

**Matthew J. Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*.** New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. ix, 269. ISBN 9781107040311. \$99.00.

This is a book on an important topic. The role of freedwomen has not previously been given sustained treatment, and in the light of the continued andro-centric approach to the study of slavery, manumission and freed statuses in the Roman world, Perry is to be praised for having given centre stage to an analysis of former *female* slaves—whose significance for modern understanding of manumission and the role of freed slaves in Roman society has not yet been fully grasped.

The first chapter sets Perry's study into the discourse on female status and gender roles. It is concerned primarily with the role of female slaves vis-à-vis that of free women—and with the relevant legal evidence in particular. Perry emphasises the lesser legal status of female slaves especially with regard to their sexual availability. Although 35 pages long, the chapter does not engage in depth with what are complex and complicated legal issues. For instance, Papinian's comment on the inapplicability of the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* to female slaves is taken at face value, without due discussion of the broader, diverging legal discussion (*Digest* 48.5.6.pr; pp. 23–4)—which is then slipped in quietly later on (e.g., pp. 27–8 and note 73); and adultery, i.e. *adulterium*, is consequently only mentioned in passing—offering perhaps a perspective that is too neat and limited. Similarly, seemingly clear statements about the juridical conceptualisation of the sexual vulnerability of female slaves more generally, and based on one or other legal text, are repeatedly toned down later on in the chapter through discussion of quite different juridical opinions. Perry concludes that female slaves occupied a somewhat mixed position within the confines of the household with regard to sex, which 'could simultaneously be disgraceful and respectable', providing the basis for the 'Romans' belief that female citizens could be created from female slaves' (p. 42).

The second chapter elaborates on the conclusion of the first chapter by discussing more broadly the social and economic roles taken up by female slaves. Perry paints a traditional picture: the allocation of a particular gendered space to these slaves in the dominant surviving discourse is understood also to have contributed 'to the devaluation and obfuscation of the lives and labor of female slaves' (p. 44). The chapter lacks due engagement with the recent debate—most notably on slave natural reproduction—which is relegated to the footnotes, regularly citing opposing views alongside each other (e.g., notes 7, 31 and 37). No quantitative analysis is offered, but quantitative summary views are (re)stated (e.g. 'slave owners *tended* to ...', 'Women worked *primarily* in ...'; p. 46; my emphases). These views are supported by an understanding of '*opus*' as work in general—rather than as farm-cum-agricultural work as referred to in one or other literary context—so that for instance Scaevola's reference to '*qui opus non facerent*' appears in multiple forms as referring to 'slaves who did not work' (e.g., p. 43, p. 48), and 'the *ancilla* [...] the archetypal slave of this classification' (p. 49). Logically, Perry emphasises the reproductive roles of female

slaves. This perspective leads him to state that ‘female slaves must have relied more on their personal relationships with their owners and fellow slaves than on their material production to achieve manumission’ (p. 58). In support, the reader is informed that one ‘has yet to find a clear example of a female slave who purchased her freedom solely with her own *peculium*’ (p. 57). To be sure, the only three surviving documentary records for (what scholars call) informal manumission (*inter amicos*) show the involvement of a third party, be it an individual or a community, in the exchange of the manumission price—for Helena (MChrest. 362), Paramone (*P. Oxy.* IX 1205) and Techosis (*P. Lips.* II 151) respectively. But scholars are agreed that as a result of their slave status, it was not possible for these women to act without legal representation—even if the monies for their manumission came from their *peculium*. At the same time, the fact that these three records concern women has—rightly—not led to the suggestion that men were less likely to benefit from this form of manumission. But where men are given the analytical benefit of the doubt, women are regularly denied the same—here with regard to their capacity to amass the necessary funds for manumission in their *peculium*. The resulting andro-centric approach sits uncomfortably in Perry’s overall conception of the place of his work as expressed in the Introduction: there, Perry sets his book apart from previous scholarship in which ‘the transition from slavery to freedom has remained overwhelmingly male-normative’ (p. 5). Whatever the Romans might actually have thought or done, Perry has certainly confined the female slave and her manumission strategies to the women’s quarters.

The notion that freedwomen are best understood through their relationships to men also frames Chapters 3 and 4, which discuss the patron-freedwoman relationship, on the basis of epigraphic and legal evidence respectively, i.e. they aim to explore the freed slave’s role through the freedwoman’s relationship to—typically—a man, their former master. Chapter 3 surveys the legal evidence discussing the relationship between patron and freedwoman, concentrating on questions of the freed person’s respect and obligation vis-à-vis their patron. The chapter emphasises the role of the freedwoman as a Roman citizen, and thus focuses on aspects that serve to differentiate the freedwoman from the female slave, regarding in particular the freedwoman’s honour and standing in the community, their roles as wives, and the potential tensions between the rights and entitlements of patrons and those of husbands. Given the a priori identification of freedwomen with citizens, Perry concludes that ‘the legally defined structure of general rights and responsibilities illustrates how Romans’ conceptions of female honor and respectability shaped manumission as a citizen-building process’ (p. 95). Likewise, the freedwoman’s embeddedness in the patron’s *familia* is seen as a given, and shapes Perry’s discussion from the start; consequently, patrons emerge clearly as the ‘necessary “points of attachment” that allowed freedwomen access to the citizen community’ (p. 95). In similar vein, Chapter 4 focuses on ‘freedwomen’s relationship with their patrons as a particularly powerful means of communicating information

about individual worth and social standing' (p. 96)—in the inscriptional record. Perhaps the strongest chapter, the discussion presents a number of intriguing epigraphic texts and social situations, all from Rome. It is notable that Perry's analysis shows a preference for the mention of patrons before (or over) the husbands—by a large margin—including situations in which husband and patron are one and the same person. But it is far from certain that '(n)owhere was the idea that freedwomen's relationships with their former households influenced their standing more evident than in the inclusion of the patron-freedwoman relationships on both freedwomen's and patrons' funerary monuments' (p. 128): to validate this claim, the analysis must include data other than just those inscriptions that specifically mention a patron—which, however, have been Perry's sole choice. The inclusion of images of visual representations of the depicted (and discussed) freed women and men would have been good; as would a complete list of all the identified texts in *CIL VI*.

Chapter 5 returns to the literary and legal sources, offering a discussion of the trope of the licentious freedwoman. That trope, combined with the reassertion that manumission meant citizenship, serves Perry to postulate marriage as the bridge between slavery and citizenship for manumitted women. As Perry put it: '(t)he idea of marriage was a crucial element in rationalizing the standing of ex-slaves in the citizen community because it allowed Roman elites to reconcile a freedwoman's newfound respectability with the sexual exploitation of her past' (p. 152). Here, as throughout the chapter, discourse and actuality, literary tropes and social realities merge.

Perry's study demonstrates the potential for giving freed female slaves greater scope in our analyses of manumission and freed statuses in Roman society. It brings into the debate a set of evidence that is as complex as exciting—however short and simple especially much of the epigraphic evidence may appear at first sight. As a next step, it will be necessary to study carefully evidence *from* freedwomen *without* preconceived notions about their place in the *familia* and their role in the citizen community that are shaped by ideas made and disseminated by men; to compare and contrast understanding of freedwomen with understanding of freedmen – thus to gain a more secure grasp of the importance of gender in the manumission process; and to widen the analysis to include a larger data pool—from Italy, and the provinces: there is little reason to think that the material from what are largely exceptional burial grounds in the city of Rome can be generalised from for the rest of the empire. There is generally a need for more quantitative analysis to place the female and male experiences more securely beside each other: of the price of freedom; of the demography of manumission; of chronological and locational differences. It will also be necessary to engage directly with the question of the role of citizenship in the manumission process: what would happen to Perry's image of the Roman freedwoman-cum-matron if we came to think that the 'citizen-building process' was only rarely, or in any case not immediately, the outcome of (a first) manumission? Scholarship currently lacks a means to distinguish freed slaves endowed with citizenship from freed slaves without—the so-called Junian Latins—women like

Helena, Paramone, and Techosis: the capacity to distinguish citizens from non-citizens amongst Rome's freed population, female and male, would likely have a dramatic effect on analysis and understanding of these former slaves, manumission, and the roles of freed and civic statuses in Roman society.

DR ULRIKE ROTH  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
[u.roth@ed.ac.uk](mailto:u.roth@ed.ac.uk)