

# MATRIMONIUM



From **PUELLA** to **MATERFAMILIAS**

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Susan Treggiari points out in her book *Roman Marriage* that the word the Romans used for civic marriage, *matrimonium*, is built on the word *mater*. Thus, for the Romans marriage was an instrument for creating mothers and the purpose of marriage, expressed in some lost but not forgotten early law was *liberorum procreandorum causa*, "for the production of children" [see Plautus' *Captivi* 889: *liberorum quaerundorum causa ei, credo, uxor datast*, and in 6<sup>th</sup> century *Codex Justiniani* 5.4.9]. In truth, marriage left the lives of Roman men fairly unchanged, while a girl's first marriage was her rite of passage to adulthood --deprived of a public life, the elite *puella's* existence was completely transformed by marriage.

**[Slide 2]** With trepidation, she left her natal family and home to enter new ones as a stranger, bonded but not kin; she put aside girlish activities and possessions to assume the responsibility for feeding, clothing and managing a new household of family and slaves; she committed herself to the life-threatening task of producing children to continue her husband's family. Perhaps surviving evidence about marriage is so fragmentary and scanty for the very fact that it was seen to be primarily a concern of women.

**[Slide 3]** Apart from love poetry, the word **PUELLA** defines the period of a girl's life from infancy to the age of menarche, a time fixed in Julian law as 12 years old, the minimal age at which a girl could legally become a wife. Cases of aristocratic girls being married at a much earlier age were widespread before the passage of the *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* in 18 BCE.



**[Slide 4]** Even after Augustus limited the engagement period to two years, elite parents betrothed pre-pubescent daughters to men who were sometimes underage and frequently much older, divorced or widowed. The imperial family was particularly guilty: Vipsania was engaged to Tiberius when she was 2 years old and he was 7;

**[Slide 5]** the Emperor Claudius' daughter Octavia was first betrothed to L. Junius Silanus as an infant; when that engagement was broken by her stepmother, she was married at 11 to her adopted brother Nero. Various and multiple motives led nobles to commit their daughters to marriage before they were capable of understanding or giving consent. Chief among them was the desire for forging family alliances and improving socio-political status, though some consideration was given to finding a man of good character, especially during the classical period. Finally, paternal concern for a young girl's virginity and filial obedience made early marriage desirable. However, unlike female children born to the poor who were often unwanted and abandoned, elite daughters were not begrudged family resources and attention. Prominent fathers showed pride in and love for their daughters, educating and encouraging them in various ways –

**[Slide 6]** one example that springs to mind is Julius Caesar, who sought Julia's approval before arranging her marriage to Pompey [others: Cicero and Tullia; Augustus and Julia; Ovid and Perilla].

**[Slide 7]** Evidence of parental affection can also be found in opulent funerary monuments that memorialize in words and image daughters who died before marriage – a not unusual occurrence, as the mortality rate for children in ancient Rome was very high.

**[Slide 8]** In the hope of encouraging you to add to your syllabus the topic of marriage and its associated issues of gender and class, I offer you a case study of an elite *puella* who did not survive to complete the cycle to *materfamilias*. Given the lack of biographical information about women -- especially the *puella* -- we are fortunate to have not only Pliny the Younger's letter, dated to 105/6 CE, about the death of his friend's daughter, but her inscribed cinerary altar as well, only discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The altar appears on your handout with the annotated Latin text of Pliny *Ep.* 5.16 (*The Worlds of Roman Women*, pp. 12-15).

**[Slide 9]** Pliny praises the character of the younger daughter of C. Minicius Fundanus, a senator and consular, describing with regret her premature death and empathizing with her father. The letter never names her because Pliny's audience would know that, according to Roman nomenclature, she was *Minicia Minor*. Perhaps more significantly, it was considered disrespectful to use an upper-class woman's name in public. Her full name, *Minicia Marcella Fundani filia*, and her exact age at death -- 12 years, 11 months, 7 days -- are provided in the altar inscription. But Pliny is strangely silent about Minicia's mother, nor does her name appear as is customary on her daughter's monument. An altar resembling Minicia's was found nearby in the family tomb, inscribed to *Statoria Marci filia Marcella*. It is probable that Minicia's mother Statoria died before her daughter, perhaps even in childbirth.

In section 6 of his letter, Pliny decries the timing of her death (*iam destinata erat egregio iuveni, iam electus nuptiarum dies, iam nos vocati*), for Minicia died a *sponsa*, about to be married.

**[Slide 10]** It is noteworthy that already by her 12<sup>th</sup> year, Fundanus successfully completed the delicate process of finding a worthy spouse for his daughter. While the search for a husband usually involved mother as well as father, kin, and sometimes even a marriage broker,

#### *Patria Potestas*

all Roman citizens were under the authority of their *Paterfamilias* until he died or made them independent

a daughter who entered a *manus* marriage left her father's *patria potestas*

#### *Manus Marriage*

women entered *manus* in one of 3 ways:

*Confarreatio*: religious ceremony, for nobles

*Coemptio*: symbolic bride-price

*Usus*: unbroken cohabitation for a year

**[Slide 11]** fathers alone held the *patria potestas*, the paternal authority, required to negotiate a marriage. Prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, paternal discussions would have considered whether the young woman would enter *manus* at marriage, that is, under law become like a daughter to her husband (if he was independent) or if not, of his *paterfamilias*. Elite couples who met the strict conditions of *confarreatio*, an unbreakable form of marriage, and who were interested in the priesthood, could choose to have a religious ceremony, with solemn rites conducted by the *flamines* in the presence of ten witnesses. However, after the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, elite women increasingly did not enter *manus* marriage. Minicia would most likely have married *sine manu*, thus remaining under the *patria potestas* of Fundanus, in a marriage ceremony that would have been purely social.

**[Slide 12]** Betrothal arrangements between fathers could be verbal or written, and would contain a formula of request and commitment to the marriage, assurance of the consent of all, and the dowry settlement. While it was not legally required that a young woman bring a dowry

to her marriage, the custom was strong even among the poor. Marriage arrangements could be carried out without the couple ever meeting, as it was expected that affection would arise from association, after marriage. Once an agreement was reached, the family of the *sponsa* would traditionally host a betrothal party (*sponsalia*) to announce the engagement and introduce their children as a couple to family and friends. It was the occasion for an exchange of gifts between families and for the *sponsus* to send his bride-to-be a betrothal ring, the *anulus pronubus*. The clasped hands on the ring symbolized the couple's pledge of faith to each other.

**[Slide 13]** In section 7 of his letter, Pliny grieves over Fundanus' terrible reversal of fortune (*quod in vestes margarita gemmas fuerat erogaturus, hoc in tus et unguenta et odores impenderetur*). The money that was set aside for Minicia's wedding finery was now being used instead for her funeral expenses.

**[Slide 14 ff]** Only the wealthiest families could afford the wedding apparel for the bride's first marriage. The color and design of her costume set her apart as sacred; it attested to her nobility, purity, and promise of good fortune, particularly fertility. While our sources do not agree on what the bride wore, some elements seem certain.

**Flammeum:** the flame-colored veil was the most characteristic and visible element of clothing. Gauzy and voluminous, it predicted the heavier *palla* of the matron, covering the bride's hair and shielding her face.

**Tunica recta:** totally white, it was woven of wool or linen by the bride in one piece. She wrapped it around herself, fastening it at the shoulders with pins. The side opening was either seamed or closed with a belt or cord and fastened with a Hercules knot that her husband undid the night of their marriage.

**Corolla:** traditionally the bride gathered aromatic herbs and flowers that she wove into a small crown and wore over/under her veil, a symbol of the fertility she brought into the marriage to fulfill its goal of the production of children.

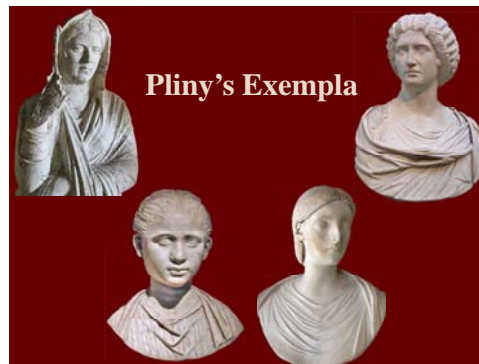
**Seni crines:** her hair was distinctively arranged: it was divided into 6 tresses, with the head of a spear (*hasta caelibaris*), then wound or braided to the top of her head in a *tutulus*.

**Luteus soccus:** she wore flame-colored slippers that matched the color of her veil, thus protected from head to toe.

**Ornamenta:** Her hair and body were decorated with jewelry; she wore her betrothal ring. This unique girdle of gold chain, was probably worn over the bridal tunic.

**[Slide 15]** Jacqueline Carlon discusses this letter in her book *Pliny's Women*. In the chapter "Pliny: Creator of the Ideal Wife" (pp. 147-157), she notes that Fundanus' daughter is one of four women – the only *puella* – who are characterized with the detail and individuality Pliny

accorded male *exempla*. She observes that the four women, each at a different stage of life, share attributes desirable in a *matrona* and that each of them was shaped by a male close to her.

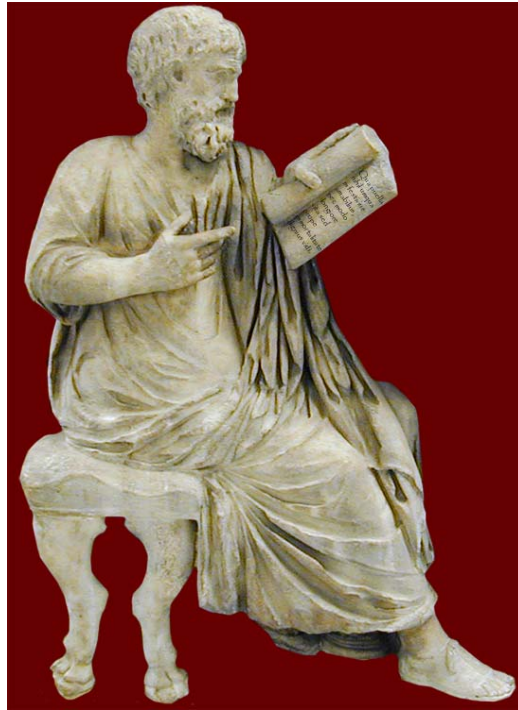


**[Slide 16]** Pliny crafted this miniature encomium with great artistry. In sections 1-5 he offers a portrait of Minicia as a *puella-matrona*, capturing her liminality in highly rhetorical language with words that show her at once in multiple worlds. With *festivius amabiliusque* he describes the unusual child whose affectionate behavior toward her father, his friends, and all those who served her is detailed in section 3. In section 2 he draws the reader's attention to Minicia's womanly virtues with an intricate orchestration of word order. He collapses in her the different stages of a woman's life, which he arranges in descending and ascending chiasmic order: the old woman's wisdom, the *matrona's* seriousness, the sweetness of the child with the maiden's modesty. The balanced interlocking word order of the first pair of virtues is offset by the asymmetry of the second pair: *suavitas puellaris* reverses the adjective-noun order of *anilis prudentia* and *matronalis gravitas*, and the concluding virtue, *virginali verecundia*, is set in a prepositional phrase with the adjective-noun order restored, creating an internal chiasmus with *suavitas puellaris*.

**[Slide 17]** In tribute to Fundanus' nurturance of his daughter, Pliny celebrates Minicia's intellectual and moral qualities: she reads, she plays little; in the face of bodily weakness she shows mental fortitude, exhibiting the virtues of *temperantia*, *patientia*, *constantia*, and responding to necessity with obedience, exhortation, and finally endurance. At the end of his letter, Pliny counsels sympathetic understanding for a father who has lost his ability to respond stoically to fate in his grief over a beloved daughter who not only resembled him in appearance but shared his habits of mind (section 9: *Amisit enim filiam, quae non minus mores eius quam os vultumque referebat, totumque patrem mira similitudine exscripserat*).

**[Slide 18]** Pliny has drawn us into Fundanus' grief by showing us a portrait of a *puella* unfairly deprived of her marriage and her future. He opened his letter by asserting that Fundanus' daughter was not only worthy of longer life but of immortality as well. In some sense Pliny has given that to her. While longer life would have allowed Minicia to fulfill her promise as a

*materfamilias*, it is hard to imagine how she could have earned greater *gloria*.



**[Slide 19] BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Almost all images in the PowerPoint presentation can be found in the searchable *VRoma* Image Archive, free of charge for non-commercial use. They are also in the Worlds of Childhood and Marriage on the *Companion* website @ <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/companion.html>.