**CLST 320 (Greek and Roman Slavery) Handout**

**Instructor: Dr. Siobhán McElduff**

**Families and relationships**

**Slave families were incredibly fragile: with no legal status they depended on the whims of masters to stay intact. It is hard to understand the experience that ancient slaves went through, except by reading comparative material from the modern period, a selection of which have been linked to. When reconstructing the experiences of ancient slave families and relationships, we rely on very little information. Below is a selection of different texts relating to slave families.**

**I. Slaves babies might be children born to slave mothers, or they could be babies who had been exposed by parents unable to raise them. These were raised by wet-nurses, who were sometimes free. The following are two contracts for such wet nurses.**

(1106) To Protarchus on the tribunal from Marcus Aemilius son of Marcus of the Claudian tribe and from Theodote the daughter of Dositheus, a Persian, with her husband Sophron son of ...archus, from the Persian expedition serving as her guardian and guarantor in regard to this contract. According to the agreement Theodote contracts for 18 months from Phamenoth of the present 17th year of the emperor Augustus to care for and nurse outside of his home in her own home in the city with her own pure and unadulterated milk the foundling slave child that Marcus has entrusted to her as a nursling by the name of Tyche, having taken from him for each month as pay for her milk and nursing care along with olive oil 8 drachmas.

Theodote has also received from Marcus by hand from his own house for the aforesaid 18 months for nine months' nursing 72 drachmas, and if during that time the child should experience a mortal calamity, Theodote agrees to care for another foundling child and to nurse her and to hand the child over to Marcus after nine months, receiving no additional wages at all, because she has undertaken to bring up a child irrespective of whether it dies or not, taking good care of her in all other respects month by month, and to give her the care she would give her own child, not ruining her milk or sleeping with her husband nor becoming pregnant or nursing another child. Whatever things she receives she shall keep safe and return when requested to, or pay back [to Marcus] the value of each unless it can be demonstrated that the child is dead; if this can be shown she is released from obligation. Moreover, she is not to abandon her nursing responsibilities during the time.

If she does not abide by the contract, she and her husband Sophron are liable to prosecution and to be held in custody until she has paid back the wages she has already received, and she is to pay what she has taken plus one half and the damages and expenses and 300 silver drachmas in addition. In the event of such a judgement, both parties are liable for restitution of the money and it may be taken from either one or the other, and from all their property, as if by court judgement, with all assurances that they may produce and all protection being invalid. But if she fulfils her contractual obligations, Marcus Aemilius is to pay Theodote her monthly wages for nursing for the remaining nine months and he shall not take away the child during that time unless he pays her the equivalent wages. Theodote is to come to Marcus three times per month in order that the child may be inspected by him. Theodote the daughter of Dositheus and her husband Sophron for the slave child Tyche and for 18 months have received 8 drachmas for 9 months, in the city.

(1107) To Protarchus from Isidora the daughter of Com ... with her brother Eutychides son of Com ... acting as guardian and from Didyme the daughter of Apollonius, a Persian, with her brother Ischyrion son of Apollonius of the Persian expedition acting as guardian. Didyme agrees to take care of and to nurse outside of his home at her home in the city with her own pure and unadulterated milk for 16 months from Pharmouthi of the current 17th year of Augustus Caesar, the foundling infant slave child that Isidora has entrusted to her as nursling. Didyme has received from the aforesaid Isidora wages for her milk and nursing care for each month ten drachmas of silver and two cotylae of oil. In return for these wages she contracts to take care of herself and not ruin her milk nor sleep with a man nor become pregnant nor nurse another child. Whatever belongings from the child she receives or is entrusted with, she shall keep safe and return when requested to, or to pay back the value of each unless it can be demonstrated that the child is dead; if this can be shown she is released from obligation.

Furthermore Didyme has received from Isidora by hand from her house oil for the first three months, Pharmouthi, Pachon, and Pauni. She is not to abandon her nursing during this time, but if she does not abide by the contract she must pay back the wages she has received and half of whatever she has received plus damages and expenses, and in addition she is to pay 500 drachmas and the prescribed fine. Isidora is to have right of execution on Didyme's person, and on all her possessions as if by court judgement, with all assurances that Didyme may produce and all protection being invalid. But if she fulfils all the conditions of the contract, Isidora is to provide her with the monthly wages for the remaining 13 months as specified above, and not to take the child away during that time, unless she pays her the equivalent wages. Didyme shall visit Isidora every month on four separate days taking the child with her to be inspected by her.

(second hand) I, Isidora, agree to abide by this contract as written. I, Eutychides, declare myself as guardian of my sister and have written for her because she does not know letters.

(third hand) I, Didyme agree to abide by this contract as written. I, Ischyrion, declare myself as guardian of my sister and have written for her because she does not know letters. (first hand). Isidora's contract. 17th year of Caesar's reign.

**BGU 4.1106, 1107. G, 13 BCE**

**II One important way to understand relationships between slaves, slave families, freedpeople and free people are epitaphs, which sometimes mention various relationships. The following show a variety of relationships between slaves and other slaves, between freedpeople and slaves, and so forth.**

Publius Marcius Philodamus, builder, freedman of Publius, for himself and his. Here was buried Jucunda his darling.

CIL 12.1734 Marcius Philodamus. Beneventum. C. Early in the first century BCE.

Posilla Senenia, daughter of Quartus, and Quarta Senenia, freedwoman of Gaius.

Stop, stranger, and also read through what is written here: A mother was not permitted to enjoy the presence of her only daughter. Some god or other, it's my belief, cast unfriendly eye on her life. Since it was not permitted to her to be arrayed in life by her mother, her mother performed this act after her death, at the limit of her time, as was due; she has provided with a memorial her whom she had loved.

## CIL 12.1837. Posilla Senenia. Found at Monteleone in the old Sabine territory

[a] Lucius Aurelius Hernia, freedman of Lucius, a butcher of the Viminal Hill.

She who went before me in death, my one and only wife, chaste in body, a loving woman of my heart possessed, lived faithful to her faithful man; in fondness equal to her other virtues, never during bitter times did she shrink from loving duties.

Aurelia, freedwoman of Lucius.

[b] Aurelia Philematium, freedwoman of Lucius.

In life I was named Aurelia Philematium, a woman chaste and modest, knowing not the crowd, faithful to her man. My man was a fellow-freedman; he was also in very truth over and above a father to me; and alas, I have lost him. Seven years old was I when he, even he, took me in his bosom; forty years old - and I am in the power of violent death. He through my constant loving duties flourished at all seasons . . .

CIL 12.1221. Lucius Aurelius Rermia and his wife Aurelia. Stone slab now in the British Museum. Found at Rome by the Via Nomentana. c. 80 BCE or later.

If anyone cares to add his own grief to ours, here let him be; and with no scanty tears let him deign to weep. Here an unhappy parent has laid to rest his one and only daughter Nymphe whom he cherished in the joy of sweet love while the shortened hours of the Fates allowed it. Now she is torn away from home - earth covers her, dear to her own; now her fair face, her form too, praised as fair, - all is airy shadow and her bones are a little pinch of ashes.

CIL 12.1222. Nymphe (?). Found at Rome.

Here are placed the bones of Caesellia Hymnis, freedwoman of Quintus and his wife. Helena a freedwoman made this at her own cost.

CIL 12.1588. Caesellia Hymnis. Capua.

Property of Gaius Pagurius Gelos freedman of Gaius.

Stranger, stop and look at this lofty tomb, which contains the bones of a little life of tender age. Here I lie buried whose tender age was in its spring-time. I brought dignity to attend on my duty, my wool-making. Plaint fills me at Fortune's lot so hard and unfair. Should you ask my name, the name of 'Salvia' would rise up. I will bid you farewell, stranger. I would like you to be happier

CIL 12.2161. Salvia? Ivrea. Now lost.

Still living. Lucius Postumius Diodorus, freedman of Lucius, made this during his lifetime for himself and his wife, Pomponia Calliopa, now deceased, freedwoman of Pomponius.

CIL 12.2261. Lucius Postumius. Found in Casus Island.

Gaius Numitorius Asclepiades, and Mummia Zosima, freedmen of Lucius.

These are two persons of one heart, good report, and honourable passing. Blest.

CIL 12.1347. Numitorius and Mummia. On a piece of sarcophagus. Rome. First century BCE

Publius Larcius Nicia, freedman of Publius; Saufeia Thalea, freedwoman of a matron; Lucius Larcius Rufus, son of Publius; Publius Larcius Brocchus, son of Publius; Publia Horaea, freedwoman of Publius and of his wife.

I was a woman respected by the good and hated by no respectable woman. To my old master and mistress I was an obedient servant, but to him yonder my husband I was a dutiful wife; for they gave me freedom, and he arrayed me in a robe. For twenty years since my girlhood I maintained the whole house. My last day delivered its judgment and death took away my breath, but took not the splendour of my life.

Lucius Eprius Chilo, messenger-attendant on a tribune of the plebs; Epria . . .

CIL 12.1570, Found at Traiectum on the Liris, c. 45 BCE? now lost.

**III. Wills reveal some of the complicated relationships created by slavery. In the following will[[1]](#footnote-1) from CE 189-194,a Roman soldier frees his daughter (he has already freed her mother).**

Gaius Longinus Castor, veteran honourably discharged from the praetorian fleet of Misenum, has made a will. I direct that my slave Marcella aged over thirty years and my slave Cleopatra aged over thirty years shall be freed, and they shall each in equal portion be my heirs. All the others shall be disinherited. They shall enter on the inheritance, each on her own portion, as soon as they each think proper to attest that they are my heirs, and it shall not be lawful to sell or mortgage it. But if the aforesaid Marcella suffers the lot of humankind, then I wish her portion of the inheritance to go to Sarapion and Socrates and Longus. Likewise for Cleopatra, I wish her portion to go to Nilus. Whoever becomes my heir shall be obliged to give, perform, and provide all things that are written in this my will, and I commit them to its trust. My slave Sarapias daughter of my freedwoman Cleopatra shall be freed, and I give and bequeath to her five arurae of corn land which I own in the area of the village of Karanis in a place called Strouthos *"Ostrich"*, likewise one and a quarter arurae of a ravine, likewise a third portion of my house and the third portion of the same which I bought formerly from Prapetheus mother of Thaseus, likewise a third portion of a palm-grove which I own close to the canal called Old Canal. I wish my body to be carried out and dressed for burial through the care and piety of my heirs. If I leave any later provision written by my hand in any manner whatsoever, I wish it to hold good. May evil guile be absent from this will. On the making of this will Julius Petronianus bought the household and chattels for one sestertius, Gaius Lucretius Saturnilus being the scale-holder (acknowledged) and Marcus Sempronius Heraclianus being called to witness (acknowledged). The will was made in the village of Karanis in the Arsinoite nome on November 17 in the consulship of the two Silani, in the 30th year of the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus Armeniacus Medicus Parthicus Sarmaticus Germanicus, Hathur 21. If I leave any further document written by my hand, I wish it to hold good. Opened and read in the Arsinoite metropolis in the Forum Augustum in the office of the five per cent tax on inheritances and manumissions on February 21 in the consulship of the present consuls, in the 2nd year of the Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus, Mecheir 27. The remaining scalers Gaius Longinus Acylas (acknowledged), Julius Bolyssius, Marcus Antistius Petronianus, Julius Gemellus, veteran. Translation of the codicillary tablets. I, Gaius Longinus Castor, veteran honourably discharged from the praetorian fleet of Misenum, have made a codicil. I have appointed Marcus Sempronius Heraclianus, my respected friend, trustee to act on his own good faith. To my kinsman Julius Serenus I give and bequeath 4,000 sestertii Written in my own hand on February 7. Sealed by Longinus Acylas and Valerius Priscus. Sealers Gaius Longinus Acylas (acknowledged), Julius Philoxenus, Gaius Lucretius Saturnilus (acknowledged), Gaius Longinus Castor, Julius Gemellus, veteran. Opened and read on the same day on which the will was unsealed. {Subscribed} I, Gains Lucius Geminianus, expert in Roman law, translated the foregoing copy and it agrees with the original will. {Endorsed} Of Gaius Longinus Castor.

1. BGU 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)