A JOURNEY IN CHAINS: A STUDY OF THE ANCIENT ROMAN SLAVE

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

A Journey in Chains: a study of the ancient Roman slave

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Often termed the "invisible people," ancient Roman slaves leave almost no visible footprint in

archaeological sites. Furthermore, though their presence is intricately woven throughout the very

fabric of the Roman Empire, the slaves themselves are strikingly absent from historical

dialogues. As most of the structures that have been preserved emulate the ruling elite, there

remains little in the visible spectrum of archaeology to pinpoint this elusive, and incredibly

substantial, population. This research strives, by incorporating new methodology, to look at the

negative spaces in archaeology; to look at Roman society through the eyes and movements of the

slave population. This research will finally give voice and credence to an entire civilization of

people that have, both in life and in death, been dismissed as "invisible," and may finally end the

subjugation of a people.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to all of those who worked so hard to keep me sane during my research with late night coffee breaks and early morning adventures. You are my backbone. Without your support and openness, I would still be lost and panicking in the library, in frantic search of the Classics section.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LATIN NOMENCLATURE

Actor: A Latin noun used to describe the slave in charge of the domestic household

Aequo Animo: Latin phrase for a calm, even spirit.

Catasta: auctioneering platform.

Grammatici: A plural, Latin noun translated literally as 'a teacher of letters.'

Ingenui: used to describe freedmen born to *libertini*

Ius Gentium: general Roman law applied to a certain group of slaves.

Latifundia(ium): A Latin noun translated as a large, functional estate, housing land, animals, slaves, and the family itself, often considered a functional society in its own right.

Libertini: A Latin noun used to describe a recently freed person.

Pilleus: A Latin noun used to describe the hats used to demarcate slaves for sale at the markets.

Servus/Serva: The masculine and feminine noun that means slave.

Sub Hasta/Sub Corona: lance or wreath used to demarcate foreign slaves from *vernae*.

Terra Incognita: A compound Latin noun referring to the unknown lands that lay beyond the frequently travelled world, encompassing lands the stretch to modern day Northern Britain, Central Africa and even to most of eastern Asia.

Titulus: a plaque placed on the slaves elucidating all information known about the individual.

Vernae: The plural, Latin noun used to describe a group of slaves who were born to slave women in Rome.

Vilici: A plural, Latin noun for slave farm bailiffs employed in the household.

Vincti: a subgroup of the Roman 'private slave' that is translated literally as 'those who work in chains.' These are often employed in agricultural work.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule."

Aristotle, Politics

The theme of slavery

At the mention of slavery the mind conjures up images of large, pregnant consignment ships stocked full of their human cargo; it conjures up images of a war-torn nation at a time when racial inequality was as thick in the air as the pipe tobacco, pungent and sour. Slavery, the subjugation of one human to another, however, remains one of humanity's oldest traditions, stretching across time and culture, as old as man's superiority complex. Forming the heart, sweat and foundation of many prominent civilizations, slavery provided power and stability for those empires, all for the sake of progress. It has taken roots in many well-known, prominent regions, including the Americas, Britain, China, and India. Far removed, however, from the time of the infamous African slave trade of the 17th-19th centuries, the ancient Romans, many centuries earlier, built their empire on the backs of such slaves. Specifically spanning from the 1st century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E., the Romans acquired their slaves through many different avenues including piratical attacks, war, bankruptcy, political corruption, and even by the subjugation of a jealous rival, creating a amalgamation of slaves from all walks of life. Not bound by social status, racial identity, or political affiliation, slavery, during the era of the ancient Romans, was subject to the changing times and fluctuating borders of an empire governed by a desire for more. As the ground layer of Roman society, ancient slaves had

profound implications in trade, economy, and foreign relations in a precarious age when peace and tranquility could easily be substituted for war and vulnerability.

Essential to the Roman world were considerable advances in trade, not only through terrestrial travel, but also through maritime expeditions to the farthest reaches of the Mediterranean Sea and even stretching into the Black Sea. Using their maritime technology that was specifically adapted for the changing weather of the Mediterranean sea, including their ability to utilize every part of the ship in order to maximize rowing efforts, the ancient Roman merchants and sailors forged new paths in international trade relations, providing their people with unparalleled access to the world's treasures and eccentricities, not the least of which was the foreign people themselves. By transforming the Mediterranean sea into an international highway, the ancients fed their ever-growing affinity for the new, the exciting and the exotic. Acquiring people from Turkey, northern Africa, Greece, and the mysterious *terra incognita,* the Romans put luxury and production above all, in order to adhere to an elegant but efficient way of life. Slavery, in the Roman world, was a fundamental piece in their booming foreign and domestic trade markets, providing the Romans with a vital source for a much-needed labor force as well as an arena for families to prove their wealth and social standing.[1] This slave labor force, according to the ancient Greek writers Demosthenes and Xenophon, outnumbered the free population of society three to one, with a minimum of 50 slaves belonging to each household.[2] For a well-paid senator of status, says Pliny the Elder, the *latifundia* could contain anywhere from 400 to 1000 private domestic slaves, on average, not including the thousands who tended the fields, animals, and

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[1] Ormerod, *Piracy in the Ancient World.* The idea that industrial expansion led to increased use of slave labor is mirrored in the

[2] Boeckh, *The Public Economy of Athens* (London: J.W. Parker, 1842), 53-58. Though these authors are Greek in origin the numbers are applicable to both the ancient Greeks and Romans. The numbers of slaves in each household did not alter much, however, there were more foreign born slaves then during the Greeks.

gardens of these large estates. In fact, the slave population grew to such an enormous size that the landed gentry and elite decided *not* to enforce a law requiring slaves to don conspicuous uniforms, as they would risk revealing the slaves' overwhelmingly superior numbers.[3] Amounting to the majority of the population, the slaves in antiquity provide unique insight into the social, political and cultural functions of a society dominated by landed populace and seeded politicians.

Archaeological invisibility

"The past is what we choose to observe."

Pavel, 2011[4]

As creatures of this world, human beings share a common thread—a mutual history—that at once binds civilizations together while cultivating uniqueness and individuality. This mutual history, created from stories of both innovation and destruction coupled with periods of both alacrity and stagnation, forms the dynamic foundation of humanity. The material culture left behind, be it discarded litter or preciously guarded plunder, is a shadow—a glimpse—of that history. It is an echo of a time and of a people that once were and yet still continue to be and influence. By studying those material remains, archaeologists open a channel between the past and the present, allowing for a limited, but invaluable window into the inner-workings of that ancient society. Archaeology unashamedly manifests respect for those individuals, who were previously limited to mere shadows and ideas. As the study of material culture, archaeology not only illuminates human history, but also provides a unique opportunity in the course of understanding the place humanity holds in the world that hosts it. It presents a platform where

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[3] Basore, John, trans. 1928. Seneca, *On Clemency* 1.24.1; in regards to his idea that evil should not be known in society.

[4] Pavel, *Vesuviana*, 2011.

individuals, regardless of their position in their society, receive equal recognition and acknowledgement; where individuals are remembered for who they really were rather than the people their society wished them to be. A platform where "the politics of history do not overwhelm any tangible actuality of these individual lives and its importance in our investigations of human behavior in the past."[5]

As archaeologists move away from the seduction of studying the renown and erotic artifacts of the world that have dominated the field of archaeology since its creation, they have come to recognize the gaping chasms littered throughout the archaeological record of antiquity. For decades, scholars have ascribed the words of exalted philosophers and scribes, such as Pliny the Elder, Seneca, and Livy, to a myriad of people in antiquity unassociated or unaffiliated with the experiences of those men. In doing so, archaeologists have neglected entire assemblages of people and cultures that do not adhere to that narrow field of thought. Throughout human evolution, history remembers and gives credence to the victors and the 'civilized.' Archaeologists and historians, by accepting these proposed perspectives and imputed beliefs, take an unwitting part in this perpetual subjection of the forgotten. Littered throughout the major cities on Earth, indelible structures invoke images of their lofty inhabitants and of their significant and arresting movements, but history rarely deigns to consider those that labored over those structures. Gravitating toward the exciting, toward the erotic and the extreme, just as the ancient Romans did, many admire the giant mosaic walls of Pompeii and the massive sculptural reliefs in the numerous victory arches in Rome, without fully marveling at the amount of work it took to erect such structures. Even in drama, our favorite philosophers and authors, including

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[5] Allison, "Using the Material..." 2001

Pliny the Elder, Aristotle, and Vitruvius, selected the subjects and characters of their works based on social status. In ancient drama and satire, the main characters were usually drawn from the free members of society and their slaves occupied the role of silence and stupidity.[6] These slaves were often either painted as nuisances, indolent hindrances or conniving antagonists. Characteristically, however, they were not featured in the plays of the elite, becoming as invisible in literature as they were in life. This type of writing essentially gagged the slave population during their lifetime, robbing them of perspective, equality, and humanity.[7] Modern historians and archaeologists use these biased works to derive most of what we know about this rich civilization, further constricting the voices of the ancient Roman slave population. These works, though biased, make up the bulk of the literary record that survives about this time period. Using these works is unavoidable, however, they can be used in a more responsible manner.

Often termed as the "invisible people," ancient Roman slaves leave almost no visible footprint in archaeological sites, though their presence is inscribed in their very heart of the material remains.[8] As most of the structures that have been preserved emulate the ruling elite, there remains little in the visible spectrum of archaeology to pinpoint this elusive, and incredibly substantial, population. In major landmarks, such as the Colisseum and the Forum, as well as major cities such as Pompeii, the most famous and the most well preserved sections of the sites

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[6] In one satirical play, a recently freed slave, who has accumulated wealth and riches, is featured only to mock and berate him for not being sufficiently civilized. See Joshel and Peterson, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves,* 11.

[7] Seneca equates the guard dog and the doorman (who would have been a slave) and quips that they are essentially the same though one is tipped and the other is given a treat. In fact, the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii features a large dog in mosaic constituting the floor of the entryway, taking the place of a doorman. Joshel and Peterson, *Material Life,* 41.

[8] Both Jane Webster and Paul Mullins assert that "slave culture" cannot be separated from the material culture of the free, because it was so deeply inscribed in their society. They believe that there is no pattern in the culture that distinguishes the two. Webster, "Slavery, Archaeology and the Politics of Analogy," 140 and Mullins "Politics," 123.

are the ones that generate the most revenue and the most awe, essentially the rooms and structures inhabited by the elite and the upper class. The others, likely those occupied specifically by the slaves, have fallen into disrepair and neglect, many even used as storage facilities[9]. This blatant disregard of an archaeological site is what many modern archaeologists have attempted to address. For it is these areas, most likely, that we can see evidence for the intimate lives of the ancient Roman slaves.

Since the Romans possessed a unique assemblage of people from not only diverse regions, but also widely different social standings, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to determine an archetypal Roman slave based on the archaeological record alone. Many studies follow the traditional route and combine the analysis of material remains with those biased sources previously mentioned, in the hopes of distinguishing the slave from the free. For example, one study thought to focus on isotope analyses in conjunction with bone chemistry and body treatment of the deceased in order to distinguish foreign versus domestically born individuals. However, due to the overwhelming amounts of slaves that were born and raised within Rome and its surrounding territories, the application of this method when studying the ancient Romans is inconclusive.[10] The study, without certainty, provided a small group of probable slaves and in doing so, was forced to dismiss a large portion of the slave population. The next attempt was to focus on the appearance of grave goods at the archaeological site of Laurion.[11] Researchers excavated burials in the area that dated as far back as the 4th century B.C.E. They found that

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[9] Joshel and Peterson, *Material Life*, 31.

[10] See Thompson 2003; a study conducted on South African burials

[11] F. H. Thompson. *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery.* There are differences in the system of captivity between the ancient Greeks and Romans.

70% of these graves did not contain grave goods, which, when compared to the regions surrounding Laurion, is significantly different. For instance, as many as 80% of the graves at Kerameikos, an area in modern day northwest Athens, boast substantial grave goods. This led researchers to believe that they had not only located a group of ancient slave burials, due to their lack of riches, but also discovered a consistent and easy way to make the "invisible" visible for the first time in history. However, this study proved to have faults of its own. The archaeological data seemed flawed and incomplete, stemming from inconsistent documenting, as their tests were based on older methods of documentation and convenient sampling, consequently leading to biased results. Furthermore, it is now known that grave goods were not uniformly applied to all those within the slave-owning population in ancient Rome. In fact, many graves are without them, further undermining the results of the Laurion study. Jane Webster, one of the pioneers in the study of Roman slavery in archaeology, has placed heavy emphasis on segregating the material culture left behind by slaves and those left behind by the free.[12] She largely focuses on points of revolution and conflict, which leaves a large portion of the story of Roman slaves untold. Joshel and Peterson, however, choose to incorporate spatial theory, a way to adopt Webster's method and adapt it to ordinary, mundane spaces.[13] In a sense, they approach an archaeological site realizing that slaves not only built many structures that have been uncovered, but they also lived in them, alongside the elite. In doing so, they have found evidence of how the slaves not only lived from day to day, but also how that contributes to their overall standing in the social system of ancient Roman society. Often saddled with incomplete research and underrepresentation of the certain points or people in history, the traditional

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[12] Joshel and Peterson. *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* 1-13. Jane Webster admits, however, it is impossible to completely segregate them. We should, rather, look more intensely into previously excavated sites in order to bring out the imprint of the slave population.

[13] Joshel and Peterson, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves, 4-7.* Spaces such as the streets, kitchen, and washrooms.

methods in approaching the ancient Roman slave class remain hopelessly driven by the perspectives of the elite members of Roman society, who chose to ascribe whatever perspective to the slave that suited them most. It is the aim of my research to tackle a new form of archaeology, which breaks the ties to partial sources and one-dimensional research. This archaeology, by first highlighting the less glamorous points in the material remains, then by superseding the ancient scholars that write with elitism and bias, and by finally focusing on the negative spaces in the material remains, does in fact, give voice to an inconspicuous class otherwise "invisible." It is through this method of research that archaeologists can delve further into ancient Roman society, beyond the minds of the great philosophers and the might of the tyrannical emperors, and into the heart of Roman society and those who labored to create it. In this thesis, I will incorporate this method of study in order to continue the dynamic dialogue on the ancient Roman slave.[14] This dialogue may lead to a complete, fulfilled and unique understanding of the ancient enslaved peoples of Rome, heightening our understanding of the inner-workings of their society.

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[14] It is possible that archaeology has not progressed far enough in order answer many questions concerning the ancient Roman slave. However, this research can lay a strong foundation for future excavations. See Webster, 2008.

CHAPTER II

ROMAN SLAVE HIERARCHY: A FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In a time of war and expansion, the ancient Roman society transitioned from a historically agricultural community into a highly functioning industrial machine, fueled by both the free and slave labor force.[15] This transition called many away from a countryside monopolized by the agricultural industry and into the vibrant city and port life, which was characterized by constant movement due to the influx of foreign goods and people. Because of the newly cultivated trade routes across the Mediterranean, merchants and traders were straying from the heavily traveled terrestrial trade routes in favor of newer and more effective means of transportation. With Pompey's edict in 67 B.C.E., piracy and many other dangers were significantly lessened, providing the merchants with not only a safer mode of transporting goods, but also a more cost-efficient one. At this time, goods and commodities even from the furthest reaches of the Mediterranean and beyond to the *terra incognita,* became accessible and available to the ancient Romans for purchase and acquisition. With all of these changes came peace, stability and innovation for the Roman people. With that stability came an increase in invention, art, philosophy, and above all: population. As the population increased, the ancient Roman state began to look to new arenas of conquest. Expanding all sides of their border, the Roman state grew rapidly and officially became the Roman Empire after the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.[16]

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[15] Jules Toutain, *The Economic Life of the Ancient World. (*Great Britain, Barnes and Noble Inc, 1968). The transition from an agricultural society into an industrial one severely affected the amount of free labor in the outer rim provinces. Many from the lower level of the class system were economically and socially pressured into servitude, fueling the outgrowth of the slave population at this time.

[16] The Battle of Actium was a naval battle that took place on the Ionian Sea. It was the last battle of the Roman Republic and officially determined Julius Caesar as Emperor.

With this growth and expansion, came certain responsibilities, including a growth of the state's

annual production of foodstuffs and the maintenance of its strong military. Since the military

required an endless supply of troops in order to maintain its rate of expansion, conscription of the

lower class into military life triggered a further reduction in the agricultural labor force, leading

to an increase in the popularity of slavery.[17]

The "ideal slave"

The ancient Romans were fascinated with the concept of being. Many different schools of

thought emerged during this time of luxury and efficiency, which elucidated the traits necessary

in order to live the life of "true" Roman. Seneca and the Stoic philosophers promulgated a life of

purity and limited emotion, for emotion led to impure acts against God and that could not be

allowed.[18] Pliny the Younger championed a life of kindness and clarity. He believed that a

calm, even spirit—*aequo animo*—was the key to living the life of a true Roman.[19] Many authors

impressed their ideas of being onto the less fortunate members of society, specifically the slaves.

Each author had their own idea about what characteristics and feelings constituted the 'ideal'

slave, but all agreed that they must seek to control even the most basic emotions within the slave.

This obsession of the control of being infiltrated their literary works of philosophy, drama, and

even the law itself.[20] The characteristics of the 'ideal' slave stemmed not from a concern for the

overall welfare of the slaves, but out of convenience and financial benefit for the master. Such

traits as efficiency of work, meekness, and reticence were highly valued characteristics, as these

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[17] H. A. Ormerod, *Piracy in the Ancient World.* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987). The increasing influence of industry and trade took a hold worldwide. Many economies saw an influx of people into the main cities and an increase in slave labor.

[18] Basore, John, trans. 1928. "On Anger" Seneca.

[19] Radice, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny,* Letter 9.

[20] Aediles Edict (*Digest* 21.1) contains a law concerning the flaws and defects of the slave and whether these flaws make the slave unsellable.

directly correlated to the overall effectiveness of the slave. They were to remain invisible, silent, obedient, and, in a society absorbed with the dynamics of movement, they were to remain in constant motion. On the other hand, traits such as idleness, malice, avarice, ambition, and frivolity were not only considered undesirable but also inherent moral flaws with the character of the slave, and diminished the numerical worth of the individual. In order to deter the majority of the slaves away from spiraling into financial worthlessness, the slave owning class prescribed punishments for harboring even the slightest hint of one of these characteristics.[21] If an individual exhibited any sign of becoming too strong or too rebellious or even too docile, they would risk punishment in the gladiatorial games or even crucifixion.[22] In drama, most explicitly in comedy, slaves were featured as either a major hindrance to the protagonist or a silent schemer brooding in the background. Both of these served one purpose: the amusement of the audience, the slave owning populous.[23] The 'ideal' slave, a notion "designed…to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule," is created and perpetuated in order to reinforce the slave owning population's concept of superior being.[24]

Acquisition and sale

The actors/agents

The process by which these slaves were bought and sold was almost like theater. There was an audience, actors, a stage, a director and a very specific script outlined in Roman law. The slaves,

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[21] According to the Aediles Edict, the master possessed the right of life or death over the slave. This principle was rarely challenged, except for the specific protection against wanton cruelty, until the Roman state instituted laws for capital punishment. See Hopkins, 1983 and Watson, 1985.

[22] Pellegrino, *Ghosts of Vesuvius*, 155.

[23] Plautus featured a slave woman as one of the main characters in his play *Pseudolus*, but her character was restricted to absolute silence, save the sound of her weeping. See Marshall 2015, 124.

[24] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 18.

or *servi*, in ancient Roman times, were generally acquired through militaristic maneuvers if they were not native to Italy. The growing Roman military, as it spread like fire throughout the land referred to as the *terra incognita,* provided Rome with a constant supply of laborers. These laborers were taken from their conquered homeland and forced into slave labor, operating under the idea that the soldier responsible for the subjugation, saved that individual from certain death and provided a favorable alternative.[25] In fact, even the title *servus* stems from the verb *servare*, which means to save.[26] This type of forced acquisition brought not only much needed labor into Rome itself as well as her provinces, but it also brought prestige, honor, and wealth to the soldier who secured such a prize.[27] Strabo mentions the Roman military pillaging and capturing several cities across Western Europe, including the British Isles and even Corsica.[28] These slaves were either sold in neighboring regions or were valuable enough to be brought back to Rome and sold for large sums of money due to their physical characteristics, though Strabo warns that many of the foreign-born slaves became insolent and rebellious causing much grief for their owners. Alternative forms of acquisition of property were employed in addition to the efforts of the military campaigns. Despite Pompey's edict outlawing piracy on the Mediterranean Sea, the enterprise continued and proved to be one of the major sources for supplying the region surrounding the Mediterranean with its forced labor. The sea, being the main arena for piratical attacks, was generally avoided by most of the upper classes. Moreover, many people avoided small coastal towns as they were in high risk of exposure to piracy, in a town with little resources for protection.[29] If maritime travel was unavoidable, however, mercenaries and private

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[25] Leage, *Roman Private Law*, 54-74.

[26] Watson*, Digest* 1.5.4

[27] De Souza, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*, 20.

[28] Roller*, Geography of Strabo 5.2.7* and 4.5.2

[29] *Geography of Strabo*, translated by Duane Roller, 228. And Casson, *Ancient Mariners*, 177-183.

bodyguards could be enlisted for protection, if the individual was wealthy enough. In many cases, shipwrecked merchant vessels and cargo ships reveal weapons and armor that were most likely used for the defense against pirates and marauders.[30] These slaves, acquired through forced relocation, were governed under the *ius gentium* and their lives were entirely in the hands of the pirates who captured them. Other than piracy and military movements, there were alternative routes into slavery. For instance, if a man was over the age of 20 he could sell himself into bondage reaping a fraction of the revenue gained from his purchase. These men were often close to bankruptcy, although a few were motivated into gladiatorial servitude for prestige. Those that willingly sold themselves into captivity were governed by civil law, as they once were citizens, setting them apart from the slaves controlled by the *ius gentium*. There was a fourth and final route into slavery, which was the most regularly employed and the most consistent with captivity. These slaves, known as *vernae*, were 'bred in captivity.' Providing the bulk of the slave population, the *vernae* were the most cost-efficient and reliable of the four, as their numbers were not affected by changing boundaries and allegiances nor were they affected by the financial stability of the state. These indigenous slaves were so cost efficient that laws were put into place providing rewards to slave women for giving birth to many children, thus increasing the overall value for fertile women in the slave market as well as the amount of slaves under the master's control.[31] Since they were essentially Roman by birth, if not by law, the *vernae* enjoyed more amenities than their foreign counterparts. The slave owning population generally treated them with more leniency and trust due to their nationality and inexperience

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[30] Refer to a stela of war captives from the campaign of Cilicia (the origin of a known pirate hoard) in Mellink 1963, *An Akkadian Illustration of a Campaign in Cilicia*. Many individuals captured were not sold into slavery but ransomed back to their families for exorbitant prices.

[31] Both Columella and Martial speak of this reward program. See Marshall, 2015 on the subject of sex slavery.

with the outside world.[32] Though the *vernae* were endemic slaves, they still were bought and

sold in the market alongside their foreign-born counterparts.

The stage

The slave market, as the slaves were taxed on both import and sale, was very highly controlled

by the Roman government.[33] Importing anywhere between three to four million slaves

throughout the 1st century C.E., approximately 18,000 per annum, the government used

manumission to keep the population under control and to prevent surmounting riots.[34] In many

cases, young women would be freed before giving birth so that her child would be free rather

than slave-born. Literally meaning 'to send by the hand,' manumission was not only the process

by which Roman masters would free their slaves, but also the process by which they would

create a citizen.[35] Manumitted persons enjoyed exponentially more freedoms relative to their

former lives. Though they would no longer be considered property, the former slaves were still

subjected to copious amounts of control by the landed elite. A force for social manipulation,

manumission checked the emotions of the slave population. For example, in some instances,

mothers were manumitted but their children were not, in order to reward her for industry, but tie

her down to the family.[36] After manumission, the individuals were known as *libertini* and

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[32] Maynes and Waltner, 208-233. These slaves had seen less of the world and held loyalty that the foreign-born slaves did not, making them easier to trust. In fact, Plautus in his play *Miles Gloriosus*, mocks the ignorance and inexperience the *vernae* had of the outside world.

[33] Maynes and Waltner, 208-233.

[34] Scheidel, W. *Human Mobility in Roman Italy II*, 64-79. Manumission, the process by which the owner granted the slave freedom, was a popular form of population control. The word manumission, coming from the greek stem *manu,* refers to the traditional steps in order to achieve this freedom. The owner, historically, would take the slave by the hand and spin him in a circle and setting his sights on the land beyond. After this, the slave would be free.

[35] White, Horace, trans. App. *BC* 4.17.135, Perry, *Gender, Manumission and the Roman Freedwoman.* And *Digest 1.1.4*

[36] This would have been beneficial to the masters, because they could keep the mother in service without responsibility of her upkeep. Scheidel, 64-79.

enjoyed a new dynamic life, apart from their former entrapments.[37] The journey to citizenry, however, was far from its conclusion, as *libertini* did not possess the full and abundant rights of citizenship.

Abundantly strewn throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, the slave markets were a place of theater. The two most notable stages were located in Rome, itself, and Delos, an island in the center of the Cyclades in the Mediterranean Sea. After the destruction of Corinth in 146 B.C.E., the merchants and traders flocked to Delos to take advantage of the void that the loss of the markets in Corinth left in the Mediterranean. This was extremely beneficial to the Romans as it provided them with an easily accessible free trading port, uninhibited by taxes, that created a portal between Rome and the entirety of the southeastern Mediterranean.[38] The slave markets of Delos and Rome featured both *vernae* and foreign born slaves.[39] Upon arrival at the market, their feet would be marked with gypsum (white chalk) in order to distinguish them for sale. They were then placed on a platform, known as the *catasta,* by the *mangones*.[40] A *titulus* hung around each slave's neck, which detailed the full extent of information required by the law. This included birth defects, mental fitness, injuries, regions of origin, skills, and age.[41] Many Roman elite considered impetuousness, disobedient tendencies, and quick-tempers forms of mental disease and therefore required by law to be divulged on the *titulus*. A *pilleus,* a type of felt cap,

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[37] See Watson, 1985, *Digest 21.1;* there were many stages of being free. Those that were born of freed mothers were known as *ingenui*. These factions operated under the umbrella of 'freedmen' but each accommodated their own set of unique rights and restrictions.

[38] See Roller, 471.

[39] If the foreign-born slaves were not sold on the spot by the *mangones,* they were marked out from the *vernae* using a lance (*sub hasta*) or a wreath (*sub corona*). See *The Cambridge World History of Slavery I.*

[40] The word 'monger,' derived from the Latin word *mangones* literally means "dealer." In this case, it refers to a dealer of hands, though it can be used like "fishmonger" or "whoremonger." This man usually traveled with the military and would sell the captives as the army swept through the region.

[41] See *The Cambridge World History of Slavery I.*

was placed atop the heads, as well, in order to further distinguish a slave for sale.[42] Upon the

transfer of funds, the slaves would then be transported to a holding cell until their new master

was ready to collect them. Though the Romans enslaved both foreign-born men and women, the

importation of slaves was somewhat skewed toward a higher number of women and children

because they were more likely to survive an incumbent siege than their male equivalents.[43] After

arriving at their new home, they were assigned their different duties depending on skill set,

ethnicity and whether or not they were privately or publicly owned.

Delegation and dispersion

The private and the public slave

There were two overall divisions of the slave labor force in Rome: the public and the private

slave.[44] Performing a myriad of tasks, however, the slaves were utilized in every corner of the

Roman Empire.[45] Enlisted by the state for the betterment of civil works, the 'public slaves' often

were tasked with anything from administrative to manual labor, including participation in the

public police force. A small percentage of the public slave population worked in the mines, this

class of people consisted of mostly imported foreigners and they remained slaves for a short

period of time before they were replaced by new bodies, as the survival rate for such

employment did not exceed a few years. Public slaves were of the smallest group and their

prerogative could encompass a wide range of duties specific to their skill set (i.e. scribe,

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[42] Watson, 1985, *Digest* 21.1; if the slave dealer failed to report any of this information the deal could be rescinded and the dealer
punished by law. Furthermore, the *pilleus* began as a demarcation of slavery, but evolved to be a symbol for pride and
accomplishment by the freed persons.

[43] See Scheidel, 64-77. There is evidence that childbirth balanced the scales between the two sexes. In addition, the females and
young persons would have been a more logical investment.

[44] Peck, *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Antiquities.* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1898)

[45] Veyne, *A History of Private Life,* 52.

accountant, architect, or manual laborer).   The bulk of the slave population is categorized as

'private slaves', those specifically owned and housed by an individual or estate in Rome or her

provinces. From here the slave population was further divided into three subgroups: the

domestic, the agricultural and the *vincti*. The domestic slave, was employed within the

household, intimately woven within the family life. These slaves were the most trusted of the

three subdivisions, allowed full reign of the home and estate and even the care of the children.

They could be employed as anything from cooks to *vilici* or even *grammatici*. The domestic

slaves, mostly educated and skilled in their craft, were usually purchased specifically for their

expertise in a certain field or even their place of origin. For example, a Macedonian woman

would fetch a higher price than a Celtic woman, because they were valued more for their

appearance and work ethic than were their Northern counterparts.[46] Often forming close,

familial bonds with their masters, these household slaves were, on the whole, well treated,

respected and even paid for their work. Scholars disagree on how this level of the slave

population was viewed in Roman society, however, but it is known that these slaves were

considered an essential piece of the family and were respected as such. The most important

position held by a domestic slave would be the *actor*. This person was considered the head of

the household staff, a modern day butler. They would be in charge of overseeing food

preparation, housekeeping and entertaining guests. Many were even close advisors to their

masters. This position came with advantages, as one would be paid a considerable sum, given

land, and respectability between the slave and free population alike. Oftentimes, it was the *actor*

who in turn owned slaves on his own property, thus embodying the highest rank in the slave

class system. Furthermore, many of the slaves that form this class were more wealthy than many

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[46] Peck, *Harper's Dictionary*. Many ancient authors (including Demosthenes, Xenophon and Pliny) disagree on the prices of individual or a group of slaves.

of the free population.[47] The agricultural laborer, however, amounting to the largest portion of

the 'private slave' population, lived, worked, and ate on the estate. Strictly and without

exception, these slaves operated outside of the home, existing in an entirely separate world from

their masters. They would function largely as manual laborers for the field, gardens or animals

owned by the estate. Like the domestic slaves, these people were often purchased for their skills

or region of origin, as Cappadocians were thought to be the strongest and Carian men made the

best goldsmiths, etc.[48] These slaves were also paid a small wage and were allowed to possess

small pieces of private land themselves, though few in this class had slaves of their own. The

highest position in this class would have been known as the *vilicus*. This person oversaw all of

the agricultural production, including livestock protection, fertilization and irrigation, as well as

to superintend the rest of the agricultural laborers. The *vilicus* was given a considerable sum for

his work and allowed, not unlike the *actor*, to keep certain amounts of property and slaves.

While not graced with the same amount of respect as their domestic counterparts, the agricultural

slaves constituted the bulk of the middle class of the slave social system and as such held respect

within the slave community, if not the free society as a whole. This social respect is lost on the

third and final subdivision known as the *vincti*, or those who work in chains, thus forming the

lowest level of the subjugated labor force. These slaves worked the fields in constant bondage,

as they usually consisted of criminals and degenerates from Roman society and occasional

foreign migrants. Pliny the Elder referred to them as unfortunate workers without hope, yielding

insubstantial and poor work, essentially a loss in profits. This level of the slave class, rife with

discordance and malcontent, could be seen at the forefront of many of the slave revolts and

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[47] Veyne, *A History,* 52.

[48] Peck, *Harper's Dictionary.* Romans and Greeks alike ascribed different positions to different slaves based on ethnicity. Among the most preferred ethnicities include Cappadocian, Macedonian, Thracian, Carian, Lydian, etc.

protests that litter Roman history. Highly stratified and competitive, the slave class system mimicked Roman society in social organization as well as the value of production and efficiency. It was a closed system of people, with little social mobility within the population itself, but with ample opportunity for slaves of all levels to reach manumission and eventual citizenship. For example, it was near impossible for an agricultural slave to become a domestic slave in the course of his or her life, but quite relatively easy to show prowess in work to achieve freedom. When purchased, the owner would determine the occupation that the individual would retain for most of his or her captivity. There were some, however, who managed to work their way up the ranks to become *vilici* or *actores*. Though, it was far easier to achieve manumission than hope for upwards mobility within the slave class.

The slave owning population, through certain degrees of manipulation and astringency, successfully manifested a subservient population who were largely unaware of the restricted universe that the Roman elite created for them. By giving the slave population an attainable goal—manumission—as well as providing significant amounts of propaganda in their plays on how to be the "perfect" slave, the Roman ruling class aptly motivated their labor force to work as diligently as possible in order to achieve freedom as well as respect the system enough to enslave individuals of their own. A society rooted in the dynamic balance between efficiency and elegance, the ancient Roman people developed a social machine that constantly generated new bodies for work and kept the existing labor force docile and ever invisible.

CHAPTER III

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SLAVES

Rarely evident in the material culture uncovered by archaeologists, Roman slaves often leave an imprint on the archaeological record, rather than solid, physical proof, making it difficult to discern anything substantial about what the slave population was, let alone who they were as individuals. However, through new methods of archaeology, it may be possible to give a voice to those individuals who constitute the base layer of ancient Roman society. Joshel and Peterson in *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* have developed a method that involves looking at what they call the 'negative' spaces in archaeology, meaning in order to see the invisible you need to look deep into the background of the archaeological picture in order to draw out the movements of the slaves. These movements would have otherwise been shrouded by the enticing lives of their masters that sit at the forefront. By narrowing the scope and focusing the utilitarian, yet unexciting places, such as the kitchen, the stairways, and alleys, where the slaves would have spent most of their time, archaeologists can visualize the cohesive steps in their daily routine and how they reacted to each other all that were strictly choreographed by the ruling elite. Furthermore, this methodology could be used to discover the different, yet subtle points of rebellion within their daily lives, including their relationships with other slaves from other households. Joshel and Peterson employed this methodology in the well-preserved site of Pompeii, located at the foothills of the active volcano Mt. Vesuvius situated on the Western coastline of Italy, near Naples. By applying this technique to the site of Herculaneum (a sister city at the base of Mt. Vesuvius), I will provide insight into the inner-workings of the slave

society and add to the ever-growing accumulation of data archaeologists have acquired on the Roman slave.

A brief history of Herculaneum

Located in between the two slow-moving, tectonic plates of Eurasia and Africa, Italy rests in an area of unique and abundant seismic activity. Because of this, the countryside is littered with volcanoes, both dormant and active, creating a very rich, fertile soil perfect for agriculture. This soft rock soil was exposed by a prehistoric volcanic eruption that occurred some 6,000 years before the time of the Romans. The areas immediately surrounding the volcanoes offer the most arable soil and the most breathtaking views, establishing the ideal vacation spot for many prominent patricians as well as the prime location for the lower classes to thrive on healthy produce and livestock. Herculaneum, a town situated at the base of one of these volcanoes, benefitted from this profitable geography. The exact date of its origin, however, remains to be confirmed, though most scholars agree that it existed near the beginning of the 5th century B.C.E.[49] Not originally Greek or Roman, the town of Herculaneum has a colorful history. Strabo attributes the first settlement in this area to be originally under Oscan control, a people who did not remain in power long. Swiftly changing hands, the area of Herculaneum was then ruled by the Etruscans who dominated the region until 474 B.C.E. when they lost Campania at the Battle of Cumae. At this point, the Samnites gained control of the unoccupied territory, who remained in power until overturned by the Greeks. Though Strabo offers a detailed description of the

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[49] De Kind, *Houses in Herculaneum*, 19. The site plan of Herculaneum is similar to another site called Neapolis in Naples that is confidently dated to 474 B.C.E.

origin of the area, most ancients believed that it was a deified Hercules who should be credited with the construction of the city; hence the decidedly Greek name *Herakleion.*[50]

According to Strabo's account of the layout of the city of Herculaneum, there would have been two rivers circling the area. However, due to the severity of the infamous volcanic eruption on 24th of August 79 C.E, these rivers are no longer visible and can be only imagined.[51] This volcanic eruption, though catastrophic, provides archaeologists with a unique opportunity as both the heat from the blast and the overwhelming clouds of ash have preserved both the sites of Herculaneum and Pompeii. These sites were instantly preserved, meaning that many were caught enacting their daily routine, essentially creating a snapshot of the past. Pompeii, in the initial eruption, was covered with small pumice pellets or *lapilli,* which, along with consolidated ash, completely encased the town and all remaining inhabitants. Due to the southwardly wind at the time of the eruption however, Herculaneum, unlike Pompeii, avoided the cloud of *lapilli* and was subjected to surges of extremely hot gaseous air (approximately 400-500 degrees Celsius) that instantly vaporized any organic matter within its reach, carbonizing all wood and preserving many skeletons of the deceased.[52] Preserved in time, Herculaneum provides a unique opportunity to intimately see how the ancient Romans lived and unlike Pompeii, has received significantly less attention.

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[50] This story is by no means original. There are many 'herakleions' throughout the whole of both the Greek and Roman empires.

[51] Pliny the Younger in his *Letters* dates the eruption to this day, however, scientists recently have suggested that this is no longer a credible date. Wallace-Hadrill, *Herculaneum.*

[52] Wallace-Hadrill, *Herculaneum*, 30-35.

The excavations

Herculaneum has been subjected to looters and treasure hunters since antiquity. Indeed, in recent excavations there is evidence for tunneling stretching all the way back to the Middle Ages and the medieval period. However, formal excavations began in the 1700's with Charles II of Spain, around the 1730's and 40's.[53] In a time when a penchant for tourism revenue and historical preservation began, the Spanish ruler of Naples put a tremendous amount of emphasis on the reclamation of the past. He attempted to excavate the famed sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum and generate revenue for his populace. In doing so, the sites became the newest destination in The Grand Tour, achieving international scholarly fame. Unlike in modern days, Herculaneum was the focal point of the excavations done during this time as it was relatively untouched by looters.[54] By the 1760's interest in Herculaneum had generally waned due to the changing political balance and power in Western Europe. Excavations at the site of Herculaneum ceased altogether in 1764 when the chief archaeologist, Karl Weber, died and there was no urgency to replace him. The site lay relatively undisturbed until the 1860's when Giuseppi Fiorelli led the next phase of excavation. The burden of the excavation exchanged hands for several decades until in 1930 Amedeo Maiuri stepped in, endorsed by Mussolini himself in an effort to create a foundation of power for the Italian government. It was in this phase that we see the most significant achievements made, as many works of art were produced from the houses of the elite, though the documentation left little for later excavations. The present day site receives little attention due to the gravitational pull of its sister site, Pompeii and as such receives little funding for further excavation.

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[53] Charles II began the excavations when he ruled Naples, before he became king of Spain.

[54] Wallace-Hadrill, *Herculaneum*, 30-35. Because it was encased in rock, rather than ash, it was incredibly difficult for looters to excavate into the actual city of Herculaneum.

Application of the Joshel and Peterson method

The creators of the idea of 'spatial analyses' in archaeology, Joshel and Peterson place a specific emphasis on the dynamism of domestic life. They highlight the specific motions executed by the slave individuals as they progressed from room to room and the implications those movements had on the overall dynamism of the house. In Herculaneum, like Pompeii, we can see evidence of this dynamism in the utilitarian. For example, in many of the preserved houses, including the "House of the Stag" and the "House of the Mosaic Atrium" there are two distinct paths that weave throughout the household. The first of these routes, leads through large, ornate doorways to rooms focused more on aesthetics rather than function. These apartments, such as the *triclinium* and the *tablinum* would have been strictly for the ruling family and their guests. The domestic slaves, though largely barred from passage into these markedly beautiful rooms, would have entered intermittently in order to perform duties such as refilling a wine glass or delivering a message. The slaves, however, had their own network of passages and hallways that constitute the alternative route hidden within the ancient Roman household. If you turn your attention to the small, cramped doorways of the household, you can see a general outline of a route, without the flow and dynamism of path of the family. These routes, without adornment or distraction, weave their way throughout the house, discreetly and inconspicuously allowing slaves access to strictly functional rooms, such as the kitchen or the washroom, while still providing alternative entry into the apartments of the family.

Specifically within the "House of the Mosaic Atrium" as you step through the furthest and most accessible entry into the magnificent structure, immediately to the left is a small room that would

have been occupied by the *ianitor* or the doorman.[55] This room, though near the pathway of the

owners and their guests, would have remained invisible to the eyes of the elite. In this particular

design, the kitchen lies immediately to the right of the entryway, as far away from the *triclinium*

and *tablinum* as possible so to avoid any noise and distracting smell that would remind the

owners of their invisible counterparts. The slaves, after preparing a meal in the kitchen at the

front of the house, would have to take a less inviting and more congested route to the dining

room. Instead of passing though the house and disturbing the guests in the process, the slaves

would have to exit the household through the front entryway and proceed down a less accesible

path spanning the length of the house. They would then enter the house through a back entrance

near dining room, so as to slip in unnoticed and unobtrusive. The "House of the Mosaic Atrium"

is not unique in this respect. These pathways can be traced throughout each of the more

prominent homes of Herculaneum's respected elite.

Many homes in Herculaneum, no matter the social class of the owner, are equipped with a

second story accessible only through a hidden stairwell.[56] Often opening out directly onto the

alleyway, these second stories were most likely storage rooms and even possible slave quarters.

Because Herculaneum went through bad economic periods, just like many Roman towns, many

believe that the inhabitants rented out different rooms in their houses in order to lighten the

financial burden. Because the entrances to these second story apartments are located in

inconspicuous positions, many believe that these were built to accommodate the different tenants

within the same household. However, I would postulate that these hidden stairwells, before the

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[55] The deductions made about the archaeological site, Herculaneum, are based on the site map and descriptions found within Deiss, *Herculenum*. These conclusions were drawn by employing the Joshel and Peterson method mentioned previously.

[56] Herculaneum and Pompeii are unique in that the second story apartments are preserved.

times of financial distress, would have originally been built so that the slaves could access the storage room above without disturbing the internal peace of the home, itself.

Operating in separate, but intimately woven realms, the slaves and the owners executed their choreography in perfect harmony. Slaves moved efficiently and quietly, careful not to disturb the family, while the masters occupied themselves with less manual work, as most were politicians, scholars, mathematicians, etc. By studying the negative spaces in archaeology, we can see not only who these individuals were, but also how they worked in a world of constant motion. Though there is scant material evidence for their existence, the ancient Roman slaves are not restricted to the confines of their master's literature, but rather liberated by an analysis of their dynamic journey through their daily life. My research in Herculaneum, due to its history of dubious excavations and scanty documentation, is just a step in the movement toward more understanding. If archaeologists undertook new excavations in sites such as Herculaneum and many others, with an approach inspired by an in depth research of the ancient Roman slave population, we could fill in a large portion of data lost in Europe's erratic history and further recreate a picture of the individual life of a Roman slave and the relationships they formed. By documenting their movements, their journey in chains, we can finally pay respects to the population long considered only in fragments and moments, we can "remember [these individuals] through the material traces of intentional acts."[57] If we can only look for those traces, we can alter the course of human history, by remembering not only the "past we choose to observe" but also the past worth remembering. Through something as simple as archaeology, we can finally hear those forgotten but powerful voices that have previously fallen on deaf ears.

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[57] Joshel and Peterson, *Material Life.*

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