

## **Eduqas Latin GCSE**

Resource material for Component 3B:  
Roman Civilisation

# **Slavery in the Roman World**

(Examination in 2027-29)

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## Introduction

This booklet on Slavery in the Roman World is intended to support teachers and students preparing for the WJEC Eduqas GCSE Latin Component 3B examination in Roman Civilisation in 2027, 2028 and 2029.

### Important notice: the purpose and status of this booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to provide teachers with a wide range of sources for their teaching. It should therefore be considered only as a teaching support publication. Such booklets are not intended to be definitive catalogues of sources which may be used in the examination and students should not attempt, nor be encouraged, to 'rote learn' the sources contained within. Although examiners may use some of the sources in the booklets, other similar sources may also be used in the GCSE examination.

Likewise, teachers should feel under no obligation to study any or all of the sources contained herein with their students.

### Additional Support Resources

Teachers may find additional support materials in the following textbooks which are endorsed by WJEC Eduqas.

- The Cambridge Latin Course – Books I, II, III IV and V  
<https://www.clc.cambridgescp.com/course>
- Suburani – Books 1 and 2. <https://hands-up-education.org/textbook.html>

## Topic 7: Slavery in the Roman World

### The road to enslavement

#### Prisoners of war, pirates and kidnap

- People were captured in war, or individuals were sold or self-sold into slavery (although the Romans generally disapproved of the enslavement of Roman citizens) and infants abandoned at birth may have been 'rescued' and brought up as enslaved.
- People could also be enslaved for debts or as punishment for crimes.
- There were two slave markets in Rome. One was by the Temple of Castor in the Forum, the other was in the Campus Martius.

#### A neck chain for enslaved prisoners found in Llyn Cerrig Bach





## Roman Slaves in chains



## Prisoners of war were often sold as slaves

Aemilius Paullus [a Roman general] captured seventy cities in Epirus [in Greece] and enslaved 150,000 human beings.

**Strabo, *Geography* VII.7**

The Romans took possession of the city ... thirteen thousand in number were sold by the Romans as spoils of war along with the other loot.

**Diodorus Siculus, *The History of the World* 23**

Gaius Julius Mygdonius, born in Parthia, born to a free man, was captured in his youth and sent as a slave into Roman territory.

**CIL 11.137 (ILS 1980)**

## Pirates would sell captured people as slaves

The slave trade was very profitable, because it was easy to capture slaves. Delos was a large and very rich market, with the capacity to receive and export thousands of slaves in a single day. The reason for this growth in the slave trade is that the Romans had become rich after the destruction of Carthage and Corinth and began to use large numbers of slaves. The pirates saw how easy it was to make money in this way, so they sprang up all over the place, making raids and trading in slaves.

**Strabo, *Geography* XIV.5.2**

## Born into slavery

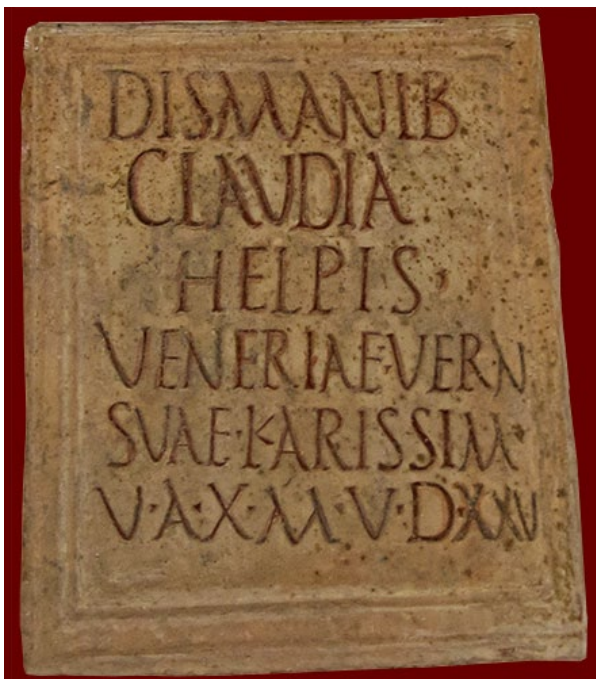
- Children may be born into slavery or even sold by their parents.
- The children of enslaved women were also enslaved.
- These children were known as *vernae* and belonged to the owner of their mother, who had no rights to her own child.
- The owner could decide to sell the mother or the child, separating them from each other. Although, the later Roman emperor, Theodosius, passed a law addressing this cruelty.

## The free members of the household may form close bonds with their slaves

To the spirits of the dead. For Lucius Annaeus Firm(ius), who lived 5 years, 2 months, 6 days, 6 hours, who was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> July and died on the 10<sup>th</sup> September. Annaia Ferusa set this up for her dearest household slave.

Ashmolean Museum ANChandler.3.90. H. 0.38, W. 0.21, D. 0.4.

## Tombstones of children born into slavery



DIS MANIB[us]

CLAVDIA

HELPIS

VENERIAE VERN[ae]

SVAE KARRISSIM[ae]

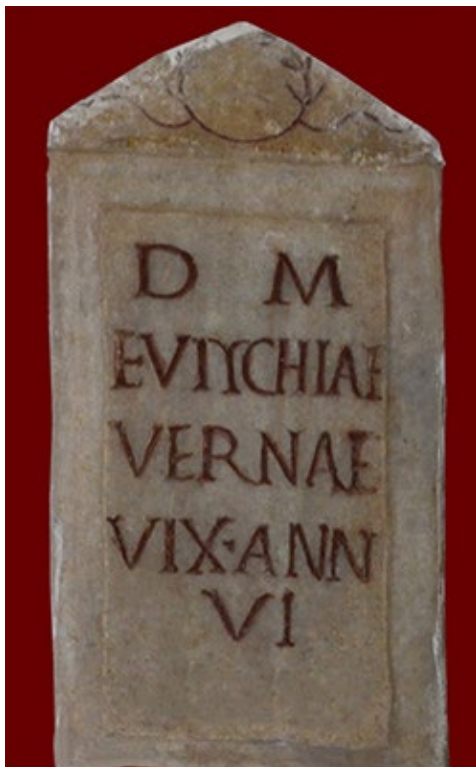
[hoc monumentum fecit]

V[ixit] A[nnos] X M[enses] V D[ies] XXV

To the Spirits of the Underworld

Claudia Helpis made this monument for her  
dearest Veneria, her slave

She lived 10 years, 5 months, 15 days



D[is] M[anibus]

EVTYCHIAE

VERNAE

VIX[it] ANN[os]

VI

To the spirits of the underworld

For the slave, Eutychia

She lived 6 years

### **Emperor Trajan's response to Pliny's inquiry regarding the status of those who claim they were raised as slaves after being exposed at birth**

The question you raise of free persons who were exposed at birth, then brought up in slavery by those who found them, has often been discussed, but I can find nothing in the records of my predecessors which could have applied to all the provinces ... Therefore, I am of the opinion that those who wish to claim freedom on these grounds should not be prevented from publicly declaring their right to freedom and they should not have to buy their freedom by paying back the cost of their upbringing.

**Pliny, *Letters* 10.66**

### **The emperor Theodosius legislates against splitting up the families of enslaved people**

Who can tolerate that children should be separated from parents, sisters from brothers, wives from husbands? Therefore, anyone who has separated slaves and dragged them off to different owners must recover these slaves and place them with a single owner ... Take care that from now on no complaint persist about the separation of slave families.

***The Law Code of Theodosius 2.25.1***

## Voluntary enslavement

Gaius Melissus was freeborn, but abandoned by his parents because of an argument. Through the care and efforts of the man who brought him up, he received a good education, and was given to Maecenas to employ as a secretary. Because he found that Maecenas liked him and treated him as a friend, he continued to be a slave even though his mother claimed his freedom on his behalf, since he preferred his present status to that of his birth.

Suetonius, *Grammarians* 21 = Wiedemann 121

## Cost of enslaved people

- The cost of enslaved people varied considerably depending on their gender, age, looks and skills.
- The average price for an unskilled or low-skilled enslaved person might have been around 2,000 sesterces.
- A skilled enslaved person would cost considerably more, as shown in the sources below:

For, admitting that vineyards demand a very generous outlay, still seven *iugera* require the labour of not more than one vinedresser, upon whom people in general set a low value, thinking that even some scoundrel may be acquired from the auction-block, but I, disagreeing with the opinion of the majority, consider a high-priced vinedresser of first importance ... his purchase price [is] to be 6000 or, better, 8000 sesterces.

Columella, *de re rustica*, Book 3.3.8

## Horace describes how a slave dealer may attempt to make a sale

Here's a handsome lad, lovely from head to toe, 8000 sesterces and it's done, he's yours, born in-house, quick to obey his master's orders, trained in Greek letters, adaptable to any task, wet clay that can be moulded however you wish: He'll even sing as you drink, artlessly but sweetly. Extravagant claims knock confidence, if a dealer who's eager to push his wares overdoes them. Nothing's pricking me though: I'm poor but in funds. You'll not get an offer like this: no one will easily see the like from me. He's only skipped once, as they do, and hid under the stairs fearing the strap on the wall. Give me the cash, if that lapse of his don't bother you.

Horace *Letters* 2.2.3–19

**Roman officials, called *aediles*, supervised the selling of enslaved people to ensure they were sold honestly:**

- In good health and honest
- Were not wanted for a crime
- Were not runaways or stolen

Let care be taken that the bill of sale for each slave be written in such a way that it can be known exactly what disease or defect each one has, and which one is a runaway or a wanderer, or not innocent of any offence.

**Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 4.2.1**

### **A record of the sale of an enslaved woman**

Julius Germanus took possession of her from Agathos Daemon just as she was. She is nonreturnable, except for epilepsy or external claim. The price was 1200 drachmas of silver which Agathos received in full from Julius Germanus when the handwritten sales contract was made out. For this amount Julius Germanus paid the sales tax on the aforementioned slave. A warranty on this slave has been given by Agathos Daemon according to all claims made in the sales contract.

***P. Oxy. 95 (Select Papyri 32)***

### **People may also ‘rent out’ their enslaved people**

Glaukios ... has rented out to Achillas ... for a period of one year his female slave Tapontos to work at the weavers’ trade. Glaukios, who has rented her out, will make sure that she is absent from him neither day nor night, and that she will be fed and will receive other necessities, except clothing, from Achillas; she will be clothed by her owner. The rental fee for the whole year is 420 silver drachmas, which I Achillas will pay to Glaukios once the rental contract has been ratified, in monthly instalments, as due, at the end of the month without delay. The slave Tapontos will have four days off in the month of Tybi and similarly four days off in the month of Pachon for holidays, a total of eight days, for which nothing will be deducted from the rental fee. If, however, she will take more time off for festivals or illness or some pressing necessity on the part of her Master, the rental fee for those days will be deducted. If her Master needs her during the night to bake bread, he will send for her without anything being deducted from the rental fee. The rental contract is valid.

***P. Wisc. 16.5***



## Lives of enslaved people

### Urban slaves: tasks and responsibilities in the home

#### Relief showing an enslaved person serving drinks



#### Relief showing an enslaved person caring for a child, gravestone, Cologne, 3rd century AD



**Relief showing an enslaved person working as a scribe**



**A wall painting from Pompeii depicting a banquet**





### Seneca describes the tasks performed by enslaved people at a banquet

When we recline at a banquet, one slave mops up the disgorged food, another crouches beneath the table and gathers up the left-overs of the tipsy guests. Another carves the priceless game birds [...]. Hapless fellow, to live only for the purpose of cutting fat capons correctly [...]. Another, who serves the wine, must dress like a woman and wrestle with his advancing years; he cannot get away from his boyhood; he is dragged back to it; and though he has already acquired a soldier's figure, he is kept beardless by having his hair smoothed away or plucked out by the roots, and he must remain awake throughout the night, dividing his time between his master's drunkenness and his lust; in the chamber he must be a man, at the feast a boy.

Seneca, Letter 47

### An enslaved girl is mistreated by her mistress

The mistress' house regime is no less cruel than a Sicilian tyrant's court. If she has an appointment, then she wants to be beautified even above the usual standard... Unlucky Psecas, the slave girl, will be doing her mistress's hair, with her own scalp torn, and her breasts and shoulders bared.

'Why is this curl sticking out?' the mistress demands, with the bull-hide strap ready to swiftly avenge the foul crime of a twisted curl. Why is it Psecas' fault? How can it be the slave girl's fault if your own nose displeases you?

Juvenal, Satire 6

### A mosaic showing enslaved women performing tasks in the home





Enslaved women such as these shown in the picture would have helped their mistress to dress and run the household, performing tasks such as helping with childcare and the general upkeep of the house.

Relief showing enslaved people on a treadmill operating a crane. Monument of the Haterii, Rome



## Rural slaves: tasks and responsibilities in the country

### Enslaved men working in the fields



### Role of the *vilicus* (overseer)

The *vilicus* (overseer) must look after the farm equipment and the tools. He must keep in good repair in the store room all the tools the slaves need. He must organise the slaves' clothing, which should protect them from the wind and the rain. The best clothes are leather tunics with long sleeves or cloaks with hoods. He should be first out of bed in the morning, as it is most important that the slaves begin work at the crack of dawn and get on with it without slacking.

**Columella, *de re rustica* (Meg Thorpe adaptation and translation )**

### Rations for rural enslaved people

Rations for the household: for those who labour, in winter, four *modii* of wheat, and in summer, four and a half. For the overseer, the housekeeper, the foreman, and the shepherd, three *modii* of wheat. For the chain-gang, four pounds of bread in winter, five when they begin to work the vines, then return to four when the figs ripen.

**Cato, *de agricultura* 56-57 (CSCP Translation)**

## **Columella gives advice on the choice and treatment of rural enslaved people**

Do not appoint a foreman from that type of slave who is physically attractive and certainly not from one previously employed in the city where all skills are directed towards increasing pleasure. This lazy and sleepy type of slave is accustomed to having a lot of time on his hands, to lounging around the Campus Martius, the Circus Maximus, the theatres, the gambling dens, the snack bars and brothels ... always dreaming of these same foolish pleasures. If a city slave continues to daydream when he has been transferred to a farm, the landowner suffers the loss not just of this slave but actually of his whole state. You should choose someone who has been hardened to farm work from infancy, and tested by experience...

The foreman should be given a female companion, both to keep him in line and also to assist him ...

The foreman should choose the slaves' clothing with an eye to efficiency rather than fashion, ... to protect them from the wind, cold and rain with long sleeved leather tunics, patchwork cloaks, or hooded capes. All of these garments protect the wearer from the weather, and so no day is so unbearable that out of doors work cannot be done. The foreman should not only be skilled in agricultural operations but also be endowed with such strength and virtue of mind (at least as far as his slave's personality permits) that he may oversee men neither with too much leniency nor with cruelty. ... There is no better method of maintaining control over even the most worthless of men than demanding hard labour ... After their exhausting toil, they will turn their attention to rest and sleep rather than to fun and games ... the landowner [should] inspect the slaves chained in the prison, to examine whether they are securely chained, whether their quarters are safe and well guarded, whether the foreman has put anyone in chains or released anyone from chains without his master's knowledge.

A diligent master ... should even grant them [the enslaved] the opportunity of registering complaints against those who have harmed them either through cruelty or dishonesty ... I have given exemption from work and sometimes freedom to very fertile female slaves when they have borne many children ... For a woman who has three sons, exemption from work is the reward; for a woman who has more, freedom.

**Columella, *de re agricultura*, 1.8.1. 2, 5, 6, 9,10, 11, 16, 18. 19**

## **Conditions in the mines were the worst of all**

The slaves who are engaged in the working of the mines produce profits for their masters in amounts almost beyond belief. They themselves wear out their bodies from working in the mineshafts both by day and night. Many die because of the excessive hardships they suffer. They are given no rest or break from their work but rather are forced by the lashes of the foremen to endure the most dreadful of hardships; thus they wear out their lives in misery... although they often pray more for death than for life because of the extent of their suffering.

**Diodorus Siculus, *History of the World*, 5.38.1**



## Servi publici

- These were enslaved people who were owned by a community.
- Public slaves in Rome were under the authority of the Roman Senate, whilst in other cities they were under that of the local council.
- Public slaves in Rome were mostly employed as attendants to priests and magistrates.
- They also worked as custodians of public buildings, such as temples and basilicas.
- From Augustus to Claudius, a *familia publica aquaria*, comprised of 240 public slaves, was used for the maintenance of the water conduits.
- Other *servi publici* carried out generic public works (*opera publica*).

### Public slaves who served the Roman state could expect better chances of freedom

Scipio released those who were citizens of New Carthage and restored to them their city and also all the property which the war had spared to them. The artisans numbered about two thousand men. These he announced would be public slaves of the Roman people, with the not distant hope of freedom if they should actively exert themselves in providing the equipment for war.

Livy, *ab urbe condita libri XXVI.47.1-2*

### An enslaved attendant of the temple of Vesta saves Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso

Piso made his way to the temple of Vesta, where he was admitted by the compassion of one of the public slaves, who concealed him in his chamber.

Tacitus, *Histories* 1.43

### Public slaves may also be employed to provide services to the city

Among the ancients three men were appointed for the purpose of providing against fire, who, because they kept watch at night, were styled *nocturni*. The *aediles* and the tribunes of the plebs also sometimes took part; and there were, in addition, a detachment of public slaves stationed around the gate and the walls, whence they could be summoned if necessary. There were also certain bodies of private slaves who extinguished fires, either for pay, or gratuitously.

Paulus, *On the Duties of the Prefect of the Night Watch*, 1.15.1

## Attending to the city's water supply

There are two crews of slaves used to maintain aqueducts: one belongs to the state, the other to the imperial household ... Both crews are divided into several groups of labourers: overseers, reservoir managers, watchmen, pavers, plasterers, and other workmen. Of these, some must be outside the city for jobs which have not great magnitude, but which nevertheless seemed to require immediate attention. The men inside the city stationed at reservoirs and public baths will apply their energies, especially in sudden emergencies, so that an abundant supply of water can be transferred from several regions of the city to the one where the need exists.

Frontinus, *The Aqueducts of Rome* 2.116 and 117

## Gladiators, charioteers, actors

- The Romans frowned upon citizens performing in public, therefore most performers were slaves, freed men, or foreigners.
- Gladiators, actors and dancers, and possibly charioteers, were among those persons in Rome who held the status of *infamia* or disrepute, regardless of whether they were enslaved or free.

## Despite their enslaved status, gladiators, actors and charioteers were very popular

The characteristic vices of this city, conceived, it seems to me, almost in the mother's womb - the mania for actors, and the passion for gladiatorial shows and horse-racing

Tacitus *Dialogues* 29.3-4

## An inscription from the tomb of a charioteer called Polynices

M. Aurelius Polynices, a home-born slave, lived 29 years, 9 months, and 5 days. He won 739 races, receiving the palm of victory. Of these victories, 655 came with the Red team, 55 with the Green, 12 with the Blue, and 17 with the White. He won 40,000 sesterces 3 times, he won 30,000 sesterces 26 times, and 11 times he won a race with no prize. He raced in an eight-horse chariot 8 times, in a ten-horse chariot 9 times, and in a six-horse chariot 3 times.

*ILS 5286.1* from near Rome

## Pliny writes about Quadratilla's troupe of actors

At the most recent sacerdotal games, after her pantomime actors had been entered in the opening event, when Quadratus and I were leaving the theatre together, he said to me: "Do you know that today I have seen my grandmother's freedmen dancing for the first time?"

Pliny, *Letters*, VII.24

## **Rights and responsibilities**

### **Hierarchy of enslaved people within the *familia***

- It is likely that there existed a hierarchy within Roman families' enslaved populations, with some enslaved members of the *familia* holding higher status and privileges than others.
- This hierarchy would have been based on factors such as skills and education, cost, length of time in the *familia*, gender, location (urban vs. rural), and even proximity to the master.
- While the term *familia* refers to the members of the household, including enslaved members, a distinction was made between those working in the household and those performing agricultural or other labours.

### **Varro gives advice on how to manage enslaved people**

Slaves should be neither timid nor brazen. They ought to have men who have knowledge of basic reading and writing skills and some learning as their overseers ... It is very important that the overseer be experienced in farming operations, for he must not only give orders but also perform the work, so the other slaves may imitate him and understand that he has been made their boss for good reason. He is superior to them in knowledge. However, overseers should not be allowed to force obedience with whips rather than words if words can achieve the same result. Don't buy too many slaves of the same nationality, for this is very often accustomed to cause domestic quarrels. You should make your foreman more eager to work by giving them rewards and by seeing that they have a *peculium*<sup>1</sup> and female companions from among their fellow slaves, who will bear them children ... Slaves, become more eager to work when treated generously with respect to food or more clothing, or time off for permission to graze some animal of their own on the farm, and other things of this kind.

**Varro, *On Agriculture*. 1.17.1, 3-5, 7**

### **The poet Martial complains that the freedman who looked after him from birth continues to try to control him**

You had been the rocker of my cradle, Charidemus, and guardian and constant companion for me as a boy. Now the barber's towels grow black when my beard has been shaved and my girl complains when pricked by my lips; but to you I have not grown up: our estate manager trembles at you, our accountant fears you, the house itself fears you. You allow us neither to play nor to love; you want nothing to be allowed to me and you want everything to be allowed to you. You scold, you watch, you complain, you sigh, and your anger scarcely

<sup>1</sup> Money or property belonging to an enslaved person

refrains from the canes. If I have taken up purple clothes or I have dressed my hair, you exclaim 'Your father had never done those things'; and you count our drinking cups with knotted brow, as if that wine jar were from your cellar. Stop; I cannot bear a kill-joy freedman. My girlfriend will tell you that I am already a man.

**Martial, *Epigrams* 11.39**

## **Education, skills, and methods of influence**

In the days of our forefathers, when anyone's slaves were offered for sale, it was not usual except in special cases to advertise any one of them as *litteratus* but rather as *litterator*, implying that he had a smattering of letters, but was not a finished scholar.

**Orbilius, quoted in Suetonius, *de grammaticis* 4.8**

## **Plutarch informs us that Cato did not wish his son to be taught by an enslaved person**

As soon as the boy showed signs of understanding, his father took him under his own charge and taught him to read, although he had an accomplished slave, Chilo by name, who was a school-teacher and taught many boys. Still, Cato thought it not right, as he tells us himself, that his son should be scolded by a slave or have his ears tweaked when he was slow to learn, still less that he should be indebted to his slave for such a priceless thing as education.

**Plutarch, *The Life of Cato the Elder* 20. 4-7 (adapted)**

## **Attitudes of the free towards the enslaved**

### **Seneca shares his thoughts on how an owner should treat his enslaved people**

I am really pleased to hear that you get on well with your slaves and treat them in a kindly way: that's just what I would expect from someone with your sensible attitude and intelligence.

People are always saying: 'They're only slaves.' I say, they are men. 'Just slaves!' Not at all; they live under the same roof. 'Slaves!' No, simple friends. 'Slaves!' Think for a moment and you'll realise they're our fellow slaves: Fate can do just what she likes with us and with them.

That's why I find it very amusing to hear people say that it is undignified for a man to have a meal with his slave. So why is it undignified? Because 'smart society' says that a master must be surrounded by crowds of slaves at the dinner table. They must stand there while he stuffs so much food down his throat that his stomach can hardly bear the load and finally rebels: he wears himself out more by throwing the whole lot up than he did by shoving it all down. While this is going on, the slaves must stand

absolutely silent: not a word must pass their lips – and no food, either. The smallest noise is beaten back with a stick; the slaves are even beaten for letting slip a cough or a sneeze or a hiccup.

The slightest sound is punished most severely. And they have to stand there all night long, starving and mute.

The outcome of all this is a household of slaves who cannot speak in front of their master's face – so they all talk behind his back. In the good old days, when slaves could talk quite freely in front of their master, even enjoy a conversation with him, they were quite prepared to face the executioner on his behalf and bear the brunt of any danger that might be threatening him. At dinner they were always willing to talk; under torture they never uttered a word. You must have heard the saying 'count every slave your enemy' – well, it's arrogance like this which started that one on its rounds. They are not our enemies when they join our households: we turn them into our enemies.

So treat your slaves kindly and politely; talk to them, discuss things with them, associate with them.

'He's a slave!' people say. But he may think and feel like a free man. 'He's a slave!' they say. Should that be his disgrace? Is there anyone who isn't a slave? Sex is one man's master, money another's, ambition another's. We are all slaves to hope and fear.

**Seneca, *Moral Letters* 47**

### **Cicero expresses concern for his sick slave, Tiro**

I of course wish you to come to me, but I dread the journey for you. You have been most seriously ill: you have been much reduced by a low diet and purgatives, and the ravages of the disease itself. After dangerous illnesses, if some mistake is made, drawbacks are usually dangerous. Moreover, to the two days on the road which it will have taken you to reach Cumae, there will have to be added at once five more for your return journey to Rome. I mean to be at Formiae on the 30th: be sure, my dear Tiro, that I find you there strong and well. My poor studies, or rather ours, have been in a very bad way owing to your absence. However, they have looked up a little owing to this letter from you brought by Acastus. Pompey is staying with me .... He asks me to read him something of ours, but I told him that without you the oracle was dumb. Pray prepare to renew your services to our Muses. My promise shall be performed on the day named: for I have taught you the etymology of *fides*<sup>2</sup>. Take care to make a complete recovery. I shall be with you directly. Goodbye

**Cicero, *Letters*, IV (F XVI, 10)**

### **Pliny expresses concern for his sick slave**

Indeed, my reader Encolpius (the one who is our joy for work or play), found the dust so irritating to his throat that he spat blood, and it will be a sad blow to him and a

<sup>2</sup> Cicero has promised to free Tiro on a certain day.



great loss to me if this makes him unfit for his services to literature when they are his main recommendation. Who else will read and appreciate my efforts, or hold my attention as he does? But the gods promise happier things. The bleeding has stopped and the pain is less severe, and he is a good patient. We are taking every care of him and the doctors are attentive. In addition, the healthy climate here and the complete rest and quiet can provide as much for a cure as for a holiday.

**Pliny, *Letters* 8.1**

**A golden bracelet from Pompeii, given to an enslaved woman by a male slave-owner**



The inscription reads:

(From) the master to his slave-girl

**Seneca points out that the enslaved outnumber the free**

There was once a proposal in the Senate that slaves should be distinguished from free men by their dress. Then it became clear how dangerous it would be if our slaves began to count us.

**Seneca, *On Mercy* 1.24.1**

## Resistance to slavery

### The Spartacus revolt

- Many Roman enslavers, and especially those who owned hundreds of enslaved people, lived with the fear that their slaves might revolt.
- The Spartacus revolt, also known as the Third Servile War, was a slave rebellion against the Roman Republic from 73 to 71 BC, led by the gladiator Spartacus who had escaped from gladiatorial school at Capua with around 70 other enslaved people.
- He was joined by many thousands of runaway slaves, including a large number of Thracians and Gauls, and German survivors of the Cimbric wars, and of herdsmen from the *latifundiae* of Southern Italy, who tended to carry weapons for the defence of the animals they tended. It is estimated that Spartacus grew his forces to in excess of 70,000 men, women and children.
- In 73 BC, the rebels easily defeated the Roman forces sent to deal with them. They defeated the armies of both consuls and the governor of Cisalpine Gaul. The slave army then travelled the length of Italy, plundering as they went.
- Plutarch tells us that although the way was open to their native lands across the Alps and Spartacus understood that they could not expect to defeat the Roman army, his men refused to go and instead preferred to continue to plunder Italy.

It was now no longer the indignity and disgrace of the revolt that harassed the senate, but they were constrained by their fear and peril to send both consuls into the field, as they would to a war of the utmost difficulty and magnitude.

**Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.6**

- After the defeat of the consuls, Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was praetor 3 of 73 BC, was given *imperium* in 72 BC to take over command of the war.
- Appian tells us that it was the Romans' belief that Spartacus and his army may try to march on Rome.

<sup>3</sup> The *praetor* was the second highest office on the *Cursus Honorum*, the pathway of Roman political offices. This office carried *imperium* and military obligations.

### **Plutarch's account of Spartacus' revolt and its defeat**

The senate appointed Crassus to conduct the war. He sent Mummius, his legate, with two legions to follow, but not engage or skirmish with the enemy. However, Mummius attacked and was defeated. Many Romans were slaughtered, others, throwing away their arms, fled. Crassus, after castigating Mummius, rearmed the soldiers and had them swear oaths to keep their arms. The 500 most cowardly men, the first to flee, were divided into 50 decades and one from each decade was chosen by lot to be executed, thus reviving the ancient punishment of decimation, a death which carried shame. Crassus then marched to engage Spartacus, who avoided him and retired through Lucania to the sea. Determined to seize Sicily to rekindle the servile war, he chanced upon some Cilician pirates, who, after coming to terms with him and receiving gifts, deceived him and sailed away. So, Spartacus established his army in the Rhegium peninsula. Crassus, to keep his soldiers busy and the enemy lacking provisions, determined to build a wall across the isthmus ... which Spartacus ignored at first, but with dwindling provisions and seeing he was trapped, he filled up a portion of the ditch with earth, timber and boughs of trees, sent a third of his force across ...

Fearing Spartacus would march on Rome, Crassus took heart when he saw many of Spartacus' men had withdrawn after a quarrel, camping on Lucanian Lake. Crassus attacked, driving them away but the sudden appearance of Spartacus robbed him of pursuit and slaughter ... Crassus sent out 6000 men, instructing them to remain hidden, but they were seen by two women sacrificing for the enemy. Disaster was averted with Crassus' sudden arrival, initiating battle. 12,300 were slain with only two wounded in the back, the rest died standing and fighting in the ranks.

Spartacus then withdrew to mountainous Petelia, followed by a quaestor of Crassus. But he faced about and defeated the Romans, the quaestor was only just dragged to safety. However, this success was his ruin, for the slaves became overconfident, refusing to avoid battle or obey their leaders, whom they surrounded, forcing them to return through Lucania against the Romans. Spartacus drew up his army and pushed his way towards Crassus through many flying weapons and wounded men, killing two centurions. Finally, after his companions had fled, he stood alone, surrounded by enemies, still defending himself he was cut down.

(Based on) **Plutarch, *Life of Crassus* 10-11**

### Appian describes the aftermath of the final battle

So great was the slaughter (of Spartacus' army) that it was impossible to count them. The Roman loss was about 1000. The body of Spartacus was not found. A large number of his men fled from the battlefield to the mountains and Crassus followed them there. They divided themselves in four parts and continued to fight until they all perished except 6000, who were captured and crucified along the whole road from Capua to Rome.

Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 1.14.120

### Punishments for slaves

Owners could beat enslaved people



Enslaved people could be executed by crucifixion. An enslaved person's heel bone or ('calcaneum') showing where the iron nail was driven through it



**The remains of an enslaved Roman's heel bone with a two-inch iron nail driven through, found in Cambridgeshire. The whole skeleton was unearthed during an excavation at the village of Fenstanton in 2017.**

### **The emperor Hadrian legislates against excessive punishment of enslaved people**

Hadrian forbade masters to kill their slaves; capital charges against slaves were to be handled through official courts, and execution, if necessary, was to be carried out by these courts. He forbade a master to sell a male or female slave to a pimp or to a gladiator trainer without first showing good calls. If a slave owner was murdered in his own home, not all his slaves were to be tortured for evidence. Only those who were close enough to have had some knowledge of the case.

**Aelius Spartianus, *The Life of Hadrian* 18.7-11**

### **Running away, theft and murder**

**Enslaved people might be branded for running away or thieving, but this would reduce their value if sold on.**

### **Pliny describes the brutal murder of Larcus Macedo**

Larcus Macedo, an ex-praetor, has fallen victim to his own slaves. Admittedly, he was a cruel and overbearing master too ready to forget that his father had been a slave, or perhaps too keenly conscious of it. He was taking a bath at his house at Formiae when suddenly he found himself surrounded. One slave seized him by the throat while the other struck his face and hit him in the chest and stomach and, shocking to say, his private parts. When they thought he was dead, they threw him onto the hot pavement, to make sure he was not still alive. Whether unconscious or pretending to be so, he lay there motionless, thus making them believe he was quite dead. Some of his more faithful slaves received him, and his mistresses ran up screaming frantically. Roused by their cries and revived by the cooler air, he opened his eyes ... The guilty slaves fled, but most of them have been arrested and a search is being made for the others. Macedo was brought back to life with difficulty, but only for a few days, then he died with the satisfaction of having revenged himself, for he lived to see the same punishment meted out as for murder. There you see the dangers, outrages and insults which we are exposed. No master can feel safe because he is kind and considerate. For it is their brutality, not the reasoning capacity, which leads slaves to murder masters.

**Pliny, *Letters*, 3.14**



**Tacitus, a Roman historian, tells us that all 400 enslaved members of a household had to be executed because one killed their owner**

- **The free Roman people of the community believed this to be an excessive punishment.**
- **They believed that such extreme punishments would prevent other enslaved people taking steps to prevent similar attacks on their owners.**
- **The executions were carried out despite the protests of the local community and the emperor Nero stationed soldiers along the route the condemned had to take in order to prevent further trouble.**

Shortly afterwards, the city prefect, Pedanius Secundus, was murdered by one of his own slaves ... According to the old custom, all the slaves resident under the same roof ought to have been led to execution. In order to protect so many innocent lives, the rapid assembly of the people protested and besieged the senate house. Even within the senate there was a party which protested against excessive harshness, though most members supported the view that the slaves should be killed.

**Tacitus, *Annals* 14.42**

### **Collars worn by an enslaved people, containing inscriptions**



The inscription reads:

I have run away; hold on to me. When you have brought me back to my master Zoninus, you will receive a gold coin.



"Hold me so that I do not escape and return me to my master Viventius on the estate of Callistus,"

4th century AD, via British Museum

**Cicero is annoyed that one of his enslaved people stole from him then ran away never to be found!**

Dionysius, a slave of mine who had the care of my library, worth a large sum of money, having stolen a large number of books, and thinking that he could not escape punishment, fled. He is in your province: my friend Marcus Bolanus and many others saw him at Narona; but they believed his assertion that I had given him his freedom. If you would take the trouble to restore this man to me, I can't tell you how much obliged I shall be to you. It is a small matter in itself; yet my annoyance is serious. Bolanus will inform you where he is and what can be done. If I recover the man by your means, I shall consider myself to have received a great kindness at your hands.

**Cicero, *Letters to his Friends* 13.77**

## Freedom

### Process of manumission

- Enslaved people could be formally given their freedom in several ways:
  - by being included in the census
  - freed in the presence of a magistrate (formal manumission, *manūmissiō iūsta*)
  - granted freedom in an owner's will or even just in the presence of the owner's friends.
- Once free individuals became citizens, however, they continued to owe duties to their former owners and were not eligible for public office.
- Enslaved people may have had the option to buy their own freedom from their owners. It is unlikely that many had the means to do so, but some enslaved people were granted a *peculium*.
- A *peculium* was the property or assets granted to enslaved people by their owners.
- Legally the *peculium* belonged to the owner, but it was considered the enslaved person's property and could be used to purchase freedom.

Barates freed his enslaved woman, Regina, in order to marry her



The inscription reads:

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



### **Marriage may have been a common reason for enslaved women being freed**

1. A patron cannot force a freed woman to marry him against her will.

**Marcianus *The Digestive Laws* 23.2.28**

2. However, if the patron manumitted her for this reason (marriage), she must marry him.

**Ulpian ,*The Digestive Laws* 23.2.29**

### **Reasons for manumission**

In Ancient Rome, most of the slaves who were manumitted received their freedom as a gift because of their hard work and fine service. This type of manumission from an owner was considered the most desirable. A few slaves, however, paid a ransom fee which they had saved up from just and honest labour.

**Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4.24.4-8**

### **Relief depicting the manumission of two enslaved men with *pileus* hats (1st century BC, Musée royal de Mariemont)**



### Informal manumission could be formalised at a later date

If you really intend to liberate formerly the slaves you recently pronounced free before your friends, you need not fear that this will be a trouble to a man who did not find a journey around the world too far on my behalf.

Pliny, *Letters*, 7.16.

### Enslaved people could improve their status after being freed

Lucius Voltacilius Pilutus is said to have been a slave and even to have been chained to the door post as a doorman until he was manumitted because of his intelligence and interest in education. ...Then he became a teacher of rhetoric.

Suetonius, *A Book about Schoolteachers* 27

### Rights and status of freed people

- The freed man (or freed woman) was obligated to his former owner even after he was manumitted.
- Freed men and women (*liberti/ libertae*) became clients of their former owners and could therefore never completely leave their control.
- The freed man or woman would usually take their former owner's family name.
- The former owner continued to benefit economically from their former slaves, although in turn he had the expense of gifts to his clients.
- The freed man (or woman) became a Roman citizen but with some limitations on their rights, for example they could not stand as a candidate in an election.

This cremation chest for his wife shows that freedmen could rise high enough to even serve the emperor

The inscription on this cremation chest reads:

'Vitalis, freedman and Private Secretary of the Emperor, to Vernasia Cyclas, his most excellent wife; she lived for twenty-seven years'.



### **King Philip of Macedon praises the Romans for freeing enslaved persons**

- **In a letter to another Greek city, King Philip of Macedon praises the Romans for their policy of freeing their slaves, although he is not wholly accurate in his understanding, as a freedman could not hold offices.**

[...] the Romans make even slaves into citizens when they have freed them, and allow them to hold important positions in the state. In this way the Romans have not only improved their own fatherland, but they have also sent out colonies to almost seventy places.