THE ROMAN FAMILY: RECENT INTERPRETATIONS

La familia romana: recientes interpretaciones

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RESUMEN: La epigrafía se ha convertido en una herramienta metodológica de suma importancia en los estudios recientes sobre los aspectos funcionales y estructurales de la familia romana. La perspectiva tradicional de la familia multigeneracional se ha visto opacada por el modelo familiar nuclear, como la representan las inscripciones funerarias. Estas mismas inscripciones nos muestran que los esposos, por regla general, eran diez años más viejos que sus mujeres. Por su parte, una alta mortalidad infantil –aunque no aparece suficientemente representada en los epitafios– se refleja en la asidua conmemoración de los padres por los hijos muertos. Además, en contraste con la imagen convencional del padre estricto, ciertas inscripciones nos revelan la existencia de un cariño verdadero entre padres e hijos.
Palabras clave: Familia, epigrafía, sociedad romana, matrimonio, divorcio, niños, afecto.

ABSTRACT: Epigraphy has become an important methodological tool in the recent dialogue over the structural and functional aspects of the Roman family. The traditional view of the multigenerational family has been eclipsed by the model of the nuclear family, as represented in funerary inscriptions. Such inscriptions also show that husbands were, on average, a decade older than their wives. A high rate of child mortality, while numerically underrepresented on epitaphs, is reflected in the fact that more parents commemorate dead children than vice-versa. Moreover, in contrast to the conventional image of the strict father, inscriptions reveal a genuine affection between parents and children.
Keywords: Family, epigraphy, Roman society, marriage, divorce, children, affection.

1. Introduction

In the past twenty years there has been a surge of interest in the Roman family. This interest, sparked by innovative research on medieval and modern families, has been expressed in a series of international conferences and their published proceedings. Indeed, the bibliography on this topic for the period 1981-2001 approaches 200 items, of which only a selection can be discussed here[1]. In this article, we shall outline the main directions and results of this research.

While earlier scholarship generally had a male bias and a preference for legality over behaviour, there has been an increasing realization that the study of the family must be based not only on Latin literary and legal texts, but also on the fruits of archaeological investigation: houses, tombs, sculptures, papyri, and especially epigraphy. These sources reveal that social practice often differed considerably from the formal dictates of Roman law. Ethnographic parallels from other ancient and modern cultures, which share many of the same concerns (meaning of the family; ancestor worship; arranged marriages; role of the family in

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[1] A bibliography of 4336 items, covering the period up to 1990, can be found in Krause, 1992.

politics), can provide a useful comparative perpective for understanding Roman behaviour (Goody, 1983; Casey, 1989; Pomeroy, 1997). It is also necessary to remember that the structure and activities of lower-class families (which are the subject of most of the inscriptions) often differed greatly from those of the upper class; and that rural peasants, who made up the majority of the population, are scarcely represented at all.

Before proceeding further, it is important to understand the usefulness and limitations of epigraphy in reconstructing the Roman family. Unlike students of the medieval and modern family, we do not have census records or parish registers to provide collective and individual information on the Roman family. Our only form of bulk documentation, apart from Egyptian papyri (which reflect social conditions that may have been peculiar to Egypt), is inscriptions on stone. Most of these are funerary inscriptions that pertain to the lower classes of society and provide a refreshing contrast to the literary sources (such as the letters of Cicero and Pliny) which are concerned chiefly with senatorial families. Of approximately 250.000 surviving Latin inscriptions, mostly of the Early Empire, it is estimated that more than 170.000 are epitaphs (Saller and Shaw, 1984: 124 n. 1). Although this represents only a tiny fraction of the population of the Roman Empire —fifty million people at any one time, or 500 million over the ten generations (assuming 25 years per generation) from Augustus to Alexander Severus— it is certainly an adequate sample for the study of family functions and relationships.

There are, of course, some aspects of the family that epigraphy cannot elucidate at all, for example the debate over whether the *paterfamilias* was an authoritarian tyrant or a benevolent parent. Epigraphy also cannot help with the spatial dimension of the family, such as the size and layout of private homes, for which the excavated remains of houses from Pompeii and other Italian cities are providing new perspectives.

2. Family structure

One area in which epigraphy has had a revolutionary impact is the structure of the

family. Prior to 1984 it was generally believed that the Roman family was not a "nuclear" family (mother, father and children) such as we find today, but an "extended" family comprising several generations, under the control of the *paterfamilias*. That the extended family was not the norm even in earliest times, might have been deduced from the restricted size of the archaic huts on the Palatine. But Latin has no specific term for "nuclear family" –*familia* refers to everyone living under one roof, including the slaves– and the myth of the extended family was broken only by the demonstration by Saller and Shaw that in 80% of pagan funerary inscriptions from Italy and the western provinces, the deceased is commemorated by a spouse, parent, child, or sibling, and only rarely by a grandparent, uncle, etc. Therefore the mother-father-child triad seems to be the normal family structure (Saller and Shaw, 1984). A similar pattern emerges from an analysis of the Christian inscriptions, though with some differences between urban and rural patterns of commemoration (Shaw, 1984). The initial enthusiasm which greeted this discovery has since been tempered by reservations. Literary sources provide examples of Roman households that included elderly parents, or married children, or adult brothers living together; and Egyptian censuses often record three generations in a single household (Dixon, 1992: 7-8). It can also be argued that commemorations between siblings (which represent about 10% of all epitaphs) can hardly be counted as nuclear family if the siblings are adults. Moreover, the nuclear nature of the commemorations does not preclude other relatives living in the same house. If grandparents seldom appear, this may have been due to low life-expectancy rather than a "nuclear" family model: only 19% of male Romans had a father alive by the time they were thirty (Saller, 1987a: 33). Children had a moral obligation to support their parents in old age, but this was a private duty and was not regulated by law (Parkin, 1997). Although numerically in the minority, epitaphs mentioning grandchildren, mothers-in-law and even more obscure relations (such as *soror patruelis* "patrilineal cousin" or *socerio* "wife's brother") remind us that, beyond the bonds of affection in the immediate family, there was a larger circle

of kin which must be considered (Corbier, 1998).

A challenge to Saller and Shaw's method has been offered by Martin (1996), who argues that if those authors had counted inscriptions instead of relationships, they would have found more examples of extended families than nuclear. If a man set up a memorial to his wife, son, daughter, cousin and freedman, this would count as three nuclear and two non-nuclear relations by Saller and Shaw's method, whereas Martin would count them as one extended family. Martin analyzes ten inscriptions from Olympus in Lycia, which by Saller and Shaw's method would be 74% nuclear family, but Martin's method 70% extended family. However, Martin's technique suppresses the variety of relationships revealed by Saller and Shaw, and his Olympus sample is small and arbitrary (Rawson, 1997a). A more recent analysis of family inscriptions from Lusitania, using both methods, found little difference in the results (Edmondson, 2000). Moreover, reliefs depicting family groups emphasize the nuclear family as the norm in the West (Rawson, 1997b). It is possible that in the eastern provinces there was a greater tendency toward extended families, but this will need to be verified by further investigation.

While Saller and Shaw's epigraphic study argues for a prevalence of the nuclear family, it can give no indication of its distribution. House plans from Pompeii and Herculaneum reveal a tremendous variety in house size. Specifically, 35% of houses are less than 100 m² in area, 34% are 100-300 m², 21% are 300-600 m², and only 10% are larger than 600 m². Although these figures do not tell us the density of population in each house, it can reasonably be assumed that the larger houses were intended to accommodate more people, which could include clients and lodgers. The average number of inhabitants at Pompeii, assuming an urban population of 10.000, would be 7-8 per house (Wallace-Hadrill, 1991). While this is much larger than the average modern household, it must be remembered that the Roman *familia* included domestic slaves –in some households as many as 400. Although rooms in the house can often be identified, there is no evidence for

differentiation of the occupants by status, age or gender; for instance, we cannot identify "slave" areas (Allison, 1997: 352-353). Slaves may have slept in upper storeys, or in a convenient corner, or in the same room as their master (George, 1997: 316).

3. The life-cycle of the family

3.1. Marriage

A nuclear family begins with the union of a man and woman from different families. The Romans usually followed the practice of "homogamy", in which people tend to marry their social or professional peers (Segalen, 1986: 119). For the senatorial class, marriage served an important political function, in forming alliances between powerful families (Bruhns, 1990). Some individuals could boast of their descent from fourteen or even twenty senatorial families (Corbier, 1990b: 29). New senators, on the other hand, were often married to equestrian women (Corbier, 1990a: 237). Non-homogamous marriages, sometimes attested in inscriptions, could facilitate social mobility, for instance an *eques* marrying a senator's daughter, an *Augusti libertus* taking a free-born wife (Weaver, 2001), or a female slave being manumitted in order to marry her master (Gardner and Wiedemann, 1991: 162). The procedures for betrothal, matrimony, and dowry have been exhaustively discussed in a magisterial study by Treggiari (1991b), which combines literary, legal and epigraphic evidence. In practice, the legal rules were not always obeyed, and *de facto* unions were common among those who lacked the legal capacity for marriage (Evans Grubbs, 1993). The letter of Domitian appended to the Lex Irnitana (*AE* 1986, 333) forgives those who, prior to the grant of *Latium*, entered into unions without *conubium*. Another form of quasi-marriage is the keeping of concubines. These women, though of servile birth, are described with affection and respect on tombstones set up by their male partners. They were expected to have a wife's virtues, without her pretensions (Treggiari, 1981; Friedl, 1996).

Funerary inscriptions listing ages at death as well as length of marriage reveal that women typically married in their late teens or early twenties (despite occasional attestations of girls marrying as early as age thirteen)[2], whereas men tended to marry in their late twenties or early thirties (Saller, 1987a; Shaw, 1987). Early marriage for women maximized their childbearing potential. Men, on the other hand, were not believed to achieve true fertility until their twenties (Rousselle, 1988: 59). Contrary to the opinion of Goody (1983: 51), the Romans did not usually marry close kin: only 10% of husbands and wives named in inscriptions have the same *nomen*, and some of these *nomina* are so common that the two are probably not blood relatives (Shaw and Saller, 1984). At the same time, kinship terms on inscriptions suggest some instances of marriage between cousins (Corbier, 1991a: 130-132).

Although marriage was intended as a lifetime union, a substantial proportion of marriages ended in death or divorce within ten years. However, the frequency of divorce among the upper class was no higher than in modern society, and among the lower classes it was probably lower. Among 562 senatorial women on whom we have information, there were only 27 certain and 24 possible divorces, in other words less than 10%; and 20 of these 51 real or potential divorces involved members of the imperial family (Raepsaet-Charlier, 1981-82). The chief contrast with modern divorce is that in Roman times the husband automatically got custody of the children (Treggiari, 1991a). Despite occasional inscriptions praising a woman as *univira*, remarriage after divorce or death of a spouse was common practice. Many families may thus have been "blended" households, including not only a couple and their children, but also step-children from previous marriages. Among the elite, examples are known of men with six wives and women with six husbands. Although pilloried in literature as evil (Gray-Fow, 1988; Noy, 1991), the step-mother *(noverca)* played an important role in raising the children from her husband's

previous marriage. Early mortality produced many widow and widowers. Although Augustus' legislation encouraged widows to remarry, it is estimated (perhaps too generously) that as many as 30% of adult women were widows (Krause, 1994-1995: vol. 1, p. 73). Remarriage must have been especially difficult for lower-class widows who could not provide a dowry. One inscription (*ILCV*, 4545) mentions a grandmother who was a widow for thirty years. Some of these widows may have lived with their married children, producing an extended family. Children's epitaphs erected jointly by *mater, pater* and *avia* (e. g. *ILS*, 6084) may reflect such a household.

3.2. Children

Since the production of children was the primary goal of marriage, the birth of a baby, especially if male, was a cause for celebration. This is seen in painted messages on the walls of Pompeii, announcing the birth of children to the family (*CIL* IV, 294, 8149). The occasion would be less joyful if the mother died during childbirth —or, as some epitaphs record, a few days after childbirth (*ILS*, 1914, 8480)– or if the child was illegitimate. Illegitimacy may underlie a series of tablets from Herculaneum, in which the girl Petronia Justa, raised in the home of her mother's ex-master Petronius Stephanus, brings a lawsuit against Petronius' wife, claiming that she was born after her mother's manumission and is therefore free (*Tabulae Herculanenses*, 13-30). The clear implication is that Petronius was her father (Gardner, 1998: 259).

Since the milk of a wet-nurse was considered, wrongly, to be healthier than the mother's own milk (Garnsey, 1991: 60-61), women preferred not to nurse their own children. It is specifically recorded on the tombstones of some women that they breast-fed their own babies (*ILS*, 8451; *AE* 1995, 1793), which implies that this was unusual. Slaves, freedwomen and freeborn poor are all attested as *nutrices*, working either in the master's household or in their own homes (*SP* I, 16). The nurselings named in inscriptions include future consuls and possibly the future emperor Galba (Bradley, 1986). Epigraphy

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[2] E. g. *ILS*, 8531 (a woman who was married 17 years and died at age 30).

shows not only that nurses were often manumitted by same family that employed them (and thus, presumably, began nursing as slaves) but also that they continued to be called *nutrix* long after they were physically capable of lactation (Mangas, 2000: 231-235).

Children suffered a high rate of mortality: by one estimate, 28% of live births died in the first year, and 50% before the age of ten (Garnsey, 1991: 51). These deaths are inadequately represented in epigraphy. Of 16.000 inscriptions from Rome and Italy mentioning age at death, only 1,3% were of babies less than 12 months, and 13% were between age one and four (Hopkins, 1983: 225). Many young children must have been buried without a memorial, or perhaps with a painted wooden marker which does not survive. A touching epitaph refers to an infant snatched from the breast (*ab ubere raptus*: *CIL* VI, 23790). Children who died later were more likely to be commemorated, since the total proportion of children under 14 is 31% (McWilliam, 2001: 75). The tombstone of one mother, who died at age 27, records that only one of her six children survived her (*CIL* III, 3572). Epitaphs of lower-class families seldom record more than two children who survived infancy (Rawson, 1986b: 9). Demographic projections suggest a family would need five children to ensure that two reached child-bearing age (Frier, 1982). Such losses were not confined to the lower class: the two children of Antonia Maior depicted on the Ara Pacis are otherwise unknown and must have died in childbirth (Syme, 1984). Boys on Italian epitaphs occur twice as often as girls; this small ratio of daughters reflects a low social estimation of females (Gallivan and Wilkins, 1997: 246). Another indication of the high rate of child mortality is that commemorations of children by parents (Lám. I) outnumber commemorations of parents by children (Dixon, 1992: 92). Saller and Shaw (1984: 137-138) concluded that in regions with a high proportion of these "descending" commemorations, there was also a greater tendency to commemorate children less than ten years old; the fallacy of this inference has recently been demonstrated (Curchin, 2000a).

The theory that childhood is a modern invention, and that Roman children were treated as young adults, has been disproved by recent studies discussing children's games, toys, dolls and pets (Wiedemann, 1989: 146-153; Néraudau, 1994: 290-307; Bradley, 1998). The Romans definitely recognized childhood as a separate phase of life. In terms of education, however, they were more interested in the moral and practical training of children than in their intellectual, physical or emotional development (Dixon, 1992: 116). Children were expected to do housework and to help in the family business, and were subject to harsh discipline when they misbehaved. An altar from Portugal warns parents not to let their son urinate on it[3]. Overly strict and overly lax parents are stock characters in Roman comedy, and young men like M. Caelius Rufus (subject of Cicero's speech *Pro Caelio*) and even the future saint Augustine are characterized as rebellious (Eyben, 1993). Against this stereotype of restless teenagers, we may contrast a papyrus letter of the second century A.D., in which one brother tells another, "we ought to revere our mother as a goddess, especially one so good as ours" (*SP* I, 121). Although Hallett (1984) argues that there were special bonds of affection between fathers and daughters, and between mothers and sons, there are plenty of examples of close relations between mothers and daughters, and between fathers and sons (Eyben, 1991: 125-136). The arguments of Bettini (1988), that paternal aunts and uncles were stern, while maternal ones were kind, are demonstrably false: for instance, inscriptions from Rome contain as many mentions of paternal aunts (*amitae*) as maternal ones (*materterae*) (Saller, 1997: 30).

The size of the family could be increased by adopting or fostering children. In more than 20% of inscriptions we find two or more gentilic names within one nuclear family: these gentilics may reflect adopted children, foster-children, and illegitimate children (Brancato, 1999: 101-108). However, changing patterns of nomenclature make it difficult to identify adoptees specifically (Salomies, 1999). Formal adoption (*adoptio*) required that both parties be citizens;

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[3] *Praecipias puero ne linat hunc lapidem*: *ILS*, 4514b.

LÁM. I.   *Children buried by their father. From Petronell, Austria (CIL III, 4506). C(aius) Arruntius | C(ai) f(ilius)*
Lentulus | an(nis) V et C(aius) Arr|untius C(ai) f(ilius) | Ligus an(nis) III h(ic) s(iti) s(unt) | et Varena C(ai)
f(ilia) | Candida an(nis) XXXV | C(aius) Arruntius Ingenuus | fili(i)s et coniugi p(osuit). (Photo: L. Curchin).

women could be adopted but could not adopt. Illegimate children and freedmen could be adopted if they were Roman citizens. The designation "Sp(urii) f(ilii)" for free-born illegitimate children is found chiefly in families of servile origin (Rawson, 1989). Unlike today, the adoptees were mostly adults, and they were usually close relations (Corbier, 1991b: 67). Adoption allowed, for instance, a childless man to acquire a son and heir. Testamentary adoption made it possible to acquire a child after death, while *adrogatio* allowed even the head of a family to

come under the *potestas* of another (Fayer, 1994: 291-377; Gardner, 1999). In inscriptions where a person is described as "son and freedman" *(filius et libertus)* of his patron, it is possible, though not certain, that we are dealing with adoption (Gardner, 1998: 184-186).

Foster-children *(alumni)*, who are mentioned on about 1% of the pagan inscriptions from Rome, are sometimes of free status and sometimes slaves (Rawson, 1986a: 173). Despite claims to the contrary (e.g. Boswell, 1988), there is no evidence that they were normally either orphans or foundlings (Nielsen, 1999: 250); they may have included both these groups, as well as illegitimate children. *Alumni* often enjoyed the affection of their foster-parents; an unusually intimate inscription says of a foster-child, *basio te, lingo te* (Lám. II). They seem to have enjoyed a social position similar to adoption, and were eligible to be heirs of their foster-parents[4]. Children given the Greek name Trophimus (which, like Latin *alumnus*, means "nourished") were presumably also foster-children (Crespo Ortiz, 1992).

3.3. Extinction or breakup of the family

The family was not perpetual. It is well known that a large number of senatorial families became extinct during the Republic, because of war casualties or failure to reproduce. Among the lower classes, inscriptions sometimes refer to persons who were the last member of their family[5]. Even families that did not disappear were liable to be split by factors such as death or divorce, which could divide not only persons but also family property (Dixon, 1997). Slave-families were particularly vulnerable to disruption because, although masters encouraged the mating of slaves, he might choose to sell the children. The manumission of slaves could also split families, since only one partner, or both partners but not the children, might be freed[6]. When a slave was

manumitted without his partner, he might marry a free-born woman and begin a new family (Weaver, 2001: 101).

4. Other aspects of the Roman family

4.1. Power and piety

Legally, the *paterfamilias* held absolute legal power over his children. He could choose to expose unwanted infants to die, or at least abandon them where they could be found by others (Harris, 1994). He could physically abuse the child (Evans, 1991: 168-171; Nathan, 2000: 33), or disinherit him through the process of *abdicatio* (Thomas, 1990). An extreme view would see even grown-up children as little more than slaves to their fathers (Veyne, 1985: 41-42). In reality, however, it is doubtful that the average father exercised his punitive powers so cruelly (Saller, 1994: 133-152). Moreover, the idea that children lived their adult life under the despotic control of their father has now been dispelled. A computer simulation suggests that by the time Roman girls were married in their late teens, about half had already lost their fathers, and for men marrying in their late twenties or early thirties, only one-quarter were still in *patria potestas* (Saller, 1986). For grown-up children wishing to escape their father's power, emancipation offered a legal remedy (Arjava, 1998: 164; Gardner, 1998: 6-113). In any event, the punitive power of the *paterfamilias* seems to have been exaggerated by modern scholars. In both legal and literary texts, *paterfamilias* normally means "estate owner" rather than "head of family". Since many women owned property, the *materfamilias* may also have wielded considerable authority (Saller, 1999). Marriages with *manus*, a man's power over his wife, decreased in frequency in the last two centuries B.C., as wives were anxious to control their own wealth (Looper-Friedman, 1987). In the Late Empire, mothers even acquired the right to be legal guardians of their children (Dixon, 1988: 64-65).

Traditionally, the solidarity of the Republican family has been attributed to *pietas*, submission to the authority of one's father. However,

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[4] *Alumni et heredes*: *CIL* VI, 15983.
[5] *Ultimus suorum*: *ILS*, 935, 7998; *CIL* VI, 24697.
[6] Children did not always remain in slavery, however: there are epigraphic examples of slaves being informally manumitted as young as one year old (Weaver, 1997, p. 61).

LÁM. II.   *Commemoration of an alumnus. From Rome (CIL VI, 10674). D(is) m(anibus) | P(ublio) Aelio Dextriano | fecit M(arcus) Ulpius Pol(l)io | alumno suo, basio te | lingo te b(ene) m(erenti) fecit. (Photo: Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada).*

recent studies have forced a reinterpretation of this concept, showing that *pietas* involved reciprocal affection and obligation among all family members (Saller, 1991a: 147-149). For instance, there was *pietas* between brothers (Bannon, 1997). In an important inscription, the *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre*, the Senate refers to the *pietas* of the emperor Tiberius towards his mother (*AE* 1996, 885, line 119; Severy, 2000). The solidarity of the family can also be seen in the burial of children with their parents, as shown on tomb reliefs and epitaphs, often citing family members as *piissimi*. The mutual nature of *pietas* is continued in early Christian doctrine, which reinforces the authority of the father but also instructs him to love his wife and be considerate to his children (Osiek and Balch, 1997: 118-123).

4.2. Non-kin in the family

The Roman household often included persons who were not part of the biological family. Domestic slaves are the most obvious example of this phenomenon, but not the only one. Working-class families might take in boarders and apprentices (Shelton, 1998: 111-112). Elite families might have several homes –a townhouse and one or more rural villas– where they lived at different times of the year, together with their clients and guests (Dixon, 1999: 217). Recent investigations have examined both the relations of slaves with their masters, and the formation of slave "families" within the household. They have shown that ties of affection often developed between owners and their domestic slaves. In some inscriptions, slaves are described as their masters'

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"delights" *(delicia)*; in others, slaves describe their master as *parens* (Lassen, 1997: 109). Female nurses *(nutrices)* and male care-givers *(nutritores, educatores, paedagogi)* formed close ties with the master's children, who might later set up memorials to them, calling them by the childish names *mamma* and *tata* (Bradley, 1991: 12-102). Slave-children who were breastfed by the same nurse as the master's child are designated in inscriptions as *collacteus* or *collactaneus* "milk-brother" (Corbier, 1999: 1284). In some cases, relations developed a deeper intimacy. Masters could have sexual relations with their female or young male slaves (Saller, 1987b), and occasionally a slave-woman is described as the master's concubine or mistress *(amatrix domini: ILS,* 8421). Deserving slaves were sometimes buried in the master's tomb: we know this both from inscriptions (Hopkins, 1983: 229 n. 36) and from the house-shaped tombs in the Vatican and Ostia (Isola Sacra) cemeteries, in which the cinerary urns outnumber the family members named on the inscriptions and therefore presumably include slaves, unnamed yet entitled to repose with the family (Eck, 1988). Epitaphs sometimes praise slaves' virtues, despite the fact that lack of moral qualities was the traditional justification for slavery[7].

Although there could be no legal marriage between slaves, masters often allowed them to cohabit; this gave them a feeling of normality and made them less likely to run away. In inscriptions, slave partners, technically *contubernales,* are sometimes called *uxor* or *vir* as if really married. Epitaphs also provide many examples of mixed unions between freedmen and slaves. Although this has been interpreted to mean that slaves deliberately married freedmen, who could use their influence to secure their partner's manumission (Morabito, 1990), it is likelier that in most cases the union was formed while both partners were still slaves, and one was subsequently manumitted (Weaver, 1991). At their master's discretion, however, slave families could be split up. For instance, Antestia Glycera, the daughter of slaves, was sold to another household *(CIL* VI,

11924). By the time of her death, all three had been manumitted, but in different households *(CIL* VI, 11924; Rawson, 1986b: 24).

Freedmen remained clients of their former master, whether living in his house or on their own. Dedications to patrons by their freedmen show the *obsequium* expected of ex-slaves. The loyalty of freedmen was thus divided between their patron and their own nuclear family. One freedwoman records that she was well-behaved towards her patron, patroness, father, and husband[8]. Patrons sometimes married their freedwomen, in some cases manumitting them for that purpose. An analysis of 700 inscriptions found that patrons married freedwomen nine times more frequently than patronesses married freedmen (Weaver, 1986: 154). Freedmen and their descendants were often buried in the patron's tomb (Lám. III), and living freedmen were sometimes entrusted with making sacrifices there *(ILS,* 8365; *AE* 1945, 136).

4.3. Affection and sexuality

In contrast to the false stereotype of the loveless marriage and uncaring parents (Coontz, 2000: 284), there is ample evidence for tender feelings in the life of the Roman family. Although it is notoriously problematic to determine emotions or the meaning of love in past societies, we do have evidence for family sentiments. Easiest to document is parental affection for children, for which there is not only ample literary testimony and touching portrayals of deceased children on sarcophagi (Huskinson, 1996) but also the actual words of the parents on the child's tombstone. Bereaved parents often describe themselves as *infelicissimi (ILS,* 7963, 8005, 8486), and one father looks forward to seeing his daughter again in the next world *(CIL* XI, 3771). Children, in both pagan and Christian epitaphs, are often described as *dulcis* "sweet" (Nielsen, 2001: 173). Children likewise express fondness for their parents —most notably in the *Laudatio Murdiae (ILS,* 8394)— and even an

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[7] I owe this insight to Dr. Michele George.

[8] *Qualis fuerit contra patronum patronam parentem coniugem: ILS,* 8417.

LÁM. III. *Freedmen and their descendants buried in patron's tomb. From Rome (CIL VI, 21096). D(is) m(anibus)*
A(ulus) Larcius | Adiutor fecit | monumentum | sibi et suis libe|rtis libertabus|que posterisque | eorum hoc
m(onumentum) | veto veniri veto | donari. (Photo: L. Curchin).

illegitimate son can call his father *karissimus* (*ILS*, 8555).

More difficult to understand are the feelings between spouses. Upper-class marriages, arranged by the parents, were not usually emotionally satisfying, to judge by the frequency of divorce and remarriage (Bradley, 1991: 129-130). Yet by the Late Republic we find inscriptions, art and literature stressing the expectation of affection between spouses and the ideal of harmonious marriage (Dixon, 1991). By the Early Empire, such writers as Seneca, Plutarch and Pliny the Younger speak of love in marriage (Bénabou, 1990: 130-134). Epitaphs of husbands, which usually refer to them by neutral terms such as *pius* or *benemerens*, are not very informative about women's expectations in marriage (Rawson, 1986b: 26), though one woman's epitaph declares that "she loved her husband with her whole heart"[9]. A tombstone from Africa says of a "very rare wife who was an example for women" that she has left her husband in deep mourning[10]. In the famous *Laudatio Turiae*, a husband bestows extravagant praise on his wife (*ILS*, 8393). Terms of endearment are used not

[9]   *Suom mareitom corde deilexit souo*: *ILS*, 8403.
[10]   *Coniunx rarissime quae exemplo esses feminarum, gravem fletum viro reliquisse*: *CIL* VIII, 8854.

only within the nuclear family, but between sla-ves and masters, freedmen and patrons. Even the stern lawyers admit that one of the accepta-ble reasons for manumitting a slave is affection (*Digest*, 40,2,16 pr.). Of the laudatory epitaphs found in Italian inscriptions, 71% are applied to patrons and 56% to their clients (Nielsen, 1997: 177).

Family relationships were not always affec-tionate, however, and conflicts could develop. These could include disagreements between the *paterfamilias* and his children, between spouses (leading to divorce), between step-parents and step-children, and between persons related by marriage. Cicero's *Letters* display an undisguised dislike of his sister-in-law Pomponia, while Apu-leius' novel *Metamorphoses* is full of episodes of family conflict which, though fictitious, probably reflect social reality (Bradley, 2000: 288-290, 296). Epitaphs, by contrast, are uniformly com-plimentary, apparently on the principle *nil de mortuis nisi bonum* (Curchin, 1982: 180).

Sexuality is another topic that has received attention in recent years. Paternal protection of daughters, and the early age of marriage, made it unlikely that girls engaged in pre-marital sex; their sexuality would find an outlet in marriage (Rousselle, 1988: 65). Wedding hymns include an expectation of sexual attraction within marria-ge (Dixon, 1991: 87). Women on tombstones are hailed as *pudica casta* "modest and chaste" (*ILS*, 8398, 8402) or *unicuba* "keeping only one bed" (*ILS*, 8444). On the other hand, there is ample evidence for extramarital sex, as shown by the extensive legal discussion of adultery and literary references to prostitution and cheating on one's spouse. Vestal Virgins were forbidden to marry or have sexual relations until they had comple-ted thirty years of service. Soldiers also could not marry, at least until the time of Septimius Seve-rus, though this is unlikely to have impeded their sexual activity.

4.4. Economy and religion in the family

The family was both a production unit and a support system for all its members. Inscriptions allow us to reconstruct the involvement of families

in business, such as the Veturii, a family of dyers and textile workers (Dixon, 2001). Though a dowry was not a legal requirement for marriage (Crook, 1990: 115), it enabled the father to pro-vide for his married daughter's support. If the marriage was *cum manu*, the father would not need to include her in the division of his estates when he died (Gratwick, 1984: 44). Exposure of surplus children was another strategy to avoid fragmenting the patrimony (Saller, 1991b: 27). Partners in mixed marriages, for instance a Roman citizen and a peregrine, had the problem of being unable to inherit from each other (Gardner, 1997). Several studies have focussed on the so-called "testament of Dasumius", a detailed epigraphic document of A.D. 108, which may actually be the testament of Cn. Domitius Tullus (Castillo, 1982; Vita-Evrard, 1989) or of L. Lici-nius Sura (Canto, 1991).

The family had religious rituals associated with birth, death, marriage, etc., and participa-ted together in festivals such as the Parentalia and Compitalia. Worship of the household gods (Lares and Penates) is often attested in inscrip-tions; so, occasionally is the *genius* of the family or of the father (*ILS*, 3025, 3643, 3644). The influence of Christianity on the family has been much debated. In theory, Christianity echoed the Augustan moral policy and promoted the patriarchal family structure (Osiek and Balch, 1997: 121). In practice, Christianity ruptured family solidarity by creating tension between Christians and pagan members of the same family (Barclay, 1997). The family legislation of Constantine –the most extensive since that of Augustus, with about 100 laws dealing with family matters– was formerly seen as reflecting Christian values, but a detailed study by Evans Grubbs (1995) shows that many of these "Chris-tian" provisions were in fact grounded in Roman law and custom.

4.5. Regional studies

Most work on the family has dealt specifi-cally with Rome and Italy, for which there is the most epigraphic and literary evidence. However, by tabulating data from family commemorations

in different parts of the empire, Saller and Shaw (1984) demonstrated the considerable differences that existed between provinces. Even within Italy, there are significant differences in commemoration trends between north and south (Gallivan and Wilkins, 1997). Likewise within provinces, there may be significant constrasts; in Lusitania, for instance, there are discrepancies between one *conventus* and another (Curchin, 2000b). Studies of the Roman family in Africa have examined upper-class families (Corbier, 1982) and marriage (Cherry, 1997), while a study of first-century Palestine focusses on the variety of family types (Guijarro, 1997). The family in the provinces was the theme of the most recent Roman Family conference, held at McMaster University in September 2001, whose proceedings will be published; papers at this congress dealt with such provincial areas as Gaul, Egypt, and the Greek East. Clearly more investigation is needed in other provinces, to complete the picture and to formulate an explanation of these inter-regional differences.

5. Conclusion

Research in the past two decades has made tremendous advances in elucidating our understanding of the Roman family. While earlier generations of scholars worked largely from literary and legal sources, much of the new work that is changing our perception of the family is based on the analysis of inscriptions. Epigraphy cannot, of course, be used in isolation, but the evidence it provides on real families, especially those of the lower class, provides a valuable counterpoise to the often idealized portrayal of the family in literature and to the often hypothetical situations in the juristic sources.

Notwithstanding the important progress that has been made, much more work is needed, particularly in evaluating the epigraphic material from the provinces. How, for instance, did the family function in Britain or Pannonia? To what extent were Roman family values adopted in the Greek-speaking provinces? A further problem is the shortage of epigraphic evidence for the Republican period and the Late Empire, making it difficult to piece together a coherent history of the Roman family. Undoubtedly, some aspects of the family will remain matters of uncertainty or contention. None the less, the picture emerging from recent investigation confirms indisputably the importance and resiliency of the family as a fundamental institution of Roman society.

Abbreviations

AE	*L'année épigraphique.* Paris.
CIL	*Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum.* Berlin.
CP	*Classical Philology.* Chicago.
ILCV	E. Diehl (ed.), *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae veteres* (1925-1931). Berlin.
ILS	H. Dessau (ed.), *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae* (1892). Berlin.
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies.* London.
SP	A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar (eds.), *Select Papyri* (1932). Cambridge and London.
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.* Bonn.

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