corner in the slums" was auctioned off for a paltry sum (vi 66) In the *Digest*, a buyer had an action against the seller should a slave woman sold as a virgin turn out not to be one, and pregnancy could be considered a defect at the time of sale (*Digest*, 19 1 1 5, see Gardner 1986 206–207) None of this makes sense if slaves were bred for economic reasons, in that case, contributions of semen should be welcomed, especially in large households (Betzig 1989 661–662) When women were deflowered, the penalties could be severe Commodus found out his powerful freedman, Cleander, had "begotten sons" by some of his 300 women, those sons, their

mothers, and Cleander were all put to death (SHA, *Commodus Antoninus*, vii 2–3) In the *Digest*, seducing another man's slave might involve the seducer in a suit (*Digest*, 47 10.9 4, 47 10 25, 48 5 6 pr ; see Treggiari 1979: 193) And in particular, under the *Lex Aquilia*, a Roman damage legislation, an action might be brought if a virgin slave were debauched (e.g., Gardner 1986 119, 207, 220). Seneca thought particularly profligate masters most likely to insist on fidelity in their slaves (*Ira*, 2, 28. 7; in Treggiari 1979 193) Later on, in the early Middle Ages, the rape of slave women was punished in Frankish and Burgundian law, to the Franks a man who slept with another man's slave was an "adulterer," and the adulterer himself was enslaved (Rouche 1987 466, 472)

Sarah Pomeroy has made a point of contrasting the Greek *gynaeceum*, in which women were carefully hidden, with the relative freedom of Roman women (1975) Cornelius Nepos did the same; Roman matrons, in particular, moved physically and socially "in the middle of male life" (in Wallace-Hadrill 1988 51, but see p. 52, note 32) That may be so, but certainly Roman women, especially slave women, were not altogether free Women gave birth attended by midwives—always women; and they were probably cared for in segregated wards (e.g., Treggiari 1976 87, Rawson 1991 11). Slaves often slept apart many probably lived on second stories. In the Casa del Menandro at Pompeii, service areas are accessible only down long corridors, in Nero's Domus Aurea, a small suite of rooms off the north peristyle, with a small garden, and with paintings from feminine mythology, has been called a *gynaeceum*, and in at least one picture from Pompeii, possibly based on a Greek version, women lay about and talk in a "gynaeceum scene" (Westermann 1955 107, Wallace-Hadrill 1988 79, 81, 52, note 32, Stambaugh 1988 164, 170; Veyne 1987 38) And slaves often worked apart: slave women are absent from apprenticeship documents in Roman Egypt, and in Rome they were kept from any public or outdoor employment. "the more elegant the household, the less women servants appeared before visitors" (Bradley 1991a 108; Treggiari 1982 11) It is worth mentioning, too, that whether they slept or worked, women in Rome might be surrounded by eunuchs Ovid feels sorry for Bagoas, his mistress' "attendant" "Poor guardian, you're neither man nor woman,/The joys of mutual love you cannot know" (*Amores*, ii.3.1–2), Juvenal weighs the relative merits of eunuchs on whom surgeons work before and after their "testicles ripen and drop" (Juvenal, *Satires*, vi 365–379), Martial finds eunuchs even on the Baian farm (*Epigrams*, iii 58) Eunuchs seem to have been fairly common from early in the empire, by the third century, there were "hives" of them in the imperial household; eventually, the "Superintendent of the Sacred Bedchamber" was in Rome, as in other empires, a powerful castrated man (e.g., Friedlander 1908 v. 1: 66, Treggiari 1975 49, Hopkins 1978 chapter 4) Eunuchs may have been deprived of several motivations, fertilization was one of them (e.g., Dickemann 1981, contrast Coser 1964) Eunuchs have guarded harems all over the world (e.g., Dickemann 1981 Betzig 1986, 1992a)

Masters themselves, on the other hand, were free to have sex with their slaves “The whole area remains a terribly understudied subject” (Shaw 1987: 30). Still, there are some well-known examples. Carcopino thought that, although the “better Romans” saved face by resisting temptation, others, “preoccupied solely with their own ease and pleasure, as indifferent to the duties of their position as to the dignity of the honours they enjoyed, held it preferable to rule as pashas over the slave harems which their riches permitted them to maintain” (1940: 102). He cites the case of Larcus Macedo, another master apparently assassinated by his slaves, afterwards “his concubines ran up, screaming frantically,” and he revived (Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, III 14). Treggiari, in her paper on concubinage, notes that use of the word “*concupina*” is often vague. But, she adds, “it is most commonly used . . . of whole harems of women kept by emperors and members of the upper classes,” and “this usage is a commonplace of invective and hardly helps us to establish facts” (1981a: 60–61, see too 1991b: 52). She cites the case of Fabius Valens, who advanced “with a long and luxurious train of harlots and eunuchs,” and was caught “dishonouring the homes of his hosts by intrigues with their wives and daughters” when he fought for Vitellius (Tacitus, *Historiae*, III 40–41).

Lots of evidence that masters used slaves for sex is literary. Moses Finley, for instance, says slaves’ unrestricted sexual availability “is treated as a commonplace in Graeco-Roman literature from Homer on, only modern writers have managed largely to ignore it” (1980: 95, see too Kiefer 1934: 56, 179, Biezunska-Malowist 1977: 113–116, Kolendo 1981). Handbooks advised Greek wives to abide husbands’ infidelities with *hetaerae*, Plutarch advised Roman women to put up with husbands’ “peccadilloes,” that is, with their “debauchery, licentiousness, and wantonness” with their slaves (see Treggiari 1991b: 201, Plutarch, *Moralia*, 140B). Most moralists from Plato to Cato and later were concerned that men stay away from other men’s wives (Treggiari 1991b), most writers took sex with other women for granted. Horace, for instance, asks

When your organ is stiff, and a servant girl
Or young boy from the household is near at hand and you know
You can make an immediate assault, would you sooner burst with tension?
Not me. I like sex to be there and easy to get.

(*Satires*, I II 16–19) Martial writes to Sosibianus “Your mother was a slave, but though you guess it/Why call your father ‘Master’ and confess it?” He writes about Quirinalis

Children he wants, but fears the marriage bond,
Yet his dislikes and fancies correspond,
For kindly handmaids set the matter right,
The fields and mansions of the worthy knight
Are well supplied with slavelings—knightlings rather,
To each of whom he is a proper father.

And he writes against Sila, who said she’d be his wife at any price, that he’d

need: a dowry of a million sesterces, a bedroom separate from hers, and mistresses and slaves to fill his own bed—even while she was looking on (*Epigrams*, I 81, I 84, XI 23; see too XI.98, XII 49) As Juvenal jokes:

Hey there, *you*,
 Who do you think you're fooling? Keep this masquerade
 For those who believe it I'll wager that you're one hundred
 Per cent a man It's a bet So will you confess,
 Or must the torturer rack the truth from your maids?

Or, more philosophically, “led helpless/By irrational impulse and powerful blind desires/We ask for marriage and children” (*Satires*, VI, X.350–352) They didn't necessarily intersect

Other evidence that masters sired slaves is legal. There are many references to slaves as *filii naturales* in the *Digest* and other documents (see Crook 1967, Gardner 1986; Watson 1987). A blood tie between master and slave is assumed in legal discussions of manumission, damage assessments, and inheritance (e.g., Rawson 1989: 23–29 and below). And a legal inconsistency, on usufruct, makes sense if a “natural” relationship between master and slave is assumed. Buyers of livestock automatically acquired a life interest in a mother's offspring, but when a slave woman was sold her children stayed with her original owner. Hardly humanitarian, if slave children were best looked after by their mothers. But it might have made sense if owners, or their sons, were the fathers. “Hence ownership of the child is being given, reasonably, to those among whom is the putative father” (Watson 1987: 104).

Still more evidence of aristocratic polygyny is architectural. Carcopino says Tiberius “almost created a scandal” by decorating his bedroom with a *Bride of Parrhasius* and other erotica, in Nero's Golden House, the “love chambers” were covered with pearls (Carcopino 1940: 152, Friedlander 1908 v 2: 192, Suetonius, *Nero*, 31). John Stambaugh, describing Roman mansions, says that even in the republic the master's bedroom sat in an elevated place on the main axis of the house, and “dominated everything that happened” (1988: 164–165). Later, under the empire, houses lost much of their outward public function, tended to turn inward on private life, and centered on courtyard gardens. The best was, again, in Nero's house, filled with acres of meadows, trees, and flowers, “imitating the ‘paradise’ or pleasure gardens of the old Persian kings” (pp. 168–169). The names of imperial palaces of the third and fourth centuries imply that imitation went on, the “House of Amor and Psyche” and “House of Nymphaeum” at Ostia are two (p. 193). Unfortunately, little remains architecturally of the most luxurious houses, most of the Campanian coast, covered with the villas of the Roman upper classes, including its emperors, is now under water or under volcanic ash (e.g., D'Arms 1970, Gazda 1991). But in Roman Africa, remaining mosaics often invoke Dionysus and “transform products of nature into symbols of fertility,” others are filled with dancers and courtesans, bedrooms, in particular, are covered with sensual scenes. “It was there that the prevailing

morality was most shockingly transgressed—a place of adultery, incest, and unnatural intercourse” (Thébert 1987 370, 378–379) Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink, in a paper on “nymphomania,” describes the *nymphaeum*, a Roman garden filled with waterfalls, artificial springs, and architectural backgroups with sculptures and mosaics of nude or semi-nude girls (1987 280) More straightforwardly, imperial Romans might protect themselves against the “evil eye” by painting phalli in their doorways (Veyne 1987 177) Phalli are common, of course, in public architecture too The Column of Trajan, nearly thirty vertical meters of marble, is a conspicuous example Elagabalus, according to the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, planned to outdo it, but “could not find enough stone” (SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xxiv 7)

Caring for Vernae

The best evidence of all that aristocratic Romans mated with slave women is that they spent so much time, love, and *money* on those women’s children Xenophon said raising slaves wasn’t a profitable practice (in Biezunska-Malowist 1969 91) In some cases, at least, he must have been right Some slave children, especially home-grown ones, were pampered from birth, freed young, and lavished with status, sesterces, and love Interestingly, though slave fathers of slave, freed, and free children are sometimes attested in the inscriptions—especially well-off slave fathers, like those from the *Familia Caesaris*—natural parents are seldom attested for *vernae* (Rawson 1986a) Rawson draws this fairly sweeping conclusion “There may be owners’ illegitimate children among the many *vernae* (home-born slaves) recorded this term often has parental-filial overtones, and *vernae* seem to have had a privileged position and not infrequently to have become their master’s heirs” (1989 18, see too Treggiari 1979 188, Bradley 1987 57, and below)

Iza Biezunska-Malowist seems to have convinced many historians that slave breeding was profitable after all She found bills of sale for 24 infants from Roman Egypt, and argues that “buying infant slaves proves, beyond a doubt, that it was profitable to raise infants from their birth” (Biezunska-Malowist 1969 93) But, as Bradley points out, slaves were sold much more often as adults than as children, if it were more profitable to rear slaves than to buy them full grown, the opposite should hold (1978 247)

The ideal was always that slaves be born at home (e.g., Treggiari 1979 188, Wiedemann 1981 7, 120 Rawson 1986a 186) These weren’t always cheap to bring up Some *vernae*, at least, shared wet nurses, tutors, and quarters with legitimate children Bradley looked at wet nursing contracts from Roman Egypt, they listed 19 slave nurslings, and just 2 free (1980 325) He looked then at Roman inscriptions, and found the word *nutrix* in 69 of them, in this case, nearly half of the nurslings were of equestrian or senatorial rank, but at least a fifth were slaves In several cases, such slaves were

nursed by someone other than their mother in spite of the fact that their mother was alive (1986: 203–209, see too Bradley 1991a: 14–22) There is some legal evidence of slave nursing, too in the *Digest*, a husband was expected to provide a wet nurse for children born to slave women who came as part of a wife's dowry (*Digest*, 24 1 28 1, see Gardner 1986 242) Lactational amenorrhea—the fact that nursing suppresses cycling—was appreciated by Soranus (*Gynecology*, 1 15), Plutarch appreciated the fact that a mother who gave her child to a nurse would get pregnant again sooner as a result, it had already been appreciated by Aristotle (in Bradley 1986 212 Garnsey 1991 61) This is consistent with modern evidence that interbirth intervals are lengthened, and fertility is lowered, by lactation (e g , Wood 1989) Rich men all over the world, at least from Sumerian times on, have provided wet nurses for their children—and so probably raised their own reproduction (e g , Fideles 1986, 1988, Betzig 1992a, Hrdy, this volume) Galen recommended that nursing last three years (in Bradley 1991a 26–27), Soranus specified a number of conditions that the ideal nurse should meet (*Gynecology*, 11 19–20) According to Westermann, in some nursing contracts, whether the child was free or slave the same demands were made of the nurse (1955 102)

Other contracts, for teachers, are the same whether the child was slave or free (Westermann 1955 102) In Livia's household, Treggiari found evidence that *paedagogi* were provided for some of the slaves (1975b 56) Bradley found inscriptional evidence of a number of *nutritores*, *educatores*, and *paedagogi* with slave charges In fact, he suggests that “it was not at all uncommon” for slave children to be provided with tutors and other caretakers Some of these slaves were from the *Familia Caesaris* (1991a 42–43, 62) In the *paedagogium Caesaris*, boy slaves were trained for court service later in life, as Bradley points out, the same sort of institution probably existed in lesser houses, the younger Pliny, for instance, may have maintained one (1991a 63) *Alumni* and *vernae* might share their *nutritores* with the master's legitimate daughters and sons (Dixon 1988 151, 159)

Bradley cites literary and legal evidence that slaves might sleep with their owners, that legitimate children might sleep with grown slaves, and that slave children and legitimate children might be brought up together as “familiar companions” (1990 9, 150) *Vernae* are sometimes referred to as *collacteus*, that is, nursed together, or at least reared together, with a legitimate son or daughter (Rawson 1986a 1987) Cato is supposed to have intended that some of his slave children, nursed by the same women, grow particularly attached to his legitimate son (in Dixon 1988 33) Legitimate and “natural” children shared quarters in Rome, as they did later in Europe and in other places and times (Wallace-Hadrill 1991 222–223, cf Duby 1983, Betzig 1992a,b) And some slave children, like legitimate children, were given an “allowance” *Peculium*, the money a father allotted a son, was also allotted to slaves In both cases, the money technically belonged to the *paterfamilias*, but the son, daughter, or slave was free to administer it (e g ,

Rawson 1986b. 17) In the *Digest*, *peculium* given to slaves is not discussed separately from that given to daughters and sons (see Crook 1967 110) In regard not just to *peculium*, but in many other regards, “the legal position of a slave was very similar to that of a son” (Watson 1987 46, 98–100)

In Rome, *vernae* weren’t just given good nurses, good tutors, and good accommodations, some of them seem to have been loved A little evidence is in the histories Dio describes Livia, at home in the imperial palace, surrounded by naked slave girls and boys (*History*, xviii 44 3) Herodian describes boys kept about Commodus’ palace, “who went about bare of clothes but adorned with gold and costly gems” (*Marcus Aurelius and Commodus*, xvii 3) One in particular, a very little boy called “Philocommodus,” often slept with the emperor—as did other slave boys with other powerful masters

More evidence is in the poets Martial and friends were fond of a few young slaves One epigram describes the grave of a freed slave, Glaucias, loved by his mentor, Melior—he was “pure,” “fair,” and dead at twelve years, two other epigrams describe Martial’s own slave, Erotion, who died at five (Martial, *Epigrams*, 6 28, 5 34, 10 61) Both of the last are full of tenderness, at least one is worth reprinting

To you, my parents, I send on
 This little girl Erotion,
 The slave I loved, that by your side
 Her ghost need not be terrified
 Of the pitch darkness underground
 Or the great jaws of Hades’ hound
 This winter she would have completed
 Her sixth year had she not been cheated
 By just six days Lipping my name,
 May she continue the sweet game
 Of childhood happily down there
 In two such good, old spirits’ care
 Lie lightly on her, turf and dew
 She put so little weight on you

Rich Romans were often surrounded by slave children, girls and especially boys, they called them *delicia* “Great men playing with children for relaxation is a motif known in literature from Euripides on” (Slater 1974 134, see too Wiedemann 1989 31) Some of these *deliciae* were bought in the market, others must have been *filii naturales* of their masters (e.g., Treggiari 1969 212, Rawson 1986a 196) They seem to have surrounded women as often as men, husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons might have fathered some of them According to Treggiari, “their relationship with their owners was like that between parents and children,” legitimate children were called *delicia*, too (1975b 53–54, see too Rawson 1986a 186)

Other evidence is inscriptional According to Wiedemann, names masters picked for slaves were often associated with luxury or divinity (Wiedemann 1987 23) Both suggest affection So do commemorations of slave children by their *tatae* and *mamae*—literally, or metaphorically, daddies

and mommies. In 49 *tatae* and 61 *mamae* inscriptions, Bradley finds children most often of slave status, and *tatae* and *mamae* most often of free status. Sometimes, natural parents other than these *tatae* and *mamae* are mentioned in, or inferred from, the inscriptions; more often, they are not (1991a: 76–87).

Manumission

Keith Hopkins asks the question: “Why did the Romans free so many slaves?” (1978: 115). He and others offer an answer: slaves were freed for economic reasons. Liberty might have been a reward for hard work. At the same time, Hopkins and others offer another answer: slaves were freed for reproductive reasons. Masters freed young slaves because they were their illegitimate children; and they freed female slaves so that their children would be freeborn.

Manumission was common. It was more likely for some than others. Young slaves, female slaves, homegrown slaves, and slaves in Rome, especially members of the *Familia Caesaris*, were most often freed.

Roman manumissions were especially common. According to Lily Ross Taylor, in two-thirds of the inscriptions of Roman citizens, it is not clear whether status is freed or freeborn. But of the remaining one-third, probably three-fourths of the epitaphs belong to freed slaves. As Taylor adds, freedmen, rather than freeborn, were more likely to have left status off their epitaphs—so, overall, the proportion of inscriptions belonging to freedman might have been quite a bit higher than three in four. She concludes: “It seems likely that most of the Roman populace eventually had the blood of slaves in their veins” (1961: 117–120, 132). On the other hand, it is generally agreed that agricultural slaves, and slaves in the mines, were seldom freed (e.g., Treggiari 1969:9,11, 106–110; Brunt 1971: 122; Harris 1982: 118; Bradley 1984: 103–104; Wiedemann 1987: 23). Manumission was less common, too, in the provinces: Taylor says that only about 37% of the commemorated citizens of Italian towns other than Rome were freed rather than freeborn; that’s about half the ratio she found at the capital. Manumission was most common in the emperor’s family (e.g., Wiedemann 1985: 163). As Dio put it: “The freedmen of Caesar were many and wealthy” (*History*, liv.21.2).

Slaves were often freed young. James Harper averaged ages at death in inscriptions of slaves, freedmen, and freeborn; he found the mean age for freedmen to be around 25 years, and argued that slaves who survived to maturity in Rome had a “considerable” chance of being freed (1972: 342). In the *Familia Caesaris*, Weaver concluded that manumission was not uncommon before age 30, but was most common from 30 to 40—that makes early manumission less common for imperial slaves (1972: 103–104; cf. Wiedemann 1985: 163).

Female slaves were freed more often. This is true, at least, for a couple

of groups. In a sample of 998 records of Delphic manumissions, 63% of freed slaves were women; and in a sample of 173 freed slaves from the *Familia Caesaris* whose ages at death were recorded, 27, or almost 16% were women—twice the proportion of women found in the *Familia Caesaris* overall (Hopkins 1978: 139; Weaver 1972: 101–102; see too Rawson 1986a: 188–190).

Last but not least, *vernae* were especially likely to be freed. The best evidence comes from records of Delphic manumissions. From 200 BC to AD 100, 357 freed slaves were home-born, 259 were known aliens, and another 621 were of unknown origin. In other words, 58% of known origins were homeborn (Hopkins 1978: 140; see too Westermann 1955: 98). It is consistent that in Rawson's study of Roman inscriptions, 78% of 322 *vernae* of specified age were under 15. It seems reasonable to guess that older *vernae* were *liberti*—freed (Rawson 1986a: 188–191; compare Shaw 1991: 81). Interestingly, a similar pattern holds for *alumni*, the “foster” children for whom patrons also felt a “paternal affection” and who sometimes, Rawson says, might have been their natural children. Of 194 *alumni* of specified age, 77% were under 15—again, older *alumni* often might have been freed (pp. 173–180).

Why were so many slaves freed? Many have answered: to turn a profit (e.g., Treggiari 1969: 19–20; Hopkins 1978: 131–132; Bradley 1984: 83–84). As Hopkins points out, “Roman society was not marked by altruism” (1978: 117). Freedom might have been the most effective incentive to good work; and a good worker might have paid a high price to be freed. Hopkins found over 70 references, mainly in the *Digest*, to slaves who bought manumission; slaves at Delphi and elsewhere sometimes paid considerable sums for their freedom. Hopkins suggests that they saved up their *peculium* for that purpose, and that masters profited further by services performed, e.g., as *operae*, after these slaves were freed (pp. 125–30, 158–63). It makes sense that some reward should be held out to slaves who worked hard. But there are a few holes in this argument. First, it is not clear how often slaves paid to get freed. Some passages in the *Digest* suggest slaves freed *inter vivos* were automatically given their *peculium*, and that sometimes *peculium* was given to slaves freed by will (e.g., *Digest*, 15.1.53, 33.8.8.7, see Watson 1987: 96–97). Second, couldn't masters have extracted services, more or less equivalent to *operae*, more easily from slaves who hadn't been freed? To give a slave his freedom was, by definition, to lose control of him at least to some extent. Finally why, if liberty was an incentive to work, should young, female, homegrown slaves in and around Rome most often have got their freedom? Why free a young slave with his productive life ahead of him? Why favor females who, as Treggiari's work suggests, had less work to do? Why favor *vernae* over slaves who could be hand-picked at auction for their physical or mental ability to do a job? And why not hold out the carrot of manumission to provincial slaves, and even to agricultural slaves, more often?

Why else free slaves? Others have answered to legitimize children. That might be done in two ways. One, since children inherited their mothers' status, was to free a future mother. The other was to free her children. The biases to free female slaves, and to free them young, make sense if women were manumitted to be married. Other facts fit too. In the *Institutes* of Gaius, "just causes" for early manumission—before age 30—include blood relationship (include *filii naturales*), foster relationship (*alumni*), future services (if the slave was over 18), and intent to marry (e.g., Weaver 1972: 97). Weaver finds the last condition explicit in inscriptions of imperial freedwomen (1972: 99–100), several references to marriage with freedwomen exist in the *Digest* (see Treggiari 1979: 200). But who married them? Masters, or others? According to Hopkins, money paid to free young Delphic women may have been put up by suitors from other houses, masters might have retained a lien on the women's services, and some of their children, besides (1978: 169). Alternatively, Romans might have freed slave women in order to marry them themselves. As Treggiari and others agree, "freeing a slave mistress might be a sensible move to ensure the free birth of the children" (1969: 213, see too Brunt 1971: 144, Hopkins 1978: 127, Harris 1982: 120). In this case, masters gained reproductive assets—daughters and sons, though they lost economic assets—slaves.

Last but not least, Romans might have freed their bastard children. Again, several facts fit. Among slaves, the home grown variety were more likely to be *filii naturales*—this explains why *vernae* were more likely to be freed. In the *Institutes*, blood relationship was one cause for early manumission—this explains why slaves were freed young. And if polygyny paralleled power in the Roman empire, as it did in other empires, then both the number of a man's slave women and of his bastard children should have increased with proximity to the emperor—this explains why slaves were freed least often on the latifundia and in the mines, less often in the provinces, more often in Rome, and most often in the *Familia Caesaris*. That there are "very many" freedmen in the inscriptions under 30 suggests masters and slaves shared a blood relationship (e.g., Rawson 1986b: 12–13), so do expressions like *patronus et frater* and *filius et libertus* in the epitaphs (Weaver 1972: 184). It seems that, in some cases, rich Romans may have used a few of their slave women as rich men in other empires used their concubines—as bearers of contingency heirs. Given monogamous marriage, and a barren wife, a concubine's children have advanced to the status of heirs (see Goody 1976, 1983, 1990, Betzig 1992a,b). Among concubines mentioned in the *Digest*, the most common are a man's freedwomen (e.g., *Digest*, 24.1.3.1, 25.7.1 pr., 25.7.2, see Treggiari 1979: 193). In other cases, Romans may have used their slave women as men in other empires used most of their harem women—as bearers of children without rights to inheritance or succession. The bulk of a man's estate went to children by his legitimate wife. Still, other children by his slave women may have been left gleanings enough to make them rich and powerful—and even polygynous?—freedmen.

Wealth, Position, Wives, and Children

If some historians are surprised that Romans freed so many slaves, others are amazed that freedmen could have so much money. Ludwig Friedlander goes on at length: "To be as rich as a freedman was proverbial" (1908 v. 1: 43). Narcissus, at 400,000,000 sesterces, was the richest Roman of his time. Pallas was worth 300,000,000 sesterces, others of Claudius' freedmen had almost as much. Men like these "outbid the Roman aristocracy in luxury," "their parks and gardens were the largest and most beautiful in the city," "their palaces were the most pretentious in all Rome" (p. 45). How did they get so rich? Their patrons helped. Freedmen, like Petronius' Trimalchio, were notoriously good at commerce, but then as now it took money to make it. Patrons provided *peculium*, they offered lucrative jobs, like procuratorships, by which slaves might build on that capital, and they often returned the enhanced *peculium* on freedom (e.g., Friedlander 1908, Hopkins 1978, Watson 1987). Freedmen, like knights, got rich in commerce and trade—as younger sons, disinherited by primogeniture, have across empires (e.g., Betzig, this volume). But most important of all, where they lacked legitimate sons, patrons occasionally left a *bona fide* inheritance to their freedmen and slaves. That slaves could be heirs is confirmed in Horace and other literary sources, which say men without sons made freedmen their heirs, it's confirmed in the inscriptions, in which rich men and women often leave property to their freedmen and women, it's confirmed in the *Institutes*, the *Digest*, and the *Codex*, in which slaves and freedmen were made heirs with or without adoption (Horace, *Satires*, II 3: 122, Balsdon 1962: 194, Watson 1987: 26–29, 81–82). That slaves could be heirs is suggested, too, by the fact that slaves and freedmen were trusted with family financial matters: slaves, like sons, might enter into contracts on behalf of their *pateres*, freedmen, like brothers, might be obliged to serve as tutors or guardians of their dead masters' estates, and freedmen were "curiously" left their master's instructions to keep properties within his family (Watson 1987: 90, Saller 1991: 43, 45, Johnston 1988: 88–97). Last but not least, that slaves could be heirs is consistent with the facts that freedmen so often earned a place in their masters' tombs ("burial and commemoration were so closely associated with heirship"—Saller and Shaw 1984: 126), and that freed slaves were given their masters' *nomen* ("one's own freedmen, who took the same gentile name, were seen as substitute descendants"—Treggiari 1991b: 368). Edward Champlin, who looked at what fragments of evidence exist on Roman testation, from literary sources, legal sources, papyri, and inscriptions, concluded that testators were much more likely to leave estates to friends and freedmen than to cousins or other more distant kin, as Champlin says himself, "the slave named as heir might have been an illegitimate child of the testator," left the inheritance in the absence of legitimate sons (1991: 126, 137). Even when legitimates got the lion's share of an estate, freedmen and women might be left with scavengers' surfeits, there are literary ex-

amples of this, and a whole title in the *Digest* is devoted to the subject (*Digest*, 34 1; see Gardner 1986: 181). Slaves might even be left money by third parties as a favor to their masters: Herod left 500 talents to Augustus' wife, children, friends and freedmen; Marcus Aurelius gave "many privileges and much honour and money" to the freedman of his co-regent, Lucius Verus (Friedlander 1908 v.1. 38, SHA, *Marcus Antoninus*, xx 5). According to Treggiari, "a freedman might make a respectable fortune in trade . . . , but most of the outstandingly rich freedmen won their money either by exploiting the position won for them by their patron's status . . . , or by inheriting from a childless patron" (1969: 239). Her ellipses are filled with examples.

There is as much consensus that freedmen could have high status. It was apparent to Tacitus that "ex-slaves are everywhere." Most voters, public servants, and officials' attendants were freedmen; most knights, and many senators, had a freed ancestor (*Annals*, xiii 27). So did a few emperors. Otho, according to Suetonius, was grandson of a knight and a humble girl who "may not even have been freeborn;" according to the *Scriptores*, Pertinax was the son of a freedman, and "Macrinus under the reign of Commodus was a freedman and a public prostitute" (Suetonius, *Otho*, 1 SHA, *Pertinax*, i 1; *Opellius Macrinus*, iv 3). One honorary consul, under Caligula, was the son of "an attractive ex-slave," and called the emperor his father (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv.73). A "cautious estimate," overall, is that about one in five of the Italian aristocracy was descended from slaves (Weaver 1991: 173). And freedmen who fathered the Roman aristocracy often did well themselves. Hopkins, in his study of succession to the Roman senate, found seats were seldom passed from father to son. Instead, a "patrimonial administration" emerged, "centered on the imperial palace" — this was the administration of imperial slaves and freedmen (1983: 124–125). In Hopkins' words, "during the republic, Roman senators had been masters of the world. Now they had to subserve an emperor; and in order to acquire favours from him, they often had to fawn on his slaves and ex-slaves" (p. 77). As Weaver says, men in the imperial civil service were "almost entirely the emperor's freedmen and slaves," they were, among other things, in charge of petitions, chief secretary, and head of the finance administration (1972: 1–2; Dio, *History*, lxi 30 6). Outside of Rome, imperial freedmen were generals, admirals, provincial governors, and tax collectors (Hopkins 1978: 116; SHA, *Antoninus Elagabalus*, xi 1). When, early in the second century, Pliny inaugurated Trajan with his panegyric, he accused earlier emperors of having been "both lords over citizens and slaves of freedmen" (*Panegyricus*, 88 1–2). But even Trajan wasn't immune from their influence; Hadrian might have got Trajan to adopt him partly by "wooing and bribing" his freedmen. Even if the influence of freedmen abated a little under a few "good" emperors, in the long run it seems to have grown (e.g., Westermann 1954, Hopkins 1978, 1983, Wiedemann 1987). The "elusive" explanation might have something to do with filiation. the senatorial aristocracy of the Roman republic might

have been, over the empire, replaced by an imperial dynasty made up—at least in part—of the emperor’s illegitimate sons (cf Hopkins 1983 176f)

Finally freedmen, like free men, seem to have used money and status themselves to find women and father children. Imperial freedmen, in particular, could be promiscuous. For instance Verus, Marcus Aurelius’ co-regent, “built an exceedingly notorious villa on the Clodian Way” where he “revelled” for days at a time in “boundless extravagance” with his friends and freedmen (SHA, *Verus*, viii 8), under Commodus, imperial freedmen “refrained from no form of mischief” indulging, among other things, in “wantonness and debauchery” (Dio, *History*, lxxiii 10 2). Again, imperial freedmen, and imperial slaves, very much unlike the unfortunate masses of provincial, agricultural, and mining slaves, got “married” and sired *spuri filii* and other commemorated children (Treggiari 1975a, 1981b, 1982, Rawson 1966, 1974, 1989). It seems plausible, then, that well-to-do freedmen followed in the footsteps of their well-to-do patrons (see Betzig, this volume). When they could, they got legitimate children by free, well-connected, and well-to-do wives (e.g., Dixon 1985, Treggiari 1984, 1991a, Corbier 1991), and they got illegitimate children by promiscuity, and by slavery. Rich freedmen, like rich patrons, might father two or three legitimate children, and rich freedmen, like rich patrons, often owned hundreds, or even thousands, of slaves—one of the Metelli family, early in the first century AD, bequeathed 4,116 (e.g., Treggiari 1975a 400, Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, xxxiii 134). And when they died “scores” of these freedmen, along with their children and their children’s children, were saved a place in their patrons’ tombs (e.g., Carcopino 1940 102).

DISCUSSION

Let’s be skeptical. How much did the Roman family resemble families in our own society, how much did it resemble families in other empires?

What’s in the sources? How much evidence is in the Roman histories that Roman emperors, like other emperors, had sexual access to women other than their wives? These sources are thin—they are thickest on Julius Caesar and the first eleven emperors, both Tacitus’ and Suetonius’ accounts, probably the best we have, end with the Flavian Dynasty. And these sources are purely descriptive—except in Commodus’ case, nobody bothered to count an emperor’s consorts, and the 300 concubines ascribed to Commodus are nothing, of course, but a guess. On the other hand, these sources are consistent—with the single exception of “old and feeble” Vespasian, every one of the first twelve Caesars is explicitly said to have enjoyed sexual access to several women, a majority of them is explicitly said to have taken married women from their husbands, and at least three—Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius—are explicitly said to have had women procured for the sake of sex, sometimes by force. This picture is not just consistent on the first twelve

Caesars. It fits with fragments of evidence on later emperors. And it fits with evidence on emperors in other empires. It seems safe to say that Roman emperors did *not* “radiate marital propriety,” if “propriety” means “fidelity,” most of them were promiscuous, some of them extremely.

What’s in the studies? Enough to suggest that there were millions of slaves in the Roman empire, that women were bought and sold at least as often as men; and that they often functioned as breeders. Sexual access to slave women was taken for granted by their masters but taken at risk by other men, and masters cared materially and emotionally for some of their slave women’s children, often manumitted them, and gave some of them great wealth, high position, and a place in their family tombs. Access to slaves varied with wealth and power, lesser aristocrats early in the empire, like Pliny the Younger, might have had several hundred, greater aristocrats later in the empire, like Melania the Christian, had tens of thousands. Emperors were the greatest slave owners of all.

All of which suggests that Syme was right about aristocratic bastards. Most of them were sons and daughters of slaves. “The bastard followed the civil status of his mother” (1960: 325). Paternity, never assured, wasn’t even ascribed.

Why bother to look for bastards in the Roman aristocracy? For lots of reasons. For one, family history is intrinsically interesting to most people. For another, it’s part and parcel of history in a larger context. As, for instance, Richard Saller and David Kertzer point out in the introduction to their new book on the Roman family, families effect and are caused by demographics, economics, politics, and religion (1991: 8). But family history is most important because, if Darwin was right, reproduction is the reason we do everything else. As Darwin (1859: 52) said himself:

Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life, or more difficult—at least I have found it so—than constantly to bear this struggle in mind. Yet unless it be thoroughly engrained in the mind, the whole economy of nature, with every fact on distribution, rarity, abundance, extinctions and variation, will be dimly seen or quite misunderstood.

In this light, everything we do or have ever done—from demographics to economics to politics to religion—might be understood, more or less, as reproductive competition.

There is, again, plenty of evidence for competition in the Roman empire, and there is plenty of evidence that winners in Rome, as in other empires, came off much better than losers. Consider modest Augustus’ fortune: he left 1,500,000 gold pieces to his heirs (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 101). Consider mild-mannered Claudius’ despotism: he killed men “on unsupported charges,” including 35 senators and 300 knights, with “little apparent concern” (Suetonius, *Claudius*, 29). Were wealth and power like this ends in themselves? Or were they means to the spread of genes? I think the evidence here, though not conclusive, is suggestive. Power in the Roman empire, as

in other empires, seems to have made polygyny possible. Politics seems, at least in part, to have been a means to reproductive ends.

That leaves me with my favorite question: When, and why, did polygyny and despotism end, and monogamy and democracy begin? Some people have said the Roman empire was monogamous (e.g., Murdock and Wilson 1972, MacDonald 1990). This evidence isn't persuasive. Others have said monogamy began in the Middle Ages under the Catholic Church (e.g., Duby 1983, Herlihy 1985). But political, economic, and even reproductive inequality seem to have characterized medieval Europe too (Betzig 1992b). It seems to me that one event changed all that: the switch to an industrial economy in Europe in the past few centuries (Betzig 1982, 1986, 1991). Reproductive inequality, and the economic and political inequality that are prerequisite to it, seem to have declined in that one space and time. *Why* is another matter.

It gives me real pleasure to thank the historians who saved me, line by line, from mistakes of etiquette, interpretation, and fact: Susan Treggiari, Richard Saller, Jane Gardner, and Beryl Rawson sent reprints, lists of references, and even class handouts; they gave good general criticism, and they corrected errors as particular as typos. I've never had more fun—and they're partly to blame.

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