

## The Roman Dream: An Investigation into the Social Mobility of Trajanic Freedmen

The created corpus strove to answer how socially mobile the freedmen of the emperor Trajan became after manumission. This corpus explores the Imperial household of Trajan, specifically the freedmen of the emperor. Inscriptions were found through the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg. To locate these inscriptions, the phrases *Ulp* and *Aug* were searched using EDH. Of almost five hundred results, around fifty of these were found to be freedmen of the emperor Trajan. Of these fifty, thirty-one were found to be of the appropriate time period and referenced a freedman of the emperor. After translating the inscriptions, the frequency of various titles and occupations that the freedmen boasted were noted and compiled into an appendix. Each of the titles demonstrate a specific social status held within the empire. An inquiry into the Trajanic household necessitates a relatively in-depth knowledge on the Imperial household or the *Familia Caesaris*. Therefore, scholarship pertaining to the Imperial household is essential to begin to understand the complex social hierarchies within and outside the *Familia Caesaris*.

The *Familia Caesaris* was a complex bureaucratic system. It was primarily “concerned with the domestic and civil administration” of the imperial household (Weaver 47). Within the *familia*, there were varying degrees of social status which could propel newly freedmen to higher positions. Manumission among imperial slaves was relatively straightforward. Not only did the *Familia Caesaris* have the highest early manumission rate in the empire (due to an excess of resources), but the slaves themselves were paid well enough to earn their own manumission by the necessitated age of thirty (Weaver 208).

In general, the Imperial household provided ample opportunities to rise in social status post manumission. Specifically, under Trajan’s reign the opportunities for freedmen were especially plentiful because of the age of prosperity (Bennett 56). The name “Marcus Ulpius” is

prolific in inscriptions during this era as his freedmen bestow his *gentilicium* to their posterity.

Throughout his reign, Trajan championed moderation above all else and structured his household and his empire according to this tenant (Bennett 56). Therefore, his freedmen quickly obtained a higher social status propelled by the opportunities from the *Familia Caesaris* and the connotation characterizing the name *Ulpus*.

To examine the social mobility of Trajan's freedmen, the freedmen were divided into two categories: first and second generation. From there they were further separated into the groups of inscriptions by their occupation. The first-generation freedmen (born into slavery) are classified by Weaver's division of junior, intermediate, and senior careers with the added categories of unknown title and *Augustales*. The freedmen that lacked a title had the least amount of textual diversity. As a whole, there were formulaic epitaphs either made by or identifying a freedman of Trajan (Appendix 14-25). However, many of them suggest that even without a title they were successful.

The findings of this research showed that not only were Imperial slaves more likely to rise above their station, but that the *Familia Caesaris* encouraged their success for the good of the household. The Imperial household provided those manumitted opportunities for diverse occupations and more importantly the ability to continue to rise in status. One of the freedmen mentioned in the research, after achieving a senior position, was even buried by the emperor himself. This research further explored Roman slavery as an economically driven enterprise that made manumission profitable, especially in the Imperial household.

## Bibliography

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