# THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

## THE HOME

### *Domestic Space*

There existed a variety of types of housing in the Roman world. Most urban dwellers would have lived in *tabernae* or *insulae*.[1] The *tabernae* were small two- or three-room domiciles often doubling as a workshop or storefront and were typically part of the ground floor of tenements or larger public buildings.[2] *Insulae,* the equivalent of our multifloored apartment buildings, began appearing in Rome and other population centers in the second century B.C.E. as overcrowding necessitated squeezing more and more people into the limited space within the city walls.[3] Although some of these blocks of flats contained roomy, upscale apartments on the first floor, the average room size was considerably smaller than what we would be accustomed to today, especially on upper floors.[4] These *insulae* had no running water, no central heating, and no built-in cooking facilities. The occupants relied on public latrines and chamber pots for their toilet and a small charcoal brazier for what indoor cooking they were able to do.[5] The modest homes of the almost nonexistent middle class (see City and Society: Class and Status), and the grander villas of the elite, while well excavated and amply illustrated in the literary sources,[6] constituted a tiny fraction of the housing market of an ancient city. Excavations from Rome, Pompeii, Corinth, and elsewhere reveal homes where cubicle-size rooms of perhaps 3 by 4 meters were arranged around courtyards or common reception areas (the *atrium*).[7]

LUPERCUS, YOU NEED NOT TROUBLE YOUR SERVANT. IT IS A LONG WAY FOR HIM TO COME, AND I LIVE UP THREE FLIGHTS OF STAIRS, LONG ONES TOO.

MARTIAL

### *Domestic Décor*

The details and diversity of home décor in antiquity—styles of wall painting, typical furnishings, and so on—are not crucial for understanding the domestic context of urban Christianity in antiquity. However, as we attempt to visualize the earliest gatherings of Christians in private homes throughout the Roman world it is important to recognize the extent to which religion and mythology were integrated into the architecture and interior design of the typical Roman domicile. Although few of the poorly constructed dwellings of the lower classes have survived, the remains of larger homes, along with the literary evidence, allow us to sketch a reasonably complete picture.

Domestic shrines were a standard feature of Greek and Roman homes. The goddess of the hearth (Latin, *Vesta;* Greek, *Hestia*) was venerated in most dwellings, along with other household gods. The *penates* and the *lares* were Roman deities who watched over the pantry and the household and were commonly worshiped at shrines in the atrium[8] or the dining room.[9] A token portion of each meal was offered to the *lares* and *penates,*[10] and important family events would be accompanied a prayer to the household gods.[11] Depending on the region, other gods might also be invoked as protectors of the home. In Philippi, household shrines to the trio Liber, Libera, and Hercules seem to have been fashionable.[12] According to the Cynic epistles, the homes in Cyzicus (in Mysia, Asia Minor) all bore a dedicatory inscription to Hercules above the doorway.[13]

> In the corner of the room I saw a large cupboard containing a tiny shrine, wherein were silver household gods, and a marble image of Venus.
>
> *Petronius

In addition to the common household altar were the paintings, statuary, and various household utensils that mirrored the religion, superstition, and ethics of popular culture. A visitor to an upscale home in Pompeii might pass under a protective phallus in the entryway, gaze upon a wall painting of Apollo in the atrium above the family shrine, stroll through a *peristyle* featuring Pan and the wood nymphs, and be seated in the triclinium (dining room) beneath an image of Mars fondling Venus.[14] Oil lamps, serving trays, drinking cups, and statuary frequently featured a prominent phallic element, and erotic scenes could be found on walls, vases, lamps, bowls, and mirrors—and this list is hardly exhaustive.[15] Of course, Roman homes in Pompeii and elsewhere also contained murals with scenes from nature, history, and everyday life.[16] Still, the Roman home tended to propagate the mythology and morality of the larger society, and this must have been an issue faced very early among the believers meeting in private homes in urban centers throughout the Mediterranean.

> By the command of the deity is this altar to the gods Liber and Libera dedicated.
>
> Inscription, Philippi

## The Family

Like today, the family was the most basic unit of society in antiquity. However, unlike the typical household unit in contemporary Western culture, which usually comprises mother, father, and children, the so-called nuclear family, the ancient Mediterranean household was an intergenerational social unit that included other relatives and any slaves as well. A nuanced presentation of ancient families would involve careful distinctions between wealthy and poor

households, urban and rural households, Greek and Roman households, and so on. The following summary attempts to crystallize the most salient features of Greco-Roman households with a view to specific NT texts and issues.

THUS, WHOEVER DESTROYS THE HUMAN MARRIAGE DESTROYS THE HOME, THE CITY, AND THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE.

MUSONIUS RUFUS

### *Patria Potestas*

The cultures of the biblical world were strongly patriarchal and male-oriented. In the Roman context, this disposition was exemplified in tradition and legislation related to *patria potestas,* "the power of the father." As the head of his family (*pater familias*), the Roman father had virtually unchecked authority over his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. This authority included education, marriage, mate selection, financial transactions, and even life and death. Indeed, the most severe exercise of a *patria potestas* was the father's refusal to accept a child into his family:

BARBAROUS, NOT BRAVE, IS HE WHO KILLS A CHILD.

PUBLILIUS SYRUS

> Hilarion to his wife Alis very many greetings. Know that we are still in Alexandria. Do not be anxious. I beg and entreat you, take care of the little one, and as soon as we receive our pay I will send it up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out.[17]

The exposure of unwanted children was held in check by public opinion, though it continued until well into the Christian era, in spite of the objections of philosophers and moralists.[18]

The father's authority did not end when the child reached adulthood but continued until the death of the *pater familias.* At the death of the father, sons would become the head of their own families, and married daughters passed to the authority of their husbands. The gravity of any breach of *patria potestas* led to numerous legal and philosophical debates concerning the circumstances in which an adult son might be justified in disobeying his father.[19] The Stoics took the radical position that the pursuit of virtue through philosophy should take precedence over the will of a father. Musonius Rufus reasoned that since every father wants what is best for his son, and since philosophy offers what is best, then it is not disobedient to disobey your father if he forbids you to study philosophy.[20] Epictetus is a bit more blunt: "The good is preferred above every form of kinship. My father is nothing to me, but only the good."[21]

HE BEGAN HIS ARGUMENT WITH THE OLD AND DISCREDITED QUESTION, "IS A FATHER TO BE OBEYED IN EVERYTHING?"

SENECA THE ELDER

### *Household Order*

Household codes in Greek, Roman, and Jewish literature describe the ideal familial relationships that ought to exist within a household. More specifically, they attempt to prescribe correct behavior and structures of authority between husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters. Arius Didymus summarizes the household hierarchy in the following way: "Connected within the house is a pattern of monarchy, of aristocracy, and of democracy. The relationship of parents to children is monarchic, the relationship of husbands to wives is aristocratic, of children to one another, democratic."[22] He goes on to argue that the husband "has the rule of this household by nature. For the deliberative faculty in a woman is inferior, in children it does not yet exist, and in the case of slaves it is completely absent."[23] As appalling as this rationale sounds to us today, some of the most enlightened minds of antiquity, including Cicero, Musonius Rufus, Dio Chyrsostom, and Philo, assumed the cognitive superiority of males over females.[24] The perspective of slaves as subhuman was also commonplace (see Household and Family: Slaves).

> THAT DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY WHICH SUPPLIES PRECEPTS APPROPRIATE TO THE INDIVIDUAL CASE—HOW A HUSBAND SHOULD CONDUCT HIMSELF TOWARDS HIS WIFE, OR HOW A FATHER SHOULD BRING UP HIS CHILDREN, OR HOW A MASTER SHOULD RULE HIS SLAVE—IS ACCEPTED BY SOME AS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT PART.
>
> SENECA

The wife's duties involved obedience, quietness, childrearing, faithfulness, and hard work. A husband was obliged to provide for his family and treat his wife and children with respect and his slaves with patience.[25] Children and slaves were to be obedient in all things. As today, the ideal was often far removed from reality.

In spite of the fact that women could neither vote nor hold elected office in the Roman government and were subject (in theory at least) to the *pater familias,* women in the Roman world often attained high social standing. They could engage in business, own properties, and function as a benefactress.[26] Junia Theodora, a citizen of Lycia residing in Corinth, was honored by the Lycian assembly in a lengthy inscription as a "patroness" who "continuously shows her zeal and her munificence to the nation."[27] The cities of the Roman East were noteworthy for providing women with leading roles in civic religion. In Pergamum, Julia Polla held

> FOR CLAUDIA METRODORA, GYMNASIARCH, WHO TWICE DISTRIBUTED OIL TO THE CITY, SUPERVISOR OF THE GAMES, QUEEN OF THE THIRTEEN CITIES OF THE IONIAN FEDERATION, PRIESTESS FOR LIFE OF THE DIVINE EMPRESS APHRODITE.
>
> *INSCRIPTION, CHIOS

the titles of "queen of the shrines of the goddess Roma, manager of the gymnasium and high priestess."[28] Julia Polla seems to have established priestly legacy in the region. Her daughter, Julia Tyche, was also a priestess, and her later descendents are listed among the leading priestesses at Ephesus.[29] Polyaena was a "priestess of the goddess Victory" in Corinth and was honored by the high priest and the city council as "a woman of excellence."[30] This undoubtedly indicates her position as a benefactress as well as priestess. In Philippi, the temple of Augusta, wife of Augustus, contained statues of seven priestesses of the cult.[31] The inscriptions from Philippi also attest to priestesses of Diana,[32] as well as a cult of female votaries of Bacchus who funded a water supply system.[33]

DO NOT REMAIN UNMARRIED, LEST YOU DIE NAMELESS. GIVE NATURE HER DUE, YOU ALSO, BEGET AS YOU WERE BEGOTTEN.

PSEUDO-PHOCYLIDES

### *Betrothal and Marriage*

In Greek, Roman, and Jewish societies, marriage was the norm. Philosophical dissenters aside (see Household and Family: Sexual Ethics), most parents assumed their children would marry and made appropriate plans to that end—setting aside money for a dowry and selecting a suitable mate. Early in his reign, Augustus introduced legislation to encourage marriage and strengthen the traditional Roman family. The new family laws provided economic incentives to marry and produce children, while also censuring adultery and singleness, including widows and divorcees who did not remarry.[34] In some locales, this resulted in preferential treatment toward the married in municipal elections:

C. ANTISTIUS NOMISSIANUS GAVE IN MARRIAGE HIS OWN DAUGHTER ZENARION, A VIRGIN, ACCORDING TO THE JULIAN LAW WHICH WAS PASSED CONCERNING THE MARRYING OF THE SOCIAL ORDERS FOR THE SAKE OF PROCREATING CHILDREN.

ROMAN MARRIAGE CONTRACT

> Where two or more candidates have the same number of votes, the magistrate in charge of the election is to prefer and declare first elected a married man to an unmarried man, and a man with children to one without children, and one with more children to one with fewer children.[35]

Girls were typically married very young, at least by modern standards. In the Roman world, most women would be married in their mid to late teens; the aristocracy married even earlier. A girl could be legally married at the age of twelve, although the betrothal could be earlier. Roman men waited till their mid to late twenties before marrying.[36] Quintilian, whose wife died at age eighteen after bearing him two sons, was in his early forties when he married.

Marriages typically involved a betrothal period and a dowry and in most cases were arranged by the fathers. The betrothal period began with an agreement between the parents and was considered legally binding, even though the marriage was not consummated. An official ceremony marked the beginning of the betrothal, which was witnessed by a magistrate. Pliny describes attendance at such as events as the routine humdrum of a senator's day: "If you ask anyone what he did that day, the answer would be, 'I was present at a coming-of-age ceremony, a betrothal, or a wedding. I was called to witness a will, to support someone in court, or to act as an assessor.'[37] The chastity of the girl was a matter of great concern to both families, particularly among the nobility,[38] which is one of the reasons why girls were betrothed so young. The family of the bride was responsible to provide funds or property as a dowry, and the larger the dowry the better the girl's prospects for marriage would be. The dowry was returned if the couple ever divorced, which provided some disincentive toward ending the marriage.

One of the most significant differences between marriage in the ancient world and marriage in the contemporary Western world is that in Greece and Rome marriages were so not much romantic partnerships as strategic alliances. While love was not completely unimportant, it was not the most crucial consideration. Marriage partners were chosen by parents on the basis of financial considerations—could the young lady bring a significant dowry into the family coffers? Or social and political advancement—was the man from a prominent family and appropriate class? While many Cynics and Stoics eschewed marriage for the sake of unhindered devotion to philosophy (see below), Epictetus defends the decision of the philosopher Crates to marry by noting that it involved the "special circumstances" of "romantic love." This, he argues, is quite different from "ordinary marriages."[39]

FROM THIS ASSIGNMENT HE WENT TO ROME TO TAKE UP OFFICE; THERE HE MARRIED DOMITIA DECIDIANA, A WOMAN OF HIGH LINEAGE. THE MARRIAGE PROVED AT ONCE A DISTINCTION AND A STRENGTH TO HIM IN HIS UPWARD PATH.

TACITUS

The exchange of vows that we are used to hearing, with promises of love, fidelity, and devotion, are a far cry from the marriage contracts of antiquity. These typically record the precise amount of the dowry, followed by the duties of both parties:

> Apollonia shall live with Philiscus, obeying him as a wife should her husband. All necessities and clothing and whatever else is proper for a wedded wife Philiscus shall supply to Apollonia. It shall not be lawful for Philiscus to bring in another wife, or concubine, or boy-lover, nor to insult or ill-treat her. If he is proved to do any of these things, Philiscus shall forthwith forfeit the dowry. In like manner, it

> shall not be lawful for Apollonia to spend the night or day away from the house of Philiscus without Philiscus's consent, or to consort with another man, or to dishonor the common home or to cause Philiscus to be shamed by any act that brings shame upon a husband.[40]

SILA IS READY TO MARRY ME ON ANY TERMS; BUT ON NO TERMS DO I WANT TO MARRY SILA. HOWEVER, WHEN SHE INSISTED I SAID, "AT OUR BETROTHAL YOU WILL GIVE ME A MILLION BY WAY OF DOWRY IN GOLD." WHAT COULD BE MORE REASONABLE?

MARTIAL

To be sure, one occasionally finds a half-hearted remonstrance against this dispassionate, contractual approach to marriage,[41] but most people would have heartily concurred with Pliny's practical advice: "Certainly if one thinks of the children of the marriage . . . money must be taken into account as a factor influencing our choice."[42]

We do have examples of loving marital unions, both from literature and funerary inscriptions. One shimmering example comes from the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, whose description of the ideal marriage would fit comfortably in a Christian wedding homily:

> For what man is so devoted to his friend as a loving wife is to her husband? What brother to brother? What son to his parents? Who is so longed for when absent as a husband by his wife, or a wife by her husband? Whose presence would do more to lighten grief or increase joy or remedy misfortune? To whom is everything judged to be common body, soul, and possessions, except man and wife?[43]

It remains true, however, that in ancient Mediterranean society love was more the byproduct of a happy marriage than a prerequisite, and a marriage could be judged quite successful without it.

## Adultery and Divorce

Divorce was widespread in the Roman world of the first century. Also, divorce was easier and more common during the first century than the century before, despite the legislation enacted by Augustus attempting to curb the divorce rate.[44] By the NT era, either spouse could initiate divorce, though in the imperial period this was the prerogative of the husband.[45] Valerius Maximus, for example, extols the virtues of an earlier age when "wine was unknown to Roman women" and when monogamy was a virtue:

> Women who had been content with a single marriage used to be honored with a crown of chastity. For they thought that the mind of a married woman was particularly loyal and uncorrupted if it knew not how to leave the bed on which she had surrendered her virginity, believing that trial of many marriages was as it were the sign of a legalized incontinence.[46]

Other first- and second-century writers (e.g., Petronius, Juvenal, Horace, Martial) further illustrate the declining marital standards, and several authors claim to have knowledge of the first Roman divorce.[47] Seneca's censure is particularly vociferous:

> YOU ARE MARRYING YOUR LOVER, PROCULINA, AND MAKING THE ADULTERER OF YESTERDAY YOUR HUSBAND SO THAT THE JULIAN LAW CAN'T PUT A MARK AGAINST YOU. THAT'S NOT A MARRIAGE, PROCULINA, IT'S A CONFESSION.
>
> MARTIAL

> Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands, and leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to be divorced? They shrank from this scandal as long as it was rare; now, since every gazette has a divorce case, they have learned to do what they used to hear so much about. Is there any shame at all for adultery now that matters have come to such a pass that no woman has any use for a husband except to inflame her paramour? Chastity is simply a proof of ugliness.[48]

Seneca's reference to adultery as commonplace is echoed throughout the surviving literature, though much of this material issues from, and focuses on, the situation among the privileged classes in Rome.[49] It is impossible to accurately calculate a divorce rate based on such anecdotal evidence drawn mostly from upper-class literary sources. Further, it also needs to be noted that the complaint is not against divorce per se but divorce initiated by women. Most of the ancient sources we rely on were written by men and reflect their attitudes and perspectives. The chauvinistic sensibilities of the Roman male were acutely offended at the rise of liberated womanhood in the first century,[50] though in many ways their complaints serve only to further illustrate the double standard with respect to men and women in antiquity.[51]

> MARRIAGES AS LONG AS OURS ARE RARE—MARRIAGES ENDED BY DEATH AND NOT BROKEN BY DIVORCE.
>
> FUNERARY INSCRIPTION

This double standard is further illustrated in the very definition of what constituted adultery. In Roman law, adultery was defined as an illicit relationship with or by a married woman or woman of respectable rank. Sexual liaisons by a married man with slaves, courtesans, younger boys, or women of lower social orders were legally permissible under most circumstances and involved little, if any, social stigma. After enumerating the dangers that awaited the adulterer if caught, Horace concludes, "How much safer is trafficking in the second class—with freedwomen."[52] In his "Advice to Bride and Groom," Plutarch counsels that a husband's peccadilloes and paramours should be viewed as honoring the wife, because, "it is respect for [the wife] which leads him to share his debauchery,

licentiousness, and wantonness with another woman."[53] Popular novelists and poets depict men carrying on with their mistress or boy-favorite in front of their wives.[54] This comes from the realm of fiction, but as one contemporary Roman historian reminds us on this subject, "It is not probable that any humorous genre could have amused its audience without being recognizable, if exaggerated."[55]

I WARN YOU STEP-CHILDREN, DON'T TRUST A SINGLE DISH! THOSE HOT PASTRIES ARE BLACK WITH POISON OF A MOTHER'S BAKING. LET YOUR TREMBLING TUTOR TAKE THE FIRST BITE!

*JUVENAL

Moreover, while a husband could bring a charge against his wife as an adulteress, the law did not afford the same right to the woman.[56] In the following legal verdict rendered in 197 C.E. but citing a first-century statute, an aggrieved wife's charges of adultery are summarily dismissed by the Roman courts:

> Emperors Severus and Antoninus to Cassia:
>
> The Julian law (on adultery) declares that women do not have the right of accusation in a criminal court, . . . though they wish to complain about the violation of their own marriage. Though (the law) had offered the ability to accuse (a wife) to men by the right of the husband, it did not offer the same privilege to women.[57]

In light of this dismal state of affairs, it is perhaps not surprising that, especially among the elite, poisoning became a fashionable option for disposing of husbands, stepchildren, or fathers who stood in the way of one's inheritance.[58] Tacitus's *Annuls* records a dozen or so poisonings, or rumors of such, among the aristocracy in the first half of the first century,[59] and Juvenal claims that poisoning had become something of a status symbol: "Then up comes a lordly dame who, when her husband wants a drink, mixes toad's blood with his Calenian [wine]. . . . If you want to be anybody nowadays you must dare some crime that merits [banishment to] Gyara or a jail."[60]

AUGUSTUS REVISED EXISTING LAWS AND ENACTED SOME NEW ONES, FOR EXAMPLE, ON EXTRAVAGANCE, ON ADULTERY AND CHASTITY, ON BRIBERY, AND ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE VARIOUS CLASSES OF CITIZENS.

SUETONIUS

Even when one makes allowances for literary clichés, the exaggeration of satirists, and the nearly universal condemnation of adultery, the picture that emerges is one where marriage vows were often exchanged and then forgotten. Petronius captures well the tragic collision between ideal and reality among the Roman elite: "A wife should be loved like a fortune got legally. But I would not wish to love even my fortune forever."[61]

## SEXUAL ETHICS

Yet while the senate and the imperial house were charged with punishing adulterers and upholding traditional Roman values, they were also engaging in all manner of vice and scandal. Augustus forced Marcus Agrippa and, when he died, Tiberius to divorce and leave their families in order to marry his daughter, Julia.[62] As Tiberius's wife, Julia was later exiled for committing "every kind of vice."[63] Meanwhile, Tiberius himself was setting up shrines on Capri as sites for deviant sexual activities.[64] And on it goes. If even half of what Suetonius records of Nero is true, his depravity was beyond description.

Nor could the common folk look to the gods as models of virtue and probity. Zeus had liaisons with women and boys and set the standard for the rest of the pantheon. Consider, for example, the cloud-gatherer's smooth approach to Hera as he attempts to coax a little romance from his divine bride:

> Come, let us take our joy bedded together in love; for never yet has desire for goddess or mortal woman so shed itself about me and overmastered the heart within my breast—not even when I was seized with love of Ixion's wife, who bore Peirithous . . . nor when I was seized with love of Danaë of the fair ankles . . . nor when I fell for the daughter of far-famed Phoenix . . . nor in my affair with Semele, nor with Alcmene in Thebes . . . nor with Demeter . . . nor when I loved glorious Leto.[65]

The rest of the gods followed Zeus' lead and became known for seducing and raping the fairer of both sexes. With exemplars like these, philosophers had a difficult time enjoining ethical behavior on *hoi polloi,* so they often resorted to exhorting the people to believe in the gods but not the stories about the gods.[66]

Quite apart from the divine and imperial orders, the sexual ethics of the ancient Mediterranean world were very different from those of today. To be sure, there was nothing going on then that isn't still going on today, but it cannot be denied that fifteen hundred years of institutional Christianity has had a civilizing effect on Western society, if only to force underground what would otherwise be practiced openly.

Prostitution, for example, was not illegal in antiquity, nor was it subject to any local or imperial restrictions. According to Cicero, liaisons with courtesans were a rite of passage for Roman youths:

> However, if there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless eminently austere (I cannot deny it), but his view is contrary not only to the license of this age, but also to the custom and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed? When was it forbidden? When, in fact, was it that what is allowed was not allowed?[67]

This is not to say that prostitution was considered a respectable vocation, but there was nothing criminal in it. Modern visitors to the ruins of ancient

cities like Ephesus or Pompeii will find directions to the red-light district carved in stone along the main thoroughfares. The surviving graffiti from Pompeii is too explicit for a volume like this but provides ample support for Horace's disdainful summary of the main attractions of the city: "the brothel, the greasy cookshop, and the flute-playing courtesans."[68]

AT NUCERIA, LOOK FOR NOVELLIA PRIMIGENIA NEAR THE ROMAN GATE IN THE PROSTITUTE'S DISTRICT.

GRAFFITO, POMPEII

Similarly, pederasty was also widely practiced and was considered an acceptable form of sexual expression between an adult male and a prepubescent teen, usually of lower social rank. A common subject for Martial's epigrammatic wit is lamenting the boy who matures and turns to heterosexual relations; other times he simply extols the delights of pederasty.[69] Indeed, in Martial's circles, pedophilia was so pervasive that he warns young men about to marry that they had better visit the prostitute's district and find someone who will train them to enjoy women.[70] As illustrated above (see Household and Family: The Family), marriage contracts often contained a stipulation against bringing a boy-lover into the home. This provides the background for the scene in the *Satyricon* where Trimalchio begins fondling a servant boy in front of his wife during dinner. His wife objects, asserting her legal rights, whereupon Trimalchio hurls a goblet at her in response.[71] To a friend who was contemplating marriage, Juvenal counsels that suicide would be a wiser option, or better yet . . .

YOUR WIFE IS A GIRL SUCH AS A HUSBAND WOULD HARDLY ASK FOR IN HIS MOST EXTRAVAGANT PRAYERS: RICH, NOBLE, VIRTUOUS. YOU BURST YOUR LOINS, BASSUS, BUT YOU DO IT WITH BOYS PROCURED WITH YOUR WIFE'S DOWRY!

*MARTIAL

> Take some boy-bedfellow, who would never wrangle with you through the night, never ask presents of you in bed, and never complain that you took your ease and were indifferent to his solicitations![72]

Stories abound of tutors taking advantage of students in their charge, which was a perennial concern of parents.[73] In "On the Education of Children," Pseudo-Plutarch weighs the issue of whether "men who love children [romantically]" should be allowed as tutors, and answers affirmatively.[74] His rationale is based on the example of Socrates and his pupils in ancient Athens, "who sanctioned affection between males and thus guided the youth onward to learning, leadership, and virtuous conduct."[75] In Pseudo-Plutarch's view, as long as the adult's intentions are honorable, the noble philosopher "ought to have the right to kiss any fair face he sees."[76] No wonder that the first-century Jewish moralist, Pseudo-Phocylides, warns: "Guard the youthful prime of life of a comely boy, because many rage for intercourse with a man."[77]

### *Digging Deeper: Vice, Luxury, and Asceticism and the Philosophic Response*

The ethical philosophers of the day were not unaware of the decadence of the city and the moral decay across the empire, and they crystallized their censure in the form of virtue and vice catalogs.[78] Particularly common among Stoics and Cynics, these catalogs enumerated the virtues and vices of the age in a sometimes grocery-list fashion. "The worthwhile man," writes Arius Didymus, is "affable, clever, encouraging, accommodating, charming, gracious, trustworthy, and, in addition, soothing, keen in aim, opportune, shrewd, guileless, simple, straightforward, and unaffected, while the worthless man is subject to all the opposites."[79] The counterpart to the virtuous person is described by Dio Chrysostom:

"LOVE OF MONEY BEGAN THIS DOWNWARD SPIRAL," HE REPLIED. "IN FORMER AGES VIRTUE WAS STILL LOVED FOR HER OWN SAKE."

*PETRONIUS

> Then there is the man who proclaims the orgies of Pleasure, and admires and honors this goddess. He is insatiable as to things that tickle nostril and palate, and to all that affords any pleasure to the ear, as to all things that are soothing and agreeable to the touch: warm baths—twice a day—anointings, and soft robes. He is passionately devoted to the burning madness of sexual indulgence, through intercourse both with females and males, and other unspeakable obscenities.[80]

Wealth and luxury are frequently identified as the fountainhead of all vice. Writers of the period commonly connect the wealth Rome gained through its conquests with the increase of extravagance and vice. Juvenal regards Rome's moral decline as the ironic vengeance of the plundered nations: "Luxury, more deadly than any foe, has laid her hand upon us and avenges a conquered world. Since the day when Roman poverty perished, no deed of crime or lust has been wanting to us."[81] In Tacitus's view, Rome then passed on the contagion to the tribes and peoples it conquered, spreading the disease even to the rustic Britons: "They adopted Roman ways and, little by little, they went astray, taking to the colonnades, bath-houses, and elaborate banquets that make moral failings attractive."[82]

THE ORATOR WRANGLES WITH HIS OPPONENT OVER THE BOUNDARIES OF LAND, BUT THE PHILOSOPHER REBUKES THE VICES OF MANKIND AND DETERMINES BOUNDARIES OF GOOD AND EVIL.

*LUCIUS APULEIUS

As one would expect, the philosophers had quite a lot to say about wealth and extravagance. The Stoic-Cynic insistence on simplicity and "living according to nature" was, as we have seen (see Education, Philosophy, and Oratory: Philosophical Schools) a reaction to the opulence of the day. For Musonius, wealth led to the soul-threatening disease of indulgence: "As for my part, then, I would

choose sickness rather than luxury, for sickness harms only the body, but luxury destroys both body and soul, causing weakness, impotence, lack of self-control, cowardice, injustice, and covetousness."[83]

In keeping with their rejection of creaturely comforts and their embracing of hardship as morally beneficial, some Cynic philosophers adopted a form of asceticism that rejected marriage. In the Cynic literature, marriage is deemed to be a burden that will inevitably hinder the philosopher: "One should not wed nor raise children, since our race is weak and marriage and children burden human weakness with troubles."[84] Epictetus, a Stoic-Cynic philosopher, regarded marriage as a distraction that diverted attention from serving God and humanity.[85] Likewise, sexual intercourse was considered to be a frivolous waste of time that would distract the philosopher from his calling: "As for intemperate intercourse with women, bid it farewell. For there is no spare time, either for a poor man to beg, as Plato says, nor for the person hastening on the short-cut to happiness."[86]

IT IS FIRST NECESSARY TO OBSERVE THAT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IS NOT FOR THE SAKE OF PLEASURE. . . . FOR THOSE WHO HAVE INTERCOURSE NOT AT ALL FOR THE SAKE OF HAVING CHILDREN DO INJUSTICE TO THE MOST REVERED SYSTEMS OF PARTNERSHIPS, AND THEIR OFFSPRING WILL BE WRETCHED AND PITIFUL, LOATHED BY THE GODS.

*PSEUDO-OCELLUS LUCANUS

Most Stoics took a softer position on marriage.[87] In a discourse entitled "Is Marriage a Handicap for Philosophy?" Musonius Rufus takes issue with the hard line the Cynics took on marriage by appealing to the example of Crates of Thebes: "Crates, although homeless and completely without property, was nevertheless married. . . . How then can we, who have a home to start with and some of us even have servants to work for us venture to say that marriage is a handicap for philosophy?"[88] Musonius goes on to argue that marriage is perfectly in accord with nature, necessary for the propagation of the human race, and gives expression to the highest form of love between human beings.

Despite this difference of opinion, Stoics and Cynics, together with many others among the intelligentsia of the day, were in agreement that sexual intercourse was intended for procreation, not pleasure. Musonius was particularly insistent on this: "Men who are not wanton or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children . . . but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure-seeking, even in marriage."[89] Although this perspective is sometimes presented as the conventional view in Greco-Roman antiquity more broadly, the enormous amount of evidence from magical papyri, inscriptions, and erotic literature gives vocal attestation to the vibrancy of *eros,* sexual passion, in antiquity.