

## In the Emperor's Service: Identity among the Slaves and Freedmen of the *Familia Caesaris*

The Roman *familia* included not only free members of the household but also slaves and freedmen of the family. This was true of Roman households, large and small, which were wealthy enough to afford and free slaves. The most elite family and household in the Roman Empire was that of the Roman emperor. This was the *familia Caesaris* which included the emperor's slaves and freedmen. The present paper explores the identities of slaves in the imperial household relative to their proximity to the emperor, his family, and his officials. It also seeks to determine whether the slaves and freedmen of this most elite household were treated better than slaves in less elite households. As such, I argue that the identities of slaves and freedmen within the *familia Caesaris* were significantly shaped by their servitude to the emperor. This service could be a source of pride, as evidenced by its prominent place on the epitaphs of slaves and freedmen, but it could also be a source of alienation as the elite connotations of serving the emperor's family were outweighed by their servile status.

The major primary source information for the slaves and freedmen of the imperial family is inscriptional. For the purposes of this study, this includes epigraphic material from the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, specifically volume six covering the city of Rome, and from the Epigraphic Database Hiedelberg. Another significant source for the *familia Caesaris* consists of archaeological remains. Of principal interest here are the sites known as the *Monumentum Augusti* and the *Monumentum Liviae*, which are *columbaria* (meaning dovecotes) where the ashes of the freedmen of Augustus and the slaves of his wife Livia were housed in little niches. These structures, unearthed and excavated in the eighteenth century, were unique to Augustan and later Julio-Claudian Rome; they provide a crucial glimpse into the highly specialized roles of the slaves and freedmen in the household of the first emperor and empress (e.g. Livia had a slave

just for setting her pearls). They can also reveal relationships between the inhabitants of the niches. Combined, this information begins to flesh out the identities of these slaves and freedmen. Crucial in interpreting these sites is Treggiari's article on the *Monumentum Liviae* and Borbonus's work on *columbaria*.

The core of the secondary scholarship on the *Familia Caesaris* is P.R.C Weaver's *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves*. This is the best and most extensive book on the topic. However, since this groundbreaking monograph was published in 1972, little work has been done on the subject. One exception is a 2018 master's thesis by George M. Harton. While he closely scrutinizes the spatial arrangement of two major imperial residences for indications of slave presence, Harton does not explore questions of identity among the slaves of the *familia Caesaris*. As such, a renewed social and cultural study of the *familia Caesaris* is necessary to build upon and update Weaver's work and situate these elite slaves and freedmen in terms of identity formation.

#### Bibliography

Borbonus, D. *Columbarium Tombs and Collective Identity in Augustan Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Henzen, Wilhelm, Giovanni Battista de Rossi, Eugen Bormann, Christian Hülsen. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Vol 6. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1882.

Harton, George Maurice, V. "An Emperor for a Master: Slaves in the Palaces of Augustus and Nero." Master's Thesis. University of Texas at Austin, 2018.

Treggiari, S. "Jobs in the Household of Livia." *Papers of the British School at Rome* Vol. 43 (1975): 48-77.

Weaver, Paul Richard Carey. *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen*

*and Slaves*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972.