Real Roman Men and the Greeks Who Hate Them: Manhood, Slavery and Plutarch’s *Cato Maior*

(1) Cato on his youth (Festus p. 350 L. = ORF (4) no. 8, 128)

ego iam a principio in parsimonia atque in duritia atque industria omnem adulescentiam meam abstinui agro colendo, saxis Sabinis, silicibus repastinandis atque conserendis.

Still from the beginning I held my entire youth apart in frugality and in hardness and in industriousness by working the fields, Sabine rocks, and by digging up and sowing its flinty soil.

(2) Plutarch, Cato Maior 4.4

οὐδένα δὲ πώποτε πρίασθαι δοῦλον ὑπὲρ τὰς χιλίας δραχμὰς καὶ πεντακοσίας, ὡς ἂν οὐ τρυφερῶν οὐδ᾿ ὡραίων, ἀλλ᾿ ἐργατικῶν καὶ στερεῶν, οἷον ἱπποκόμων καὶ βοηλατῶν, δεόμενος· καὶ τούτους δὲ πρεσβυτέρους γενομένους ᾤετο δεῖν ἀποδίδοσθαι καὶ μὴ βόσκειν ἀχρήστους.

He never bought any slave for more than 1500 drachmas, since he did not want dainty and handsome, but rather hard-working and stout slaves, like horse grooms and cattle drivers; and he thought that it was necessary for him to sell them when they became rather old and not to feed useless men.

(3) Summary of Plutarch, *Cato Maior* 5

A. Plutarch likens Cato’s treatment of slaves to the treatment of draft animals (ὑποζυγίοις, 5.1), which Plutarch considers characteristic of a very unbending nature (ἀτενοῦς ἄγαν ἤθους ἔγωγε τίθεμαι, 5.1).

B. Although humans only exercise law and justice toward other humans, we frequently exhibit good works and favor (εὐεργεσίας δὲ καὶ χάριτας, 5.2) toward other living creatures.

C. Specific examples of kindness to animals:

(i) the Athenians building the Parthenon always allowed mules to rest, but gave special care to an exceptionally hardworking mule, even in its old age, after it was put to pasture.

(ii) Cimon buried the horses which helped him win at the Olympics near his family plot.

(iii) Xanthippus buried the dog that swam alongside his ship to Salamis in a place of honor.

D. We should not treat creatures that have *psyche* as we treat material objects when they wear out.

(3) Plutarch*, Cato Maior* 5.6-6.1

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν οὐδὲ βοῦν ἂν ἐργάτην διὰ γῆρας ἀποδοίμην, μή τί γε πρεσβύτερον ἄνθρωπον, ἐκ χώρας συντρόφου καὶ διαίτης συνήθους ὥσπερ ἐκ πατρίδος μεθιστάμενον ἀντὶ κερμάτων μικρῶν, ἄχρηστόν γε τοῖς ὠνουμένοις ὥσπερ τοῖς πιπράσκουσι γενησόμενον. ὁ δὲ Κάτων ὥσπερ νεανιευόμενος ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ τὸν ἵππον, ᾧ παρὰ τὰς στρατείας ὑπατεύων ἐχρῆτο, φησὶν ἐν Ἰβηρίᾳ καταλιπεῖν, ἵνα μὴ τῇ πόλει τὸ ναῦλον αὐτοῦ λογίσηται. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν εἴτε μεγαλοψυχίας εἴτε μικρολογίας θετέον, ἔξεστι τῷ πείθοντι χρῆσθαι λογισμῷ.

VI. Τῆς δ᾿ ἄλλης ἐγκρατείας ὑπερφυῶς θαυμαστὸς ὁ ἀνήρ·

Indeed, I would not sell a hard-working ox because of his old age, much less an older person, removed from a native place and accustomed way of life, just like from one’s fatherland, for spare change, useless to the buyers and sellers alike. But Cato, like a hot-headed youth in such things, says that he left behind in Spain even the horse which he used through his campaign while consul, that he might not charge the city with a freight charge. Really, whether we should ascribe these things to a magnanimous spirit or a petty character is open to debate.

VI. But the man was exceedingly remarkable in his self-restraint otherwise.

(4) Plutarch*, Cato Maior* 24.1-2

ἀποβαλὼν τὴν γυναῖκα τῷ μὲν υἱῷ Παύλου θυγατέρα, Σκηπίωνος δὲ ἀδελφὴν ἠγάγετο πρὸς γάμον, αὐτὸς δὲ χηρεύων ἐχρῆτο παιδίσκῃ κρύφα φοιτώσῃ πρὸς αὐτόν. ἦν οὖν ἐν οἰκίᾳ μικρᾷ νύμφην ἐχούσῃ τοῦ πράγματος αἴσθησις· καί ποτε τοῦ γυναίου θρασύτερον παρασοβῆσαι παρὰ τὸ δωμάτιον δόξαντος ὁ νεανίας εἶπε μὲν οὐδέν, ἐμβλέψας δέ πως πικρότερον καὶ διατραπεὶς οὐκ ἔλαθε τὸν πρεσβύτην.

After losing his wife, he married his son to the daughter of Aemilius Paulus, the sister of Scipio, but he himself, being widowed, took up with a slave girl who secretly frequented his bed. Truly, in a small house harboring a bride, the affair was perceived, and once, when the gal seemed to stride too brazenly to his bedroom, the young man said nothing, but the old man couldn’t miss that his son looked him in the face rather bitterly and turned away.

(5) Plutarch, *Synkrisis* of Aristides and Cato 6

Ἣν τοίνυν πλείστοις ὁ Κάτων κεκόσμηκε καὶ καλλίστοις ἐπαίνοις ἀεὶ σωφροσύνην Ἀριστείδης μὲν ἄθικτον ὡς ἀληθῶς καὶ καθαρὰν ἐτήρησεν, αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ Κάτωνος ὁ παρ᾿ ἀξίαν ἅμα καὶ παρ᾿ ὥραν γάμος οὐ μικρὰν οὐδὲ φαύλην εἰς τοῦτο διαβολὴν κατεσκέδασε.

Moreover, the self-control that Cato always adorned with the exceptionally beautiful praise, Aristides constantly held incorruptible and pure; but Cato’s marriage, contrary to his rank and time of life, spread no small or trivial amount of slander in this matter.