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Industrial Slavery in Roman Italy

I

FROM the earliest period the communities of the Latin tribes of central Italy and of the remaining Italiots made use of a few slaves as herdsmen, field hands, and probably as domestic servants to meet the simple demands of their small-farm life. No doubt these slaves were employed also in the household weaving of wearing apparel, in the fabrication of those offensive and defensive weapons needed in the wars with their neighbors, and in the production of the tools required for the still simple operations characteristic of Italian farming of that time.¹ Enslavement appears in the Laws of the Twelve Tables, which can safely be dated about 450 B.C. There is no mention of slaves in the two early treaties between Rome and Carthage, as given by Polybius.² Livy tells us very briefly of the imposition of a five per cent tax upon manumissions, which was passed in 357 B.C. if we may trust the statement and accept his dating of it.³ The picture of early Roman slavery as gained from these few primary data, and from literary sources even less trustworthy, is that of a simple agricultural use of a slave population whose numbers were relatively small. This would hold true down to about 352 B.C.⁴

In marked contrast with this early Roman type of simple agricultural and domestic slavery is the contemporary slave system in operation in the Greek city-states of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. In the farming sections of the Greek lands the older characteristics of agricultural slavery persisted; but the dominant feature of Greek economic life was no longer agricultural. The free Greek cities had now become centers of handicrafts, operating under a system of production in which small-

¹ A discussion of these requirements which is notably sensible, will be found in an article by R. Besnier in *Revue Historique de droit français et étranger*, XIII (1934), 437-439. For the restriction of household production upon the *latifundia* of Italy in the second century B.C. to lighter goods, see Hermann Gummerus, "Der römische Gutsbetrieb als wirtschaftlicher Organismus" in *Klio Beiheft* 5 (1906), especially pp. 34-49, 68.

² Polybius, III, 22, 4-13 and 24, 3-13. It is unnecessary to enter into the complicated problem of the dates of these treaties. In my judgment the earlier would fall in the later fifth century against the positive date of 508 B.C. as given by Polybius, the second in the later part of the fourth century B.C.

³ Livy, VII, 16, 7. Cf. XXVII, 10, 11.

⁴ Cf. Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, "Sklaverei," *Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplementband, VI, 948.

shop labor was competing with household handicrafts. The market, for which both types produced, was the entire Mediterranean area. In the artisan shops, such as there were, free men and slaves worked side by side. The rate of pay for workmen of either status was equal, so far as our sources indicate.

There is no evidence which directly proves that the production method of the Greek colonies of the west, namely the employment of slaves in the handicrafts alongside free hired workmen, was the same before 400 B.C. as the mixed slave and free system that had become increasingly characteristic of the mother cities. It is, however, a rational assumption, particularly for the Italian and Sicilian Greek cities as well as for Massilia in Gaul. Moreover in the early fourth century, the development of this type of slave and free labor force is provable for the city of Syracuse under the rule of its tyrant, Dionysius I,⁵ and it is very probable that it was used in the Etruscan towns of the sixth and fifth centuries.

In the fourth century the Roman state still remained a farming community of sturdy peasants, one which, in self-protection, was expanding strongly in central Italy. South and north lay city-states whose "manufacturing" methods followed the Greek system of using slave artisans in addition to free handicraftsmen. Imitation of the most modern and successful system of the time plus the compulsion of competing with the output of this system even in the markets of central Italy probably were the factors responsible for the unimpressive beginnings of slave employment in the handicrafts of the later fourth century at Rome and in other towns of Italic background and blood, such as Capua.

When Tarentum was taken in 272 B.C. the city-state of Rome had attained a position of hegemony over all of peninsular Italy, that is of everything south of the Po Valley. Along the shores of the heel and toe of the peninsula it included a number of Greek towns with developed handicrafts, each with a mercantile marine to transport its goods, and a navy of sufficient size to afford its sea-borne commerce some measure of protection. The following seventy years included the first long war with Carthage, the annexation and organization of Sicily and Sardinia-Corsica as provinces, three brief but important wars in the period 240-220 B.C., and the Second Punic War in which Hannibal was so great a figure. At times, notably in the last dozen years of the Hannibalic war, almost the total available man power subject to military service of the

⁵ The references to the slaves of the Sicilian cities and the Greek towns of lower Italy in the time of Dionysius I of Syracuse are given in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie, Supplementband*, VI, 948-949.

Roman citizenry and the Italian allies was in the field. In such instances it became necessary to enlist slaves in the Roman levies.⁶ This class was called upon in ancient warfare, whether for army or navy service, only in case of direst need. Meantime the demands for workmen in the handicrafts producing the materials of war were exceedingly heavy and two circumstances connected with the war needs stimulated the expansion of industrial slavery: the example of the small handicraft industries which used slave and free labor was all about them in the Greek city-states, and at the same time the supply of slaves furnished in the capture of beleaguered cities was relatively great.⁷ Hence both a demand for slave industrial workers and a large supply were present. We may, therefore, assume that a considerable increase in the handicraft use of slaves occurred during the second half of the third century B.C.

II

The factual data to prove both the increase in slave numbers in Roman Italy in this period and the acceptance of slave labor in the Roman handicrafts are convincing. In 214 B.C. Philip V of Macedon, then at war with Rome, dictated a series of official letters to the magistrates and the citizens of Larissa in Thessaly. These we have on the stone on which they were published by the Larissans. In this diplomatic exchange Philip made the following interesting statement as an argument that the Larissans should increase, not decrease, their citizen rolls: "I consider that no one of you would deny that it is most advantageous that your state be made strong by having as many persons as possible share your citizenship and that your territory should not be shamefully barren of inhabitants as it now is; and you may look at other peoples who follow a similar method of expanding their citizen lists. Among these are the Romans. They admit their slaves into the citizen body when they have freed them and give them a share of the magistracies; and by this means they have not only increased their own native city, but they have also sent out colonies into nearly seventy places."⁸ Important for us is Philip's implication that the

⁶ Typical references for the use of slaves in warfare during the Hannibalic war, both by the Romans and by the Carthaginians, are for the Romans: Livy, XXI, 45, 7; 46, 10; XXII, 57, 11; XXIII, 35, 7; XXIV, 11, 3; 14, 3 and 18, 12; XXV, 1, 4; 6, 21; XXVI, 47, 3; XXVII, 38, 10; XXXIV, 6, 12; for the Carthaginians: Appian, *Bell. Ext.* VII, 9, 57; VIII, 2, 9; and Dio in Zonaras, IX, 12.

⁷ The references for the numbers of persons enslaved by the Romans after the capture in war in the third and second centuries B.C. are given in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie, Supplementband*, VI, 949-954.

⁸ Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (3d ed.), II, no. 543, lines 29-34.

Roman state of his day had a considerable body of slaves. It is hard to believe that those slaves whom the Roman citizens freed and, by so doing, admitted to a status of incompleting citizenship, would be taken from among the field hands upon their farms.

Most students of the economic history of Rome have assumed that handicraft industries, under the small-shop system, were already fairly developed in the third century B.C. in towns about Rome, such as Caes, Capua, and Puteoli.⁹ Proof that such a development must be accepted for the city of Rome as well comes to us by a roundabout route. When the young Scipio Africanus in 209 B.C. captured New Carthage in Spain, he separated the captured males into three groups, setting apart the skilled workmen to the number of 2,000. To these he declared that they were public slaves of the Roman state. If they displayed good will and zeal as workmen in their crafts, he promised them their freedom upon a successful issue of the war. Polybius,¹⁰ who is our better informant, implies that he used these men chiefly in the shipbuilding trades.¹¹ Livy declares specifically that they were to be employed in war-supply handicrafts.¹² Because the strategy of Hannibal centered upon breaking Rome's hold in the Italian peninsula and no other town of Italy was so safe from capture by him, it is an easy step, and a fairly safe one, to the conclusion that essential war industries must have been concentrated at Rome. We know that farm slaves had been recruited as soldiers in the first half of the war, with the customary promise of freedom, to such an extent that complaints arose that agricultural production was being badly affected.¹³ Since social life in Rome and in the allied towns was still simple, the domestic use of slaves was not yet highly developed. This leaves only the

⁹ Tenney Frank in his *Economic History of Rome* (2d ed.; Baltimore, 1927), 111-118, minimizes the increase in production and the changes in the production system at Rome in the third and second centuries B.C., granting, however, that there was a shift toward the use of slaves. This he regarded as the only significant change. Jules Toutain in his *Economic Life of the Ancient World* (New York, 1930), 234-239, presents in brief form a sounder view of the gradual growth of industrial activity at Rome in this period. Cf. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 19-22, for the second century B.C.

¹⁰ Polybius, X, 17, 9-10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, X, 17, 14-16.

¹² Livy, XXVI, 47: *cum spe propinqua libertatis si ad ministeria belli enixe operam navassent.*

¹³ For the complaints openly made in the Roman Forum against the drafting of slaves engaged in agricultural production, see Livy, XXVI, 35: *servos agriculturos rem publicam abduxisse, nunc ad militiam parvo aere emendo, nunc remiges imperando.* The outstanding instances of enslavement of the inhabitants of the larger cities captured or retaken after revolt during the First and Second Punic Wars are collected, with the references, in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie, Supplementband*, VI, 949-950. Similar figures for the second and first centuries B.C. are to be found *ibid.*, 951-969.

handicrafts of the cities and towns as the source from which slaves could be levied as soldiers in the latter half of the Second Punic War.

Cato the Censor in the first half of the second century B.C. began the practice of permitting his older slaves to buy and to train young boys with money that he furnished. After a year of this apprentice training, he either sold the boys or retained them in his own service.¹⁴ The nature of the employments for which he trained these young slaves is indicated. Cato had come to the conclusion that farming was a pleasant occupation, but an unprofitable one. Therefore he invested his money in ponds, hot springs, in properties where fulling cloth could be carried on, and in the extraction of pitch from pine woods which he owned.¹⁵ The boys whom he kept for his own use were evidently trained for the services that these investments required. The tendency at this time in Italy to employ in the handicrafts the highly skilled Greek artisans of lower Italy, Sicily, and possibly of the Greek homeland areas, appears in occasional remarks found in the Roman literature;¹⁶ and the literary evidence is firmly supported by architectural and inscriptional evidence of the time.¹⁷ These artisans might be either of free or of slave status. In the smaller towns of Italy the use of free craftsmen was, apparently, still the rule.

III

For the second century B.C. the employment of a small nucleus of slaves upon the *latifundia* in Italy as a dependable and permanent group to carry on the routine work of the big-farm system is thoroughly attested in Cato's *de agricultura*. The continuance of such a system to the time of Augustus Caesar¹⁸ demanded no increase in the numbers of farm slaves required per acre. These would be stabilized—just enough to meet the replacements demanded by death and physical deterioration in the slave group. But meantime slaves were being shipped into Italy, and in fairly large numbers. Handicrafts, business, and domestic services must have absorbed them. As long as twenty-five years ago Hermann Gummerus made this observation.¹⁹ He dated the large increase in the Italian demand

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Cato Major*, XXI, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI, 5. Cato was, in no sense, a slave trader. See Scalais in *Musée Belge*, XXXI (1927), 95.

¹⁶ Hermann Gummerus, "Römischer Gutsbetrieb" in *Klio*, Beiheft 5, Leipzig 1906, 42, 68 ff.

¹⁷ *Idem*, "Industrie und Handel," in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IX, 1451-1454.

¹⁸ See Varro, *Libri rerum rusticarum*, I, 18-19.

¹⁹ The reference again is to the exemplary study, "Industrie und Handel," of Gummerus in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IX, 1454-1455.

by the small private entrepreneurs of the time for technically equipped slaves as beginning about 150 B.C. In 1931-1932 a discovery of inscriptions made at ancient Minturnae, a coastal town of Italy north of Naples, abundantly justified this statement.²⁰ Twenty-nine inscribed stones were discovered there, each containing a list of the elected representatives of slave and freedman religious groups.²¹ These heads of the groups are *magistri* and *magistrae*; that is, both men and women. We know that Minturnae was already a "manufacturing" center in the time of Cato the Censor who couples it with Cales as a place where *latifundia* owners should buy hoods, iron implements, sickles, spades, hoes, axes, harnesses, bridle-bits, and chains.²² We are also informed by Orosius that in the suppression of a slave revolt at Minturnae in 133 B.C., which was a repercussion of the first great slave revolt in Sicily, 450 bondsmen were crucified.²³ From these data and from our knowledge of the *collegia* in the Italian towns it is a warranted deduction that the religious groups represented by these cult officials were recruited from slave and ex-slave artisans employed in the iron-tools crafts which appear to have been the central industries of Minturnae and Cales when Cato knew these towns.²⁴ The assumption that their economic organizations were typical of many similar ones in towns of like size and like location in Italy is, in my judgment, completely warranted.

In the light of this evidence and the assumption just made, one of the business activities at Rome of Marcus Licinius Crassus, as reported by Plutarch, falls into its proper place. Sometime during the years 80-72 B.C.²⁵ he proceeded to buy up somewhat more than five hundred slaves who were skilled workmen in the building trades. When apartment

²⁰ Jotham Johnson, *Excavations at Minturnae*, vol. II, *Inscriptions. Part I. Republican Magistri* (Philadelphia, 1933). See also his article upon Minturnae in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie, Supplementband*, VII, 458-494.

²¹ According to A. D. Nock of Harvard University in his review of Johnson's publication in *American Journal of Philology*, LVI (1935), 86-91, all of these officials may have belonged to one group.

²² Cato, *de agricultura*, 135. Cf. H. Gummerus, "Römischer Gutsbetrieb," in *Klio, Beiheft* 5, p. 44.

²³ Orosius, *Historiae*, V, 9.

²⁴ At Cales there was also a thriving pottery industry. See Gummerus in *Klio, Beiheft* 5, p. 41 and his discussion of the Cales relief-ware of the period 250-150 B.C. in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IX, 1450. R. H. Barrow, in his *Slavery in the Roman Empire* (1928), 99, makes a passing gesture only toward the use of slave labor in "manufacturing" in Italy, which was so important under the Empire.

²⁵ The time is not given exactly by Plutarch in *Crassus*, 2, 3-7. But the course of his political and business development, as indicated by Plutarch, definitely places it in these years. Cf. M. Gelzer in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, XIII, 299. These builders are called *τεχνίται*, *ἀρχιτέκτονες* and *οικοδόμοι*.

houses in the city caught fire, he would buy these properties from their owners, and the threatened structures near them, at a low price; by this means he "became the personal owner of the largest part of Rome," according to Plutarch. Soon the value of his slaves surpassed all of his other investments, although he owned silver mines and high-priced lands together with their farm hands. He further developed his slave-holding and slave-selling organization to the point where he bought and trained men of a mental capacity sufficient to absorb instruction as skilled readers, as secretaries and managers of business affairs, and as waiters. Plutarch does not regard his entry into the business of training slaves for such posts as anything unusual. What was unusual was that Crassus "himself sat over them as they were learning and directed and taught them himself, and in brief considered that attention paid to one's slaves was particularly fitting for an owner since slaves are the living instruments of business management. In this Crassus acted rightly, if he considered, as he frequently said he did, that it was necessary to direct other matters through one's slaves, but to direct one's slaves personally."²⁶

Crassus was not, in any sense, the originator of trade-school education for slaves. His contributions lay in extending its scope beyond the sphere of teaching the skilled trades; for he set about preparing his slaves for the higher requirements of accounting, secretarial work, and managerial positions, substituting formal school direction, under his personal supervision, for the traditional apprentice system.²⁷ It would be interesting to know whether organized business training agencies of this kind, competing with the apprentice type, were available to young men of free status. If there were such they have not come to my attention.

IV

Evidence of the use of slaves in the formation of a continuous body of experienced workers in the water and fire departments of the city of Rome lies admittedly in data actually on the periphery of an investigation which deals with slave employment in "manufacturing" establishments. It illustrates, however, the trend of the times toward a more varied use of slave labor. In the late republic the *cura aquarum* of Rome had been

²⁶ Plutarch, *Crassus*, 2, 6-7. In the *Synkrisis*, or *Comparison*, between Nicias and Crassus, § 1, Plutarch condemns the business of acquiring property at fire-sale prices; but he speaks no word of blame against the trade-school idea.

²⁷ In his excellent study of "Slave Education in the Roman Empire" in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, LXXI (1940), 264, note 4, S. L. Mohler suggests this idea. He does not, however, distinguish the manual training of the builders from the higher skills taught in the business management school.

let out under concession to contractors. The latter were required to maintain a definite number of workers whose status is not known. Since such concessions were leased for a five-year term only, it is probable that hired free men predominated over slaves under this system. In 33 B.C. Marcus Agrippa was entrusted with the organization of the water-supply system by Octavianus Caesar.²⁸ Agrippa employed a group of his own slaves for this purpose which Augustus Caesar Octavianus, after the death of Agrippa, maintained as "slaves of Caesar." This group was eventually transferred by the terms of the will of Augustus to the Roman state, thereby becoming "public slaves." At the end of the first century A.D., under Nerva, the organized water department crew of Rome consisted of 240 "public slaves" and 460 "slaves of Caesar,"²⁹ that is, slaves owned by the then Emperor, Nerva Caesar. Both crews were, in fact, used in the service of the capitol of the Empire, although the fiction of the Emperor's ownership of the latter group was maintained. In 22 B.C. Augustus had also established a regular fire department for the capital city of the Empire. It consisted of 600 slaves. The use of the unfree in fire brigades persisted until 6 A.D. when the service was turned over to freedmen appointees and citizens of lower privilege.³⁰

For a quarter of a century under Augustus Caesar, however, Rome had a compact group of 840 "public slaves" who did the actual work in the new departments of water supply and fire control. The influence that this group exercised upon the attitude of the free population toward the slave group cannot be traced. It would seem certain that the self-esteem of the slave and freedmen groups must have risen and that the attitude of the slave-holding residents toward the institution of slavery and toward the individuals who served under its shelter must have been altered, and favorably so.

V

Contemporaneously with this advance of the slaves into departmental work in the city administration we have factual and undeniable evidence of the manualizing of slave employment in a different field of Italian industry. It is furnished by the relief pottery from the craft shops of Arretium in Etruria, located some 25 miles north of the Trasimene Lake.

²⁸ Frontinus, *de aquae ductibus*, § 96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §§98, 105, 116. For this development, see Ernst Kornemann's article *curatores* in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IV, 1784-1787, and Léon Halkin, *Les Esclaves Publics chez les Romains*, 79-85.

³⁰ Cassius Dio, LIV, 2, 4, and LV, 26, 4.

The period of the greatest output and the widest distribution of this Arretine pottery covers, roughly speaking, the half century from 25 B.C. to 25 A.D.³¹ The important fact for the purposes of this discussion is that in the earlier half of these fifty years the Arretine luxury bowls and vases showed, alongside the factory stamp, the stamps of the slave artists who made the molds. It is not possible to assert that all of these master potters of Arretium were slaves because in the later period only the stamps of the factory owners appear, whereas the matrix-making craftsmen remain unknown to us. It is a notable fact, however, that none of the names of the craftsmen of the earlier period which have so far appeared upon the Arretine ware are those of free men.

The composition, the drawing of the human figures, and the finesse of the decorative bands show that the Arretine slave potters were highly skilled craft technicians. They were conscious of their own importance as artists and they were valued as such by their owners. For if the factory owners had not thought that the names of these unfree artists, Cerdo, Nicephorus, Philemo, Pilades, Pantagathus, and others, would give the pottery additional selling value, as the work of acknowledged and well-known craftsmen, they would not have permitted the slave names to appear on the ware.

There are two additional observations worth recording. In several instances where the pottery works changed hands from one factory owner to another the mold makers were sold by the old owner to the new, evidently as a part of the inventory of the plant. In other instances they were purchased by one pottery shop owner from another. The first case is illustrated by the slave Pantagathus, who went over with the Rasinius shop to the ownership of Caius Annius, and again by Cerdo whose masters were the factory owners Rasinius, and, later, Marcus Perennius Tigranus.³² In other words these slaves belonged as much to the craft itself and to the shop as to the slave owner.³³

³¹ Hans Dragendorff in *Gnomon*, X (1934), 356 ff. and in *Festschrift August Oxé* (Darmstadt, 1938), 5. In a personal letter to me Dragendorff wrote: "Die Relieftöpferei in Arezzo drängt sich zusammen in die Zeit des Augustus und Tiberius, etwa 25 v. Chr.-25 n. Chr." The export distribution of the Arretine ware outside of Italy covered the entire Roman Empire, including the Aegean area and Palestine. For the eastern area see J. H. Iliffe, "Sigillata Wares in the Near East," in *Quarterly of the Department of Archeology in Palestine*, VI (1936-37), 4-53, and August Oxé's comments upon this article in *Germania*, XXI (1937), 135-137 (*Korrespondenzblatt der römisch-germanischen Kommission des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*).

³² See the list of the pottery owners given by August Oxé, *Arretinische Reliefgefäße vom Rhein* (Frankfurt, 1933), 111-112, and cf. Hans Dragendorff in *Festschrift August Oxé*, 8.

³³ In the Minturnae inscriptions published by Jotham Johnson, *Excavations at Min-*

For the extension of the industrial use of slaves in Italy in the early Empire, I must briefly refer to the basic and comprehensive article, already mentioned,³⁴ of Hermann Gummerus on industry and trade and to a special and detailed study of the stamps upon building bricks of the second century A.D.³⁵

It is a well-known fact that the wealthy Romans of Augustus's time used their slaves or their freedmen as financial managers, allowing them to control and direct their multifarious and widespread private investments. Augustus, the wealthiest of them all, set the example for this development³⁶ which is merely an extension of that earlier demand for intelligent business assistance which Crassus had met when he established his training service for secretarial, accounting, and managerial positions. The preference shown to slaves and ex-slaves for these posts over free men of Roman or Italian stock can only be explained rationally upon the basis of a relatively greater efficiency and better training of the unfree and newly freed. Such slaves had been brought into Italy in large numbers and were still being transported to the west from the Hellenistic Near East. In many instances they had grown to manhood in that milieu of business and financial life the scale and intensity of which has been so admirably portrayed in Rostovtzeff's recent volumes upon *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*. One significant fact may be added to Rostovtzeff's incisive remarks upon the Hellenistic pamphlet called "Economics" which appears under Aristotle's name.³⁷ Although Latin literature boasts of three important works upon agricultural organization and agronomy which are still extant, those of Cato, Varro, and Columella, I know of no single work in Latin dealing with business organization and public finance which is similar to the so-called Aristotelian *Oeconomica*.

turnae, this is even more apparent. Five of the slaves who appear as heads of the cult organizations belonged to a firm of concessionaires for pitch-making and four to a firm of salt-extracting concessionaires. They definitely were slaves of the business organizations concerned, not of the individual members.

³⁴ Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IX, 1454-1513. The largest number of slaves known to have worked in any single pottery shop in Italy is 58; but these were not all working together at one time. See Gummerus, *idem*, 1487-1488. Nor can we tell how many of them were apprentices and firers. M. E. Park, *The Plebs in Cicero's Day* (1918), 82, note 1, seems to assume that the number cited as belonging to any single factory owner represents the number he owned at a given time.

³⁵ Herbert Bloch, "I Bolli laterizi e la storia edilizia romana," parts II and III, *Bulletino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale del Governatorato di Roma*, LXV (1937) and LXVI (1938).

³⁶ See M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 55.

³⁷ Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 1941), 74-75.

This is significant in the sense that the Romans of wealth and of aristocratic background maintained the traditional Italian interest in agriculture usually to the point of personal direction of their farming enterprises. Their business enterprises, however, were almost always placed in the hands of slave or freedmen executives.

From their activities in the field of handicraft skills and business management a few of the slaves and freedmen of Roman Italy moved upward in the early Empire into the highest spheres of state affairs and imperial control. Out of their ranks came the freedmen of the Caesars, that elite of former bondsmen which played such a conspicuous role in the ruling of the Mediterranean world of the time. Under Claudius Caesar one thinks of Callistus, secretary of petitions; Narcissus, head of the imperial secretariat; Pallas, comptroller of imperial finance;³⁸ and Polybius, director of the Emperor's studies. Under Nero the freedman Epaphroditus succeeded his fellow freedman, Doryphorus, as secretary of petitions³⁹ and Claudius Athenodorus, another freedman, held the vital post of prefect of the grain supply of Rome in 67 A.D.⁴⁰

The central period of the extension of the use of slave labor alongside free artisans in the skilled trades in Italy is roughly contemporary with the beginnings of a psychological change in the accepted Roman attitudes toward life in general and toward the role of the Roman state in the Mediterranean world. For the more thoughtful leaders of Roman political expansion the teachings of the Middle Stoa, particularly as presented to them by Panaetius of Rhodes, became an attractive formulation of the new relation of the Romans to world affairs.⁴¹ The moral assumptions of the Middle Stoa had the merit that these were understandable and adaptable for them in terms of the old Roman ideal of character and the

³⁸ The freedman, Felix, a brother of Pallas, rose to the high position of procurator of Judaea and was married to two queens, possibly to three as Suetonius states in *Claudius*, 28, 1. Cf. Dio Cassius, LX, 17, 8 for the alleged venality of these ex-slaves.

³⁹ See Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, V, 1579 and 2710, s.v. Doryphorus and Epaphroditus. Suetonius, *Nero*, 37, 3, reports that Nero threatened the Roman Senate that he would some day do away with that body entirely and hand over the conduct of the republic and its provinces and the command of the army to the Roman knights and his freedmen.

⁴⁰ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, VI, 8470. For the imperial slaves and freedmen in general, see L. Friedländer, *Sittengeschichte Roms* (10th ed., Leipzig, 1921-1922), I, 35-74; Harold Mattingly, *The Imperial Civil Service of Rome* (Cambridge, 1910), 31-43; Otto Hirschfeld, *Die Verwaltungsbeamten des römischen Kaiserreiches* (Berlin, 1905), 471-474; and Max L. Strack in *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 112 (1914), 1-28.

⁴¹ The best study known to me of the adaptation of the teachings of the Middle Stoa to the traditional acceptances of the Roman ruling aristocracy is that of Julius Kaerst in *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugendbildung*, V (1929), 653 ff. See also Max Pohlenz, "Antikes Führertum" in *Neue Wege zur Antike*, II Reihe, Heft 3, Berlin, 1934.

grooves of thought and habits of action as represented by the Roman *mores majorum*. Rome's sway over the Mediterranean world was now secure. The consciousness of a secure position permitted the development of a higher sophistication and a softening of manners which slowly began to manifest itself in a more humane attitude toward slaves and led to a better treatment of them.

For a long time it was believed that the acceptance of the Stoic ideas of Panaetius and his successors into the thought of the Scipionic circles at Rome, and the amelioration of slave conditions there, were phenomena which stood in the direct relation of cause and effect. A priori one might be suspicious of this conclusion on the ground that new religious and philosophic movements are more prone to precipitate the vagrant ideas and hopes of a period into formal and systematic expression than to generate them. There is, however, a more concrete and trenchant objection. Panaetius of Rhodes, as his ideas are presented to us by Cicero in his study of moral obligations, went no further in his attitude upon slavery than his predecessors of the original Stoa of the third century B.C. He thought that one should exact services from a slave, but display justice, just as one should act toward a free hired servant.⁴² Assuredly, he said, rulers of subjected peoples must employ cruelty in dealing with these subjects if they cannot otherwise be held in check, just as a master must do in dealing with his slaves.⁴³ Posidonius of Apamea, and Hecato, both students of Panaetius, accepted this attitude completely. In case one must throw overboard some object in a storm at sea, would one jettison a high-priced horse or a cheap slave? Is it worthy of a good man, when there is a scarcity of grain, not to feed his slaves? These are moral problems set up by Hecato.⁴⁴ Whatever the answers may be, it is implicit in the statement of these problems by Hecato that he regards slaves as chattels (*res*), not as human beings.

A full century had passed before we find the softened attitude of Roman Stoicism toward bondsmen expressing itself in literary form.⁴⁵ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a very wealthy man and, of course, a slave owner

⁴² Cicero, *de officiis*, I, 13, 41, following Panaetius. Panaetius did not free himself from the old Greek aristocratic idea of labor as common and vulgarizing. See Max Pohlenz, "Antikes Führertum" in *Neue Wege zur Antike*, II, Reihe, 3, p. 141.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, 7, 24. In books I and II of *de officiis* Cicero transmitted the precepts of Panaetius quite closely. See Philippson in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, II Reihe, VII, 1172.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 23, 89, and compare Seneca *de beneficiis*, III, 18, 1. See Harold N. Fowler, *Panaetii et Hecatonis Librorum Fragmenta* (diss. Bonn, 1885), 53-60, and Johannes Lichy, *de servorum condicione quid senserit L. Annaeus Seneca* (Münster, 1927), 35.

⁴⁵ W. W. Fowler in his *Social Life at Rome* (New York, 1909), 208, note 1, long since pointed out that no Latin poet of the late republic shows any real sympathy for slaves.

upon a large scale, is the first literary proponent of the changing idea of *humanitas* as applied to slaves. "What difference whether these men be slave or free? Wherever there is a human being, there is a place for a kindly deed."⁴⁶ Again: "They are slaves you say. No, men. They are slaves. No, companions. They are slaves. No, they are friends of humble status."⁴⁷ A brilliant satire upon the lives of the coarsest and most blatant representatives of the circles of the newly rich freedmen at Rome has come down to us in the Banquet of Trimalchio, written by a contemporary of Seneca, the elegant Petronius. The freedman Trimalchio says: "Slaves too are men. The milk they have drunk is just the same even if an evil fate has oppressed them."⁴⁸ The method of expression is homely as compared with Seneca's ringing rhetoric. The idea is the same. The enslaved, the manumitted, the lowly free, the powerful freedmen of the Caesars, the great aristocrats of Roman Italy—elements in all of these groups, each element in the terms of its own class consciousness—had accepted the general idea. With the wealthy Seneca it was a pleasant intellectual exercise, this matter of clothing the thought in fine phrases. With the slaves and freedmen it was more deeply felt.⁴⁹

VI

In this interpretation of the evidence upon slavery in Roman Italy the long story of the rise in the standards of slave employment has been sketched from agricultural and domestic slavery to an accepted position in the higher craft techniques, into spheres of responsible business organization and direction, and into the lower and higher bureaucratic services of the Roman state. For the employer, whether he be a burgess of moderate means at Rome or in an Italian municipality or a wealthy tycoon of the Roman equites or senatorial class, dependence upon enslaved and manumitted persons offered advantages over the use of free men in the same positions. Slaves could be trained for specialized services and gain the needed experience in any craft or employment assigned to them. After manumission this advantage to the employer might, if he so desired, still hold. Through custom under the Republic, by established laws under the Empire, the freedman could be obligated to *obsequium et operae*, that is, to loyalty and defined services, to be paid to his former

⁴⁶ Seneca, *de vita beata*, 24, 3. This is an argument against Hecato's view that deeds of kindness can only occur between persons of equal status in life.

⁴⁷ Seneca, *epistulae morales*, 47, 1.

⁴⁸ Petronius, *Satyricon*, 71, 1.

⁴⁹ Note the angry reaction of a freedman to the ridicule of the aristocratic Ascyltus, in the *Satyricon*, 57.

owner.⁵⁰ Thus continuity in the employment of skilled workmen, let us say in a small iron foundry or in the making of molds in a luxury-ware pottery, could better be maintained. Loss in efficiency through the constant turnover of skilled handicraftsmen could be minimized. For the enslaved and the freedmen this would ordinarily mean a security not vouchsafed to the free craftsmen. To the skilled workmen it would mean pride in his work, in his job, and in himself; and this would have its effects equally upon the mentality of slave owners.

It is for these reasons that, for Italy, a fundamental connection may be established between the amelioration of slave conditions and the industrializing of slave and freedman employment. The relation is a functional one, arising from the urban location of the handicraft industries as well as from the higher types of the services rendered by the enslaved and the semifree. Urban slavery, whether in domestic or in craft employments, tends to soften the masters' attitude toward the enslaved.⁵¹ In handicraft shops slaves and freedmen were grouped with free labor. In their *collegia* they had their own cult and social organizations which gave them group solidarity. They belonged to something; and they must have been conscious of their place and their social function. On the *latifundia* in Italy the owner was customarily an absentee landlord. The work of farm slaves was almost always directed by an overseer of slave status. In the towns and cities, on the other hand, the shop organizations were relatively small,⁵² and the relation of the small shop owner, or the manager, with his slaves and freedmen employees was as personal as those with his free workmen.

It is quite true that Roman Stoicism, from the days of Scipio the Younger to the death of Cicero, had formed the term *humanitas* and filled it with those ideas which made it the slogan of an ethical system. But the ethical content of *humanitas*, and the system that it embodied,

⁵⁰ On the *obsequium et operae* read A. M. Duff, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1928), 36-49, and the more specialized study of Jacques Lambert, *Les operae liberti* (Paris, 1934).

⁵¹ Ulrich Philips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1937), 216-217. Indirectly pertinent to the problem of the effects of urbanization upon the slave system are the following observations in *Deep South* by Allison Davis, Burleigh B. and Mary R. Gardner (Chicago, 1941), 479, referring to present conditions in our Southern States: "Money . . . causes white middle-class and lower class storekeepers to wait upon colored patrons deferentially. It thereby increases the difficulties of adjusting caste . . . to manufacturing and commercial economies."

⁵² From the handicraft shops of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., we have some evidence to support the belief that about thirty slave workmen would constitute a fairly large shop. See Demosthenes, *or. 27, Against Aphobus*, I, 9 and 24. This would be a good guess for the size of the Italian shops. Actually we have no evidence on this point for the shops in Italy. See Gummerus in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie*, IX, 1487.

were designed for, and applicable to, the ruling class of Rome, an educated and ruling aristocratic caste. After the days of Cicero and Varro the application of the word *humanitas* had been broadened and in this process it had lost in depth and pregnancy of meaning. Its new meaning was accepted by Stoicism; but the change of its content had come from deeper sources than Stoicism itself. Seneca, the intellectual of Roman Stoicism of the first Christian century, might argue for the common brotherhood of men of every status. The new feeling, which he so well expressed, actually had its roots in the social subsoil of contemporary life.⁵³ Roman *jurisprudentes* of the classical period accepted the theory that all men were free according to the law of nature. This did not make slavery less prevalent under the *jus gentium*. The legalists might formulate and urge the passage of ameliorating legislation which would interdict this or that form of cruelty to slaves and punish the offenders.⁵⁴ This did not alter the fundamental legal concept of slavery as a necessary agency of social organization and welfare. The simple and rigid formulation of the law of slavery remained unchanged: *aut liberi aut servi*. In the communities of Christ's followers those slaves who believed and were baptized found complete equality within the Christian group.⁵⁵ But Christianity only accelerated the crumbling of the social walls which long before had begun to level down. In theory and practice Christianity, also, adopted the slave institution in this life, with all of its inequalities, and without demur. Industrialization of slave employment; living alongside of and in the same manner as their free fellow workmen; town and city grouping and environment—these were the elements which softened the hardness of the farm slavery of Cato's *de agricultura*. The daily practice of urban life made the more humane theory of Stoicism possible as well as the kindlier practice of early Christianity. Slaves, freedmen, and free artisans met in daily intercourse upon the streets of the Italian towns and in the imperial city of Rome. Surely a feeling of comradeship developed from these contacts like that expressed in the native Indian proverb: "On the road to Delhi I met a hundred men, and they were all my brothers."

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⁵³ For a deep and penetrating analysis of the Roman *humanitas* as an aristocratic class ideal, see the address of Richard Reitzenstein, *Werden und Wesen der Humanität im Altertum, Feier Rede*, University of Strassburg, 1907.

⁵⁴ These are assembled in the article "Sklaverei" in Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *Realencyclopädie, Supplementband*, VI, 1041-1046.

⁵⁵ In sending back the fugitive slave, Onesimus, to his master, the Christian Philemon, the Apostle Paul wrote (*Epistle to Philemon*, 16) that he should be received, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord?"