

## FAMILY LIFE AMONG THE STAFF OF THE VOLUSII\*

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The aim of this paper is to present a limited study of the family life of the slaves and freedmen of one noble Roman family, drawing on a sample of 107 usable inscriptions discovered in the initial excavation of the *Monumentum Volusiorum*.<sup>1</sup> This *columbarium* on the Via Appia was run by a guild of the staff of the Volusii Saturnini: of the *domini*, L. Volusius Saturninus (*cos.* A.D. 3), his two sons Lucius and Quintus (*cos.* A.D. 56), the latter's wife Torquata and their sister Volusia Cornelia are mentioned in the inscriptions. Mommsen held that the *columbarium* was in use from c. 40 to 60 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

The inscriptions rarely specify the legal status of the person commemorated, or of the donor of the plaque or of anyone else who is mentioned—whether they are slave, freed or freeborn. That is, it is rare to find here either filiation or indications such as *L(uci) l(ibertus)* or *L. Volusi ser(vus)*.<sup>3</sup> But the simple genitive following a single name will denote a slave, as in *Botrys Q(uinti) n(ostri)* (7299). Names of

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<sup>1</sup> Only *CIL* 6.7281–7393 have been used as a sample for the Volusii. There are later finds from the *columbarium* (see *CIL* 6, pt. 4, pp. 3430–31, where further inscriptions are listed; a number of others, e.g., 9424, should conjecturally be given the same provenance) but it has seemed better not to take these into account, as the original excavations give a more homogeneous sample.

<sup>2</sup> For details see *CIL* 6, pt. 2, pp. 1043–44.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., 7307: "Delphicus L. Volusi Saturnini ser . . .," 7309: "Hermeti L. Volusi Nerei ser . . ." The formula *L. l.* or *L. lib.*, usually common (while *L. s./ser.* is not), here occurs rarely and only in the shorter form (7326, 7349, 7350); also the more explicit type "L. Volusio Elaini lib(erto) Philoxeno . . ." (7333). *Vicarii, conservi, ancillae* etc. give some pointers.

domestic jobs, whether followed by the name of the employer or not, will denote slaves or freedmen.<sup>4</sup> In the inscriptions where job but not a Volusian employer is mentioned, inclusion in this tomb may be taken as sufficient proof that the person was a slave or freedman of the Volusii. The *gentilicium* Volusius/a marks off free or freed persons from slaves, but further information is needed if we are to distinguish freed from freeborn.<sup>5</sup> In what follows use of one name only will be taken to denote a slave (as it generally does, though the rule is not invariable).<sup>6</sup> The group therefore consists of (a) slaves and freedmen/women of the noble Volusii, (b) slaves and freedmen/women of (a), (c) possibly slaves and freedmen/women of (b), (d) wives<sup>7</sup> and children of any of the above who do not themselves belong to any of the categories (a), (b) or (c). Inscriptions which were too fragmentary for the present purpose were discarded and those involving obvious "outsiders" (such as one to a family of Ulpri of much later date, 7394a) were omitted.

For comparison, the inscriptions from the tomb of the staff of the Statilii will be used. The Statilian *domini* are of social standing comparable with that of the Volusii, but the communal grave of their staff, on the Esquiline, was in use over a longer period, from the time of Augustus to that of Nero.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Job and employer: e.g., 7297, 7300, 7367, 7368, 7370. Job alone: e.g., 7281 (a clear case): "Callistioni cellar(io) conleg(ium) castriense, Daphno sump(tuario) Hedylalo a manu curatorib(us)," or 7292.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the known *domini*, Volusii/ae appearing here will be freedmen or their descendants. In an inscription such as 7381: "Dis man. L. Volusio Eperasto Volusia Sperata patri b. m. fecit," there is no way of telling if either or both were freed or born free.

<sup>6</sup> Brevity might sometimes be preferred to constant repetition of the same *nomen*, so some single names may conceal free people. The *agnomen* helps confirm slave status for Spendio Torquatianus (7303). For full discussion of the problems of status indication see P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: a social study of the emperor's freedmen and slaves* (Cambridge 1972) 42-86.

<sup>7</sup> There are a number of wives with gentile names other than Volusia, but no husbands with "outside" names. Cf. notes 21, 23.

<sup>8</sup> CIL 6, pt. 2, pp. 994-995. Edoardo Brizio, *Pitture e sepolcri scoperti sull'Esquilino dalla compagnia fondiaria italiana nell'anno 1875* (Rome 1876) 49-117, gives a lively eyewitness description: "una vasta galleria sotterranea con pareti tutte tempestate di loculi ove dentro rozze olle di terracotta contenevansi le ceneri della legione interminabile dei servi e dei liberti della gente Statilia" (p. 4). Like other tombs on the line of the then new Via Principe Eugenio, the *Monumentum Statiliorum* was excavated before the building of the modern residential quarter, but it remains intact, filled with earth, between that street and the Viale Principessa Margherita, according to G. Lugli, *I monumenti antichi di Roma e suburbio iii: A traverso le regioni* (Rome 1938) 427-29.

In the 107 Volusian inscriptions, 204 individuals are mentioned, 129 males to 75 females. A similar calculation for the Statilian tomb gives us about 421 males to 213 females. In the *Monumentum Liviae*, a mixed bunch of dependents of the empress and her family are divided in the ratio 440:212.<sup>9</sup> This total population of tombs includes not only the original servants, but the wives whom they brought in from outside, descendants, *their* servants, and so on. Since daughters who married "away" would often end up in their husband's tomb, there will be some distortion if we apply this ratio to the live population, but at least the three groups agree in giving a ratio of roughly 2:1.<sup>10</sup>

Since the ratios of women whose job is known to men whose job is known are lower than overall ratios for women,<sup>11</sup> we may conjecture that the usual job of a slavewoman was "marriage" (*contubernium*) and childbearing.<sup>12</sup> In the Volusian tomb, 33 inscriptions of the 107 explicitly mention marriage. The following table analyses the status

TABLE A. STATUS OF PARTNERS IN CERTAIN "CONTUBERNIUM OR CONUBIUM"

	Monumentum Volusiorum	Monumentum Statiliorum	Totals
Husband and wife slaves	8	6	14
Husband ? slave, wife free(d)	3	8	11
Husband free(d), wife ? slave	4	3	7
Husband and wife free(d)	14	8	22
Insufficient data	4	6	10
Totals	33	31	64

<sup>9</sup> *CIL* 6.3926-4326. (Fragments omitted.)

<sup>10</sup> Since women as well as men belonged to the burial club, they should have had an equal chance of being commemorated, in general. Humbler slaves will have brief inscriptions, but the poor will not, thanks to the guild, be as entirely absent as from sepulchral inscriptions outside the *columbaria* (cf. on this P. A. Brunt, *Italian manpower 225 B.C.-A.D. 14* [Oxford 1971] 144. Commemoration patterns (who donates to whom ? and therefore which relationships are mentioned ?) will still vary according to age and sex (see M. K. Hopkins, "On the probable age structure of the Roman population," *Population Studies* 20 (1966) 245-64).

<sup>11</sup> The Volusian tomb is too poor in job data to make a count worthwhile. In the Statilian, the figures are 157 men to 20 women of named job, in the Livian, 61:18.

<sup>12</sup> Some seem to have given up work when they entered on *contubernium* (*Dig.* 40.4.59 pr.) or had children (Columella 1.18.19). Among the Statilian inscriptions the ratio of women to men in a "family context" jumps to 116:153.

of the partners and gives corresponding figures for the Statilii. Only those inscriptions, where the words *coniunx*, *maritus*, *uxor* or *contubernalis* are used, have been counted. Since freed status is rarely specified, *ingenui* and *libertini* have been put in the same category.

It is not surprising to find that the largest number of inscriptions giving data on marriage is set up by what was presumably the most prosperous group, that where both husband and wife were free. It is interesting to find a significant, though small, sample of partners of disparate status, and to note that in 11 cases to 7 it is the wives who are free.

Although *contubernium* was not full legal marriage (*conubium*), slaves call their mates *uxor*, *maritus* or *coniunx*, and freed slaves may retain the word proper to slave union, *contubernalis*. For the sake of simplicity, the corresponding words may be used in English. It was, other things being equal, in the interests of the slave-owner to encourage and protect (and sometimes decide) *contubernia*, both for the sake of morale in his household and for the sake of slave-breeding. Normally, both partners will belong to the same household. A neat example is the memorial set up by Spendo to himself and his two "wives," Panope the dresser, who died at 22, and Phoebe the mirror-holder, who died at 37.<sup>13</sup> If we bring in the handful of some 14 Volusian inscriptions which do not explicitly mention marriage, but may be considered to attest it, we find evidence for a practice which was much to the slave's advantage, the owning of the wife by the husband.<sup>14</sup> That is, he bought his wife as his *vicaria* with his own allowance (*peculium*). Possibly he sometimes bought her from, or was given her by, his own master, from among the women of the household. We have one good example: "To Pancarpus the collector, who lived 34 years, Aucta his *vicaria* set up this." Then, after a lapse of time, two more names are added: "Sabina daughter of Pancarpus lived 13 years. Volusia Aucta lived 31 years" (7371). By the time she died, Aucta had been freed, presumably, since we assume from his lack of *nomen* that Pancarpus did not achieve manumission, by Pancarpus'

<sup>13</sup> 7297: "D. m. s. Panope ornatix Torquate Q. Volusi, vixit annis xxii, et Phoebe a speculum, vixit annis xxxvii, Spendo contubernalibus suis bene merentibus fecit et sibi. Loc(us) d(atu)s dec(reto) decu(rionum).

<sup>14</sup> The converse could occur. A freedwoman was sometimes given the slave with whom she had previously lived in *contubernium*, so that she might free and marry him—one of the cases where the Lex Aelia Sentia allowed manumission under the usual ages.

owner, to whom his *peculium*, including such *vicarii* as "wife" and daughter,<sup>15</sup> would revert on his death.

If we catch this situation at a later stage in the career of each partner, we will find that the husband has been freed by his owner and that he in his turn has freed his *contubernalis-vicaria*. We cannot usually distinguish this from marriages which begin after the husband's manumission. A marble altar, now in the Vatican, gives the classic phraseology: "Sacred to the Di Manes, to L. Volusius Heracla, valet and chamberlain of our master Lucius, Volusia Prima to her most dutiful patron and well-deserving husband set up (this)."<sup>16</sup> Other *coniuges* called Volusius or Volusia<sup>17</sup> do not give us enough data to decide whether they were freed or freeborn descendants of freedmen, whether the husband freed his wife or was her fellow freedman.<sup>18</sup> There is a large number of permutations: who is the owner of each partner? how far has each got in the progress towards freedom, citizen status and full Roman marriage? If we admit that a person with only one name is normally to be assumed to be a slave, the small sample from the Statilii fits in with findings based on larger samples that women in some circumstances may be freed before their mates.<sup>19</sup> The few ages at death recorded for Volusian women<sup>20</sup> are also not inconsistent with the possibility that women might be freed below the regular manumission age of 30.

A considerable number of Volusii married free women of other *gentes*,<sup>21</sup> some of whom are likely to be freedwomen. The best

<sup>15</sup> Legally, slaves had no parents. 6399: "Rufa Menandri Saeni (servi) vicaria ANI (sc. anni unius)" could be Menander's daughter.

<sup>16</sup> "Diis manibus sacrum L. Volusio Heraclae capsario idem a cubiculo L. n. Volusia Prima patron(o) suo piissimo idem coniugi bene merent(i) fecit et sibi p(ermissu) L(uci) n(ostri) . . ." (7368 = Museo Paolino 9869).

<sup>17</sup> 7319, 7329, 7353, 7382, 7383, 7389.

<sup>18</sup> *Conliberti* in 7323 could be *coniuges*.

<sup>19</sup> P. R. C. Weaver (above, note 6) 185-86.

<sup>20</sup> The following ages of married women are given: Slaves: 20 (7296, ? 7285), 22 (7297), 37 (7297); free: 16 (7329, 7384—died at 16 years, 8 months and 7 days, married 3 years, 7 months and 7 days); probably 17 (7312), 25 (7352, from a *conservus*), 31 (7371, mother of a 13 year old, who apparently predeceased her and who had been born while her mother was a slave). The question marks denote cases where marriage is conjectural.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., L. Volusius Valens marries Sempronia Glycaera (7388); L. Volusius Zosimus, son of the freed nurse of L. Volusius Saturninus, probably born a slave since he was foster-brother of the young master, is commemorated by Tampia Priscilla (7393); a definite freedman, highly placed, L. Volusius Paris, a *cubiculo* and *procurator*, marries a Claudia (7370).

example spans four generations and is presented by three separate inscriptions. Julia Nebris has a daughter called Julia Tryphe: there are various possibilities, but most likely Nebris is a freedwoman and her daughter either born free or born slave and later freed.<sup>22</sup> Tryphe goes on to marry Volusius Antigonus and the two of them commemorate Nebris.<sup>23</sup> The next inscription shows that this Antigonus was a Quintus, a freedman probably of Q. Volusius Saturninus, consul in 56. He and Tryphe are commemorated by their son, the freeborn Q. Volusius Q. f. Velina Antigonus, who married a woman called Servilia Severa.<sup>24</sup> Finally, their son, who rejoiced in the full filiation, Q. Volusius Q. f. Q. n. Velina Antigonus, is commemorated by his wife Turrania Eufemia and his stepfather Marius Iustus, who were his heirs.<sup>25</sup> The line of Q. Volusii Antigoni had arrived and was extinguished. The *nomina* involved in these and other intermarriages suggest freedmen or descendants of freedmen comparable with or even higher than the consular Volusii: Julii, Claudii, Sempronii, Servilii, Turranii.<sup>26</sup> This in turn suggests a fair amount of social contact between upper class households.

An early age of marriage for slavewomen implies that they could have a large family. Unfortunately, documentation of marriage does not often overlap with that of children.

It has to be remembered that children of slavewomen are born slaves, but they or their mother may be subsequently freed, hence the five slave children of freedwomen from the Statilian tomb. A high proportion of the children were born in slavery, which may suggest that

<sup>22</sup> We can postulate a husband, Julius, for Nebris, or that Tryphe was illegitimate and therefore took her mother's name (the father perhaps being a slave), or that Tryphe was born a slave and freed by a patron with the same *nomen* as her mother's patron (most simply the same person). There could be a link with Julia Nebris, wife of a slave of Tiberius (5200), but Nebris is not an uncommon name (cf. 4259, 7302, 7304).

<sup>23</sup> Note that women from outside are commemorated in the tomb of the man's *familia*. 7311 reads, "D. m. Iuliae Nebridi Volusius Antigonus gener et Iulia Tryphe f(ilia) matri pientissime f(ecerunt)."

<sup>24</sup> 7376: "D. m. Q. Volusio Antigono Volusius Antigonus f(ilius) patri suo b(ene) m(erenti) fec(it). l(ocus) d(atus) a Q(uinto) n(ostro). item Q. Volusius Q. f. Vel. Antigonus patri s(uo) s(? mistake) sanctissimo et Iuliae Tryphe matri piissimae et Serviliae Severae coniugi sanctissimae" (marble cippus, Museo Paolino 9842).

<sup>25</sup> 7377: "D. m. Q. Volussio Q. f. Q. n. Vellina Antigono Turrania Eufemia marito optimo et rarissimo item Marius Iustus privigno heredes" (marble cippus, Museo Paolino 9863/64).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. note 21.

TABLE B. STATUS OF CHILDREN IN RELATION TO STATUS OF PARENTS

Parents	Children				
	Slave	Freed	Free	Freeborn	Totals
Father and mother slaves	2 (4)	— —	— —	— —	2 (4)
Mother slave, father unknown	3 (4)	— (1)	— —	— —	3 (5)
Father slave, mother unknown	— (5)	— (1)	— —	— —	— (6)
Father free(d), mother slave	1 —	— —	— (1)	— —	1 (1)
Mother free(d), father slave	2 (1)	— —	2 —	— —	4 (1)
Father free(d), mother unknown	2 (2)	— —	3 (4)	— (1)	5 (7)
Mother free(d), father unknown	— (5)	— —	3 (4)	— —	3 (9)
Father and mother free(d)	— —	— —	1 —	4 —	5 —
Totals	10(21)	0 (2)	9 (9)	4 (1)	23(33)

Parentheses denote examples from the *Monumentum Statiliorum*.

The column "Free" includes either freed or freeborn whose status is not given.

the majority of a freedwoman's children were born before she was freed. Columella<sup>27</sup> claims that he manumitted slavewomen from his estates, where the chance of freedom was generally less than in town, if they brought up four children. But four is an ambitious number and others may have freed town slaves for producing fewer than four. Among the free children it is often impossible to tell which were born free and which freed later, by their parents<sup>28</sup> or other owner. We do not find here instances of women who bore some children in slavery and others after manumission.<sup>29</sup> It is worth remarking that there are some couples here in which the husband was a slave and the wife a free woman from another *gens*, for instance this one from the Statilian tomb, set up by a non-Statilian: "To Julia Mansueta and his son Graecinus, Martialis the *vicarius* of Abascantus the slave of C. Nymphidius Sabinus to his wife and son."<sup>30</sup>

A strong feeling of family affection comes through from inscriptions such as the mis-spelled one set up by a slave to her eight-month-old:

<sup>27</sup> 1.8.19.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., 9151-52.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Beryl Rawson, *CP* 61 (1966) 78-81.

<sup>30</sup> 6621. Here the husband stresses his own very superior, though servile, status. The son may be Julius Graecinus (freeborn but illegitimate) or a slave (born slave before the manumission of his mother or enslaved under the *Senatusconsultum Claudianum*, on which see Weaver, above, note 6, pp. 162-69).

"if anyone moves him, may he feel the same grief as I have felt" or those of seven- and nine-year olds from their "Tata" and "Mama."<sup>31</sup> People take the trouble to put up monuments, not only to husband and wife, but to brothers, sisters, parents, uncles and other relations.<sup>32</sup> The urge to perpetuate names in the family, which we have seen in the Antigoni, appears in humbler individuals;<sup>33</sup> even a slave Spendus calls his daughter Spendusa (7303).

It is not possible to calculate the number of children, born in or out of *contubernium*, per capita of slaves in the household. Nor does one usually have the right sort of evidence to see how many children went to the average family. None of the Volusian group commemorates more than two, but elsewhere there are some examples of three.<sup>34</sup> This brings us to a final question. Of the 23 Volusian children discussed above, there are 17 boys to 6 girls; if we count slave children only there are 7 boys to 3 girls. Of the Statilian sample of 33 children, 24 are boys, 9 girls; 17 slave boys and not more than 3 slave girls.<sup>35</sup> There is no instance here of two sisters in one family. Despite differences in commemorative practice and the slightly higher birthrate and early deathrate for boys, such figures, even if rough, make one wonder if owners did not dispose of girl slaves very young. Roman aristocrats are unlikely to have been repelled by the idea of exposing babies. But Trimalchio is clearly pleased to be told that in one day 30 boys and 40 girls have been born on his estate at Cumae (Petr. *Sat.* 53.2). It seems that girls are just as much a part of the *ditis examen domus* as boys. Some girls are kept to work in the city household, others might perhaps be kept for their parents' sake and as the *delicia* of their owners, others might disappear to country estates to work wool and produce children. To account for the gap between slave boys and girls we should have to postulate either that girls were sent to farms, or less commemorated because held in less esteem by their parents—which does not fit well with the esteem in which women seem to have been

<sup>31</sup> 7308, 6443, 6571.

<sup>32</sup> Uncle: 7288; *cognata et vicaria*: 7295.

<sup>33</sup> Q. Volusius December: sons Q. Volusii Merops and December (7379); L. Volusius Hamillus: son Hamillus (7374); L. Volusius Paris: children Volusia Hamilla and Volusius Paris (7370).

<sup>34</sup> E.g., 4053: one *libertus* of Augustus, one *libertus* of Livia and their sister called Livia; 6266–69: Ti. Statilii Auctus, Epicrates and Mena.

<sup>35</sup> Weaver (above, note 6) 172 finds 40% female in the *familia Caesaris*.



held in the slave household<sup>36</sup>—or that many were sold in childhood—which if slaves were attached to their children, as they seem to have been, would be bad for morale, and which besides would deprive the *dominus* of future mothers who were badly needed to maintain the supply of servants. The prospects for girls who were sold would, if most rich families had a surplus of girls, be gloomy, the most likely purchasers being brothel-keepers<sup>37</sup> or poor people who wanted a drudge. The evidence of the Statilian and Volusian tombs is inadequate for any firm hypothesis on this point: it may be that a broader survey would invalidate this ratio of girl to boy slaves.

<sup>36</sup> As indicated by monuments from husbands or friends, by the fact that women as well as men may be officials of the burial college (e.g., 4050–59 from the *Monumentum Liviae*), by the wealth of certain freedwomen (e.g., Lyde, freedwoman of Livia [4237] has at least four slaves: 4275, a husband and wife; 4276; 4237; a steward; others pay for elaborate sculptured monuments, e.g., 7368, a marble altar [Museo Paolino 9869] or 7382, another altar [Museo Paolino 9815/16]).

<sup>37</sup> Clients of brothels were mostly slaves (who lived in households with an unnatural balance of the sexes) and the free poor, who, it has been suggested by P. A. Brunt (above, note 10) 136–40, may often not have been able to afford to marry.