

“Freedmen in the Roman World: Agency, Diversity & Representation”
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with a Keynote Lecture by Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Princeton University

Conference Paper Abstracts

“*Permissu decurionum*: Freed Slaves and Burial in the Columbarium of the Volusii”

Dorian Borbonus, University of Dayton

My paper discusses a group of inscriptions that grant permission for burial in a columbarium on the Via Appia. Interestingly, this permission is sometimes given out by the *decuriones* of the collegium and in other cases by the aristocratic *patres familias*. My argument is that a community in which freed slaves constitute the clear majority is shaped through these permissions and the agency appears to lie somewhere between autonomy and control.

The scenario points to a model of social integration within the collegium and household, to which *liberti* were closely bound, especially if their family members were still enslaved. Even though this community comprised slaves, freed slaves and freeborn Roman citizens, all of its members were commemorated in similar ways. Thus, *liberti* did not form a distinct subgroup in this context, but they were integrated with their peers of differing legal status. This suggests that it is perhaps not wise to conceptualize freed slaves as a discrete population with its own subculture within Roman society.

“The Cost of Ingratitude: Freedmen, Patrons, and Re-enslavement”

Nicole Giannella, Cornell University

In book 3 of *De beneficiis*, Seneca the Younger notes the common use of a law punishing ingratitude in rhetorical training and debates the merits of introducing a comparable law into Roman civil law. Ultimately, he dismisses the need for such a law outside of the school setting (*Ben.* 3.6-17.3). Scholars have been quick to point out that Seneca is not exactly correct; legal cases were brought for certain instances of ingratitude. I would like to consider one such instance, the fate of the *liberti* legally rendered *ingrati*. The penalties for ingratitude varied as the forms of ingratitude did, but I will focus on the extreme penalty of re-enslavement. This paper takes as its premise the debate in Tacitus’ *Annales* (13.26-27) on allowing re-enslavement to become a standard penalty for a freedman’s ingratitude. The re-enslavement supporters fail to win over Nero, but the emperor allows that individual cases for re-enslavement could be heard. I will argue that this lack of statutory regulation for this penalty paradoxically reveals the precarity of the freedman, his citizenship, and his freedom. This precarity is emphasized by the use of the language of social relations rather than the law to describe the situation of the freedman and his former owner. This paper will contribute to the study of the nature of Roman freedom by considering the following questions: did freedmen share in the same liberty as freeborn citizens? And if that liberty is different, to what extent can freedmen be integrated into the “free” population?

“Integration by Imitation?: Freedpeople as Owners of Slaves”

Marc Kleijwegt, University of Wisconsin

This paper examines the phenomenon which distinguishes former slaves in the Roman world from freed slaves in all other slave societies in world history: the frequency with which they came to acquire slaves of their own after manumission. While assuming that there may have been multiple social and economic reasons why freedpeople became slave owners, this paper will mainly focus on one: the possibility that the owning of slaves served as the most logical/the least problematic step for former slaves to seek acceptance from non-slaves. Although the paper will occasionally touch on the ownership of slaves by freedpeople in other slave societies, it will mainly test a number of approaches to the phenomenon in the Roman world. While ownership of slaves may have been a pathway towards integration, I will not automatically assume that the strategy was a successful one. There is significant evidence which demonstrates that freed slaves owning large numbers of slaves were vilified. In general, I wish to remind ourselves that the transition from slave to freed is drastic and dramatic, and perhaps one that is ultimately impossible to fully accommodate in a society where slavery remains a systematic form of human exploitation.

“Public Freedmen in the Roman West: Citizenship and Social Integration.”

Franco Luciani, University of Newcastle

My paper focuses on the legal status and social position of public freedmen in the Roman world, with a particular attention to Italy and the Western provinces. It primarily aims to test the idea that public slaves enjoyed a better social condition in comparison to other groups of slaves, by investigating their possibility to gain freedom and build social relationships.

First, I will describe the process of manumission for public slaves in self-governing towns in the light of chapter 72 of the *lex Irnitana*, also discussing the related modern debate about the possible condition that was granted to public freedmen in the municipium of Irni, Baetica (*cives Latini* or *Latini Iuniani*?). Secondly, I will examine whether, how and why public freedmen could integrate into urban society, on the basis of the extant inscriptional evidence.

“Doubling Up: Patronal and Familial Designations on Epitaphs”

Katharine Huemoeller, University of British Columbia

On a much discussed epitaph from first century CE Rome, one freedman commemorates another as his “fellow freedman and, at the same time, dearest companion” (*conlibertus idem consors carissimus*) (CIL 06, 22355a). Their lives had become entwined by no choice of their own—we learn that they met on the auction block—and were bought, and later manumitted, by the same owner. The epitaph communicates this connection between them, their involuntary legal subjection to the same patron (*conlibertus*), but it also communicates their camaraderie (*consors*). It is the relationship between these two bonds, expressed by *idem*, that this paper investigates.

Just over one hundred epitaphs employ a construction with a form of *idem* to communicate two distinct but simultaneous bonds between individuals, ranging from those of marriage to inheritance, kinship to patronage. This epigraphic formula has been examined for its grammatical significance (Sturtevant), but not its social and cultural one, namely the fact that the majority of these double-sided relationships are formed within and through the processes of enslavement and manumission. In dialogue with work reevaluating manumission as a point of

rupture in the life course (MacLean), I will use this construction to query the stability and ongoing relevance of proprietary ties in relation to those of family, marriage, and affection.

“Novel Evidence for Roman Freedmen”

William M. Owens, Ohio University

This paper seeks to advance our understanding of the mentality of Roman freedmen by considering a literary text that, I argue, reflects the perspectives of slaves and ex-slaves, a Greek novel, Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesian Tale*, or *Ephesiaca*. Though written in Greek, *Ephesiaca* is a product of early imperial culture. The protagonists, Habrocomes and Anthia, elite citizens of Ephesus, are kidnapped by pirates and enslaved. However, their experiences as slaves reflect the conventions of Roman slavery.

Formal aspects suggest the novel’s non-elite status. The author’s prose reflects characteristics associated with oral storytelling; he narrates the protagonists’ slave experiences through folktales, a genre employed by many dominated groups. The novel’s sympathies and antipathies point to non-elite or even servile/libertine affinities. Xenophon sympathizes with his enslaved protagonists even when they act like bad slaves and indicates that such behavior was necessary for survival. Habrocomes and Anthia also establish ties of solidarity to other slaves, who sympathize with them and assist them. These characters are not enslaved elites but “real” slaves, as it were. This sympathy for slaves in general has been balanced by an antipathetic portrait of various individuals in a position of mastery. They are represented as brutish, quick to anger, quick to condemn, and quick to punish.

At the end of the novel, after much wandering and travail spent apart, the protagonists are reunited on Rhodes and then return to Ephesus. Having escaped from slavery, they are now *de facto* freedmen. In the Temple of Artemis, they dedicate an inscription or a painting of what they had suffered and done as slaves (5.15.2, ἄλλα ἐνέθεσαν ἀναθήματα καὶ δὴ καὶ τὴν γραφὴν τῆ θεῶ ἀνέθεσαν πάντων ὅσα τε ἔπαθον καὶ ὅσα ἔδρασαν) and built large tombs (τάφους ... μεγάλους) for their parents, who had died of despair and old age during the time they were slaves. Then, in apparent isolation from the rest of the city, they “henceforward spend their lives together in celebration” (5.15.3, καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ διήγον ἑορτὴν ἄγοντες τὸν μετ’ ἀλλήλων βίον). They were joined by Leucon and Rhode, their slaves who had been captured with them, but were now their fellow freedmen.

A consciousness of mortality overshadows the resolute partying of the novel’s happy-ending, reflected in the construction of the parents’ tombs and also in the suggestion of the protagonists’ own mortality, implied in τοῦ λοιποῦ, which can mean “for the time that remained” as well as “henceforward.” This sense of mortality and also the details involving the protagonists’ construction of ostentatious tombs, the recording of their slave experience in words or pictures, and their endless partying in the company of other freedmen but apart from the wider community suggest a parallel to the *Cena Trimalchionis*. How did freedmen look back and remember their enslavement? Xenophon treats the retreat of his protagonists into memory and isolation sympathetically, contextualizing it in the trauma of their enslavement. Petronius’ perspective is derisive and contemptuous.

I emphasize two points in conclusion: (1) Petronius’ parody of freedmen may, more precisely, have been a parody of texts such as *Ephesiaca* in which Roman freedmen themselves represented their intentions, their motivations, and their feelings. (2) These literary but non-elite texts have the potential to take us closer to freedmen as they tried to represent themselves.

“Commemorative Behavior and Collective Identity: Mapping Group Funerary Reliefs”

Devon Stewart, Angelo State University

Previous studies of group funerary reliefs have largely focused on the monuments' formal and iconographic dependence on aristocratic portrait models and, in turn, their freedmen patrons' emulation of Roman elites in pursuit of social legitimacy and cultural assimilation. Although the close relationship between group funerary reliefs and elite models is well-established, the reliefs bear equally close and arguably more important relationships to one another. The repetition of the monuments' form, style, and iconography, with limited and often standardized deviations from the norm, suggests that the patrons of the reliefs valued uniformity in their tomb monuments. This paper questions whether that uniformity also had a larger geographic component in terms of group funerary reliefs' location within Rome's necropolises. While scholars have long noted that the repetition of group funerary reliefs throughout the necropolis would underscore the collective rather than individual identity of the monuments' subjects, none have previously documented or analyzed the actual distribution of group funerary reliefs throughout the urban Roman area. Of the slightly more than two hundred surviving group funerary reliefs, one hundred and four objects have documented findspots. Using that data, this paper explores not only the geographic and chronological distribution of group funerary relief, but also the social implications of the patrons' choice of burial location. Although the data presents some limitations, such as unequal excavation, documentation, and post-antique disturbance, the results of the analysis nonetheless suggest significant patterns of distribution from the group relief's development in the first half of the first century BCE through its revival in the second century CE. The results also reveal different patterns of use in Rome and in Ostia, despite the cities' similarity of funerary culture. Overall, this analysis shows that physical proximity and repetition within a specific location were indeed central elements to establishing the group reliefs' patrons as a distinct community within the broader sepulchral landscape.