

S(ervus): The Epigraphic Development of Slavery in Republican Rome

Undoubtedly a slave-society, Rome is traditionally considered to be as such “no later than the third century B.C.,” due to the sudden influx of captives and wealth from the second-century militaristic expansion into the East (Finley 83). Before the arrival of such eastern luxuries, however, the presence of slaves at Rome is fairly certain but with scant evidence, specifically in regards to epigraphic remains. For example, the Lapis Niger of the Comitium features an archaic inscription, dating to the fifth-century BCE at the latest, with a reference to public slaves (*calatores* or “summoners”) participating in religious rites: *QVOS R.../M KALATO / REM* (Cf. Festus, *De verborum significatu* 34 on *calatores*: ‘*Calatores*’ dicebantur servi, ‘ἀπὸ τοῦ καλεῖν’, quod est ‘vocare’, quia semper vocari possent ob necessitate servitutis.). After the Lapis Niger, the Twelve Tables from 451/450 BCE indirectly refer to slaves via freedmen (*civis Romani liberti*) and the penalty of slavery for debt. While the Twelve Tables themselves are questioned as direct sources because of their transmission through later sources, they are considered reliable enough to “reflect authentic fifth-century conditions” (Bradley 1985, 4; see also Watson 3).

Beyond these early inscriptions, the major sources that exist for slavery in this period are later authors that cover the conquest of Veii in 390 BCE and the *lex Poetelia de nexis* in 326 BCE (Welwei 2000). Related to the penalty of debt mentioned in the Twelve Tables, the concept of *nexum* or debt-bondage via trade across the Tiber, is not apparent in the epigraphic sources, which is surprising since *nexum* was supposedly a major issue resulting in the *lex Poetelia*. With such obvious gaps in the epigraphic sources, it is necessary to systematically assess the *dateable* inscriptions in the Republican period.

In short, this paper will investigate selections of inscriptional evidence of Roman slaves and freedpersons from the early to late Republic; furthermore, it will outline the trends of

epigraphy and language used, including gender, names, the nature of the slave (*verna* or otherwise), occupation, context of inscription (if applicable), abbreviations, and scripts. (Cf. Joshel's work on slaves in the empire and their occupations.)

Methodologically, this paper will be divided chronologically into three sections: early Republic (509-265), middle Republic (264-133), and late Republic (132-27). Finally, the aforementioned trends will also be used a lens to compare and contrast the more famous (or infamous) inscriptions of the Imperial period to provide an overall understanding of the lives and deaths of slaves and freedpersons as a whole.

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