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Whose Freedom? Women as Enslavers and Manumitters in the Roman Republic

Abstract:

Like many empires across time, the Roman empire had a symbiotic relationship with the institution of slavery. Imperial conquest fed the Roman slave market, and slave labor, in turn, enabled everything from the exploitation of resources to the administration of territories. Among the many beneficiaries of this system, however, one group has remained largely ignored: slaveholding women. In this lecture, Katharine Huemoeller (University of British Columbia) explores the investment of women in the institution of Roman slavery and, by extension, empire through a case study of one particularly well documented Roman matron, Terentia, wife of the Republican orator Cicero. Approaching Terentia as a *domina* (mistress)—in addition to her more widely recognized roles of wife, mother, and benefactor—reveals how Roman matrons' historically atypical independence was facilitated by the practices of slaveholding and, especially, manumission.

Short Bio:

Katharine Huemoeller is Associate Professor of Roman history in the department of Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies at the University of British Columbia. She works on Roman law, slavery, captivity, gender, and epigraphy, and her first book "The Child Follows the Womb: Gender, Reproduction, and Roman Slavery" was published in January by Yale University Press.