

WOMEN IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Study Paper for the Biblical Research Institute

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A Greco-Roman World?

We ought to ask in beginning whether it is appropriate to speak of a "Greco-Roman world" as having existed in the days of the apostle Paul.¹

To get at an answer, we can review the fact that under Alexander the Great the "Greeks" swept over the Persian Empire, around 331 B.C., and that around 168 B.C. the Romans took control of the Greeks.

Scholars are eager to inform us that when Alexander conquered the Persians, Greek *culture*² swept over the Persian Empire—and became very popular. When the Romans had their turn, Roman culture swept through that portion of the Greek world now controlled by the Romans. But Greek culture retained much of its vitality, blending with the Roman culture in both the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean. Roman law, the Greek language, and everybody's religions spread everywhere.

Juvenal in his third satire could complain bitterly in Paul's day that the River Orontes was pouring into the River Tiber, that every Roman trade and profession, from the master of the highest studies down to the rope-dancer and the pander, was being crowded with hungry, keen-witted adventurers from the East, and that every island of the Aegean, every city of Asia, was flooding Rome with its vice. He could as well have said that the Tiber was flowing into the Orontes and the Euxine, and that Roman products were being sold and Roman concepts shared all over the East.

By Paul's time, in the first century A.D., Greek and Roman cultures had been blending around the Mediterranean basin for over 200 years. In addition, elements of Syrian and Egyptian cultures, especially the celebration of the popular Egyptian goddess Isis, had also been distributing themselves. And besides, elements of local culture persisted in many places. Ephesus, for example, still cherished its traditional cult of Artemis [Diana], and Eleusis still cherished its traditional Demeter mysteries, even though the worship of Artemis and Demeter had spread almost everywhere. If we chose, we could speak of a Greco-Roman-Syrian-Egyptian-local culture; but this isn't necessary, for the admixture of Syrian, Egyptian, and local elements was all a part of the way of life which is comprehended in the single expression, "Greco-Roman culture."

We should clarify a point in passing. The Roman entity that took the place of the Greek empire around 168 B.C. we often refer to as the Roman Empire, but actually it was ruled by a republican form of government. The very first man to rule Rome as an "emperor" was Augustus, whose term of office ran from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14. Jesus was born in "the days" of "Caesar Augustus" (Luke 2). Paul wrote

- 1 The term itself is attested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as far back as 1888. It has been used by notable scholars, such as Arthur Darby Nock in the title of an essay, "Studies in the Graeco-Roman Beliefs of the Empire," republished in Zeph Stewart, ed., *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 33-48. This book is a posthumous collection of Nock's best essays.
- 2 Known as "Hellenism" after Hellas, the Greeks' name for their homeland.

his epistles about fifty or sixty years later. Thus the first century of Christianity was also the first century of the “Roman Empire”—provided we define “empire” not merely as a world power but more specifically as an entity ruled by an emperor.

Now we specifically want to know whether Greek and Roman cultures had blended together in the places where Paul worked.

Let’s look at the familiar New Testament first. When Paul wrote to the “Romans”—to the Christians who lived in the city of Rome itself—he wrote not in Latin but in Greek. Likewise he wrote to the Galatians [immigrant Gauls] of central Asia Minor not in their traditional form of Gaelic but in Greek. At the same time, although Paul was born in Tarsus, a city far to the east of Rome, he owned Roman citizenship and was proud of it. The centurion in Acts 22:28 prized his Roman citizenship and had paid a large sum to procure it.

A. H. M. Jones has painstakingly traced evidence that in the eastern provinces (including the locations where Paul labored most) Republican Rome influenced the structure of even small towns. With the arrival of the centralized imperial government, Roman influence increased markedly.³

What about Ephesus, the city to whose Christians Paul addressed the counsel that wives should “be subject to their husbands as to the Lord”? Ephesus was the *de facto* Roman capital of the Roman province of Asia.

What about Corinth, whose Christian wives, Paul said, should understand that their husbands are their “head”? The original Greek city of Corinth was completely destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C., the same year in which the Romans destroyed Carthage. Corinth was destroyed with a thoroughness similar to that with which the Romans would destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Corinth was rebuilt by the Romans in 44 B.C.—as a Roman city, and capital of the Romanized province of Achaëa.⁴ In Acts 18 we read of the judgment seat of Gallio the “proconsul.” A proconsul was a *Roman* official.

Prof. Gerd Theissen has conveniently summarized the evidence for us:

After its destruction in 146 Caesar refounded Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 B.C.E. There he settled mostly freedmen but not exclusively: . . . “sending people for the most part who belonged to the freedmen class” (Strabo, VIII, 6, 23). Veterans were probably also among the colonists. In any event the settlers were Roman citizens, a Roman colony by definition possessing such citizenship.

Under these circumstances the Roman element was dominant, even if there may have been Greek slaves, for example, among the freedmen. Thus it is certainly no accident that eight of the seventeen surviving names of Corinthian Christians are Latin: Aquila, Fortunatus, Gaius, Lucius, Priscilla, Quartus, Titius Justus, and Tertius. To be sure this tells little about ethnic origin, as Aquila and Priscilla were obviously Jews. Jews constituted a third group of people alongside Romans and Greeks. . . .

3 See A. H. M. Jones et al., *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

4 See, for example, Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), p. 240, and the quotation from Theissen below.

Prof. Theissen adds:

It is especially important for the founding of the congregation that this city had no continuity in its tradition. Nothing in Corinth was more than a century old, whether the constitution, buildings, families, or cults. . . . Such a city is rather receptive to new endeavors.⁵

Incidentally, that popular story about the unique lasciviousness of Corinth applies to the earlier community, not to the new Corinth that Paul knew.⁶ Use of "Corinthianize" as a synonym of "fornicate" and use of "Corinthian" as a synonym for "whoremonger" were initiated by writers who lived four or five hundred years before Paul was born.⁷ The report by Strabo (a first-century geographer) about a thousand prostitutes at the Corinthian temple of Aphrodite occurs in the *historical* section of his account of Corinth. In his *contemporary* section he devoted only half a sentence to "a small temple of Aphrodite" and at once turned his attention to a notable spring that he found flowing nearby.⁸

We have much more to say about the Greco-Roman culture, but in concluding this introductory section we can say that there is good reason to believe that a recognizable Greco-Roman culture did exist in Paul's day; and we can also say that Corinth was especially open to the new winds that were blowing at the time.⁹

Problems and Solutions

Before we proceed with our examination of Greco-Roman culture, why don't we take a moment to remind ourselves that our present interest in the status of women in the Greco-Roman world arises because certain Bible passages do not lend themselves easily in support of women's ordination to the gospel ministry.

These so-called problem passages include Gen 2 and 3 (Adam's rib; woman's fall and "curse"), 1 Cor 11 (woman veiled in respect to man as head), 1 Cor 14 (women not to be involved in tongue-talking), Eph 5 (wives to be submissive), and especially 1 Tim 2 and 3 (women, as created second and deceived first, not to teach or serve as "bishops").

One way to remove the offense of these passages is to disdain them. The account of Adam's rib in Gen 2 has been described in one recent work as merely a "primitive aetiological folk-tale."¹⁰ The instruction in 1 Tim 2 and 3 is commonly dismissed as not having been written by Paul. More ingeniously, the "problem" phrases in 1 Cor 11 have been explained by claiming that Paul dictated the letter in

5 Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. John H. Schütz, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 99, 100.

6 For one widely used work that applies it to Paul's day, see *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, article "Corinthians, First Letter to the."

7 See the words *korinthiazomai* and *korinthiastes* in the Greek-English lexicon of Liddell and Scott.

8 See Strabo, *Geography*, 8, 20-23; translated in the Loeb Classical Library.

9 William Harvey Lawson, "First Corinthians 9:24-10:22 in its Contextual Framework," (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984), pp. 13, 14, cites authorities who think that Corinth's ill fame may have been nourished by her rival city Athens, and that "probably Corinth was little better and little worse than any other great sea port and commercial center of the age."

10 Eva C. Topping, "Patriarchal Prejudice and Pride in Greek Christianity: Some Notes on Origins," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 1 (May 1983):8, 9.

such a crowded place that his “distracted secretary” confused what Paul really said with comments made by a bystander.¹¹

Commentaries of a more “conservative” stance, on the other hand, may not deny the inspiration of these passages but may instead invoke the influence of presumed *cultural settings*. One such work¹² so stresses the male-female equality which it perceives in Genesis 2 that it can only explain the *male-ness* of Christ’s incarnation as a concession to male-dominance in first-century culture. Other more-or-less conservative commentators are certain that Paul would have given women much more freedom and authority, had it not been that he would have been grievously misunderstood by his contemporaries.

This conservative dependence on *cultural conditioning* arouses its own set of problems, if only because reconstructing the cultural situation of women in Paul’s day is itself difficult. No thoroughgoing contemporary sociological analysis of the status of women in Greco-Roman culture has been preserved for us from Paul’s day, and it’s most unlikely that any was written then. Instead we are confronted with the challenge of putting together bits and pieces of ancient art work, stories, plays, letters, legal documents, and inscriptions. Inscriptions exist by the many thousand, however, some preserving messages professionally carved into stone (or set in mosaic tiles), many others scratched irregularly and misspelled, mute testimony to the ordinariness of their engravers. Archeology helps, informing us about some of the tools, toys, utensils, and weapons that ancient people used, the size of their homes and cities, and (from skeletal remains, for instance) how early they died and, in some cases, what they died of.¹³

As modern authors piece together the available fragmented data, they inevitably introduce their presuppositions. One writer may evaluate an ancient culture as superior if it allowed women to engage

11 Margaret Brackenbury Crook, *Women and Religion*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 130.

12 Cornelia Swain, “Women, from Property to Personhood,” *The Cumberland Seminarian*, spring, 1979, p. 2.

13 See for example Carol Meyers, “The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel,” *Biblical Archeologist*, Sept. 1978, pp. 91- 103. Many women died young, in childbirth.

freely in pre-and extra-marital intercourse. Another may be delighted with the freedom of Etruscan women to attend feasts with their husbands in the company of male and female prostitutes, while their poor Roman sisters on the south bank of the Tiber a few miles away were still at home industriously spinning their wool.¹⁴ Still another author, looking at the same Etruscans, calls attention to the fewness of these aristocratic families that could effect such an extravagant lifestyle, their divisive quarrelsomeness, and their vast numbers of subjugated serfs.¹⁵

To draw an example from the more familiar field of Old Testament culture, one writer (a woman)¹⁶ may consider Old Testament women abused and discriminated against by being denied the right to own property. Another writer, a male,¹⁷ may hold that if Old Testament women didn't normally own property in the sense of being able to dispose of it, procedures laid down in Numbers and Deuteronomy nonetheless provided that they could never be alienated from their property; and the levirate laws (which were part of those procedures), requiring as they did that a man should marry his brother's widow in order to protect the widow's right to her land no matter how distasteful the woman herself may have been to the man, placed a potentially heavy claim on men.

Not only must the inevitability of an author's presuppositions be taken into account, and the fragmented nature of the evidence, but we must also be aware of the social status of women being observed. Intrigued as we may be by ancient accounts of women insulated from the world by the walls of their homes and by their multitude of servants, we have to remember that such accounts describe women of means. The Greek matrons Cornelius Nepos talks about, who spent almost all their time separated from men in their women's quarters, must have been exceptional indeed, if they existed at all.¹⁸ Most women were poor and had work to do, and a large number of them were slaves. Poor women of necessity left the house to fetch water, go to market, and help tend the family's little farm if it owned one. Slave women did what they were told to do—as did slave men. We must return later to the question of slavery.

14 Larissa Bonfante Warren, "The Women of Etruria," pp. 229-240; in John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan, eds., *Women in the Ancient World: The "Arethusa" Papers* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984).

15 M. Cary, *A History of Rome*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1954), pp. 20, 21.

16 Swain, "Women," p. 4.

17 John Pairman Brown, "The Role of Women and the Treaty in the Ancient World," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 25 (1981): 1-28.

18 Cornelius Nepos, a Gaul who spent most of his life in Rome in the century before Christ, is noted for saying that whereas a Roman wife thinks nothing of attending a banquet with her husband, a Greek matron attends parties only of her relatives and otherwise "keeps to the more retired part of the house called 'the women's apartment,' to which no man has access who is not near of kin." See the translation in the Loeb Classical Library. It is a delicate portrait but, again, it can only apply to wealthy women—if, indeed, it is trustworthy. The biographies for which Cornelius Nepos is famous are not based on serious personal research but on easily available secondary sources, according to the Loeb Classical Library translator. Cornelius himself is not known to have visited Greece to make first-hand observations; and his account of Greek women seems to be at odds with Paul's first-hand observation that at Mars Hill in Athens leading women were present to hear and accept his message (Acts 17); they were not staying out of sight at home. Lydia, the seller of purple at Philippi, didn't wait for a husband to accompany her out of the house to worship at the riverside. In any case, Corinth, one of the principal cities in Paul's experience, had in Paul's day been rebuilt as a Roman colony. See above. We may be advised not to build our picture of women in the Greek world on this casual statement by Cornelius Nepos.

Having reminded ourselves of the reason for our quest and of some of the pitfalls involved in pursuing it, let us move back to the specific question before us, the status of women in the Greco-Roman world. Let's begin by looking at free women first.

The Status of Free Women in the Greco-Roman World.

The Greco-Roman world was politically dominated by men. There can be no dispute over something so obvious. All the Emperors were men; so also, so far as we know, were the senators, the proconsuls, the praetors, and every other ordinary officer of state. If any of them were women, they were so exceptional as not to alter the overwhelming male dominance. Women were excluded from voting in political elections.

The popular concept, however, that wives were entirely under the domination of their husbands is unjustified. It is true that the ancient Roman Law of XII Tables (dating perhaps to the fifth century B.C.) placed "women, even though they are of full age" under the "guardianship" (the hand or *manus*) of their husband or of some other male relative. However, Table VI specifically provided that "if any woman is unwilling to be subjected in this manner to her husband's marital control," all she needed to do to free herself was to "*absent herself for three successive nights in every year*"—sleep at some friend's house three nights in a row—"and by this means shall interrupt his prescriptive right of each year."¹⁹

Prof. M. Cary (who bore an honorary doctorate from Oxford University) perceived in the XII Tables not so much a binding of women as a releasing of them. "In the matter of family law it sanctioned, under certain conditions, the emancipation of wives and children from the autocracy of the *paterfamilias*."²⁰

Now the woman who extricated herself from the guardianship [the *manus*] of her husband, came under the guardianship of some other male relative. This regulation was relaxed step by step, however, and by the time of Augustus—who was eager to promote child-bearing among the upper classes—a woman could be freed from all guardianship after she bore a third child. In the early second century "a married woman did not need a guardian even to draft her will, and a father no more dreamed of forcing his daughter to marry against her will than of opposing a marriage on which she had set her heart, for, as the great jurist Salvius Iulianus maintained, a marriage could not be made by constraint, but only by consent of the parties thereto, and the free consent of the girl was indispensable."²¹

Women were also free to own property—on which apparently they had the almost unbelievable privilege of *not* being taxed. We recall that some of the earliest Christians met in the house belonging to John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). This authority to own property in Jerusalem was matched by a similar authority in Italy. In the second century, the historian Appian retold a well-known story from the era of civil wars which preceded the founding of the Empire. To help meet the mounting military expenses, 1400 very rich women were summoned to make major financial contributions. The women refused to do so. As retold by Appian, they said,

19 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, pp. 174, 175.

20 Cary, *History of Rome*, p. 78.

21 Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire*, ed. Henry T. Rowell, trans. E. O. Lorimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 84.

Why should we pay taxes who have no part in the honours, the commands, the statecraft, for which you contend against each other with such harmful results? "Because this is a time of war," do you say? When have there not been wars, and when have taxes ever been imposed on women, who are exempted by their sex among all mankind?

The women admitted that their mothers had once made contributions in a time of war, but, they said, their mothers had done so voluntarily and only from their jewelry. Their mothers had not donated

from their landed property, their fields, their dowries, or their houses, without which life is not possible to free women.²²

The statement is valuable as revealing the authority which women enjoyed, a century before Paul's visits to Ephesus and Corinth, to own fields and houses in addition to their dowries; and ownership implies management. We recall Lydia again, seller of purple, an Eastern Greek-speaking woman who managed her own business and household and who invited Paul to stay awhile at her house (Acts 16:14, 15).

Diligence in examining ancient literature and modern collections of ancient inscriptions has reassured us that many women were loved and honored by their husbands, parents, children, and communities. This research has also informed us that some women filled certain public roles, including serving as priestesses. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant have put us in their debt by providing a convenient collection of ancient documents and inscriptions in translation.²³

For example, a first-century B.C. inscription by a butcher praises "my wife . . . my one and only, a loving woman who possessed my heart, she lived as a faithful wife to a faithful husband with affection equal to my own."²⁴ Another epitaph says: "He was married at eighteen and she at fifteen, and for fifty years of life together they shared agreement unbroken, . . . twice archons of their city. . . ."²⁵

Pliny the Younger, who rose to the rank of consul and then governor (proconsul) of a province, wrote with special tenderness about women known to his wife and himself. For example, "This premature death of Helvidius' daughter is tragic—both sisters giving birth to girls and dying in labour. I am deeply distressed, and not unduly, that these were noble young women in the flower of their youth. . . ."²⁶ And again from Pliny, this time in respect to brave Fannia, who had risked her life for her husband, when she seemed about to die: "Will there be anyone now whom we can hold up as a model to our wives, from whose courage even our own sex can take example." And in respect to Fannia and her mother: "My services were at their command alike in prosperity and adversity."²⁷

22 Appian, *Civil Wars*, 4. 32-34; in Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 207, 208.

23 See above footnote entry.

24 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 134.

25 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 136.

26 Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 4, 21; in Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 143.

27 Pliny, *Letters*, 2. 19; in Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, pp. 212, 213.

Little daughters could be loved as tenderly then as they are today. "I am writing to you in great distress: our friend [Minicius] Fundanus [a consul] has lost his younger daughter. I never saw a girl so gay and lovable, so deserving of a longer life." Among her graces were these, that "she would cling to her father's neck, and [also] embrace us, his friends, with modest affection; she loved her nurses, her attendants and her teachers," and "applied herself intelligently to her books."²⁸

If many women and girls were loved with sincere affection, some women were publicly honored. In Corinth only a few years before Paul went there an inscription was raised to

Junia Theodora, a Roman resident in Corinth, a woman held in highest honour . . . who copiously supplied from her own means many of our citizens with generosity. . . .²⁹

The council and people of a town in Asia Minor erected a monument to Flavia Publicia Nicomachis, "founder of our city, president for life."³⁰

Women served as physicians [sometimes, but not always, considered an honorable profession], midwives and wetnurses, pedagogues, wool weighers, fishmongers, hair dressers, salt vendors, actresses, and so on and on, and also as poets, musicians, advocates, and even as authors of history books. At least one is remembered as a philosopher.³¹

But we're especially interested that they served as priestesses. In Ephesus in the first century Flavia Ammon functioned as "high priestess of the temple of Asia . . . president, twice *stephanephorus* . . . president of the games."³² In another city in the first century Lalla, wife of Ditomus, served as "priestess of the Emperor's cult."³³ In another place, Tata was offered "first-rank honors" as a "priestess of the imperial cult a second time" and as "priestess of Hera for life, mother of the city," who "offered sacrifice throughout the year."³⁴ In Athens in the second century, a woman whose name had to remain secret was by the Athenians made "sacred priestess of Demeter" and as such initiated no less a person than Emperor Hadrian into the mysteries of her goddess!³⁵

The sixth satire of Juvenal [c. A.D. 60-140], called "Dream of Unlovely Women," is sometimes cited as revealing the very negative attitude toward women of a typical Roman man. To regard Juvenal's tastelessness as typical is to ignore the manly gentleness and respect for women illustrated in the previous paragraphs. An entirely different man from Pliny, Juvenal crudely demands of his friend, Postumus, if he is really going to marry. Doesn't he know that Chastity has fled the earth? Is he in his right senses? Doesn't he have a high window he can jump out of?³⁶

28 Pliny, Letters, 5, 16; in Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 144.

29 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 157.

30 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 158.

31 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, pp. 161-172.

32 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 260.

33 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 156.

34 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 260.

35 Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*, p. 261.

36 See the English translation in the Loeb Classical Library.

No doubt Juvenal had some cases in mind when he spoke of a wife who squandered her husband's income on jewelry and entertainment, a wife who used her large dowry to dominate her husband, one who wore so much lipstick her husband got paste on his lips when he kisses her, a termagant wife who tongue-lashed her neighbors and worked noisily at her dumbbells, and an insatiable wife who ran through eight husbands in five seasons. But Juvenal also reveals (through his gratuitous expressions of distaste) that he knew some wealthy Roman wives who could converse in Greek, who could compare the Greek Homer with the Latin Virgil, who could converse on philosophy and history, who could discuss affairs around the Empire with army generals, and who could handle their husband's business matters.

But in 1905 Prof. Samuel Dill, who taught at Oxford, Belfast, Dublin, and Edinburgh, summarized the new freedoms of Roman women so concisely and with such fine documentation that it seems wise to let him take over more or less for the next couple of pages.³⁷

The truth is that Juvenal is as much shocked by the "new woman" as he is by the vicious woman. He did not understand, or he could not acquiesce in the great movement for the emancipation of women, which had set in long before his time, and which, like all such movements, brought evil with it as well as good. There is perhaps nothing more striking in the social history of Rome than the inveterate conservatism of Roman sentiment in the face of accomplished change. . . .

The old Roman matron was, by legal theory, in the power of her husband, yet assured by religion and sentiment a dignified position in the family, and treated with profound, if somewhat cold, respect; she was busied with household cares, and wanting in the lighter graces and charms, austere, self-contained, and self-controlled. But this severe ideal had begun to fade even in the days of the elder Cato [234-149 B.C.].³⁸

About the same time [the time of the Second Punic War, 218-201 B.C.] began that emancipation of women from the jealous restraints of Roman law, which was to be carried further in the Antonine age³⁹ [2nd century A.D.]. The strict forms of marriage, which placed the wife in the power of her husband, fell more and more into desuetude. Women attained more absolute control over their property, and so much capital became concentrated in their hands that, about the middle of the second century B.C., the Voconian law was passed to prohibit bequests to them, with the usual futile result of such legislation.⁴⁰

37 Dill, *Roman Society*, pp. 78-81. The dates in brackets have been supplied to help maintain a proper sense of time. The documentation is Dill's, but with most of his numerous abbreviations spelled out.

38 Mommsen, *Roman History* (Tr.), 2:408.

39 Mommsen, *Roman History*, 2:408.

40 Cicero, *Verrine Orations*, 1, 42, 107.

Yet the old ideal of the industrious housewife never died out, and Roman epitaphs for ages record that the model matron was a wool-worker and a keeper at home. A senator of the reign of Honorius praises his daughter for the same homely virtues.⁴¹ But from the second century B.C. the education of the Roman girl of the higher classes underwent a great change.⁴² Dancing, music, and the higher accomplishments were no longer under a ban, although they were still suspected by people of the old-fashioned school. Boys and girls received the same training from the grammarian, and read their Homer and Ennius together.⁴³

There were women in the time of Lucretius, as in the time of Juvenal, who interlarded their conversation with Greek phrases.⁴⁴ Cornelia, the wife of Pompey [106-48 B.C.], was trained in literature and mathematics, and even had some tincture of philosophy.⁴⁵ The daughter of Atticus, who became the wife of Agrippa, was placed under the tuition of a freedman, who, as too often happened, seems to have abused his trust.⁴⁶ Even in the gay circle of Ovid [43 B.C.-c. A.D. 17], there were learned ladies, or ladies who wished to be thought so.⁴⁷ Even Martial reckons culture among the charms of a woman. Seneca [4 B.C. - A.D. 65] maintained that women have an equal capacity for cultivation with men.⁴⁸ Thus the blue-stock- ing of Juvenal, for whom he has so much contempt, had many an ancestress for three centuries, as she will have many a daughter till the end of the Western Empire.⁴⁹

Even in philosophy, usually the last study to attract the female mind, Roman ladies were asserting an equal interest. Great ladies of the Augustan court, even the empress herself, had their philosophic directors,⁵⁰ and the fashion perhaps became still more general under M. Aurelius. Epictetus had met ladies who were enthusiastic admirers of the Platonic Utopia, but the philosopher rather slyly attributes their enthusiasm to the absence of rigorous conjugal relations in the Ideal Society.⁵¹

Even in the field of authorship, women were claiming equal rights. The *Memoirs of Agrippina* was one of the authorities of Tacitus.⁵² The poems of Sulpicia, mentioned by Martial,⁵³ were read in Gaul in the days of Sidonius.⁵⁴ Greek verses, of some merit in spite of a pedantic affectation, by Balbilla, a friend of the wife of Hadrian, can still be read on the Colossus of Memnon.⁵⁵ Calpurnia, the wife of Pliny, may not

- 41 Symmachus, *Epistles*, 6, 67; cf. Suetonius, *Octavian*, 44; *Or. Henz.*, 2677, 4629, 4629, lanifica, pia, pudica, casta, domiseda.
- 42 Macrobius, *Sat.*, 3, 14, 11.
- 43 Friedländer, 1, 312; Boissier, *Rel. Rom.*, 2:240.
- 44 Lucretius, 4, 1160; Juvenal, 6, 192.
- 45 Plutarch, *Pompey*, 55.
- 46 Suetonius, *De Illustribus Grammaticis*, 16.
- 47 Ovid, *Ars Amores*, 2, 282.
- 48 Martial, 12, 98, 3; cf. Seneca, *Ad Helviam Matrem*, 17; *Ad Marciam*, 16.
- 49 Claudian, *Laus Serenae*, 146.
- 50 Seneca, *Ad Marciam*, 4.
- 51 Epictetus, *Fragment*, 53.
- 52 Tacitus, *Annals*, 4, 53; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 7, 8, 46.
- 53 Martial, 10, 35; 7, 69.
- 54 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina*, 9, 261.
- 55 C.I.G. 4725- 31.

have been an author; but she shared all Pliny's literary tastes; she set his poems to music, and gave him the admiration of a good wife, if not of an impartial critic.

Prof. Dill continues on the theme of women's engagement in political affairs. Though they were denied the privilege and responsibility of political office, they exerted effective influence on political decisions nonetheless. Juvenal's scorn for such influences reveals once more how far he was behind the times.

From the days of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, to the days of Placidia, the sister of [Emperor] Honorius [395-423], Roman women exercised, from time to time, a powerful, and not always wholesome, influence on public affairs. The politic Augustus discussed high matters of state with Livia.⁵⁶ The reign of Claudius [41-54] was a reign of women and freedmen. Tacitus records, with a certain distaste for the innovation, that Agrippina sat enthroned beside Claudius on a lofty tribunal, to receive the homage of the captive Caractacus.⁵⁷ Nero emancipated himself from the grasping ambition of his mother only by a ghastly crime. The influence of Caenis on Vespasian [70-79] in his later days tarnished his fame.⁵⁸

The influence of women in provincial administration was also becoming a serious force. In the reign of Tiberius, Caecina Severus, with the weight of forty years' experience of camps, in a speech before the Senate, denounced the new-fangled custom of the wives of generals and governors accompanying them abroad, attending reviews of troops, mingling freely with the soldiers, and taking an active part in business, which was not always favourable to pure administration.⁵⁹ In the inscriptions of the first and second centuries, women appear in a more wholesome character as "mothers of the camp," or patronesses of municipal towns and corporations.⁶⁰ They have statues dedicated to them for liberality in erecting porticoes or adorning theatres or providing civic games or feasts.⁶¹ And on one of these tablets we read of a Curia mulierum [women's senate?] at Lanuvium.⁶² We are reminded of the "chapter of matrons" who visited Agrippina with their censure,⁶³ and another female senate, under Elagabalus, which dealt with minute questions of precedence and graded etiquette.⁶⁴ On the walls of Pompeii female admirers posted up their election placards in support of their favourite candidates.⁶⁵

Prof. Dill concludes:

Thus Juvenal was fighting a lost battle, lost long before he wrote. For good or evil, women in the first and second centuries were making themselves a power.

56 Suetonius, *Octavian*, 84.

57 Tacitus, *Annals*, 12, 37, novum sane et moribus veterum insolitum, feminam signis Romanis praesidere.

58 D. Cassius, 66, 14; cf. Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 16; Krause, *De Suetonius Fontibus*, p. 75.

59 Tacitus, *Annals*, 3, 33; cf. 1, 64; 1, 69, sed femina [i.e. Agrippina] ingens animi munia ducis per eos dies induit, etc.

60 *Or. Henz.* 6000, 4036, 5158, 4643, 5134, 3774, 2417, 4055, 4056, 7207, 3815.

61 *Ibid.*, 3738, 3773, 6992.

62 ely with th

63 Suetonius, *Galba*, 5.

64 Lampridius, *Heliogabalus*, 6; cf. Lampridius, *Aurelian*, 49. That this senate actually did meet is disputed, but not decisively—CMM.

65 Mau, *Pompeii* (Kelsey Tr.), p. 479.

In an unhappy but well documented chapter, Professor Jérôme Carcopino, director of the École Française de Rome, wrote in the 1930s about a well known but very negative aspect of this ancient feminist movement, the destruction of family life among the upper classes of Roman society.⁶⁶ The sequel to the freedom enjoyed by first-century wives to divorce their husbands as easily as their husbands could divorce them—which was very easily indeed—was that “women in their turn discarded their husbands and abandoned them without scruple after having ruled them with a rod of iron.” By the middle of the first century Seneca would lament, that

no woman need blush to break off her marriage since the most illustrious ladies have adopted the practice of reckoning the year not by the names of the consuls but by those of their husbands. They divorce in order to re-marry. They marry in order to divorce.⁶⁷

A modern feminist guardedly concedes the point. “We must reconcile the ‘ideal’ of Roman women’s seclusion and obsequiousness with the ‘fact’ that many proper Roman women could and did mingle freely in public and have legally sanctioned carnal knowledge of more than one man.”⁶⁸ Their lasciviousness she attributes to exploitation of the few freedoms which they possessed; though whether this is a fair assessment can be doubted in view of their freedom to own and manage property, to mingle freely in public (as she admits herself), to improve their minds with education as well as any man’s, and to choose their own husbands.

And let us not be unmindful of the epitaphs memorializing for two thousand years the happiness of many loyal marriages, and Pliny’s appealing and attractive pictures of affection that was lasting and true.

But we’ve been dealing with women of the upper classes. It’s time we turned our attention to another class entirely, the women who were slaves.

Paul and Roman Slavery.

We ought to take a look at Roman slavery, if only because in Paul’s day many women in the Greco-Roman world were slaves.

But there is *another* reason why we ought to take a look at Roman slavery. In recent times various authors have used Paul’s references to slavery as part of their interpretation of Paul’s references to women. The argument may be paraphrased like this: Paul didn’t oppose the slavery of his day even though it was very bad; with our insights today, we can do better than Paul. Likewise, Paul didn’t support women’s rights as much as he might have; today we can, and should, do better for women than Paul did.

So what was slavery like in Paul’s day, and what was its effect on women?

It is essential that we not confuse the slavery of Paul’s day with the slavery of the early United States. Slavery under the early Empire was slavery to be sure, but there were many differences.

66 Carcopino, *Daily Life*, pp. 84-99.

67 Seneca, quoted in Carcopino, *Daily Life*, p. 100.

68 Judith P. Hallett, “The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism,” p. 245; in Peradotto and Sullivan, eds., *Women*.

Among the many features that distinguish Roman from American slavery is that the Roman variety wasn't based on race. All over the Empire slaves were transported for sale—from outlying areas to Rome (the principal market for slaves as for almost any other commodity), from one province to another province, and from one locality to another nearby.⁶⁹ It is likely that members of most races resident in the Empire sooner or later held slaves belonging to most of the other races resident there.

A significantly helpful consequence of this polyethnicity was the relative ease with which a slave could blend into the free world after manumission, and even before manumission for that matter. No one could assume that a person was or was not a slave by glancing at facial features. Indeed, Roman slavery tended to be an integrating⁷⁰ rather than, as in the United States, a segregating factor. Conquered people, who constituted most of the Roman slave population in the first and second centuries B.C., were integrated into Roman society by serving in Roman homes, shops, and farms as slaves and in due course being manumitted to become “freedmen” and “freedwomen.” Freedpersons still owed certain obligations to their former masters and mistresses (their “patrons”), but they were able to become involved more deeply than most slaves were into general Roman society. And not a few freed persons, and many of their sons and daughters, went on to become full citizens.

The observation that some slaves became freedpersons and some of these and many of their children became Roman citizens reminds us that Greco-Roman society was not divided simply into slave and free. And certainly it wasn't divided merely into male and female! Roman society was complex. From one standpoint, it was divided into free, freed, and slave; from another, it was divided into Roman, Latin, and alien (or subject foreigner). From still other standpoints, it was divided into Patricians and Plebs, or into Senator, Equestrian (Knight), and more. Upon manumission, a freedperson could be assigned to alien status, Latin status, or full Roman citizenship.⁷¹

These class distinctions were significant and should be kept in mind when talking about the relative rights of men and women. A female citizen enjoyed more rights than a male slave. Again, when we observe that “women” didn't enjoy a particular right, we should remember that in the society of the time most people didn't enjoy rights that some others did.

We read of the brutal treatment that could legally be meted out to slaves. Vedius Pollio ordered that a young slave who broke a crystal cup should be fed to the huge lampreys in his fish pond.⁷² When an

69 Wayne Edward Boese, “A Study of the Slave Trade and the Sources of Slaves in the Roman Republic and the Early Roman Empire,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1973, pp. 173-176.

70 Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 3, 13. Wiedemann's work is a compilation of ancient sources with introductions by the compiler.

71 Gaius [second century A.D.], *Institutes*, book 1, based on the early-first century *Lex Aelia Sentia*; in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 25.

72 Seneca, *Dialogues*, 5; in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 175, 176.

angry slave murdered his owner (a certain Pedanius Secundus), the Senate concurred—in spite of loud popular protests—that the heir should have all of Pedanius's slaves executed, all 400 of them.⁷³ Even Emperor Hadrian (117-138), enraged by some trifle, struck the eye of a slave with his pen, blinding it.⁷⁴

To put such horrors into ⁷⁴elpful to remember that the times were brutal. If slaves were subject to judicial torture, so in the first century A.D. were all citizens except the very highest.⁷⁵ If till recently a slave owner had had the right to execute a slave, every free man had had the right to execute his own minor sons.⁷⁶

But, we ask, how many fathers actually exercised their right to execute a son—or a slave?

Working in mines could be especially stark for slaves, yet many free men volunteered to earn their living working in the same mines.⁷⁷ For many low-income persons (and most people earned low incomes), slavery was so far from being the exceptionable thing we may conceive it to have been that Dio Chrysostom⁷⁸ could say in the first century that “tens of thousands of people who are free sell themselves to become slaves in accordance with written contracts—and the terms are sometimes not at all moderate, but very exacting indeed.”

If many Romans treated their slaves in a cavalier and even cruel manner, many others appear to have treated them as fellow humans and members of their families. It is salient to our quest that in the first century A.D. many slave owners were coming to realize that kindness and encouragement got more out of a slave than cruelty did. The writings of Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 B.C.), Lucius Annæus Seneca (c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 65), Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella (fl. A.D. 60-65), and Pliny the Younger (c. 61-c. 112) particularly point up this development.

There were many reasons for the change. One was that with the success of Augustus's conquests the need for further conquests declined sharply and with it the availability of newly conquered subjects—which had been the principal source of new slaves—also declined sharply. The *pax Romana* terminated most piracy, another major source of new slaves. In the first century new slaves came mainly from free persons who couldn't pay their debts, free persons who offered themselves voluntarily as slaves, children born to slaves, and foundlings (abandoned babies who were discovered before they

73 R. H. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire* (reprint; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), pp. 56, 57.

74 Galen, *The Diseases of the Mind*, 4; in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 180, 181.

75 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 168.

76 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 10.

77 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 177.

78 Dio Chrysostom, *On Slavery and Freedom*, in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 229. Dio's figures may not be accurate, but we may assume the actuality was impressive.

died).⁷⁹ Slaves who were fed, clothed, and educated from birth represented an investment in time and money that couldn't be heedlessly squandered by irrational cruelty. And it is appropriate to speak of affection. Why should we remember Vedius Pollio (and his dreadful lampreys) but overlook the slave owner who, when his own child died, adopted a slave child to love in its place?⁸⁰ We should know, too, that the wealthy people who commanded hundreds of slaves were relatively few. Most persons who had slaves owned one or two or three. They worked with them side by side.⁸¹ In the first century even the wealthy class learned that slave labor was insufficiently productive to work the land unless the land was unusually fertile; thus they hired free persons to do most of the agricultural work, with the result that their slaves were employed in the owner's home or on the owner's home estate.⁸² Familiarity appears to have bred understanding and sympathy.

The consciousness of kindly treatment and the recognition of a debt to the master brought in return a disinterested [i.e., non-self-seeking] devotion of slaves to their master. The domestic slave living in close association with his owner's family found his life bound up with theirs, and often became attached by ties of affection and common interests. Inscriptions testify to the devotion of slaves not only to an Octavia but to humble masters not long [themselves] promoted from slavery. Many of these records, as will be seen later, refer to the gratitude of freedmen, but it was not only manumission that secured such gratitude.⁸³

Scholars who have looked into such matters insist that Pliny's joy at eating with his slaves and his sorrow at their illnesses and death were sincere and that they were also typical of the reactions of many other slave owners at the end of the first century.⁸⁴ "Seneca," says Dill, "in his humanitarian tone about slavery, represents a great moral movement, which was destined to express itself in legislation under the Antonines [in the second century]. And the energy with which Seneca denounced harsh or contemptuous conduct to these humble dependents had evidently behind it the force of a steadily growing sentiment. The master who abused his power was already [in the early first century] beginning to be a marked man."⁸⁵

Before we go too far we should know that Emperor Hadrian grieved deeply that he had blinded his slave's eye. He apologized to him and offered him whatever compensation he desired. The Emperor must have been genuinely saddened when the slave said that all he wanted was the return of his eye. And even at the beginning of the first century, when Vedius Pollio tried to feed that slave boy to his lampreys, he didn't get away with it. Emperor Augustus, guest of honor at the feast, ordered that the boy should be freed at once and that every piece of Vedius's crystal should be smashed to bits.⁸⁶

79 Boese, *Slave Trade*, pp. 203-294.

80 I regret that pressure to finish this paper prevents me from rediscovering the source of this moving human incident.

81 See, e.g., Cary, *Rome*, p. 655.

82 A. H. M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World," *The Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 9 (1956):185-199; repr. in full in M. I. Finley, ed., *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (Cambridge, Eng.: Heffer, 1960), pp. 1-16.

83 Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 64.

84 E.g., Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 45; Dill, *Roman Society*, pp. 141-145, 181, 182.

85 Dill, *Roman Society*, p. 117.

86 For documentation, see references above for these incidents.

We also need to know that under the Roman Empire slaves were paid a wage, and that prudent ones were able to save enough over the years to purchase their own freedom. In fact, a strong conviction became rooted in the populace at large that slaves had a right to be freed after years of loyal service, often at the relatively youthful age of 30.⁸⁷ It is thought that this provision applied more to household slaves than to those engaged in big-farm agriculture, but we have found that a good proportion of slaves were located in households.

This leads us to a reason why many thousands of poor people voluntarily sold themselves into slavery. Slavery provided food and lodging in lean seasons as well as in good times. It often provided an opportunity to learn a trade, if not for the adult then quite probably for the adult's children. "It is certainly true that often slavery was a compulsory apprenticeship in a business or craft or art."⁸⁸ Talented slaves, while still in slavery, were at times appointed to be merchants, banking agents, and even ship captains, and those who were appointed managers of remote estates often superintended free workers as well as other slaves. And to be manumitted in due course by a well-known person and thereafter to be known as that person's freedman or freedwoman was a matter of enviable prestige. Countless freedpersons went on to establish their own businesses and not a few became famous and very wealthy—thanks to the start they got as slaves.

The article "Slave, Slavery,"⁸⁹ in the recently published five-volume *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, reaches the same conclusions, on the basis of extensive research in primary and secondary sources. The author, Prof. A. Ruprecht, says in part:

Evidence of various kinds indicates that the Romans freed slaves in great numbers. . . . [Indeed, so great was the number being freed, that in 2 B.C. a law was passed, the *lex Fufia Canina*, to limit the number who could be freed at one time.]

When a master freed his slave, he frequently established his freedman in a business and the master became a shareholder in it. Usually the slave had learned his trade as an apprentice in the master's household or handicraft shop. . . . Many times the former slave became wealthier than his patron. . . .

One can only conclude that the average free man lived no better than the slave. In fact, in time of economic hardship it was the slave and not the free man who was guaranteed the necessities of life for himself and his family. . . .

There is obviously much more to be said about first-century slavery, on the bad side as well as on the good; but we may have looked at enough to gain an idea as to why Paul didn't say what he didn't say against slavery. He didn't castigate it as an unmitigated crime, evidently because this it wasn't. But we would be quite wrong to say that Paul didn't say anything against slavery. If what Paul did say about slaves and slave owners was ever carefully followed, it surely did away with slavery as an obscene institution.

The obscenity of slavery at its worst is not that one person takes orders from another person. Employees even in the freest of societies are expected to take orders if they expect to get paid. Otherwise they aren't employees but thieves! The obscenity of slavery is that persons made in the image of

87 See e.g. Wiedemann, pp. 51, 52.

88 Barrow, *Slavery*, pp. 60, 61.

89 by A. Ruprecht. After I had almost completed this present paper, my attention to this article was called by Samuele Bacchiocchi. William Fagal, Jr. was also helpful to me.

God so behave toward one another that they beget mutual fear, hatred, obsequiousness, dishonesty, suspicion, and contempt. The best philosophers in the first century proposed something better: they recommended that for slaves to be rendered more productive, they should be regarded as fellow humans and treated with kindness and intelligent leadership. It was a move in the right direction that Paul cannot have considered evil.

But under inspiration Paul went much further than even the philosophers did.

He recognized that the quality of slavery in any particular instance depended in great measure on the character of the slaves and especially on the character of the slave owner.

So he went right to the heart of the matter and asked slave owners to behave kindly to their slaves *for Christ's sake*, remembering that in Christ even slave masters had a Master. He asked slaves to labor with sincere eagerness and respect, regarding their masters as representatives of Christ Himself.

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. . . .

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is slave or free.

Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.⁹⁰

We can say without hesitation that among those slaves and slave owners who practiced what Paul preached, the obscenity of slavery was removed. What remained was a solid person-to-person working relationship along with a fairly dependable assurance of freedom for the slave as soon as it was earned.

The reason that Paul didn't talk against slavery the way we might expect him to have spoken against it is that he had before him a unique kind of slavery and a unique solution to it.⁹¹

Women in Roman slavery.

Now we must come to the specific question of the status of slave women as compared with that of slave men.

Whereas men worked in the house as well as doing the hardest field labor, in a large household women seem to have done housework mostly, including spinning weaving and attending to children.

⁹⁰ Eph 5:21; 6:5-9. See also the appendix to this paper.

⁹¹ This is also the conclusion of Prof. Ruprecht in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* referred to above: "The apostles' [Peter's and Paul's] attitude is best explained by the unique way in which Romans of the 1st cent. A.D. treated their slaves, and released them in great numbers."

Some women slaves served their male owners sexually. Asked an indignant Christian with a righteous passion for hyperbole, "Was there any [male slave owner] whose promiscuous slave girls didn't have a right to look on him as their lover—or husband?"⁹² Having said this, we must remember (inasmuch as we're concerned about the relative positions of men and women) that boys were sold into prostitution as well as girls,⁹³ and that in the absence of their husbands, many mistresses had relations with their favorite male slaves.⁹⁴

One of the least favorable features of Roman slavery was that while allowing male and female slaves to live together as couples, Roman law *legally* denied them the right to marriage, presumably in order to facilitate separate buying and selling.

Having said this, we find ourselves asking questions; for example: "Why didn't the apostle Paul discuss the problem of slave sex?" As we have seen, he spoke earnestly about the slave's obligation, as a Christian, to obey his master loyally and faithfully. He spoke earnestly against fornication and adultery. But he never specifically addressed the problems of imposed slave-fornication and imposed slave-separation.

Further questions suggest themselves as possible answers. Were the Christian slaves in Paul's congregations all owned by Christians, who respected their conjugal rights? Or is it just possible that the conjugal rights of slaves were far better respected in Roman culture than the Roman law required?

We don't know about the Christianization of the owners of Paul's slave audience, but we do have reason to believe that in actual custom slave cohabitation resembled ordinary marriage much more closely than the law required.

Prof. Cary, who helped us earlier in this paper, felt he could speak of the "quasi-marriage" of slaves (translating *contubernium*) even in the relatively unenlightened second century B.C. He could add that once granted to a slave couple, it was "seldom revoked,"⁹⁵ even in those days. In the more enlightened first centuries A.D. in which we are mainly interested, slave marriage (Barrow believes) was virtually true marriage in spite of the law codes, and copious documentation supports this view. Barrow says,

While law recognized the slave merely as a *res* [thing], classed with movable property, while Varro regarded him as an articulate implement . . . both law and agriculture are compelled eventually to take into account the constantly self-asserting humanity of the slave. Varro himself, in the age of Augustus, is forced to write that the farmer should encourage family life among his slaves, who then become more attached to the estate; Ulpian, in the age of Severus [at the end of the second century, taking into account earlier edicts of the praetors], writes that, if a farm and its *instrumentum* are bequeathed, the wives and children of its slaves are included, on the ground that it must not be supposed that the testator commanded so cruel a separation. Indeed, epitaphs suggest that an unbroken family life was securely counted on; thus, Lais, a slave, put up a monument to her dead husband, and to herself and their children. [Other examples follow.] . . .

92 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 178, quoting a fifth century Christian. But evidence throughout the book shows that the question might have been asked (with equal exaggeration) in any century.

93 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 143f, 225.

94 Dio Chrysostom, *On Slaves and Freedom*; in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 225. "Many Athenian women have become pregnant by foreigners or a slave."

95 Cary, *Rome*, pp. 265-266.

Barrow continues:

Though such tendency is everywhere attested, in strict theory the position of the slave as regards family rights remains much where it had been under the Republic. Yet even the law adopts the language of usage; though the union of slaves can strictly be only *contubernium* [concubinage], the jurists are as ready as the slaves themselves to speak of *maritus* [husband], *uxor* [wife], *filius*, *parentes*, *pater* within the strict bounds of slavery. [Numerous examples follow]. The *ius gentium* [the natural custom of mankind] is triumphant over the *ius civile* [encoded law].⁹⁶

For the sort of example Barrow has in mind, think of the former slave, who long after he and his wife had been freed and allowed to marry legally, erected a monument in her honor and in honor of the 45 years and 11 days they had lived together happily.⁹⁷

When a certain manager, on the other hand, abandoned his slave-wife to marry a free women, the slave wife slew their child and committed suicide. Thereupon the slave owner held the manager responsible for the loss of the slave woman and her child—and had the unfaithful slave-husband executed.⁹⁸

Roman slavery had its fine as well as its foul sides. Rather than attacking its evils in a negative spirit, Paul chose to make its finer aspects finer, by Christianizing them. So may we not be justified in perceiving that Paul did the right thing in saying what he said and leaving out what he left out when dealing with the question of slavery?

If we are really right about this, then is it perhaps wrong to argue that *because* Paul was handicapped by culture in his treatment of slavery we can say that he was *also* handicapped by culture in his treatment of women? Does it not seem wiser to say that under inspiration Paul said just what needed to be said about both slavery and the condition of women?

Further aspects of women in slavery.

We must still look at several other aspects of female slavery. In law, when violence overtook a master or mistress, all slaves within earshot who didn't come to his or her rescue were assumed guilty of complicity until proved innocent.⁹⁹ In this context, female slaves were regarded as being just as responsible as male slaves.¹⁰⁰

Although there is considerable truth to the accusation by some modern feminists that in ancient times a woman's status was determined by the status of her husband, it was also true that a great

96 Barrow, *Slavery*, pp. 151-153.

97 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 165. The observation in the same epitaph that their son was a slave implies that the mother was a slave at the time of his birth. See below.

98 Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 88.

99 Roman civil law tended to hold a suspect guilty till proved innocent, in contrast to the theory of [English and American] common law. This is one reason that in the late Middle Ages, after the revival of Roman civil law, heretics were tortured before they were legally convicted. See *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, art. "Torture."

100 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 170. A slave girl was regarded as worthy of torture when she failed to scream for help when her mistress was attacked in her bedroom.

many men had their status determined for them by women. One custom that was thoroughly established was that a person's basic status as free or slave was determined in the first instance by the *mother*. So firmly was this right vested in the mother that if her status changed during pregnancy so that she was freed for only a brief interval and then returned to slavery, her child was born free.¹⁰¹

Women could and often did raise the status of their slave men and women. Female slave owners manumitted their male (and female) slaves, just as male slave owners did. And when female slaves were freed, they knew how to bring about the freedom of male slaves to whom they had become particularly attached, just as male slaves did at times for female slaves.¹⁰²

C. Apridius Primus built this [monument] for himself and Aristia Arche, his patroness [the one who freed him] and wife.¹⁰³

Women were permitted to own slaves and to be patrons of freedpersons. There was no question about this. (Notice that Aristia Arche, in the above quotation, was the patron of a freedman.) This means that *the authority which male slave owners and patrons exercised over male slaves and freedmen was also the prerogative of female slave owners and female patrons*. In the (probably second century) story by Achilles Tatius about Leukippe and Kleitophon, the female slave owner, Melite, upon arriving at her estate near Ephesus and discovering the misdeeds of her male slave-manager Sosthenes, "demoted him on the spot."¹⁰⁴

Managers (stewards, bailiffs), like Sosthenes, were appointed by a land owner to supervise groups of employees—often free, not always slave—on large remote properties. At best, they had wives to assist them. "Whomever you appoint as manager, you must allocate him a woman to live with him, and keep him in check and also to help him in various things," advised Columella.¹⁰⁵ The "various things" the wife was to help with included working at the loom to set an example to the other female slaves, and also moving around the estate to see that the other slaves were hard at work and (in this more enlightened era of slave holding) to make sure that the ill ones had permission to go to the estate hospital and were adequately cared for there. During harvest operations, she was to supervise the slaves in getting the wine, wool, and grain stored properly. Though it can probably be assumed that such women usually operated in their husband's authority, they could at times be recognized as managers in their own right. One such, a central Italian freedwoman by the name of Trebia Aprodisia is known from an inscription made in honor of her own effectiveness as a manager:

Caius Obinius Epicadus, freedman of Caius, and Trebia Aprodisia, freedwoman of Caia, were managers here for fourteen years.¹⁰⁶

It is doubtful that these female managers and manager-wives supervised only slaves; the natural conclusion from Columella's account is that they were expected to help supervise all the workers, male and female, slave and free, just as the male managers did.

101 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 23, 161; Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 155.

102 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 52, 53.

103 Quoted in Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 196.

104 Achilles Tatius, *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, 5, 17; in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, pp. 151, 152; see also p. 11.

105 Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 140.

106 Inscription 7372; in H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin, 1892-1916); in Wiedemann, *Slavery*, p. 150.

In concluding this section about Paul and slavery and slave women in the Greco-Roman world, we note that Paul taught the noblest way of abolishing sin in employer-employee relationships. We note that mothers gave status to children and that women slave owners gave status to their manumitted male and female slaves as truly as husbands gave status to their wives. And we have seen that women of all ranks, slave, freed, and free, exercised legal authority over male and female slaves and freedpersons every day.

Women and Greco-Roman Religion.

We have already seen, above, that women were occasionally made priestesses and even high priestesses in pagan cults. We have not looked in depth at the cults themselves, and neither is there room to do so now.

For those who sought consolation or inspiration or fellowship in matters supernatural, the Greco-Roman world offered philosophy in many forms, astrology, magic, and numerous superstitions. It also offered well developed religions of various sorts.

Foremost of these Greco-Roman religions were the rites of the traditional gods and goddesses, Jupiter, Juno, Athena, and the like. But the worship of these marble deities was cold and impersonal. Besides, their rites were celebrated only occasionally during the year, usually in annual festivals. Most people, therefore, sought satisfaction for their religious yearnings in the more dynamic and personal mystery religions (or "mysteries").¹⁰⁷

The mysteries typically offered membership and initiation rites, which provided lonely people with a sense of belonging. The rites were performed in secret, imparting a sense of importance to those who came to be in the know. And their gods and goddesses were presented typically as having suffered trials and overcome them, providing a sense of mutuality with the trials of the folk who worshiped them.

Demeter of the Eleusinian mysteries had lost her daughter and found her again only after a long and tearful search. Once a year in September her initiates acted out some of her trials, weeping where she wept and eating the same kind of barley bread she had eaten.

Cybele, the Great Mother, searched for her lover, Attis, shrieking as she ran through the wind-swept hills. Her devotees imitated her experience until they again found Attis, lying dead, symbolized by a log. In a frenzied stroke of self-sacrificing devotion, men emasculated themselves and thereby succeeded in giving life to the dead. Attis was restored, perhaps in the form of a young conifer tree.

Dionysus (or Dionysos) was celebrated by drinking alcoholic beverages until his devotees became indwelt by his [alcoholic] spirit. A name for their celebrations, replete with drinking songs, ecstasies, dances, and drunken frenzies, was "bacchanalia." Half a millennium before Christ, men and women half out of their minds had roamed the hills of Greece at their bacchanalia. When the rite reached Rome, it was too outlandish for the Romans, who banished it, but not very effectively. Paul taught his Christians, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the [Holy] Spirit, addressing one another [not in drinking songs but] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing

¹⁰⁷ For a popular conservative treatment of the mysteries, see Ronald H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-20).

Perhaps the most sophisticated of the mysteries were those of Isis, a version of an ancient Egyptian worship that had been modified by the Greeks who lived in Egypt before it spread around the Greco-Roman world. Its temples offered services every day, and its various annual celebrations boasted dignity as well as excitement and broad popular support. Its celebration along the streets and waterfront of port cities at the opening of navigation each spring was particularly attractive and impressive.¹⁰⁸

Growing in popularity and in legality were the *koina* and *collegia*, the clubs associated with the gods that met usually once a month to share a meal, provide for burials, collect dues, give thanks to patrons, and elect officers. It appears that women and talented slaves could hold office in some of these clubs as well as free males, and that they were popular with all classes.

Now some modern scholars have pointed to rituals in the mysteries that superficially resembled Christian baptism, Christ's virgin birth, the last supper, and His death and resurrection. Then they have said that in Paul's day ordinary folk can hardly have distinguished the mysteries from the religion that Paul preached.

Careful comparison reveals a great difference! Christ had died literally and historically, not in a legend in the distant past but in Palestine under Pontius Pilate only a decade or so ago! He did not ask men to sacrifice their virility to give Him life! Rather, He died to give them life, eternal life at that. And He didn't live only in imagination, mimicry, and ritual. He ever lived to intercede in heaven, and to comfort and console in the hearts and homes of His believers.

Further, unlike the legendary divinities of the mysteries, Christ taught a revelation of Himself in history and a system of ethics and character formation loftier and more inspiring than anything known to the ancient world.¹⁰⁹ Says the distinguished professor, Arthur Darby Nock after many years of research into the religions of those days, "To us, [Christianity] may seem to have much in common with other creeds of the time: yet to those who met it, it opened a new world."¹¹⁰

Now what about women in the religious atmosphere of the Greco-Roman world?

As for women slaves, they fared as well as the male slaves in being accepted by virtually all the available religions. Citing one of our authorities on Roman slavery:

On the whole it may be said that Roman religion was never hostile to the slave. It did not close the temple doors against him; it did not banish him from its festivals. If slaves were excluded from certain ceremonies, the same may be said of free men and women—men being excluded from the rites of Bona Dea, Vesta, and Ceres, women from those of Hercules at the Ara Maxima.¹¹¹

108 See e.g. Dill, *Roman Society*, pp. 560-584.

109 Not that pagan religions didn't have a standard of morality. See e.g. A. D. Nock in Stewart, *Arthur Darby Nock: Essays*, p. 65.

110 See A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

111 Barrow, *Slavery*, p. 160.

All accounts show that the popular mysteries were open to both men and women and that many men and women belonged to more than one mystery. In general, the mysteries held their main celebrations at different times of year and so it was to a person's advantage to belong to several of them.

Both men and women got drunk at the bacchanalia, and both men and women of all classes took part in the rites of Demeter and Isis. We have seen that a *priestess* initiated Emperor Hadrian into the rites of Demeter. Mithraism was a male-only mystery, but in the days of Paul it was as yet almost unknown, so we leave it out for now.

Gillian Clark has proposed an interpretation of 1 Cor 11 that involves the participation of women in the Bacchanalia. She thinks that when the Christian women in Corinth "prophesied," they looked and acted like the drunk, frenzied devotees of Dionysus. Paul couldn't keep the Spirit from having His way, but he could (she thinks) protect the reputation of the church by requiring the women to dress more modestly than women did at a Bacchanalia.¹¹² She brings some interesting insights and data into her article, but surely she is wrong in her basic presupposition. Surely the Christian women who prayed and prophesied in Corinth under the true influence of the Holy Spirit did not behave as if they were wild and drunk. And there is nothing in chapter 11 which suggests that they did. It is in chapter 14, where some men and women were becoming ecstatic with false tongue-talking, that Paul complained that the men and women seemed mad and so ordered women to keep silence and ordered men to speak only in an organized manner and only if an interpreter were present.

In fact, the Christian meetings must have seemed vastly different from the meetings of other religions. That slaves and slave owners met together, men and women, would not have seemed unusual. But the Christians met like this once a week at least. They heard the Bible read. Preaching was done explaining the Bible, and exhortations to faithfulness were made. God's promises and Christ's historical death and resurrection were reviewed, the people participated in the Lord's supper, an offering was likely taken, and everyone could take part in the hymns.¹¹³

Conclusion

So what shall we say in conclusion?

We have seen that there was a sufficiently coherent blending of Greek and Roman cultures in the Roman Empire that it is permissible to speak of "the Greco-Roman world."

We have seen that this culture was dominated politically by men. But within such a male-dominated society, women were not so bound to their husbands as might be supposed. Free women could own property, get an education, carry on their own businesses, and influence politics. They could also commit adultery, dominate their husbands, and get divorced at will.

Husbands gave their status to their wives, but mothers determined whether their children would be slave or free. Women manumitted their male and female slaves. Some slave women saved enough to manumit their husbands and themselves.

¹¹² Gillian Clark, "The Women at Corinth," *Theology* 85 (July 1982):256-261.

¹¹³ For one account of a Christian worship service in the second century, see the famous passage in Justin, *Second Apology*, 67.

Some women were lazy, others worked hard. Some were bossy and crude, others gentle and polite. Some were hated by their husbands, others loved.

We have not escaped the conviction that Pliny's intelligent, supportive, loyal, and much appreciated wife, and the butcher's loyal and affectionate wife as well, were better off than the drinking divorcing hussies who misused the growing liberation of women in the Greco-Roman world!

We have observed that many women were enslaved and did what they were told. And many women of all classes, slave, freed, and free, owned slaves (male or female) and exercised extensive legal authority over them regardless of their sex.

Men and women of all classes were welcome at almost all available religious rites, and women took a leading role in some.

Men and women attended the new Christian meetings and found in them a wholly new Divinity and a wholly new dignity and experience.

So are we ready to say whether Paul was or was not influenced by the *culture of his time* when he counseled women to dress modestly out of respect for their husbands, be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, and refrain from exercising ecclesiastical authority over men because women were second created and first deceived?

It seems to this observer—heeding his own cautions expressed at the beginning, that he, like any other writer, must be wary of his presuppositions, and that he must not generalize too precisely about particular aspects of the Greco-Roman world—that when Paul said what he said about women, he was surrounded by women on both sides of the question. Some women were choosing to respect their husbands and others were divorcing them. Some women were exercising authority over male slaves, and many owned none. Some women owned property—including the very houses in which some Christian groups were meeting—and other women were themselves owned.

We remember, too, that only a few people, men or women, were listening to Paul at all, and that he talked about making sacrifices for the cross.

It is my personal conclusion, after what has been a very enlightening study for me, that Paul would have gone contrary to the culture of his contemporaries whether he had instructed women to submit to their husbands or to dominate them. Paul was an apostle, however, not a mere creature of his time, or a coward. He was fathering a new religious development that was unique to its very core. His challenge not to “let the world squeeze you into its mold” (Romans 12:1 Phillips) was one he seems to have taken very seriously himself.

It seems to me that in view of the evidence presented in this paper and in view of Paul's known courage and especially in view of his *inspiration by the Holy Spirit*, that we should pay attention to what he actually said about women and not assume that he was influenced by overriding elements in the Greco-Roman world.