

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

The Dark Side of Rome: A Social History of Nighttime in Ancient Rome

A dissertation submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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September 2014

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Abstract

The Dark Side of Rome: A Social History on Nighttime in Ancient Rome

by

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This dissertation explores nighttime in Ancient Rome. Although several monographs on the history of night have appeared in the last two decades, no one has focused on antiquity. Through the examination of literary sources from the second century BCE to late antiquity from histories, biographies, plays, novels, laws, art, archaeology, and theological treatises, this dissertation examines how Romans experienced and thought about night.

Chapters one and two argue that night intensified emotions. The first chapter examines how Romans constructed the nocturnal soundscape. The change from day to night altered the meaning of some sounds. Other sounds induced more anger, fear, excitement, and even divine transcendence than they did during the day. The second chapter explores a reoccurring complaint Romans made about nighttime: it imprisoned them. The chapter charts how nocturnal boredom divided Romans: virtuous from reproachable, literate from illiterate, laborer from leisured. Nocturnal boredom led to creativity for some and trouble for others.

Chapters three and four explore how night separated people by status and identity. The third chapter considers the slave experience at night. Sketching the problems night posed to masters, I argue that slaveholders were more concerned about where their slaves were than keeping them busy. Because masters desired to keep their human property accessible at all hours, many slaves spent their nights inactively confined. The fourth chapter examines how beds marked Roman identity. Where one slept separated the civilized from uncivilized, the rich from the poor, and the manly from the effeminate.

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Introduction

Ammianus disliked Gallus. In a character sketch of Rome's junior emperor, the fourth-century historian portrayed Gallus as a cruel despot, driven by temper and paranoia, who exacted punishments without due process. He sent spies into wealthy homes, and even acted so audaciously that (XIV.1):¹

...[he] dared to undertake a serious disgrace, which Gallienus is said to have attempted at Rome with extreme shame. He used to wander through taverns at night with a few men, who were secretly equipped with a sword, and would ask people in Greek, which he spoke well, what they thought of Caesar. Gallus pulled this stunt with confidence in a city where nightlong light usually resembles the brightness of daylight. Finally, after having been recognized so many times, Gallus concluded that he would be seen if he ventured outside, except when he openly went out to do things which he thought would be considered serious. His activities led to much deep-seated groaning.

We are supposed to feel appalled at Gallus, who abused his power and acted in ways unbecoming of a Roman emperor. Ammianus' character sketch conveys how Romans thought darkness affected people, namely that night intensified preexisting daytime attributes. Gallus had already demonstrated his audacity during daytime by ignoring judicial protocol and invading privacy. By increasing Gallus' confidence that he could conceal his identity, night exacerbated the emperor's boldness. Ammianus accomplishes this by noting the emperor did this in a city well-lit during the night.

In addition to showing how darkness increased Gallus' boldness, this passage also conveys how night altered the meanings of actions. Ammianus expects our interpretation of Gallus' subterfuge to change based on whether it was day or night. At first, we are supposed to think Gallus has an untrustworthy character because he exploits the cover of darkness to dupe his interlocutors into letting down their guards and divulging their true opinions. However, when

¹All translations are my own except where noted otherwise. *Gallus ausus est inire flagitium grave, quod Romae cum ultimo dedecore temptasse aliquando dicitur Gallienus, et adhibitis paucis clam ferro succinctis vesperi per tabernas palabatur et conpita quaeritando Graeco sermone, cuius erat inpendio gnarus, quid de Caesare quisque sentiret. et haec confidenter agebat in urbe ubi pernoctantium luminum claritudo dierum solet imitari fulgorem. postremo agnitus saepe iamque, si prodisset, conspicuum se fore contemplans, non nisi luce palam egrediens ad agenda quae putabat seria cernebatur. et haec quidem medullitus multis gementibus agebantur.*

Ammianus informs us that Antioch had streetlights as bright as the day—no doubt exaggerating the resplendence of his hometown—we are meant to notice not Gallus’ untrustworthiness, but his audacity. To do something during the day meant one thing; to do the same action at night could mean something else.

The veracity of Ammianus’ character sketch is less unimportant than the significance of the assumptions Ammianus and his Roman audience made about nighttime. Beneath the surface of this passage reside two contradicting feelings: anxiety and confidence. The first thesis of this dissertation argues that night intensified emotions. Gallus’ confidence increased at night, and implicitly this boldness caused more anxiety. Darkness has always allowed people to get away with more. Indeed, Ammianus’ reference to Gallienus reveals an urban legend Romans circulated about the imperial family using night to mingle with the common people.

Messalina—empress during the first century AD—used the cover of night to prostitute herself (Juv. VI. 114). Nero frequented taverns and brothels (Suet. *Nero* 26). These accounts of hidden identity reveal discrepancies in nocturnal confidence. On the one hand, night emboldened some individuals because what gets noticed during the day, goes undetected at night. On the other hand, the very confidence some obtained from darkness brought anxiety to others. Night did not change these royal miscreants but unleashed their true, reprobate characters. This gets at the second thesis of this dissertation: that is the secrecy of darkness often divided people between those with nocturnal confidence and those with nocturnal anxiety. What night made possible for some was feared by others.

Most Romans would have smirked at this dissertation’s subject. No Roman intellectual felt nighttime warranted its own treatise. Having universality comparable to death and taxes, night remains so commonplace that people take it for granted. Darkness is one of the few

constants in life that one can safely assert has always been around. Indeed, because stars are born and die darkness is the norm in the universe; light is the exception.² Night's pervasiveness makes it a topic worthy of investigation because how other societies have experienced and thought about something as universal as darkness reveals cultural influences and ideas. By not examining night's past, historians also deprive themselves of an essential part of the human experience that comprises almost half of our lives.³ Moreover, since by default we set our paradigms at daytime, studying nighttime allows us to think about familiar points of scholarly analysis, such as slavery and luxury, from a different perspective.

Fortunately, the history of night no longer remains a neglected area of research. Several monographs have appeared in the past two decades. In 2000 Bryan Palmer's *Cultures of Darkness* applied Marxist and postmodern lenses to examine nighttime from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century. Palmer focuses more on subaltern cultures of night – witches, homosexuals, and jazz—than night *per se*. In 2002 a translated version of Jean Verdon's 1994 study on medieval nighttime became available to English readers. In 2006 A. Roger Ekirch examined nighttime mostly in the British Isles from 1500 to 1750. In 2011 Craig Koslofsky detailed the nocturnal revolution that occurred in northern Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Northern Europeans, in Koslofsky's view, made significantly greater use of the night for social and symbolic purposes during the early-modern period with the advent of

² Before the widespread conversion to Christianity, however, Romans thought darkness only existed in the sphere between the earth and the stars. Koslofsky, 3.

³ In Rome the hours of darkness ranged from a little under nine hours in July to more than 14 hours in December and January.

Hours of Darkness in the city of Rome

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
14:48	13:59	12:46	11:19	9:59	8:59	8:49	9:34	10:51	12:14	13:37	14:38

Retrieved November 12, 2011, from http://aa.usno.navy.mil/cgi-bin/aa_durtblew.pl. I used coordinates E012 27, N41 54 and the first of each month.

coffee shops, chocolate, tea, and consistent street lighting. In 2012 Peter Baldwin entered American history into the fray with a book on eighteenth and nineteenth century nighttime. Focusing on western civilization, all these trailblazing scholars examined how people from the past—especially those before electricity—experienced nighttime. Though also neglecting non-Western cultures, this dissertation contributes to an area in which other scholars have largely left unexplored: the ancient world.⁴ Indeed, the growing literature on the history of night demands an examination of the age that preceded much of the scholarship already done to assess the extent to which nightlife changed and ideas of nighttime were inherited from the Romans.

Previous scholars, namely Ekirch and Palmer, have examined how daytime and nighttime cultures differed. In contrast, I explore a different era of night from a different angle. I will argue that night intensified emotions and maintained social distinctions. Intensifying emotions and separating people into categories, I argue, reveal two threads in the larger tapestry of environmental history, for this dissertation—in addition to pushing the boundaries of ancient social history—contributes to larger questions, such as, how the environment affected people and how one culture socially construct its setting. Above all, this dissertation studies human passivity in relation to the environment. Romans had no unified view of nature: some saw nature as having order and purpose, others thought man should dominate nature, while others contended that the airs, waters, and places affect health and determine culture.⁵ On a larger scale, this study seeks to place nighttime in the Roman conception of nature. By examining how Romans experienced and thought about night, we not only learn a little more about this past civilization, but also about the human condition.

⁴ Although no monograph has dealt with ancient nighttime, a graduate student conference devoted to the subject was held at the University of Virginia in March 2013. Hans-Friedrich Mueller is currently working on a social, religious, and legal of the history of Roman nighttime.

⁵ Glacken, 13; Hughes, 45.

Before examining Rome after dark, we must first look at the sources. Ancient historians in general, and social historians in particular, starve for more evidence. I started this research project with a desire to keep track of what time during the night various activities occurred. After all, 8pm looks, sounds, and feels different from 3am. Our literary sources, however, rarely provide the details to allow us to make such distinctions. Instead we must rely on nebulous phrases, such as “during the dead of night” (*per silentium noctis*). Because of our paltry source material, social historians of antiquity must piece together disparate information from different genres and different centuries. Consequently, this dissertation encompasses a large timespan, from the second century BCE to fifth century CE. Confining my study to just one era, night in the late Republic for instance, would create arguments based on slim evidence and deprive this exploration of so much richness later sources offer. Using a range of sources that cover a wide span of time is the method of many social histories, and this one is no different.⁶

Despite the long timespan, this dissertation is not chronologically organized. Like most social histories, the study of night should not be written like a biographical narrative: dividing the study into various chapters, such as night during the Roman Republic, night during the Roman Empire, and night in Late Antiquity. To do so, would cause an overflow of redundancy that would whitewash any evolution, which is the purpose of chronological division. Having examined the sources, I have concluded little change took place over the centuries in how the Romans experienced and thought about nighttime, despite the rise of an empire, collapse of the state, and widespread conversion to a new religion. The one change I have found, however, deals with nocturnal boredom. As we will see, many Romans saw nighttime as boring.

⁶ Peter Garnsey’s study on famine and food supply went from Greece to late antiquity (Garnsey, 1988). Nicholas Horsfall’s on the Roman plebs adduced evidence from the Republic to Augustine (Horsfall, 2003). Even James Ker’s article on the *lucrabratio* spanned four centuries and adduced diverse genres such as agricultural manuals and antiquarian lexicons (Kerr, 2004).

In addition to using literary evidence that covers a long time span, I use sources from a variety of genres. This could cause trouble for a two reasons. First, much of the literary evidence I adduce does not come from sources aimed at facts and persuasion, such as history, biography, or forensic speech, but from fictional works such as poems, novels, and comedies. In other words, a significant portion of my evidence involves situations that never happened. Second, indiscriminate use of literary genres can lead to misinterpretations because the goal of a comedian differs from that of a biographer, philosopher, or novelist. Comedy poses an additional challenge for social historians. Some humor derives from the outlandishness of an inverted world, while other humor comes from exaggerating preconceived norms. To remedy this predicament, I have followed Christopher Pelling's advice by examining what the ancient audience needed to know for the scene to make sense.⁷ First, I explore the responses writers aimed to give their ancient audiences. Then, to reveal cultural norms about nighttime I examine the assumptions writers and audiences made.

Notwithstanding the potential problem of mixing different genres into a coherent study, the literary sources I use typically have one advantage: night is rarely the center of the writer's and audience's attention. Instead, night provides a background for the center of attention. Writers had little motivation to exaggerate this part of the story. An analogy with modern fiction might be helpful because night in Roman fiction functioned similarly to props in a play. High-school sitcoms have lockers and not giraffes in the background because the writers do not want to distract their audience from the situation at hand. In Roman plays, novels, and epigrams night often functions in a fashion similar to those lockers. The author uses night as a prop to make the setting seem appropriate. We can examine those lockers: the size, color, shape, the combinations, and the contents. We can see the expectations and assumptions we make about

⁷ Pelling, 130.

lockers. Thus, the variety of genres does not stymie my study because I use the evidence to discover cultural assumptions Romans made about night.

In fact, adducing a variety of genres, though dangerous, strengthens my arguments. The historian's task resembles that of a detective with each source acting as a witness. When various witnesses with different vantage points corroborate statements, expectations, and assumptions, their claims become more credible. To confine myself to just one or two genres would miss valuable information on this past culture.

Another potential landmine in this study is determining whether a source refers to nighttime. By default I have assumed daytime until proven otherwise. I consider a reference to be nocturnal if the word "night" or its derivatives, such as "darkness", "moon", "torch", "bed", or "sleep" appear nearby. This too can sometimes lead to misinterpretations. For instance, the word sleep (*somnus*) does not guarantee night because the Romans had siestas, though they often used the Latin word *meridio* when referring to napping.

The problem of distinguishing day from night becomes greater with our visual evidence, especially since the pictures I use have no moon, dark sky, or torches present. To determine the time a wallpainting takes place, we must ask what assumptions would the Roman audience have made about the art they were viewing. Much visual evidence is of a sexual nature, and I assume sex is nocturnal because the Romans assumed that it was. For example, when Catallus wrote, "You have the hots for a feverish whore: you're embarrassed to admit it. Now all of the sudden you do not lie alone at night" he equated sex with nighttime (6).⁸ How much visual evidence represented reality or an ideal also bedevils social historians. However, ascertaining an ideal has

⁸ *verum nescio quid febriculosi
scorti diligis: hoc pudet fateri.
nam te non viduas iacere noctes*

historical value because we learn the desires of a society that has long since perished. Moreover, just as with literary sources, visual evidence rarely makes night the focal point. Instead, night acts as a setting.

The first chapter investigates the power of nocturnal sounds. When people ponder the differences between ancient and modern nights, they first think of lighting. Demonstrating their visual bias, they wonder *what were nights like without light bulbs*. Few stop to ask *what did night sound like*. Darkness shifted the ratio of senses away from vision towards hearing. Analyzing the implications of this shift, I argue that Romans used nocturnal sounds to gauge morality, challenge authority, and ignite imagination. Unlike the eyes which can shield people from unwanted sights by looking away or being closed, ears are unable to block undesired noises. Nocturnal sounds sometimes created an emotional zero-sum game in which the noise from one's happiness became another's annoyance. Sounds sometimes changed meanings when they occurred at night; other times sounds became more vexing or more frightening. The synthesis of these three theses reveal how darkness increased passivity and amplified the emotional power of sounds; thus, this chapter contributes to the emerging field of sensory history that seeks to understand how cultures socially construct the senses and environmental history that seeks to understand how the environment affects people.

While sounds could cause a variety of emotions, long periods of nocturnal silence often brought a different feeling: boredom. The second chapter considers a reoccurring depiction of night as a time of inertia that did not release its captives until dawn. How one dealt with nocturnal boredom mattered. It divided Romans. A virtuous woman could endure nocturnal boredom, while the depraved woman could not. Nocturnal boredom caused trouble for some and creativity for others. Literate individuals had more escapes from it than the illiterate.

Scholarship on the history of emotions has expanded in the past couple decades because scholars have begun to ponder how past societies regulated emotions. Mirroring the Romans own interests, historians of emotions have focused most of their attention on the passions, such anger, grief, and love. The history of boredom is beginning to get some attention. Many of those who have studied boredom have linked the time-dragging emotion to modernity, wealth, and an expansion of individualism.⁹ This chapter, however, contributes to a smaller body of research that examines environmental causes of boredom.¹⁰ Above all, this chapter demonstrates how the nocturnal environment affected people and reveals the importance of sociability in antiquity since people depended on each other to avoid boredom.

Continuing the idea of night as inertia, the third chapter examines the slave experience at night. What to do with slaves at night must have bedeviled all slave-owning societies. I argue that masters were more concerned about where their slaves were at night than keeping them busy. Consequently, masters desired to cast their slaves into nocturnal detention: a time of confined and accessible inactivity. For masters the issues concerned the display of control, accessibility of domestic slaves, and confinement of rural slaves. Consequently, many slaves experienced night as a time of confined inaction. For the sake of maximizing daytime productivity, many masters appear content to let slaves rest at night, but socializing was more problematic because it rendered their human property inaccessible. Despite this desire, it is apparent that decreased supervision gave some slaves greater freedom at night. Scholarship on Roman slavery strives to recapture the life of an ancient slave. This chapter contributes to that forever-elusive question by considering the challenges night posed to slaveowners and their responses to those challenges.

⁹ Brisset and Snow (1993); Healy (1984); Klapp (1986); Raposa (1999); Spacks (1995).

¹⁰ Jervis, et al. (2003).

Not only was Roman society anxious over where slaves were at night, but it was also concerned with where a person slept. The fourth chapter examines how Romans judged each other and foreign peoples by where they slept at night. Romans believed beds indicated who you were—your civilization, your social status, and even your character. Beds distinguished the civilized from uncivilized and separated humans from animals. Beds could also be luxury items, reinforcing elite identity by separating rich from poor. Beds also revealed an individual's and a society's character, separating the manly from the effeminate. By examining the Romans' urge to categorize and draw distinctions based on beds, this chapter contributes to the study of identity in antiquity.

These four chapters are broad in scope. For example, the section on Roman beds could offspring into chapters on various bed functions, such as birth, sex, sleep, sickness, and death. Studying nighttime looks at familiar questions from a different angle: the nocturnal angle. I do not want to lose sight of this unique angle of the Roman world seen from darkness, which would happen if I splintered my study into more nuanced scopes, such as snoring instead of sounds, household servants instead of all slaves, and pillows instead of bed. Because night forms one part of the natural world, this examination contributes to larger questions about environmental history. How did night affect Romans? How did Romans think about this aspect of nature?

Chapter 1: Rome's Nocturnal Soundscape¹

Romans liked the sound of waterfalls. In a letter aimed at demonstrating how his villa promotes good health, Pliny the Younger boasted of refreshing breezes, lush meadows, fertile soil, and mild temperature. Then he reveals his summer house has a view of a cascade that “looks and sounds pleasing” (V.6.23).² However, just a few sentences earlier in the same letter Pliny praised his bedroom for being free from noise and light (V.6.21).³ Romans liked waterfalls except at night, when the sound of gushing water lost its appeal. Pliny's bragging reveals how night could change reactions, meanings, and values of sounds by providing a different background. Cicero would have concurred, when he similarly remarked that suspicion arises if a dog barks outside the capital at night but would have its legs broken if it did so during the day (*Pro Roscio Amerino* 20 cf. Livy V.46).

In addition to showing how night changed reactions, Pliny's statements about his bedroom reveal an assumed desire for nocturnal silence, at least in the bedroom. Desires and emotions are linked with values. When Horace wrote “keep the lamps burning until dawn; let all the noise and anger be far away”, he explicitly connected noise with anger and implicitly linked silence with harmony (*Od* 3.8.14-16).⁴ Nocturnal silence created unemotional harmony. When

¹ I thank Chris Kegerreis for reading this chapter and the participants of the “*Nox erat*: Night and Nocturnal Activities in the Ancient World” conference held at the University of Virginia in March 2013.

² *strepitu visuque iucunda*

³ Dead silence was not always necessary or requested for sleeping. Suetonius indicated that if Augustus woke up at night, the emperor would order one of his lectors to read so that he could fall back asleep (Aug. 78.2). The sound from a presumably boring book could induce sleep. In some ways this makes more sense than our modern habit of reading to fall asleep. Augustus' eyes were closed, only his ears were open, being filled with the soporific words of a *lector*.

⁴ *uigilis lucernas
perfer in lucem; procul omnis esto
clamor et ira.* 15

an old man in *The Golden Ass* pleaded for pity using the words “by the stars in the sky, powers of the underworld, elements of nature, silences of the night, sanctuaries of Coptos, rising of Nile, secrets of Memphis, and rattles from Phariaca”, he acknowledged the purity of nocturnal silence (II.28).⁵ Many Romans viewed nature as ordered, harmonious, and purposeful.⁶ For night, harmony and purpose meant silence. Not intending to make the old man’s plea humorous or ironic, Apuleius crafted this character to reference divine purities of stars, sanctuaries, mysteries, and nocturnal silence. In a plea for pity night and silence complemented one another just as the Nile and flooding as well as stars in the sky.

By idealizing nocturnal silence, Roman culture, of course, desired an unattainable environment. Therefore, when sound occurred at night, what meanings, values, and judgments did Romans make? Although the variety of sounds precludes the possibility of forming one complete paradigm that encompasses everything heard at night, I will argue that Romans believed darkness increased the emotional power of sounds. We can observe this emotional amplification in three ways. First, Romans gauged a man’s morality based, in part, on the sounds he made at night. An individual’s volume, snoring, and silence mattered at night because they formed criteria on which Roman elites judged each other. Second, sounds could challenge authority at night. Nocturnal loudness could upset social order by harassing the rich and powerful. Third, darkness increased the auditory imagination, opening channels of communication with the supernatural and the divine.

⁵ "Miserere," ait "sacerdos, miserere per caelestia sidera per inferna numina per naturalia elementa per nocturna silentia et adyta Coptica et per incrementa Nilotica et arcana Memphitica et sistra Phariaca.

⁶ Glacken, 35-79.

At the outset, however, I must note that no one ever heard most of the sounds I adduce in this chapter.⁷ Nevertheless, fictitious sounds have historical value because they reveal the meanings Romans assigned to them. We see how Roman reacted—or were supposed to react—to various sounds. Moreover, since writers do not focus their plots and topics on sounds, nocturnal noises are subject to less bias and fabrication than one gets from political history. I define sound as *anything that is heard*, which includes talking, singing, and music, as well as natural and inarticulate din. I use such a broad definition because my ultimate focus is nighttime, not sound or emotion. A narrower definition—say to just inarticulate din—would disregard so much as to make this exploration incomplete and would be so microscopic as to create a distorted view of nighttime.

Gauging morality

Verres was out of control. Cicero lambasted the corrupt Praetor's conduct in Sicily by claiming Verres acted like a Bithynian King, conducting court in his litter, surrounding himself with roses, wearing the finest threads, and deflowering the daughters of noble Silician families. Then, in vintage fashion,⁸ Cicero described how Verres partied (II.5.28):

his banquets did not occur with the silence typical of praetors and generals serving the Roman people, nor with the customary modesty of entertainments given by magistrates, but with the loudest noise, sometimes they even devolved into fisticuffs. For that stern and attentive praetor, who had never followed the laws of the Roman people, most carefully abided by customs that have been established for drinking. Consequently, these banquets concluded in such a way that some people were carried out of the party just like a battle, while others lay on the ground as if they were dead; most people passed out, so that anyone who saw it would have concluded that he was not looking at banquet of a praetor, but at the Battle of Cannae.⁹

⁷ On the methodology of aural history, see M. Smith, xi; Schafer, 3-9.

⁸ Catharine Edwards has noted that moralists used analogies paralleling one subject to an obviously more threatening one. Edwards, 138.

⁹ *erant autem convivia non illo silentio populi Romani praetorum atque imperatorum, neque eo pudore qui in magistratuum conviviis versari soleat, sed cum maximo clamore atque convicio; non numquam etiam res ad pugnam atque ad manus vocabatur. iste enim praetor severus ac diligens, qui populi Romani legibus numquam paruisset, illis legibus quae in poculis ponebantur diligenter obtemperabat. itaque erant exitus eius modi ut alius inter manus e convivio tamquam e proelio auferretur, alius tamquam occisus relinqueretur, plerique ut fusi sine*

Cicero wanted his audience to be shaking their heads in disgust when hearing these words, for in his mind volume gauged morality. Being loud at night was as unbecoming of a Roman magistrate as surrounding himself with roses or conducting court in a litter. Respectable statesmen have quiet banquets, signifying composure and order. The silence Roman society expected from Praetors and Generals indicated self-control. Indeed, to obtain a reputation of upright character, Epictetus recommended silence as the safest policy among strangers as well as keeping one's laughter low and infrequent (Ench. 33).

Elite Romans loved to judge each other.¹⁰ Carlin Barton has shown how Romans linked shame and honor with visibility.¹¹ Spectators and judges were the same and to gain honor or to be shamed a Roman had to be seen. During the day Romans judged with their eyes; during the night they judged with their ears more frequently. A person's nocturnal volume mattered. It revealed an individual's temperament. Romans connected a person's volume with self-restraint: a prerequisite for those who should govern. If a man cannot restrain his volume, it meant that he also could not restrain himself and was unfit serve the Roman people, resulting in disasters reminiscent of the Battle of Cannae. Being unintentionally loud, Verres and his rabble could not control themselves, which resulted in fights and blacked-out inebriation. Thus, loudness was both a symptom and a harbinger of bigger problems, in this case rotten character. Trouble started with sound, escalated to fights, then climaxed in the vivid sight of passed-out drunkards, resembling battlefield corpses.

mente ac sine ullo sensu iacerent,—ut quivis, cum aspexisset, non se praetoris convivium, sed Cannensem pugnam nequitiae videre arbitraretur.

¹⁰ Moralizing permeates Roman literature, Edwards, 2.

¹¹ Barton, 216-27.

The link between nocturnal volume and discipline was especially true in the military. During the Jurgurthan War, Roman soldiers became encouraged when they saw and heard their enemy acting as if the war had ended, by loudly celebrating the night and lighting many fires according to their custom (Sal. *Jug.* 98). Similar to upright Roman Praetors and commanders, disciplined soldiers restrained their noises at night. Being loud was as foolish as lighting fires because both made an army more vulnerable by revealing so much that darkness kept hidden, such as location, number, and current activity. Not only did increased volume reveal an enemy lacking the military discipline of silence, but it also signified their arrogance. Acting like victors, Jurgurtha's soldiers felt invincible and demonstrated a carefree attitude concerning the dangers of war.

Loudness did more than indicate a lack of self-control. It also corrupted children.

Quintillian scolded (*Inst.* I.2.8):

every banquet roars with foul songs, and things are seen that are shameful to speak. Habit arises from this, then habit becomes second nature. The poor, unfortunate children learn these customs before they know such things are wrong. Then, the impressionable children do not learn these evil customs from school, but bring them to school.¹²

Revealing both a person's morality and affecting those listening, loudness facilitated the spread of the songs' immoral content. Loudness acted like a contagion: children get infected, then pass on the infection to their classmates at school. We tend to think of sounds as ephemeral: in one ear, out the other, but not loud, decadent ones. Learning immorality from loudness, impressionable children carried these sounds heard at banquets into the daytime, their schools, and presumably for life, thus causing deep-rooting decadence in the young who will carry it on

¹² *omne convivium obscenis canticis strepit pudenda dictu spectantur. Fit ex his consuetudo, inde natura. Discunt haec miseri antequam sciant vitia esse: inde soluti ac fluentes non accipiunt ex scholis mala ista, sed in scholas adferunt.*

for the rest of their lives and infect the next generation. Underlying Quintillian's statement is the belief that loudness transported immorality, and the louder the volume, the greater the contagion.

When nocturnal activity affected or continued into the daytime, Roman society rarely considered it beneficial or upright. When the author of the *Historia Augusta* informs us that Heliogabalus performed the day's business at night and the night's business at day, we are not meant to admire the eccentric emperor (28.6). Similar to hangovers and unwanted pregnancies, foul songs sung at night, assuming that Romans associated banquets with night, intruded into the day.

Snoring also aggravated Romans. Cicero pondered whether gods send nightmares to snorers as divine retribution (*Div* II.129). Ammianus narrated how silent Romans killed snoring Persians, who were too undisciplined to lock their city's gate (*Amm.* XXVII.12.8). Roman literature abounds in bad things happening to snorers because this undesirable sound created revenge fantasies, in which the culprits received their comeuppance. The desired suffering of snorers reveals the amplified emotional power of sounds at night because the revenge fantasy stems from increased aggravation caused by undesired noises. Snoring and loudness caused less aggravation during the day because of greater competing sounds and the decreased desire to sleep. Silent sleep, however, used the advantages darkness offered. When Roman pictorial art depicts someone sleeping, that individual is often being watched by someone else in the painting and always by the audience.¹³ Thus, even while sleeping a person demonstrated his morality with silence indicating an upright character and snoring a glutton. Claudius' dinner companions amused themselves at the snoring emperor's expense by hitting him with a cane, throwing olive-stones at him, and putting slippers on his hands so that he would rub his face in filth (*Suet. Claud*

¹³ Sorabella, *passim*.

8). Surfeited with human flesh and wine, the Cyclops snored loudly and drooled undigested human flesh only to be blinded shortly thereafter (Ver. *Aen.* III.622-35). After drinking more wine than he was accustomed, a character snored loudly in *The Golden Ass* only to subsequently be murdered by two witches (Apul *Met.* I.11). Even with animals snoring marked gluttony. Pliny the Elder wrote that at night turtles go on land and eat gluttonously. Returning to the sea in the morning, they fall asleep on the surface of the water. Fishermen then hear their snores, stealthily swim towards them, and each catch three turtles (*N.H.* IX.12). The turtles own snoring prevented them from hearing fishermen's approach. Despite the diverse genres, all the references evince the same pattern: gluttony leads to snoring, and snoring leads to misfortune.

Like loudness, snoring was symptomatic of a bigger problem: lack of self-control. The glutton cannot control his eating or sleeping. Just as we can see a person's inability to control his appetites while awake, we can hear his lack of self-control at night. Sleeping bodies communicated morality. Similar to modern horror movies that reveal our society's condemnation of promiscuous sex and drugs, these references denote Rome's disdain for gluttony. These references evince a moral lesson that gorging food or alcohol created vulnerability because snoring inhibits hearing, when the sense was most important. Snoring makes sleepers so impervious to the world that they block the sound of a hostile approach. Moreover, snorers broadcasted their vulnerability, similar to the loudness and burning fires in Jurgurtha's army. Consequently, snorers suffered misfortunes, which seem to have pleased the audience. Snoring disgusted Romans. Martial complained how insulted guests felt because they could not avenge Zoilius' snoring but had to compliment it (III.82).

Snoring has no purpose, yet Romans judged those who made the noise in their sleep. Their judgments on snorers reveal one part in the larger picture on how Romans viewed the

body. Romans scrutinized the body: its appearance, its movements, and its sounds.¹⁴ Similar to night, the best body was silent. Unlike much in Roman culture—triumphs, banquets, speeches—sleep should not be a performance. Instead, inactivity and silence marked the ideal sleep and night.

While snoring unintentionally revealed morality, music broadcasted it without hesitation. For decades a segment of American society has believed that music corrupts—embodied in the phrase *sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll*. Roman moralists would agree with that statement with the modification *sex, food, and the flute*. First, Romans believed music had a powerful emotional effect. The famous flutist Canus boasted that his music could remove sorrow, increase happiness, create piety, and ignite love (Philostratos *Life of Apollonius of Tyrana* V.21). Second, music accompanied dinner for many rich Romans, thus combining aural and gustatory pleasure.¹⁵ Martial enticed a friend to dinner by promising him that at least one person would be playing tibia while they ate (IX.72).¹⁶ In another epigram, Martial, being concerned that his friend would have a cheerless dinner, offered him a modest one. After listing the modest food he will serve, Martial writes (V.78.22-30):

My dinner is small—who can deny it?—but you will imagine or hear nothing false, and with your own expression you will recline in peace; your host will not read a dense tome nor will girls from immoral Gades wiggle and shake their revealing, lascivious loins with no limit to their trained quiver; but little Condylus' flute will play something not too serious but not too crude.¹⁷

¹⁴ Fögen, 37.

¹⁵ Sendrey, 409. It would be wrong to believe that only the rich were accustomed to music. Athenaeus has one of his characters state that in Alexandria even the low-class, illiterates criticize mistakes made during citharodic performances (Deinpnosophistae 4.176e). cf. Power, 102.

¹⁶ Sendrey, 387.

¹⁷ *Parva est cenula—quis potest negare?—
Sed finges nihil audiesve fictum
et voltu placidus tuo recumbes;
nec crassum dominus leget volumen 25
nec de Gadibus improbis puellae
vibrabunt sine fine prurientes
lascivos docili tremore lumbos;*

By promising to uplift his friend's mood with the sound of a flute, Martial, like Canus, believed music had emotional power comparable to the taste of food or touch during sex. Image 1 demonstrates the music and food combination. The eyes of the diners are on the musicians, demonstrating how indoors at night remained visually capable.¹⁸



Image 1: Mosaic from Carthage 4th Century CE

Pagan and Christian sources evince a moral backlash against dinner music, though not as vehement as against loudness and snoring. Indeed, a blind Roman could gauge the morality of a dinner party because decadence could be heard at night. Nepos found it delightful that Atticus' dinners only had readings (Nep. *Att* 14.1).¹⁹ John Chrysostom declared that mealtime music stupefies the soul like alcohol (In Isaia 55).²⁰ Pliny the Younger indicated that righteous alternatives existed at night because when business is urgent, he forgoes music after dinner and

*sed quod nec grave sit nec infacetum,
parvi tibia Condylī sonabit.*

¹⁸ cf. Theodosian Code, 15.7; Sendrey, 388-89; 407.

¹⁹ Starr, 341.

²⁰ Quasten, 129.

chooses to exercise his memory (IX.36 cf. IX.40). Pliny's audience expected he would listen to music at night, but he had forgone that pleasure.

Roman literature was a world of accusation.²¹ Nocturnal loudness, snoring, and music formed one part of a code of conduct for Roman elites. In fact, Roman culture linked the absence of nocturnal sounds with self-restraint. If a man could restrain his noises, then he could govern his pleasures, while the inability to control nocturnal sounds also meant an inability to control desire.

What nocturnal sounds did Romans consider virtuous? Conversation. If Rome had a moral pleasure, it was a good conversation over dinner. Pliny the Younger boasted to a friend how respectably and austere he lived (VI.31 To Cornelianus):

Look at how we spend our upright and austere days, which are followed by the most delightful relaxing. We get invited to dinner everyday. Dinner was modest if you consider that it was for an emperor. Sometimes we spend our nights listening to entertainments, other times we engage in the most delightful conversations.²²

Having a delightful conversation has the same degree of rectitude as eating simple foods on an unostentatious table. Pliny omits the topics of conversation just as he did the type of food they ate. Moralists did not scoff at pleasures derived from a good conversation. Cicero remarked how invaluable having affable and courteous manner in conversation is for winning affection (*De Off.* II.14). A good conversation brings happiness to its interlocutors. For the sake of character, Epictetus urged his readers to avoid vulgar topics, such as gladiators (Ench 33). Conversations also need to be protected from noise. Martial asserted that the best music did not disturb a good conversation, indicating where chatting and music ranked on the moral spectrum

²¹ I borrow the phrase "world of accusation" from Brent Shaw's review of Edwards in *Classical Philology*, 392.

²² *Vides quam honesti, quam serveri dies; quos iucundissimae remissiones sequebantur. Adhibeamur cotidie cenae; erat modica, si principem cogitares. Interdum acroamata audiebamur, interdum iucundissimis sermonibus nox ducebatur.* .

(IX.72). Unlike loudness and snoring, talking is performed under one's complete control.

Anxieties about money lay at the heart of many moral denunciations of pleasure.²³

Conversation costs nothing.

What do these moral judgments tell us about how the Romans saw nighttime? Good conversation can be obtained whether it is day or night. Indeed, most of the references above on conversation do not limit the activity to the night. Thus, night does not affect or corrupt something righteous—be it an activity or a person. Moreover, the give-and-take of a good conversation creates a mutual pleasure of giving and receiving. Snoring—and to a lesser extent aggravating loudness—occur mostly at night. These undesirable sounds highlight the passivity of the listener, who received only aggravation and had few remedies besides fantasizing about revenge.

Challenging authority

In a letter to his friend Lucilius, Seneca expressed his frustrations with the hell-hole where he currently resided: the resort town Baiae. Telling his friend to avoid this place like the plague, the self-righteous philosopher grumbled how luxury and vice infested the city: drunkards roamed the beaches, boat parties filled the air, and pampered individuals abounded. Seneca's complaints continued. Longing for the good old days when men were men, he pined (*Ep* 51.12):

Do you think that Cato would ever have lived in such a place so that he might count the adulterous women sailing by, the many kinds of boats painted in all sorts of colors, a rose floating on the lake, or that he might hear the loud nocturnal noises from serenaders? Would that great man have preferred to hunker down in a palisade, which he had built with his own hands to serve for a single night? Would not anyone who was a real man prefer to have his sleep interrupted by a military trumpet over a chorus of serenaders?²⁴

²³ Edwards, 175.

²⁴ *Habitaturum tu putas umquam fuisse illic M. Catonem, ut praevalidantes adulteras dinumeraret et tot genera cumbarum variis coloribus picta et fluviantem toto lacu rosam, ut audiret canentium nocturna convicia? nonne ille manere intra vallum maluisset, quod in unam noctem manu sua ipse duxisset? Quidni mallet, quisquis vir est, somnum suum classico quam symphonia rumpi?* Francisco Pina Polo has studied how Roman moralists used history to regulate morality by reminding them of their righteous ancestors. Polo, *passim*.

This rich passage reveals much about nighttime. First, it distinguishes visual daytime from aural night. During the day Cato counts the lewd women, the colorful boats, and sees a rose on a lake. But, at night he hears people singing. Second, Seneca also used sound to gauge morality: the sound of war trumpets indicated rectitude, while serenading decadence. Serenaders were as decadent as lewd women, colorful boats, and roses, all of which defile because they pleasure through sensory overload. Cato and the sound of a war trumpet embodied the *mos maiorum*. The sound of war trumpets oozes patriotism since they were as traditional and disciplined as Cato himself.²⁵ Loud serenaders assaulted Roman traditions by waking up virtuous, yet helpless sleepers.

But, this passage does more than gauge morality. It also reveals how nocturnal singing created an emotional zero-sum game: the very happiness the serenaders expressed outside caused unhappiness, aggravation, and annoyance for those inside. Other sources, in fact, reveal that nocturnal singing repeatedly caused an emotional divide. To some it indicated happiness and pleasure. To others, nocturnal singing violated aural decorum. Cicero considered singing in the streets to be a gross misconduct (*De Officiis* I.40). Unlike eyes, ears have no lids to shield people from vile occurrences, so to get away Cato must take the desperate measure of building a rampart. This vulnerability demonstrates how nocturnal sounds could reinforce order or challenge Roman traditions. Sound overwhelmed Roman tradition by crossing physical and social barriers.

Disgruntled individuals could do little to combat nocturnal singing. Tacitus envisaged Germans elated by victory singing in the night to the defeated Romans' chagrin (*Hist* V.15).²⁶ In

²⁵ Seneca employs the common moralist technique of bringing up history to regulate morality traditional values. Polo, *passim*.

one Roman play a pimp is told that if he buys an attractive female slave, he better bolt his door at night because the highest ranking Athenians will be singing outside his house, attempting to seduce away his new property (Plaut. *Pers.* 565-67). This solution might keep the serenaders physically but not aurally out. Thus, darkness allowed nocturnal revelers to sing and subvert Roman order with impunity.

Sometimes nocturnal singing became a political statement. A sleeping Tiberius was awakened by people singing in the streets, ‘Rome is safe, our country safe, for our Germanicus is safe’ (Suet. *Cal* 6). Those indoors suffered a double whammy. Much to their chagrin, outdoor singing not only disrupted their sleep but also taunted them. Romans viewed nocturnal singing in the streets as an emotional zero-sum game: some expressed their happiness by singing and that very expression caused another’s annoyance. The happiness the victorious Germans, Germanicus’ supporters, Cato’s serenaders expressed brought annoyance and misery to their foes. Darkness afforded Germanicus’ supporters a chance to haunt and taunt Tiberius with impunity. Outdoor singing supports Palmer’s assertion that historically nighttime has belonged to misfits because authority retreated indoors.²⁶ Because darkness created anonymity, nocturnal singing gave lower-classes an opportunity for free speech, which enabled them to upset Roman social order. In fact, many times the most annoyed appear to have been authority figures, thus marking nocturnal serenading subversive.

When other sounds invaded homes at night, the same emotional zero-sum game occurred. Martial complained, “laughter of a passing crowd wakes me up. Rome is in my bedroom. Whenever I am exhausted and want to sleep, I make the beeline to my villa”

²⁶ Romans had the idea of a victory song. Diodorus says that during a naval battle between the Athenians and Syracusans spectators on land sang when their own fighters were winning and groaned when they were losing. (13.16).

²⁷ Palmer, *passim*.

(XII.57).²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa recounts when homeless individuals cry outside the gates of wealthy homes, an aural battle ensues. A wealthy household was putting on an opulent dinner party. Luxurious food, drink, bowls, and cups abound as well as lewd performances from actors, musicians, dancers, and courtesans, when all of a sudden (*Concerning Almsgiving* 106):

countless Lazaruses sat down outside the gates. Some have nasty, painful sores. Some cannot see. Others have mutilated feet some of whom must crawl because they have lost all of their limbs. They cry but are not heard because the sound of music, singing, and extensive laughter muffles them. If they cause any greater annoyance at the doors, then a rash gatekeeper gets up, beats them with a stick, sics the dogs on them, and mangles these disabled people with a whip thus inflicting further trauma.²⁹

These disenfranchised individuals tried to rain on upper-class fun by broadcasting their pain, but the rich countered by drowning out invalid misery with their own joyous sounds and unleashing attack dogs so that the vagrants would flee. The homeless and rich lived in two different soundscapes at night with two different emotions. The upper class surrounded themselves with music, singing, and laughter, while the homeless with cries. The homeless desired help or at least recognition, while the rich defended their auditory territory and protected their emotions by louder sounds. Gregory shows that Christians also linked volume with morality and believed that people making noises outdoors at night created the same emotional zero-sum game.

Though ineffective in this instance, nocturnal sounds granted more power to disenfranchised individuals because hearing is the most egalitarian of the senses.³⁰ Smell, touch, and taste require a proximity not often and easily obtained. Although seeing may be done at a distance, vision often reinforces authority because the powerful can stare or get attention. In her

²⁸ *nos transeuntis risus excitat turbae, et ad cubile est Roma. Taedio fessis domire quotiens libuit, imus ad villam.*

²⁹ προσεδρεύουσι τῷ πυλῶνι μυρίοι Λάζαροι, οἱ μὲν ἡλκωμένοι χαλεπῶς, ἄλλοι τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκκεκομμένοι, ἕτεροι λῶβην στένοντες τῶν ποδῶν, τινὲς δὲ αὐτῶν ἔρποντες παντελῶς καὶ πάντων τῶν μελῶν στέρησιν ὑπομείναντες. βοῶντες δὲ οὐκ ἀκούονται· κωλύει γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡ ἡχὴ καὶ τὰ μέλη τῶν αὐτοφώνων ὥδῶν καὶ ὁ τοῦ πλατέος γέλωτος καγχασμός. ἂν δέ που καὶ ἐπὶ πλέον διοχλήσῃσι τὰς θύρας, ἀναπηδήσας ποθὲν ἀνηλεοῦς δεσπότης θρασὺς πυλωρὸς ἀπελαύνει ῥάβδοις, κύνας ἀποκαλῶν καὶ μάστιξιν ἐπιζαίνων τὰ τραύματα.

³⁰ On hearing being a public sense, see M. Smith, xii-xiii.

excellent study on Roman vision, Barton averred that “being for a Roman was being seen”.³¹

Admiring eyes can empower the person being seen, while aggressive stares can violate. Roman iconography, such as Augustus’ Prima Porta statue and the Partheon, attest to images reinforcing hierarchical arrangements. Nocturnal hearing, on the contrary, dismantled hierarchy.³² Anyone can make a sound, and listeners can do little to distance themselves from it. Furthermore, darkness added greater anonymity, which further equalized relations.

Barbara Rosenwein has argued that people live in emotional communities, that is a group with its own norms of expressing feelings.³³ The cries emitted by the homeless trespassed the boundary between their own emotional community and that of the rich. Similar to genes, one emotion can dominate another when two collide.

In addition to upsetting an individual’s mood, noises could also disrupt an entire community. When the Romans besieged the Italian town of Sora, a deserter offered to betray the city. After persuading the Roman commander to feign withdrawal by encamping six miles away, the Soran deserter led 10 soldiers to the citadel at night. Once there, he told the Romans (Livy IX.24.8-10):

“You will benefit from location and night, which amplifies everything in the eyes of terrified individuals because of uncertainty. Hold the citadel, you attentive men. I will terrorize everything very soon.” He then ran down, shouting as loud as he could, “to arms” and “we are under attack”. The citadel has been captured by the enemy. “Protect yourselves, run!”. He shouted these words around the doors of eminent men, to everyone he encountered, and even to panicking people running in the streets. Many individuals spread the panic that one man started.³⁴

³¹ Barton, 220.

³² In our modern world sounds often enforce hierarchy just as visuals do. Sirens, school bells, and alarm clocks are such examples that keep us in line.

³³ Plamper, 252

³⁴ *Et locus pro uobis et nox erit, quae omnia ex incerto maiora teritis ostentat. Ego iam terrore omnia implebo; uos arcem intenti tenete". Decurrit inde, quanto maxime poterat cum tumultu "ad arma" et "pro uestram fidem, ciues" clamitans; "arx ab hostibus capta est; defendite, ite." haec incidens principum foribus, haec obuiis, haec excurrentibus in publicum pauidis increpat. Acceptum ab uno pauorem plures per urbem ferunt.*

Richard Cullen Rath—a pioneer in hearing history—has stated that earshot is an effective measure of a community: that is the area covered by sound.³⁵ Hearing is a shared sense.

Terrible sounds could wake up and scare an entire town. Being indoors did little to protect one from nighttime sounds. Similar to Quintilian’s passage on children corrupted by loud songs, Livy’s description demonstrates how sounds could be contagious, spreading like wildfire. To be contagious sounds needed to stir up emotions, in this case, fear. Panic via sound could travel like a relay race, in which one person hears it, then passes it on to someone outside of the sound’s circumference. But for news to spread with such urgency, it had to be emotionally evocative, such as, how Virgil sketched the news of Dido’s suicide—albeit at daytime—spreading through Carthage with loud crying echoing from house to house, leading ultimately to the sound of an entire city in mourning (Virg. *Aen* 4.665-71).

To show a near identical incident of how a loud, nocturnal sound could grip an entire community in fear, in the novel *An Ethiopian Tale* Heliodorus describes the nocturnal abduction of Chariclea (IV.17.3-5):

After midnight, when the city was sleeping, armed thugs went to Chariclea’s house. Commanding this erotic war, Theagenes stationed his youthful soldiers in ambush after a solemn procession. Shouting loudly together and terrifying those who heard the din of clashing shields, these ruffians invaded her house with their torches...After leaving her house, they screamed a war cry and made an awful clashing noise with their shields. They went through the whole city, throwing the inhabitants into an unseen terror, having chosen the dead of night so that they might appear scarier with all of Parnassus frightened by their brazen war cry.³⁶

³⁵ Rath, 55.

³⁶ ἐπειδὴ μέσαι νύκτες ὕπνω τὴν πόλιν ἐβάπτιζον, ἔνοπλος κῶμος τὴν οἰκισιν τῆς Χαρικλείας κατελάμβανεν, ἐστρατήγει δὲ Θεαγένης τὸν ἐρωτικὸν τοῦτον πόλεμον εἰς λόχον ἀπὸ τῆς πομπῆς τοὺς ἐφήβους συντάξας. Οἱ δὲ μέγα τι καὶ ἀθρόον ἐμβοήσαντες καὶ δούπῳ τῶν ἀσπίδων τοὺς κατὰ μικρὸν αἰσθομένους ἐμβροντήσαντες ὑπὸ λαμπάσιν ἡμμέναις εἰσήλαντο εἰς τὸ δωμάτιον...Κάπειδὴ τῆς οἰκίας ἐκτὸς ἐγεγόνεισαν, οἱ μὲν τὸν ἐνυάλιον ἀλαλάξαντες καὶ βαρύν τινα πάταγον ἐκ τῶν ἀσπίδων ἐπικτυποῦντες διὰ πάσης ἐχώρουν τῆς πόλεως εἰς ἄφραστόν τι δεῖμα τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας ἐμβαλόντες ἅτε νυκτός τε ἁωρία τὸ φοβερώτερον δοκεῖν προειληφότες καὶ τοῦ Παρνασοῦ πρὸς τὴν βοὴν ὑπόχαλκον αὐτοῖς συνεπηχοῦντος.

Similar to Livy's probably fabricated story about Sora, Heliodorus created this scene at night because his audience understood darkness's ability to amplify emotions, especially fear. Everyone heard the same sound and had the same emotional reaction—*something is out there, and it sounds scary*. Heliodorus mentions how timing amplified this assault's terror. To cause panic, the bandits chose the dead of night, knowing the power unexplained shouting and clashing of shields possessed at that time. These bandits subverted order by exploiting the insecurities of inhabitants who lacked a local police force. Self-help was the law of the land in antiquity, especially in rural areas and at night.

Noise, however, could build and unite communities when townspeople created nocturnal sounds together. During the Third Macedonian War the Roman general Claudius received word that the inhabitants of Uscana wanted to rid themselves of their Cretan garrison and side with the Romans in their war against Perseus. So, late at night he set out for the town. As soon as the Romans came within a weapon's cast of Uscana, the screaming inhabitants sallied out of the city. However, they were not the only ones making a ruckus. Livy reports that “along the walls a loud noise arose from the yells of women rattling objects whose sound filled the air, while an unorganized mass of people mixed including a bunch of slaves kept resounding with various voices” (XLIII.10; cf. XXVI.5).³⁷

Making noise at night could be defiant. Rattling pots and pans was probably the loudest sound a person could make in antiquity. By creating a communal cacophony that was paradoxically disordered and unified, the inhabitants attempted to scare away an invading enemy. Communal nocturnal sounds demonstrated power in numbers by creating an emotional

³⁷ *ad clamorem erumpentium ingens strepitus e muris ortus ululantium mulierum cum crepitu undique aeris, et incondita multitudo turba inmixta serui uariis uocibus personabat. Hic tam multiplex undique obiectus terror effecit, ne sustinere primam procellam eruptionis Romani possent.*

zero-sum game in which the noisemakers gained confidence, while the listeners experienced fear. Furthermore, since night conceals those numbers, darkness allowed the enemy to overestimate and fear their opposition. Earlier I indicated that the louder the party, the greater the immorality. When a community united, the proportion went the louder the town, the greater the fear instilled in the enemy.

Taste, touch, and smell provide few opportunities to challenge authority because they require a proximity not many disgruntled individuals could obtain. Sound, however, especially under the anonymity of darkness, provided a vehicle to invade another's emotional community. R. Murray Schafer has called hearing "a way of touching at a distance".³⁸ These vocal touches smacked opposing enemies.

Igniting imagination

Do you believe in ghosts? Pliny the Younger asked Trajan's right-hand man—Licinius Sura—this question. To support his case Pliny informs Sura of a haunted house in Athens that everyone avoids. Pliny described the house's supernatural activity this way (VII.27.5-6):

a sound of iron started echoing in the dead of night, and if you listened more closely, it sounded like chains. At first it was far away, then it got closer: soon afterwards a ghost appeared, looking like an emaciated, squalid old man with a grungy beard. This apparition kept rattling the chains on his hands and feet. The residents spent their dreadful and dismal nights in fear.³⁹

Pliny understood that sounds can be just as scary as sights. Unexplained sounds cause the imagination to run wild.⁴⁰ Expressing uncertainty, Pliny first indicated that the noise resembled

³⁸ Schafer, 9 in M.Smith.

³⁹ *Per silentium noctis sonus ferri, et si attenderes acrius, strepitus vinculorum longius primo, deinde e proximo reddebatur: mox apparebat idolon, senex macie et squalore confectus, promissa barba horrenti capillo; cruribus compedes, manibus catenas gerebat quatiebatque. Inde inhabitantibus tristes diraeque noctes per metum vigilabantur.*

⁴⁰ Joachim-Ernst Berendt argues that the eyes' dominance limits our imagination. Berendt, 32; Bull and Back, 2.

clashing iron, then rattling chains, giving rise to the question, *what is causing this sound?* The intensity climaxed with sight—it was a ghost. By themselves, clashing irons and rattling chains would not scare anyone. In fact, they were the typical sounds of daytime labor, especially outside a blacksmith’s shop (Plaut *Cap.* 732-36; cf. Herodotus I.68).

All senses provide knowledge of the surrounding environment. So far we have seen Romans defined sounds as good or bad, using that sensory knowledge to morally classify. Darkness, however, created a background for insufficient knowledge, which made night of time of increased possibility and imagination.

Looking at how the meaning of sounds changed at night, we see darkness amplifying emotions. During the day clashing iron and rattling chains either induced no reaction or annoyance. Fear arose because of this uncertainty. Indeed, Virgil confirms this link between fear and uncertainty in *The Aeneid*. A volcano blocked out all the light from the stars and moon, scaring Aeneas’ crew “having taken shelter in the forest for that night, we endured frightening marvels, unable to see what was causing the sounds of these marvels” (*Aen.* III.583-4).⁴¹ Eyes limited imagination; nocturnal sounds ignited it.⁴²

What nocturnal sounds scared Romans? One, war cries could frighten. As we have seen, the bandits kidnapping Chariclea terrified inhabitants with their battle cries (Hel. IV.17.3-5, above p. 15). Mithridates’ soldiers expected shouting to disturb the Rhodians at night (App. *Mith.* IV.26). Two, clashing metal also scared Romans. The rattling of arms gave Cicero the heebie jeebies as well as the inhabitants of the haunted house Pliny described above (*Response of Haruspices* 10). Three, frightening sounds needed to come from an uncertain source, which

⁴¹ *noctem illam tecti siluis immania monstra
perferimus, nec quae sonitum det causa uidemus.*

⁴² Berendt, 32; cf. Bull and Back, 2.

darkness fosters. Daytime noises were not supposed to scare anyone. To underscore timidity, Horace has a spring's slight sound startle a fawn during daylight (Carm 1.23).⁴³ Daytime sounds often lacked the emotional power of nighttime because vision led to certainty. Philosopher William Lyons has stated that fear of dark may stem not from the absence of light, but from the absence of knowledge.⁴⁴ This insufficiency of knowledge stimulates imagination, often causing people to assume the worst, thus pushing their survival instincts to full throttle. Humans instinctively fear the dark, and noises brought out their vulnerability.⁴⁵

Uncertain nocturnal sounds did not always cause fear, however. Night and its sounds provided a one-way channel of communication from divine to human. Many of these human-divine nocturnal encounters often happened through sound. Numerous references in Livy's history show how inexplicable nocturnal sounds indicated a divine presence. A divine voice ordered a man to inform the magistrates of an impending invasion by the Gauls (V.32 cf. Juv. XI.111-16). Some Romans posited that a loud voice heard in a forest during the middle of the night came from Silvanus—the god of forests and fields (II.7). Some prodigies also involved nocturnal sounds. Livy groups an unexplained loud noise from a Temple of Juno with a blazing sky, the sun turning red, monstrous births of animals, hermaphrodites, and a new-born baby who came out of the womb as a 16-year-old (XXI.12).

Patricia Cox Miller has argued that for an object to transform into a relic “the thing” must overflow with surplus value caused by excessive meditation.⁴⁶ In other words, to become a relic an object must ignite the viewer's imagination, such as envisioning the suffering of a

⁴³ Baker, 71-75.

⁴⁴ Lyons, 75.

⁴⁵ Ekirch, 4.

⁴⁶ Cox Miller, 62-4.

martyr. Divine nocturnal sounds functioned the same way as Cox Miller's description of Christian relics because the insufficiency of knowledge led to excessive contemplation since seeing relics or hearing divine sounds linked the spiritual and earthly realms.

An incident from Plutarch's *Life of Antony* illustrates how Cox Miller's point also applies to how pagans interpreted nocturnal sounds. The last night of Ptolemaic Alexandria did not go out with a whimper. In the middle of the night while the city slept knowing it would go under Roman control in the morning, a strange thing happened (Plut *Ant.* 75.3-4):

Suddenly some harmonious sounds from all kinds of instruments, as well as a crowd's shouting, cries, and satyric leapings, like a bunch of Bacchic revellers making a ruckus, were heard leaving the city. Their movement traveled through the middle of the city toward the gate facing the enemy, then the noise became its loudest and left the city. It seemed to those who thought about this incident that it signaled Antony's God, whom he emulated and lived with, abandoning him.⁴⁷

Nocturnal sound defined this event. The Roman mind had a knee-jerk reaction to link the unexplained with the divine. In contrast to Pliny's haunted house, no visual confirmation occurs, thus leaving people to wonder *what was that*. Plutarch indicates that people sought the meaning of these unexplained nocturnal noises. By piquing imagination, this unexplained music allowed listeners to transcend worlds.⁴⁸

The combination of unexplained sounds and darkness could create mystery, which Romans sometimes attributed to the supernatural. Susan Ashbrook Harvey has shown how early Christians believed scents blurred the line between the corporeal and incorporeal.⁴⁹ Unexpected nocturnal sounds straddled the same line between human and divine, forming a medium of

⁴⁷ αἰφνίδιον ὀργάνων τε παντοδαπῶν ἐμμελεῖς τινὰς φωνὰς ἀκουσθῆναι καὶ βοήν ὄχλου μετὰ εὐασμῶν καὶ πηδήσεων σατυρικῶν, ὥσπερ θιάσου τινὸς οὐκ ἀθορύβως ἐξελαύνοντος· εἶναι δὲ τὴν ὁρμὴν ὁμοῦ τι διὰ τῆς πόλεως μέσης ἐπὶ τὴν πύλιν ἔξω τὴν τετραμμένην πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους, καὶ ταύτῃ τὸν θόρυβον ἐκπεσεῖν πλεῖστον γενόμενον. ἐδόκει δὲ τοῖς ἀναλογιζομένοις τὸ σημεῖον ἀπολείπειν ὁ θεὸς Ἀντώνιον, ᾧ μάλιστα συνεξομοίων καὶ συνοικειῶν ἑαυτὸν διετέλεσεν.

⁴⁸ Gouk, 54.

⁴⁹ Harvey, 224.

communication with the corporeal world. Livy's history shows that pagans had perceived a similar permeable boundary with divinity, just with nocturnal hearing. However, the difference between sounds and objects reveals a different kind of relationship with the divine. Christian relics were meant to transform the viewer through sight.⁵⁰ Divine nocturnal sounds were meant to inform the listener. Though nocturnal sounds invoked divine presence, uncertainty pervades their reporting. Plutarch's final night of Ptolemaic Egypt indicated "it seemed to those who thought about this incident". Darkness naturally creates more mystery than daytime.

Ignited imagination caused by sound played an integral role in many divine nocturnal encounters. Hearing the pitter-patter of gods reveals how Romans engaged with the increased passivity darkness created. The unexplained gives people the freedom to interpret the unknown however they want. These frequent interpretations of unexplained sounds reveal a Roman view of night not only as an enchanted time, when divinity could become perceptible, but also a world view full of divine and supernatural interactions.

Today's UFOs rely on people *seeing* something unexplained. Romans, on the contrary, had UNSs: unidentified nocturnal sounds. Both rely on imagination to concoct supernatural or extraterrestrial explanations, perhaps demonstrating a distinction between premodern and modern thinking. The Romans saw their world full of divine beings, while UFO observers see the universe beaming with intelligent life. Moreover, in both cases deniers, who considered these explanations farfetched, arise. Lucretius was one such non-believer. In book four of *The Nature of Things* he explains how senses perceive, emphasizing sounds and hearing. After expounding the physiology of voices, Lucretius moves to sonic physics. Propounding that echoes are caused by sound hitting rocks, he gave an opposing explanation (Luc. IV.577-83):

⁵⁰ Cox Miller, 82-85.

I have seen places that have even returned six or seven voices, when you send one: the reverberating hills kept repeating words between themselves. The local people imagine that goat-footed satyrs, nymphs, and fauns live there. The locals support this belief because these creatures' nocturnal noise and pranks shatter voiceless silence.⁵¹

Sounds sometimes did more than animate nighttime; they enchanted it. Lucretius supports his case with sight (*vidi*) and undermines his bumpkin adversaries who not only relied on hearing, but nocturnal hearing (*noctivago strepitu*) at that. The dichotomy between rational, visual daytime and irrational, aural nighttime follows the distinction between backward rural folk and sophisticated urban intellectuals. Lucretius, similar to some anthropologists, viewed ear-based orality as primitive compared to eye-based literacy. By implication Lucretius believed vision was factual, uninventive, and unemotional.

Because darkness creates uncertainty and hearing did not offer the same reliability as vision, these references demonstrate night as the time for imagination. Repeatedly people asked for the meaning or cause of nocturnal sounds. Hearing and night created questions, while seeing and daylight provided answers. The epistemological value of nocturnal sounds contributed to a larger debate over the senses that had been occurring among Greco-Roman intellectuals since the Presocratics. Darkness

Conclusion

Romans—along with all of humanity—altered their environment. They farmed, fertilized, deforested, and drained to fit their needs and desires. This chapter makes clear to difficulty—indeed the near impossibility—of changing the nocturnal soundscape. Nocturnal sounds demonstrate night as a time of increased passivity. Seeing and hearing are both passive

⁵¹ *sex etiam aut septem loca vidi reddere vocis,
unam cum iaceres: ita colles collibus ipsi
verba repulsantes iterabant dicta referri.
haec loca capripedes Satyros Nymphasque tenere 580
finitimi fingunt et Faunos esse locuntur,
quorum noctivago strepitu ludoque iocanti
adfirmit volgo taciturna silentia rumpi*

senses; however, we can close our ears and turn our heads from undesirable sights. Our ears have no such ability. At night Romans became more subjected to their environment when darkness shifted the ratio of senses towards hearing. This passivity demonstrates night as a time of increased powerlessness. Throughout this chapter we have observed people having less control over their sensory stimuli. Thus, increased passivity and routine disorientation shows night in ancient Rome as more uncontrollable and unpredictable than day.

Night is too big for one unified view. The variety of sounds produced a variety of emotions: disgust, joy, anger, fear. However, one emotion not brought up in this chapter, appears to have flourished at nighttime in Ancient Rome: boredom.

Chapter 2: Nocturnal Boredom¹

Romans loved board games.² They were—and remain—great ways to fill time. For example, according to legend, a soldier invented *alea* during the Trojan War to occupy dull moments.³ But, Roman board games had a fatal flaw: no games existed for loners. This defect is observed in Plutarch's *Roman Questions*. Explaining why Romans honor a courtesan named Larentia, Plutarch reveals the origin lay in one man's boredom (*Ques. Rom* 35):

Apparently having a lot of time on his hands, a certain attendant at the temple of Hercules habitually spent his days playing dice. As luck would have it, one day the guys with whom he usually played and spent his time with were gone. So, he was bored and challenged a god to play dice against him.⁴

The temple attendant, of course, lost. The attendant's experience reveals two ways in which Romans viewed boredom. One, companionship was essential to avoiding boredom. The attendant cannot think of anything to occupy his mind when he is alone. Two, the anecdote also reveals how boredom acted as a gateway emotion. Loneliness caused the attendant's boredom, which in turn led to the ultimate no-no of challenging a god. Boredom seems more common than severer emotions, such as anger and sadness, yet can lead to those feelings of passion.

Romans and Americans view boredom similarly. Both societies believe places can be boring. For example, Lucretius mentions a man who cannot stand still, moving to his villa then

¹ I thank Beth Digeser, Angela Holzmeister, John W.I. Lee, Amy Richlin for reading parts or all of this chapter. I also thank Sociology professor Tom Scheff for making unpublished work available to me and the Friends of Ancient History who commented on this chapter in the fall 2013.

² R.G. Austin's collection of literary references about Roman boards offers no evidence on games in which only one person could play: Austin (1934) and (1935), *passim*. Horsfall, 76-77. For a literary reference to Romans' love for board games, see, Virg. *Aen.* IX.163.

³ Purcell, 3 quoting *Etymologicon magnum* 666, 17. Similarly, Russian roulette was created by soldiers who were combatting their boredom in the trenches during the Russian-Turkish War. Mæland and Brunstad, 9.

⁴ ζάκορός τις Ἡρακλέους, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀπολαύων σχολῆς ἔθος εἶχεν ἐν πεττοῖς καὶ κύβοις τὰ πολλὰ διημερεύειν: καὶ ποτε, τῶν εἰωθότων παίζειν σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ μετέχειν τῆς τοιαύτης διατριβῆς κατὰ τύχην μηδενὸς παρόντος, ἀδημονῶν τὸν θεὸν προυκαλεῖτο διαβαλέσθαι τοῖς κύβοις πρὸς αὐτὸν

back to his city abode (III.1052-1072). One Italian town thanked a benefactor for alleviating its boredom by building an amphitheater.⁵ Both societies believe listening to a speech can make time drag painfully (Quin *Inst.* 4 pr; 5.14). However, one thing differentiates ancient boredom from ours: nighttime. Numerous literary references attest to Romans calling night boring. In fact, the adjective “long” frequently accompanies “night” in Roman literature. You can tell a lot about a society by what it complained about, so this chapter will explore the most frequent complaint Romans made about nighttime: it was boring. Many monographs on the history of nighttime devote plenty of ink to the exciting aspects of night: monsters, witches, orgies, and decadence.⁶ But, night resembles warfare in that action is the exception, while inaction is the norm.

With boredom a person is physically but not mentally free. When a place is boring, the travel restrictions imprison the sufferer. When an activity is boring, social customs usually prevent the sufferer from leaving. Increased leisure made boredom a more common nocturnal than diurnal experience in Ancient Rome. With nocturnal boredom, physically getting up and leaving were rarely solutions. Instead, Romans needed to wait it out or find people. Time is the heart of the problem with boredom, but especially boredom at night. First, I will show how Romans complained about nighttime, for a widespread cultural view of night as a time of inertia existed. Then, I will show how nocturnal boredom divided Romans. Nocturnal boredom divided workers from leisured, rich from poor, virtuous from depraved, and men from women. This chapter will: 1) argue that the difference between daytime and nighttime boredom lies in intensity, with darkness increasing the time drag; 2) demonstrate the importance of nocturnal sociability, for the main remedy Romans had against nocturnal boredom was each other.

⁵ Toohey (2011), 143.

⁶ Baldwin, 54-74; Ekirch, 185-209; Palmer 209-31, 343-69; Verdon, 126-39.

Many scholars of boredom's history have asserted that notions created during the Enlightenment, such as an individual's right to happiness along with increased wealth and leisure, have led to an epidemic of boredom in modern society.⁷ Studying life on an Indian reservation, Lori Jervis and her research team of anthropologists concluded, however, that environmental factors contribute to boredom just as wealth and leisure do.⁸ This chapter will support Jervis's thesis by arguing that ancient nighttime created an environment conducive to boredom. The previous chapter examined how nocturnal sounds caused certain emotions. This chapter will explore how night itself caused what might be its most common feeling: boredom.

Definitions

Several dangers arise in studying ancient boredom. First, the Latin and Greek words *taedium* and *ἄλγος* do not perfectly translate into our word boredom.⁹ In addition to boredom, *ἄλγος* can also mean distracted or stricken with grief. *Taedium* has just as wide a definitional range, connoting weariness or loathing. To remedy this, I have expanded my search beyond simply examining only instances when writers use *taedium* and *ἄλγος*—in fact those two words do not appear in most of the references I adduce. Emotions tend to reveal themselves indirectly. Few people bluntly say “I am bored”, “I am angry”, “I am sad”. Thus, I have taken complaints about night's long duration as more reliably indicating boredom. For example, when Chariton in his novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe* describes how time passed more slowly than two characters desired because they had to listen to long stories at the banquet, I interpret as boredom (VI.172). Nonverbal behavior, then and now, can also indicate boredom. Peter Toohey, for example, has

⁷ Goodstein (2005); Healy (1984); Klapp (1986); Spacks (1995). For excellent overviews on the scholarship of boredom, see Jervis et al. 38-42 and Mæland and Brunstad (2009), 2-5.

⁸ Jervis, et. al. (2003).

⁹ Toohey (2011), 15, 162; (2004) 106. For an in depth discussion, see Toohey, (1988) 153 and Wenzel, 6 on *acedia*.

shown how Romans saw restlessness as a symptom of boredom (Ennius frag XCIX; Lucretius III.1060-67).¹⁰

Second, philosophers have distinguished several types of boredom.¹¹ Simple (or situational) boredom is disgust with the moment. Waiting in line or listening to a dull lecture are examples of simple boredom. Repetitive boredom (or boredom of surfeit) is the same experience or action done *ad nauseam*. Working on an assembly line or eating the same food everyday are examples of this type of boredom, characterized by lack of variety. Existential boredom (or hyperboredom) entails a long-lasting disgust with a major aspect of one's life, such as a marriage, job, or life itself. Most research on the history of boredom has focused on existential boredom of the past few centuries.¹² Many scholars of boredom have seen the Enlightenment as a turning point in the emotion's history. Once people believed they were entitled to a fun, interesting, and pleasurable life, the floodgates of existential malaise opened.¹³ However, a single passage from Seneca debunks the view that values from the Enlightenment engendered existential boredom. The Stoic philosopher wrote "How long will things be the same...I do nothing new. I see nothing new. Sometimes this makes me seasick. There are many who judge living not painful but empty" (Ep 24.26).¹⁴ To avoid conflating and confusing the range of

¹⁰ Toohey (1988), 156-7.

¹¹ Lars Svendsen has the clearest delineation of boredom types, Svendsen, 21. Mæland and Brunstad, 2; Healy, 28; Toohey (2011) 12-15.

¹² Goodstein (2005); Healy (1984); Jonard (1998); Kessel (2001); Spacks (1995); Svendsen (2005).

¹³ Svendsen, 21-22; Musharbash 308; Jervis, et al 39-40; Goodstein 3-29.

¹⁴ Translation by Toohey (2011), 131-2.

boredoms, I avoid existential boredom because night's temporary nature makes this form inappropriate.¹⁵

Third, anachronism also threatens this study. Cultural notions of what is interesting and what is not affect boredom. For this reason examining nocturnal boredom in Ancient Rome is a worthy subject. It seems logical that devoid of our technological addictions Romans had a higher tolerance of boredom. Such an assertion is, of course, impossible to prove; nevertheless, I hope this chapter will show that Roman endurance was far from inexhaustible. To avoid this pitfall I focus on complaints Romans themselves made about nighttime. I do not consider it boredom if no negative sentiments are indicated. People do not perceive time with uniformity since it flies with fun and drags with boredom. Thus, I define boredom as feeling imprisoned because of the perceived slowness of time.¹⁶

Welcome to Inertia

In the third-century novel *An Ethiopian Tale* Cnemon realizes a traveling companion is planning to kill him. As they approach a village in the distance, Cnemon begins feigning a bad case of diarrhea. He repeatedly tells his companions to continue walking while he goes to relieve himself. Having made his absence routine, he slips away into the dense, nearby forest and sprints in the opposite direction well into the night. Finally exhausted, Cnemon tries to sleep under a tree, but his anxiety keeps him awake (Heliodorus II.20.2-3):

If at any time sleep started to overcome him gradually, he imagined he was still fleeing and kept looking over his shoulder for the person who was not at all pursuing him. When he wanted to sleep, he would stop

¹⁵ Toohey asserts that distinguishing situational from repetitive boredom is not worth the effort because neither is chosen. Toohey (2011), 17.

¹⁶ For boredom and confinement see, Toohey (1990), 351; (1988), 151; (2011), 4.

himself because his dreams were worse than the reality. He seemed to be angry with the night and thought it was longer than all the other ones. When he saw dawn, he became happy...¹⁷

This scene perfectly captures the heart of this chapter: night paralyzed its inhabitants and dawn freed them. For Cnemon the purpose of night was to end. He feels imprisoned, lying under the tree awake and doing nothing. He is trapped in the jail cell of nocturnal solitude. Being alone, he cannot rely on someone's company to occupy his mind. Cabin fever-like conditions of nightmares, paranoia, and insomnia torment him, but night's perceived slowness seems to have agonized him the most.¹⁸ Thus, feeling as though he has received a raw deal by prolonged darkness, Cnemon blamed night: a routine event that is natural and ought to treat everyone equally.

Verdon remarked that the difference between day and night is similar to that of men and women: one can talk about men and never think of women, while talking about women implicitly leads to a juxtaposition with men.¹⁹ Women and nighttime are non-default positions: they are *the other*. Though fictional, Heliodorus' passage shows Verdon's analogy working with nocturnal boredom. No Roman blamed daytime. When boredom happened during the day, the place or activity became the culprit. However, when boredom happened at night, night received blame. Night was the other time. Indeed, throughout this dissertation I have assumed ancient action takes place at daytime until proven otherwise.

¹⁷ Εἰ δὲ που καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐκνικηθεῖ πρὸς ὕπνον, φεύγειν ἐδόκει καὶ θαμὰ πρὸς τὰ κατόπιν ὑπέστρεφε καὶ περιεσκόπει τὸν οὐδαμοῦ διώκοντα καὶ βουλόμενος καθεύδειν ἀπηύχετο τοῦθ' ὃ ἐβουλετο, χαλεπωτέροις ὄνειροις τῆς ἀληθείας ἐντυγχάνων. Πρὸς τε τὴν νύκτα καὶ χαλεπαίνειν ἔσκει μακροτέραν τῶν ἄλλων ὑποτιθέμενος. Ὡς δὲ καὶ ἡμέραν ἄσμενος εἶδε

¹⁸ Toohey has astutely written of boredom's similarity to cabin fever. Toohey (2011), 64-65.

¹⁹ Verdon, 217.

This excerpt from Heliodorus also reveals a cultural assumption that the ancient and modern world share: the environment affects a person's emotions.²⁰ Today we link the weather with moods: clouds create depression, rain brings sadness, and sunshine leads to happiness. In the Roman mindset night and day affected a person's mood, for Cnemon believes his torment will end when dawn arrives. Heliodorus tapped into the Roman mindset that night was an environmental factor that led to boredom because darkness created a setting in which one must wait.

Besides Heliodorus' novel, other sources attest to the desire to get night over with. Juvenal—who may or may not be aware of the latitudinal difference between length of night—believe short nights left the inhabitants of Britain feeling satisfied (*contentos*) (II.161). This unsubstantiated belief about Britons' attitudes toward night reflects a widespread Roman view that the sooner night ended the better. In an epigram on things that make life happier, Martial wrote “sleep that makes the darkness short” (X.47.11).²¹ In other words, it is preferable to *escape* night than to *experience* it. By contrast, prolonging night tormented Cnemon. These statements demonstrate how the prolonged night was a bad night. Night imprisoned those awake. The dark hours often tested Romans' patience because of its perceived inertia state. Indeed, these negative remarks reek of a nihilist attitude toward night. Not only was night *the other time*, it was also *empty time*. The author of the *Historia Augusta* understood this nihilistic attitude toward night well, when he imagined Hadrian on his deathbed comparing night to death, calling them both empty and foreboding (HA *Had.* 26).

²⁰ Jervis, et al. 40.

²¹ *Somnus, qui faciat breves tenebras*. In the Hebrew Bible, Job, sufferer *par excellence*, experienced night like Cnemon did: “so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down, I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss and turn until dawn” (Job 7:3-5). Translation by New International Version of Bible.

Nocturnal boredom was not confined to just instances of sleeplessness. People in re-industrial western cultures slept differently from us. In his pioneering study on the history of sleep, Ekirch discovered that before electricity people slept in four-hour fits, waking up in the middle of the night for one to three hours.²² For example, the pattern of sleep in antiquity might have resembled

First Sleep	Awake	Second Sleep	Awake
8pm-midnight	midnight-2am	2-6am	6am

The reverse siesta that Ekirch discovered has one significant implication for this study on nocturnal boredom: the interval between the first and second sleeps routinely created a situation in which people had little to do and if they slept alone, no one to talk to.²³ Those with bedmates, roommates, or housemates could keep each other company during this nightly interval. The pre-dawn morning hours were also a time of inactivity for most, bakers being an exception. For example, the author of the *Historia Augusta* considered it noteworthy and laudable that an emperor attended to public business before dawn and continued well into the day (HA *Alex Sev.* 29). With inactivity before dawn being the norm, much of the pre-dawn hours must have been spent waiting for sunrise, like Cnemon.

²² Ekirch, 300-23. In the early 1990s psychiatrist Thomas Wehr performed an experiment on seven individuals whom he confined to a totally dark bedroom for 14 hours a day. The subjects' sleep also increased over an hour, but this extra 60 minutes of sleep may be due to confinement in a dark room. Many animals also sleep in segments. Wehr, 103-107. Cf. Williams, 41-6, Summers-Bremner, 37. Dreams—a favorite object of interpretation for Romans—still occur with four hours of sleep because REM and non-REM alternate at around 90 minute cycles. Aveni, 27.

²³ Williams, 45-6.

But, there is more to nocturnal boredom than just inactivity. Philosopher Lars Svendsen astutely noted that airports are boring because they delay the one thing many people want: to leave.²⁴ Night frustrated Romans in the same way by delaying daytime. Martial revealed a cultural attitude that the night serves no purpose except to end, when he wrote “Give us back the day. Why are you delaying our joys? Caesar is coming, return the day” (VIII.21.1-2).²⁵ Similarly, in one Roman novel a queen prayed for day to arrive so a trial would begin (Chariton VI.1.6). Nighttime made people feel stuck, while daytime liberated. These cries indicate night as a time of nothingness. Numerous complaints about night’s long duration reveal an experience resembling a journey with daytime as the destination. Similar to most journeys, night was fraught with waiting and boredom.

Other sources indirectly reveal the cultural attitude that night acted as a delayer of daytime joys. Sometimes nocturnal investments yielded daytime dividends. People waited in the dark to obtain choice seats at gladiatorial matches and circuses (Suet. Caes. 39; Cal 26). Like shoppers getting in line hours before Black Friday, these spectators were willing to endure self-inflicted nocturnal discomfort for daytime entertainment. Other times nocturnal investments were for an economic advantage. The social prohibition against transacting most business at night led to impatience. For example, in a novel the buyer and seller of a slave girl had to endure a long night before they could complete the transaction (Chariton, I.13.6). While these passages do not mention boredom, these individuals had the same desire for night to end. For eager businessman and spectators night acted as a void between two days. They had the comfort in knowing that their patience and endurance would reward them when the day arrived. Apuleius

²⁴ I borrow this example from Lars Svendsen’s excellent book on boredom. Svendsen, 119.

²⁵ *Phosphore, redde diem: quid gaudia nostra moraris?*
Caesare uenturo, Phosphore, redde diem.

indicates how dawn ignited outdoor activity, writing “once the golden sun rose up with the clouds of dark night having dispersed, noisy crowds filled all the streets with devoted and triumphant running about...” (Apul. *Met.* XI.7).²⁶ These statements from fiction and biography reveal a widespread view that night impeded. Conversely, daytime released individuals to pursue their desires.

Most emotions dissipate over time. Anger, grief, excitement all subside as time passes. Boredom is different. Time itself is the problem with boredom. Instead of gradually decreasing, boredom often ends in the blink of an eye, clearly demarcating its conclusion. Numerous literary references reveal daytime as the solution to nocturnal doldrums. Catullus wrote “sleep did not quietly cover my eyes, but being sleepless and yearning to see daylight, I furiously kept being turned over in the whole bed” (Catullus 50.10-12).²⁷ When Tacitus gave the sentence “nature has provided everyone the benefit of light and day” to a truculent German, the historian tapped into the Roman attitude that viewed night as prison (Hist IV.64).²⁸ Combining the statement of a German in Tacitus’ *Histories* with the previous claim from Juvenal that Britons prefer short nights shows that Romans saw the dark hours as universally imprisoning. Night affected other people in the same way. No one can escape night, and all must suffer confinement until daytime, which released people to a world of action.

Sociability lies at the heart of the daytime solution to night’s torments. Pliny spent most of a night in the frozen state of thinking about his girlfriend and waited till daytime to visit her (I.74). These references from Apuleius and Pliny reveal a cultural assumption that daytime

²⁶ *cum noctis atrae fugato nubilo sol exurgit aureus, et ecce discursu religioso ac prorsus triumphali turbulae complent totas plateas...*

²⁷ *nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos,
sed toto indomitus furore lecto
uersarer, cupiens uidere lucem,*

²⁸ *quo modo lucem diemque omnibus hominibus, [ita omnis terras fortibus viris] natura aperuit*

brought movement, while nighttime brought waiting. In other words, night detained and daytime freed. In the Roman mindset sunrise served as both a visual and emotional on/off switch.

I have argued that a common nocturnal experience was waiting for daytime to arrive, but what about the reverse? Surely, some Romans wanted daytime to end and night to begin. Trimalchio, for instance, proclaimed “day is for serious stuff; night is for fun” (Petr. *Sat.* V.64).²⁹ The difference between desiring day or night to arrive lies in wishing for *negotium* or *otium*. Those wishing for night, as Trimalchio’s statement reveals, expected night to be fun. This expectation of nocturnal fun made boredom at night a more aggravating experience and explains why—in addition to night being the *other time*—Romans blamed night for boredom. Leisure is a coin flip: fun and freedom lie on one side, boredom and imprisonment on the other. Ennius recognized this dual nature of leisure, when he wrote “whoever does not know how to use leisure, has more work than when there is work” (frag. XCIX, vv. 195-202).³⁰ Those wishing for daytime desired not so much fun but activity. Loneliness and inactivity seem to be their tormentors. Daytime *negotium* at least kept the mind occupied even if with an undesirable activity. I, however, must admit that the spectators who stood in line at night to see gladiators were not waiting for work. Humans and their emotions are too complicated to be simplified into a mathematical “if x, then y” statement.³¹

Adding to the ordeal of nocturnal inertia was the occasional inability to tell how much time remained until dawn. Having a nocturnal literacy that our clocks have erased, pre-industrial

²⁹ *Interdiu severa, nunc hilaria.*

³⁰ Translation by Toohey (2004), 110, 322.

³¹ Svendsen, 8.

people could determine how much night remained by the moon or the stars.³² If cloud cover or a new moon prevented natural time reckoning, then a water or sand clock may have done the trick.³³ Nevertheless, some individuals could not tell how much night remained. A reference from the Bible has a random person asking a watchman “how much of the night remains” (Isaiah 21:11).³⁴ A prisoner can count the days till freedom; a worker can count the hours till release; but, at night sometimes one did not know how much night remained, though the moon’s position in the sky could often help. Nevertheless, all demonstrate the same imprisoned feeling. Similar to traveling, the goal is to pass through as quickly as possible. Waiting for dawn was a common nocturnal experience.

The working bored

In *The Golden Ass*, Thessaly suffers from a grisly crime wave of body snatchings.³⁵ Witches have been snipping off pieces of corpses to concoct their evil potions. One family hires a guard to watch over a loved one’s corpse for a single night.³⁶ After certifying the corpse’s undamaged condition and receiving strict instructions that he must remain on high alert throughout the night, the guard asks his new employer for everything he will need: a lamp, a cup,

³² I borrow the phrase “nocturnal literacy” from Eluned Summers-Bremmer, 6. Stephen McClusky has called nocturnal timekeeping by star gazing rudimentary astronomy within the capability of illiterate peasants, even though the calculations require knowledge of seasonal shifts in constellations and the duration of night. Monks in the fifth century used stars to determine when to wake up their brothers for nightly prayer (Cassian, Inst. II.17). Medieval monks stayed up in pairs waiting for the appropriate time to call pray, McClusky, 9-10. Furthermore, many scholars have noted how clocks govern our lives and separate us from nature, O’Malley, 3, 309-12. Lewis Mumford, for instance, called the clock a synchronizer of men, Mumford, 14.

³³ Landes, 53.

³⁴ Translation by New International Version of Bible.

³⁵ Grave robbing and body snatching are different crimes. Whereas as grave robbing involving stealing objects in a tomb, body snatching entails removing parts of a corpse itself.

³⁶ By no means did the guard from *The Golden Ass* have an exceptional job. Laws show how seriously Romans took grave robbery and other literary references attest to individuals guarding a corpse at night (CTheo IX.17; Petr. Sat. 111-12; Matthew 27:64-66, 28:1-15).

warm water, dinner leftovers, a flagon of wine, and enough oil to last till dawn. His requests for food and drink outrage his new employer, who accuses him of wanting to enjoy himself in a grieving house. She gives the guard a lamp with ample oil and locks him in the room with the corpse (*Gold. Ass.* II. 20-22).

This scene highlights the alleged inappropriateness of what he asks for—food and drink. In the mistress's view drinking and eating did more than fill the guard's belly; they also diverted her hired nocturnal laborer from his job of staring at a corpse all night long. In other words, guard duty should be boring. But, it is what the newly-hired guard did not ask for that is more remarkable. Even if he obtained all of his requests, what was the guard supposed to do with his mind? Guards had no television, radio, internet, or video games to occupy their minds. Reading also offered few individuals a mental escape because of widespread illiteracy. He has no one to talk to and was hired to remain awake while everyone slept. Perhaps one could argue that night workers ate and drank not so much for the sake of nourishment but to alleviate boredom. Eating and drinking out of boredom are what we can call *substitute actions*: actions done to replace waiting. However, drinking alcohol on the job in antiquity was as commonplace as drinking coffee is in our own day.³⁷ Perhaps one could argue that music offered an escape, after all, as one astute observer of Roman popular culture noted, the Romans were an intensely musical people, having songs and chants for weddings, triumphs, meals, traveling, working, begging, and bedtime.³⁸ Maybe night workers played an instrument, sang, or danced alone to relieve the long hours. Not surprisingly most of the evidence shows music and dancing as social, not solitary, activities. However, fear of disturbing the sleep of one's nearby employer must have curtailed many musical escapes for nocturnal workers.

³⁷ I thank Amy Richlin for this analogy.

³⁸ Horsfall, 31, 43-45.

If you worked at night, chances are you waited at night. Guard duty was just one of many nocturnal jobs. Nurses, doormen, prostitutes, bartenders, and watchmen all labored at night. Besides working at night these jobs entailed waiting. Nocturnal laborers possessed fewer outlets for alleviating boredom than those with leisure at night. For many nocturnal workers the nature of their jobs made night a time of waiting.³⁹ Daytime laborers often worked with co-workers and dealt with physical objects, such as crops, bricks, and market goods. Nocturnal laborers, on the contrary, typically worked in service industries of the Roman economy: guards, nurses, and prostitutes.

Not only did many night jobs entail periods of waiting, but often waiting alone: guards waited for trouble; nurses waited on sleeping children; prostitutes waited for customers.⁴⁰ With plenty of free time many night workers had to stay awake and endure boredom alone. Nocturnal guards' poor reputation for attentiveness attests to an under-stimulating occupation. A sleeping guard regularly appears in literary sources (Ach Tac III.10; Livy V.13; Tac. *Hist* IV.22; Apul *Gold Ass.* I.15). Though I admit that many guards slept because they were sleepy, the under-stimulation they received from their jobs must have exacerbated their weariness. We can see this under-stimulation because guards sometimes left their post. For example, when Pertinax ascended the purple, he ordered the Senate be opened at night. To the new emperor's chagrin, however, the Senate's doorkeeper could not be found, having left for greener pastures (HA *Pert.*4.3). Some guards were even chained to their posts.⁴¹ Nocturnal labor demonstrates the importance of companionship in preventing boredom. Returning to the temple attendant who

³⁹ Toohey, (2011) 13, 17.

⁴⁰ Thomas McGinn closely captures the typical night life of Roman prostitutes in his book, *The Economics of Prostitution*.

⁴¹ Bodel, 325-6.

challenged a god because he was bored, although this legend took place during the day, it reveals a common experience for many of those who worked by themselves at night. Because no one was around, the attendant's job entailed waiting with few outlets for stimulating relief.

There were, of course, exceptions to my claim that nocturnal labor involved waiting. Nocturnal farming and baking in the pre-dawn hours are two non-service orientated night jobs. Prostitutes, musicians, and bartenders are examples of night workers who interacted with others and therefore probably did not have to contend with boredom to the same degree as a guard or nurse. Of all the judgments on prostitution, we tend not to think of the job as boring. Yet, many prostitutes must have spent long stretches of time waiting. The extent to which prostitutes were alone and waiting at night depended on numerous variables, such as location (street or brothel), interaction with other prostitutes, and frequency of clients. The variety of prostitutes from streetwalker to high-priced naturally created a variety of experiences, including the amount of boredom endured on the job. Using comparative evidence from modern societies, Thomas McGinn came up with a ballpark figure that Roman prostitutes saw five to 20 clients *per diem*.⁴² Prostitutes in a brothel had each other to keep each other company, but the solitary streetwalker must have experienced a night as a time of waiting just as a guard or nurse did.

The study of nighttime in Ancient Rome would be incomplete with considering the experience of those who labored during the dark hours. This examination of nocturnal labor shows how it is wrong to link boredom with wealth and leisure. First, without a doubt, slaves filled many nocturnal jobs, and as the next chapter will show, night detained this segment of the Roman population. Second, while work versus leisure is an obvious division of the night, how nocturnal labor differed from daytime labor is not. Darkness limited the type of work that could be performed. Most of the work entailed long periods of waiting—sometimes alone. Leisure

⁴² McGinn, 47-49.

and boredom are joined at the hip because both involve too much free time, yet the experience of those who worked at night in some ways resembled those who did not since both had unoccupied time on their hands. Nocturnal labor is an example how night changed the nature of work by creating jobs that entailed waiting for human interaction.

Trouble

Among other things, history studies the challenges people faced and how they met those challenges. So far in this chapter I have argued that many Romans felt night sometimes imprisoned or impeded them. The Roman nocturnal experience entailed long periods of waiting, especially for those who worked alone at night. Now the question is *how did Romans react* when night imprisoned them and *how did society dictate they react?* The next two sections will show how nocturnal boredom divided Romans.

To prevent nocturnal boredom I have argued Romans needed each other. However, one group theoretically did not need anyone: the Stoics. These paragons of self-sufficiency could dodge the challenges of night, just like any other negative externality. For instance, in praising Zeno's endurance, Diogenes Laertius quoted an unnamed source who described the philosopher's attributes this way (Diogenes Laertius *Zeno* VII. 27):

Neither cold winter nor continuous rain nor sweltering heat from the sun overpowered him: neither a horrible illness nor the power of popularity affected him. He remained unwearied night and day regarding teaching and learning philosophy.⁴³

This passage emphasizes Zeno's endurance, withstanding all the environment threw at him: cold, rain, heat, and pain. Though referring to fatigue more than boredom, the phrase "unwearied night and day" reveals the Stoic virtue of steadfast continuity. The change from night and day failed to affect Zeno just as the weather failed. In fact, throughout Stoic philosophy the phrase

⁴³ τὸν δ' οὐτ' ἄρ χειμῶν κρυόεις, οὐκ ὄμβρος ἀπείρων, οὐ φλόξ ἡελίοιο δαμάζεται, οὐ νόσος αἰνὴ, οὐκ ἔροτις δῆμου ἐναρεῖ μένος, ἀλλ' ὁ γ' ἀτειρὴς ἀμφὶ διδασκαλίῃ τέτατι νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμαρ.

“day and night” reoccurs, thus, implicitly indicating the switch from day to night could caused emotional unsteadiness. Seneca, for instance, wrote “if throughout day and night you maintain a steady and unswerving course of your soul, which is upright and happy with itself, then you have reached the acme of humanity” (Ep. 59.14).⁴⁴ The switch from day to night causes no trouble for a Stoic. Marcus Aurelius believed Stoics could do more than just endure boredom; they could also prevent it from arising in the first place. The emperor wrote that our mental prowess should give us the ability to recognize how fast everything goes away (*Med.* I.12). Thus, boredom—be it daytime or nighttime—was like any another feeling that a self-sufficient individual could deflect.

But, not everyone possessed the endurance of a Stoic. Augustine, for example, was quite the rascal during his youth. He hung out with the wrong crowd, lusted, fornicated, and would do this at night (Conf. II.4):

I stole things which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and doing of what was wrong. There was a pear tree near our vineyard laden with fruit, though attractive in neither colour nor taste. To shake the fruit off the tree and carry off the pears, I and a gang of naughty adolescents set off late at night after (in our usually pestilential way) we had continued our game in the streets. We carried off a huge load of pears. But they were not for our feasts but merely to throw to the pigs. Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed.⁴⁵

Augustine and his friends were not suffering from boredom in this scene he painted. Yet, boredom was what Augustine and his friends were fighting when he wrote they stole for the sake of excitement and not profit. Throughout this chapter we have seen how boredom acts as a gateway emotion, leading to anger and loneliness. But, boredom can lead to more than just a more negative emotion: it can also create mischief. Sometime in the first century CE an individual walking in the streets of Pompeii saw a wall covered in graffiti. This individual

⁴⁴ *si per dies noctesque par et aequalis animi tenor erecti et placetis sibi est, pervenisti ad humani boni summam.*

⁴⁵ Translation by Chadwick, 29.

decided to join the fun and contribute to the collection, writing “Wall! I wonder that you haven't fallen down in ruin, when you have to support all the boredom of your inscribers.”⁴⁶ Providing an outlet for bored individuals to add excitement and fill time explains much hooliganism. Vandalism can, of course, be an outlet for subversive activity, such as the destruction of the Hermes or Christians burning temples. Though at first glance appearing senseless, vandalism has rational goal of eliminating boredom. Excitement is a vandal's profit. Thus, bored individuals were dangerous, and the cover of darkness makes them even more so.

Nocturnal boredom led to more than physical mischief. It could also disrupt a person's mental equilibrium. To underscore how the Romans made this link, I will juxtapose how Suetonius depicted Augustus' and Caligula's sleeplessness. In these two passages, we have the same genre, same author, and same challenge, but two different responses (Aug. 78.1-2):

Augustus went to bed and never slept more than seven straight hours, but awakened after three or four hours. If he could not resume his interrupted sleep, as happens, he would summon readers and storytellers, and sleep well past dawn. He never lies awake in the dark without someone by his side.⁴⁷

Caligula, on the contrary, cannot control the night (Cal. 50.3):

Caligula was especially harassed by insomnia. He never rested more than three hours in the night and even these hours were not tranquil but terrifying by inexplicable images such as the time when he saw some sea creature talking to him. Therefore, he would start off lying bored in bed for a large part of the night. Then, he would wander through very long colonnades and periodically call upon daylight and await its arrival.⁴⁸

Augustus maintained his stable disposition by summoning people and controlling the night. To the contrary, Caligula remained alone, thus fueling his torment. His inability to stay still—an

⁴⁶ Translation by Toohey (2011), 145.

⁴⁷ *In lectum inde transgressus non amplius cum plurimum quam septem horas dormiebat, ac ne eas quidem continuas, sed ut in illo temporis spatio ter aut quater expergisceretur. Si interruptum somnum recipere, ut evenit, non posset, lectoribus aut fabulatoribus arcessitis resumebat producebatque ultra primam saepe lucem. Nec in tenebris vigilavit umquam nisi assidente aliquo.*

⁴⁸ *Incitabatur insomnia maxime; neque enim plus quam tribus nocturnis horis quiescebat ac ne iis quidem placida quiete, sed pavida miris rerum imaginibus, ut qui inter ceteras pelagi quondam speciem conloquentem secum videre visus sit. Ideoque magna parte noctis vigiliae cubandique taedio nunc toro residens, nunc per longissimas porticus vagus invocare identidem atque expectare lucem consuebat.*

indicator of boredom in Roman culture just as frequent glances at a watch is in ours—reveals Caligula’s unpredictable temperament.⁴⁹ Night’s emptiness and loneliness overpowered him.

In his excellent book on walking in Roman culture Timothy O’Sullivan showed that the body’s movement revealed a person’s psychology which in turn revealed that person’s character.⁵⁰ In other words, character affects psychology, and psychology affects body movement. Suetonius in these two passages assumes that a person’s character determines how one responds to insomnia, and therefore, nocturnal boredom. Mentally competent individuals, such as Augustus, handle nighttime. Nocturnal boredom makes deranged individuals, such as Suetonius’ depiction of Caligula, more destructive. Such people do not control the night but become passive objects to it. In addition to boredom being a gateway emotion, night acts as an emotional intensifier, as the previous chapter on sounds argued. Though these two passages may not be the real historical descriptions, they reveal a cultural assumption that the greater a person’s mental instability, the more night exacerbated their condition.

In addition to showing the importance of companionship, Augustus’ use of readers and storytellers demonstrates literature’s power in combatting nocturnal boredom. Literacy is an important exception to my argument that nighttime harassed loners. Thus, two different nocturnal worlds existed: one for the literate few, and one for the illiterate masses. The literates—most of whom were rich—had more escapes from boredom. Indeed, Seneca knew how boring free time could be for illiterates, writing “leisure without literature is death and a burial while still alive” (Ep. 82.3).⁵¹ Toohey has argued for the virtues of boredom, namely that

⁴⁹ Toohey (2004), 114, 120.

⁵⁰ O’Sullivan, 35. For psychology revealing character, see Gill, *passim*.

⁵¹ *Otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepulture.*

the undesirable emotion produces creativity.⁵² Quintillian would agree, for he advised writers to work alone during the night—in other words, write in a boring environment (10.3.19-27).⁵³ The *lucubratio* made a great outlet to channel what Pliny the Elder called his leftover hours (N.H. *praef.* 18).⁵⁴

Nicholas Horsfall has argued for a “common fund”, that is all levels of Roman society shared pleasures and entertainments.⁵⁵ However, rich Romans had access to more outlets of remedying nocturnal boredom than did their poor counterparts. Augustus could summon a lector. Pliny the Elder and Aelius Gellius could write at night. Perhaps one could argue that the poor’s access to taverns and brothels counterbalanced the access the wealthy enjoyed with slaves and literacy. While it is true that elites who frequented those establishments may have been stigmatized—some, for instance, covered their head or wore a disguise when entering or leaving—brothels were never far from where the rich lived in the city.⁵⁶ The access of the wealthy to slaves at night also counters Horsfall’s claim of a common fund since masters might possess an ample number of female slaves who could have served as a sexual outlet. Moreover, even if an elite never stepped foot in a tavern, that individual more than likely attended his fair share of banquets, which were not devoid of alcohol or socializing.

Though dealing with the existential kind, much scholarship on boredom has linked it with wealth.⁵⁷ To be bored required a comfortable lifestyle with plenty of free time and no worries

⁵² Toohey, (2011), 185-6.

⁵³ Cf. Ker, 213-16.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ker, *passim*, especially 209-10.

⁵⁵ Horsfall, 100.

⁵⁶ On rich dwellings near brothels, see McGinn, 80. On stigma of rich frequenting brothels, see McGinn, 84-85.

⁵⁷ Goodstein (2005); Spacks (1995).

about basic survival needs, such as money and food. This section has combated the view that the rich were more prone to boredom. Though sleeplessness can affect anyone, because of literacy and slaves the rich had more remedies when night began to drag.

Waiting women

Plutarch liked to judge people. Having an opinion on everyone's virtue, the philosopher advocated that women learn geometry and philosophy to keep their minds occupied on higher things. In doing so, he revealed two cultural assumptions Romans had about the lives of women: 1) sometimes their minds were occupied but with unworthy preoccupations, such as gossip; 2) other times their minds remained unoccupied in non-cognitive tasks, such as waiting (Mor. 145 c-d).⁵⁸ In advocating for philosophy and geometry, Plutarch championed a mental self-sufficiency that would allow women to wait with a purpose and thereby escape from boredom.⁵⁹ To fill dead hours women would no longer need to rely on chit-chatting with each other or have their mind wander into forbidden territory.

A woman's ability to keep her mind occupied remained important at night. This is seen in a famous passage written by Propertius. After several hours of drinking with the boys (*pueri*), Propertius stumbled home drunk to find Cythnia sleeping peacefully. He decides to have some fun at her expense. He plays with hair and puts apples in her hands as if they were gifts. When moonlight wakes her up, she looks at Propertius and scowls (I.3:35-46):

Has another girl's insult driven you out, closing her doors, finally bringing you back to our bed? So, where have you spent hours of this night that have been so long for me, that was my night, you are fatigued as the stars have passed? I wish that you—you cruel little man—lived through the same long nights because you deserve to suffer the same misery as me. Until just a moment ago, I kept holding off sleep by weaving purple threads, and still becoming tired by a song from Orpheus's lyre. Sometimes I was complaining to

⁵⁸ Lefkowitz, 81.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Plutarch's near contemporary, a Greek physician named Rufus of Ephesus, asserted that constant contemplation on geometry led to melancholy, Toohey (2011), 119,121.

myself all alone about your often long delays in everlasting love. Sleep knocked dozy me out with its pleasant wings. That was the final time I paid attention to my tears.⁶⁰

This passage is a fantasy. Because of the direct speech from a woman, scholars have studied the reality of this scene.⁶¹ Many classicists have seen sleeping Cynthia as representing the ideal woman, while the awakened one as a real-life abusive woman.⁶² Distinguishing reality from fantasy makes love poetry a dangerous source for social historians. However, the reality of this passage is unimportant to our study of nighttime. It is the values and thoughts that make this passage valuable. Just as sociologists can use science fiction to learn about social values, so too can social historians of the ancient world use Propertius to discover how Romans thought about nocturnal boredom. To do this we must examine Propertius' assumptions in this passage.

Being a fantasy written by a man for men, the passage reveals what one Roman male desired: women bored and lonely at night without men but still engaged in virtuous activities. Propertius did not have Cynthia say she waited "day and night". Instead, he limited her complaint to just night. Thus, being bored and lonely was one thing; being bored and lonely *at night* was something else. As the previous chapter on sounds showed, night intensifies emotions.

⁶⁰ *tandem te nostro referens iniuria lecto* 35
alterius clausis expulit e foribus?
namque ubi longa meae consumpsisti tempora noctis,
languidus exactis, ei mihi, sideribus?
o utinam talis perducas, improbe, noctes,
me miseram qualis semper habere iubes! 40
nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum,
rursus et Orpheae carmine, fessa, lyrae;
interdum leviter mecum deserta querebar
externo longas saepe in amore moras:
dum me iucundis lassam Sopor impulit alis. 45
illa fuit lacrimis ultima cura meis.

⁶¹ This poem has attracted many classicists and historians cf. Breed (2003), Griffin (1981), ff. 44, Harmon (1974), 152; Kaufhold (1997), Wyke (1987).

⁶² Lyne, 99-100; Stahl, 75; Curran, 189; Maria Wyke and Brian Breed, however, have argued that both sleeping and awake Cynthia are unrealistic, with Propertius striving to make the scene appear realistic. Breed, 41. Shelley Kaufhold has asserted that Propertius mingles idealism and realism in both sleeping and awake Cynthia.

Propertius' excerpt, like previous passages, taps into the cultural view of the importance of nocturnal companionship in combatting boredom. Using phrases such as "hours of the night have been long to me", "long-drawn-out nights", and "you delayed", Propertius created a Cynthia who was bored out of her mind before he came to her house. To no avail she tried to occupy her time first by spinning wool, then listening to music. If only she knew geometry. In fact, excessive change from one form of occupation to another, as Cynthia exhibits, signified boredom in Roman society.⁶³ We have already seen in Lucretius a man going back and forth from his rural villa to his urban dwelling to escape boredom (III.1052-1072, page 38). Since variety often remedies boredom, it is unsurprising that many bored Romans attempted to change activities or location.

In addition to showing the importance of companionship at night, Propertius' fantasy demonstrates how Roman society gendered nocturnal boredom. The liberator from boredom differs in this passage. In previous passages men desired daytime to rescue them from boredom. In this passage Cynthia desired her boyfriend to rescue her from boredom. Night should imprison women except when men arrive to liberate them from their doldrums. That is what Propertius, and presumably his male audience, desired. The nocturnal outdoors and excitement belonged to men.⁶⁴ Not only did Cynthia wait at home, but she also assumes her female competitor also remained indoors, "closing her doors" and "shutting you [Propertius] out". Suffering from jealousy as well as boredom, Cynthia contrasts the night of men with that of women by chiding Propertius for spending most of the night and in a different emotional state with his male friends and a different lover. The thought that Cynthia would leave her house at night never appears to have entered Propertius' mind. Even the transgressing wives from Livy's

⁶³ Toohey (2004), 120.

⁶⁴ On the virtue of women being indoors, see North, 38-9.

Lucretia story revealed indoors (I.57). Only the notorious Messalina snuck out of the palace at night, but even this she did accompanied by a female servant, not a group of women (Juv. *Sat* VI.116-35). Although many women remained indoors at night because they feared violence, society only permitted men to paint the town red, thus demonstrating nocturnal segregation between the sexes.

We have seen in this chapter that waiting was a common nocturnal activity: waiting for dawn, waiting to sleep, waiting for a customer, waiting to be relieved of guard duty, and waiting for a husband or boyfriend. However there is a significant difference between the former examples and this one. Propertius' passage on female nocturnal boredom evinces the virtue of waiting. Mary Lefkowitz has argued that women were judged by their dedication to their husbands.⁶⁵ The virtuous woman demonstrated dedication by waiting at night. This appealed to the average Roman man because waiting was an activity of the powerless and the servile, for those who wait became subject to another's whims. Epictetus, for example, included waiting at people's doors as one obsequious act performed by those campaigning for consul (Disc. IV.10; cf. Columella, preface; *Sal Cat.* 28). For men the domineering entity was night; for women it was her man.

Thus, society dictated that it was a woman's duty to wait for her husband at night. This value was not unique to love poetry. Strabo wrote "After giving birth, these [Iberian] women farm the soil and wait upon their husbands whom they put to bed instead of themselves" (3.4.17).⁶⁶ Iberian women were paragons of dutiful wives because even after childbirth they kept waiting on their husbands at night. When observed by competing husbands, Lucretia spun wool

⁶⁵ Lefkowitz, 68.

⁶⁶ γεωργοῦσιν αὐταὶ τεκοῦσαι τε διακονοῦσι τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐκείνους ἀνθ' ἑαυτῶν κατακλίνασαι.

to occupy her time until her husband's arrival well into the night, while her debased counterparts found enjoyment from people other than their husbands (Livy I.57). Unlike Cythnia, these paragons of feminine virtue endured boredom without complaints. In modern society the ability to endure boredom signifies maturity by distinguishing children from adults. In Roman society the same ability distinguished the virtuous from decadent woman by indicating her fidelity.

Like *pudicitia*, nocturnal patience was a virtue unique to women. Waiting for dawn brought no virtue; waiting for a husband did. Similar to affluence being a prerequisite for asceticism, the virtue of nocturnal patience must present its sufferer with a choice.⁶⁷ Men waiting for dawn had no choice; thus, their patience cannot be considered virtuous. Women, on the contrary, chose to wait for their husbands instead of socializing and gossiping with each other; thus, Roman society esteemed them. Women received praise not because of their ability to endure boredom *per se* but because enduring this uncomfortable feeling signified their devotion to their men. Lucretia chose to stay at home; Messalina and Lucretia's counterparts did not.

What a person finds boring often reveals a lot about that individual. Without men, women more frequently occupied their nightly hours by spinning wool: the *lanificium* (Apul. *Met.* IX.5; Proverbs 31:17-19). Cythnia's failure to maintain woolworking into the night indicates that she found the activity boring since she started out spinning, moved to listening to music, then complained how long the night lasted. Indeed, mindless repetition often leads to boredom.⁶⁸ When a task has a purpose, however, the desired achievement should prevent

⁶⁷ Female choice determining virtue is also exemplified with adultery and rape. Some ancient men regarded adultery as worse than rape because the wife chose to have sex outside the marriage, while with rape the woman did not make that choice. Cf. Harris, 375.

⁶⁸ Mæland and Brustad, 70; Raposa 105-35; Toohey (2011)13, 105. Svendsen labels it *boredom of surfeit*. Klapp talks about redundancy, not repetition, Klapp, 71-80.

boredom. Nicole Boëls-Janssen has shown that spinning had religious meaning for Romans.⁶⁹ For Cynthia to find a task with religious meaning boring reveals her uninterest in virtue. The connection between boredom and the virtue of *lanificium* functioned like the Protestant work ethic: those who spun wool without boredom obtained virtue and those who became distracted and stopped lacked virtue.

Boredom shows that Romans understood emotions reveal values because one should not be bored with the wrong occupation. Roman society's toleration of nocturnal boredom underscores the emptiness of night.

Conclusion

Historians of emotions study how societies have regulated individuals' feelings.⁷⁰ To what extent should people suppress anger, joy, and grief? In part because of Western society's abhorrence of suicide, depression has become the emotion of concern today as indicated by the number of self-help books published and sold on how to be happy. In classical antiquity, however, anger was the emotion Greeks and Romans were most concerned about as indicated by the amount of press it received. Seneca, for instance, devoted an entire treatise to anger (*De Ira*). The perceived destructiveness of these two emotions—depression's self-destructiveness and anger's external destructiveness—led to the goal of restraint. Both societies have relegated boredom to a feeling of lesser importance. As Svendsen put it, "boredom is something we live with and not something we think about systematically."⁷¹

⁶⁹ Boëls-Janssen, *passim*.

⁷⁰ I am admittedly blurring the difference scholars make between emotions and feelings. People are always aware of their feelings, while not necessarily their emotions. For example, a person can be angry without knowing it. On the contrary, one feels angry and knows it. Svendsen, 14; Toohey (2011), 32-34; Scheff, "Recognizing and Treating emotion-based problems" (unpublished).

⁷¹ Svendsen, 8.

So, if the Romans and much of the modern world consider boredom—let alone nocturnal boredom—unworthy of thinking about too much, then why is nocturnal boredom in Ancient Rome important? To see what nocturnal boredom reveals about Roman society, it is best to compare the emotion with its modern counterpart. In *Bowling Alone* Robert Putnam argued that television has made us a solitary society.⁷² Today's world has an arsenal of nocturnal time killers for loners: television, radio, internet, and widespread literacy provide ways to fill up empty time. Lacking our technological addictions, Romans relied on each other more and had to. This reveals night as a time of greater dependency and alienation. The previous chapter on sounds argued that night intensified emotions. Similarly, night increased dependency and loneliness.

Because of instant communication and the speed of our travel, it is a platitude to remark that the ancient world moved slowly. However, nocturnal boredom reveals antiquity's mental slowness. Boredom is a state of powerlessness because it a bored individual cannot change the environment to one's liking. This powerlessness reveals Romans' relationship with the night. Just as the speed of a horse or the wind circumscribed the spread of information and people, night's drag confined Romans. No one can accelerate time and dawn could not come sooner. Night tormented spirits by demonstrating nature's power over them. Dawn holds much greater significance for people without electricity because sunrise often released people from boredom like a bell frees students from class.

⁷² Putnam, 277-284.

Some have stated that in order to be bored a person must feel entitled to fun, pleasure, and happiness.⁷³ Trimalchio's proclamation that "days are for work and nights for fun" embodies that entitlement. Boredom is an internal battle of an entitled person who feels deprived. We saw this with the guard deprived of wine and food; Cynthia deprived of Propertius; Romans deprived of daytime. With this idea that Romans depended on each other more during night, the next chapter will show that this ancient society could not be deprived of one group of people when it was dark: their slaves.

⁷³ Entitlement to fun applies all types of boredom. Many scholars of boredom have asserted that the importance of the individual, which Enlightenment produced, has caused an epidemic of boredom, Goodstein, 3-11; 18, 21-23; Kessel, 7-8; Spacks, 13. Jervis, et. al, has the best overview of scholarship on boredom 38-41.

Chapter 3: Slavery at Night

In the second-century CE Plautus' play *The Rope* a slave was on cloud nine. He had gone fishing at midnight and survived a storm. After repeatedly thanking Neptune, the slave says (Plautus, *The Rope*, 914-23):

When I energetically arise out of bed in the middle of the night, I prefer money over sleep and rest. I strive to experience this fierce condition, striving to remove my master from poverty and bear my own servitude with no slacking off. Indeed, the most worthless human being is the slacker. Man, do I hate that type of guy! A person who wants to get his work done in time should stay up late doing it, for a slave should not be twiddling his thumbs until his master wakes him up to do his job. For those who sleep insouciantly, don't rest beside money but beside evil.¹

We are supposed to chuckle at the slave's enthusiasm. He burned the midnight oil with such alacrity for his master's financial well-being that Romans found it preposterously humorous. Every master dreamed of having a slave like Gripus. Consequently, this excerpt reveals a problem Roman society faced: what to do with your slaves at night? Night produced an empty time when slave owners' animate tools typically became inoperable because darkness hampers plowing, harvesting, selling, and many other slave activities. Indeed, The New Testament confirms the societal view that darkness stunted labor with the statement "night comes when no one can work" (John 9:4).

To make matters worse, these unoccupied and unsupervised hours made night the prime time for mischief. As the previous chapter showed, nocturnal boredom led to trouble. Ancient sources attest to slaves stealing lamps, trampling flowers, and murdering masters at night (Mart

¹ *nam ut de nocte multa impigreque exurrexi,
lucrum praepositi sopori et quieti: 915
tempestate saeva experiri expetivi,
paupertatem eri qui et meam servitutem
tolerarem, opera haud fui parcus mea.
nimis homo nihilist quis piger est nimisque id genus odi ego male. 920
vigilare decet hominem qui volt sua temperi conficere officia.
non enim illum expectare oportet, dum erus se ad suum suscitet officium.
nam qui dormiunt libenter, sine lucro et cum malo quiescunt.*

XIV.42; Longus *Daph* IV.7; Tac. *Ann.* XIV.44). Moreover, Roman law held masters liable for any damages their slaves committed—the *noxalis actio*.²

The sheer number of slaves also exacerbated the problem of what to do with them at night. Not including the rural slaves he might own, a wealthy *paterfamilias* could possess as many as 400 slaves in his household (Tac. *Ann.* XIV.44; cf. Plaut. *Trin.* 250-53).³ The chart below, compiled by Sandra Joshel, demonstrates that large households owned many highly-specialized slaves whose jobs do not appear conducive to nocturnal labor.

Service Occupations in the Large Domestic Household (includes slaves and freedmen):⁴

Occupation	Individuals	Distinct Job titles
Teacher	2	2
Architects and Surveyors	4	3
Doctors and midwives	22	2
Barbers and hairdressers	11	2
Masseurs and oilers	8	1
Readers and entertainers	10	7
Bath attendants	4	2
Child nurses and attendants	34	5
Bodyguards	10	2
Room servants	57	11
Table servants	2	1
Cooks	9	1

² The master had two choices: pay the damages or give up his slave. Slaves were not liable until manumitted (Gaius IV. 77). Buckland, 98-102.

³ For the distinction between *familia* and *domus*, see R. Saller, 336-349.

⁴ Joshel (2010), 183; cf. Treggiari (1975), 61.

Provisioners	11	4
Caretakers	22	10
Gardeners	5	3
Social organizers	9	4
Animal tenders	7	6
Runners and bearers	26	3
Financial agents	54	8
Administrators	50	15
Secretaries and copyists	28	6
Total	385	98

Hence, night should have bedeviled slave owners because what could four architects, five gardeners, and 54 financial agents do when it became dark? In some cases, lighting may have kept slaves working. For example, in the *Aeneid* Minerva kept her servants busy working by lamplight (VIII.407-13). But sweatshops filled with hundreds of slaves working by candlelight did not exist in Ancient Rome. Palmer has argued that the powerful retreated indoors at night, conceding the dark hours to the estranged and marginal of society.⁵ Some evidence supports the view the night brought freedom to Roman slaves. In the fifth-century comedy *The Grumpy Old Man* a slave cheered (41-2):

Nature has done nothing better for humanity than to create night. That is our day. That is when we do everything. It is at night that we go to the baths... We bathe with the slave-girls and boys— isn't this a free life? ...everyday we have weddings, births, games, orgies, and holidays of the slave-girls—because of this, why would we want to be manumitted.⁶

⁵ Palmer, 16-17.

⁶ Translated by Harper, 251-1 with some modifications.

Did this late-antique comedy accurately depict the nocturnal experience of Roman slaves? To answer this question we must view nocturnal slavery from the masters' perspective. People owned slaves for three reasons: profit, status, and convenience.⁷ This chapter argues that masters were more concerned about *where their slaves were* at night than keeping them busy and making money off of their labor. Motivated by status and convenience instead of economics, masters desired to keep their slaves nearby at night for the sake of displaying control and enjoying accessibility. Slaveholders may not have desired all their slaves to be working throughout the night, but they expected their human property to bolster their status and be available when needed. As a result of the desire masters had for control and accessibility, many slaves experienced nocturnal inertia: a time of uncertain inactivity.

License and Regulation

In the first act of Plautus' comedy *Amphitryon*, a slave named Sosia carries a lantern through the streets of Athens in the middle of the night. After finishing an errand at the harbor that his master sent him on, Sosia starts boasting of his fearless audacity to walk alone at night when he knows what hoodlums do. Then, he presumably hears something and immediately does a *volte-face*. Sosia now fears the police. They will arrest and whip him; throw him in a dungeon and hang him (Plaut. *Amp.* 153-162). This comedic evidence purports the existence of some type of government regulation of slaves at night. However, Sosia's soliloquy exemplifies the dangers of using comedy to reconstruct the slave experience because this law was pure fantasy. If a law prohibiting slaves from being outside at night existed, Sosia's concerns lose their humor. But, his anxiety becomes funny if he is frightened of a law that does not exist.

⁷ Patterson, 173.

The Roman government appears to have conceded night to the slaves.⁸ First, no evidence of regulations on slave nocturnal activity exists in the Twelve Tables, Digest, or The Theodosian Code. Indeed, Latin has no word for “curfew”, which derives from the old French word *cuevrefeu* meaning “to cover fire”.⁹ In 1068 William the Conqueror appears to have imposed the earliest European curfew law.¹⁰ Laws and an agricultural text demonstrate a societal concern over slave wandering and loitering. For example, slave dealers had to inform buyers that a slave had a habit on wandering or loitering (Digest 21.1.1.1 ; 21.1.17.14; cf. Colum 11.1.16).¹¹ However, these laws do not specify a time of day.

Second, anecdotal evidence also supports the view that Rome lacked slave curfews. To check on reinforcements from Italy, Julius Caesar crossed the Adriatic at night alone dressed as a slave (Val Max 9.8.2; Plut *Caes* 38, *Moralia* 319B-C).¹² When Nero desired to frequent taverns and brothels, he disguised himself as a slave (Tac. *Ann.* XIII.20-5). We never read of any crackdowns on slave nocturnal establishments, unlike speakeasies during prohibition. Thus, Roman society acknowledged taverns and brothels as slave hangouts and had no desire to close such places even though slaves cavorted there. In contrast to antebellum America, where slaves accompanied their masters into taverns, Roman slaves typically appeared unchaperoned.

⁸ The nocturnal mobility of slaves worried Colonial America. Massachusetts imposed a curfew on slaves after 9pm; Connecticut required slaves to carry passes after 9pm; New York publicly whipped slaves who appeared in the streets after sunset without a candle; Brookhaven forbade slaves from being outside at all during the night. Likewise, eighteenth-century South Africa imposed a 10pm curfew and required slaves to carry a lantern and a pass from their master. The plethora of slave curfews from the eighteenth century demonstrates disapproval of and anxiety over nocturnal slave roaming. Yet, many of these statutes allowed slaves out after dark with the master’s permission.

⁹ I thank Alison Turtledove for telling me to pursue this line of inquiry.

¹⁰ Ekirch, 63. William the Conqueror’s 8pm curfew was not aimed exclusively at slaves but on the entire population of England.

¹¹ Few laws in the Theodosian Code mention nighttime, most forbidding magic and sacrifices. None regulated slaves at night.

¹² George (2002), 41.

Columella judged slaves who frequent such places as unreliable (I.8.2). Indeed, appearing in such degraded establishments like taverns and brothels was beneath many slaveowners (Amm. XIV.6.25; Cic. *Pisonem* 13). Yet, this same degradation permitted slaves to frequent them. Even though the government objected to slaves inhabiting tombs, the reason for this prohibition was their sacred locations, not nocturnal absence (Digest 47.12.3.11).

Third, cities lacked the apparatus to enforce slave curfews. Even when Augustus established the *vigiles*, fire prevention was their *raison d'être*, as curfew's etymology suggests. Distinguishing free from slave would have been difficult enough, yet alone telling the difference between a runaway and a working slave; hence, the reason colonial America required permission slips. Not only would such a law be difficult to enforce, but it also would have frustrated masters themselves who often had domestic slaves run errands during the night. In a comedy, a master sent slaves to fetch a son who never came home after dinner (Terr. *Adel.* 21). As we have seen, Sosia's master sent him to the harbor for unknown reasons (Plaut, *Amp.* 153-162). The real world could not have functioned with a law demanding all slaves found outside at night be arrested.¹³ Since no such law was on the books, the slave's nervousness becomes humorous. Instead of fearing hooligans—who were all too real—Sosia dreads being apprehended under a non-existent ordinance. That Plautus and his audience could imagine such a law demonstrates an undercurrent of slaveholder anxiety: a slave by himself in the middle of the night created suspicion.

Having a *laissez-faire* curfew policy, the Roman imperial government left the issue in the hands of municipal governments and the *paterfamilias*, who differed amongst themselves on slaves' nocturnal place. Local laws have not survived to the present day; however, we can discern the views of some masters. For instance, Galba bemoaned that the practice of slaves

¹³ On separating fantasy from historical reality in comedy, see Pelling, 125.

greeting a master good morning and wishing him goodnight had fallen into obsolesce (Suet. *Galb.* 4.4). Ideally slaves served during their master's every waking hour. Yet, this codger's fantasy world assumes the master's sleep created a void time for his slaves. Not only did night pose a pragmatic question of what to do with slaves, but it also challenged the master's control, and thus his social standing. However, the ideal Galba desired indicates nocturnal license typically began before the master's slumber. In another Roman comedy a character named Daemones pleaded his slave to dine at his house that night because his services were needed (Plaut. *Rud.*, 181-83). The joke relies on inversion. Here the master begs his slave to come by his house at night. Slave accessibility during the night was one issue, and the master's control the other. Nighttime caused Daemones to lose his control. Therefore, the whereabouts of their slaves at night concerned masters. Should slaves always remain on the premises or should they be free to leave during the evening?

No socializing for you!

Some domestic slaves had to stay in the house at night, especially during a dinner party. Slave socialization at banquets divided Roman society. After stating that he laughs at people who think it is degrading to dine with their own slaves, Seneca complained of the excessive use of control some masters demonstrated at banquets (Ep. 47.3):

The poor slaves are not allowed to move their lips so as to speak. Any murmur is suppressed by the rod; even unintentional sounds, such as coughing, sneezing, or hiccups, are not exempt from the whip. When silence is broken by a single sound, it is atoned for by a lot of pain. For the entire night they must stand hungry and silent.¹⁴

Etiquette, not government, enforced these stringent regulations of slaves. Highlighting slave alienation from humanity, banquets were social events for masters, not slaves. Multiple slaves were present at banquets, thus providing opportunities to shoot the breeze with their compatriots

¹⁴ *At infelicibus servis movere labra ne in hoc quidem ut loquantur, licet; virga murmur omne compescitur, et ne fortuita quidem verberibus excepta sunt, tussis, sternumenta, singultus; magno malo ulla voce interpellatum silentium luitur; nocte tota ieiuni mutique perstant.*

in bondage. However, Seneca's complaint indicates that some masters sought to suffocate servile camaraderie, demanding slaves be speechless tools. By choking the social life out of slaves, masters demonstrated their control at banquets. Masters do not appear to have implemented the same gag effect at other times of the night, even in locked-down farmhouses. Thus, in the eyes of some Romans banquets were performances, and by playing obedient, asocial roles slaves gave greater status to their masters. As we saw in the chapter on sounds, keeping one's volume low at night indicated self-control. Similarly, keeping one's slaves silent in front of dinner guests indicated a master's control.



Image 2: House of Triclinium, Pompeii

Wall paintings from Pompeii suggest that slaves were more than just wallflowers at banquets. All these paintings show slave movement. In image 2 one slave cleans a foot, while another holds water. In image 3 a slave on the far right pours water. Although it is true that we cannot be certain these scenes were happening at night, there are two indicators that the Roman audience would have assumed it was dark outside. First, all these wall paintings show a social

event occurring indoors. Thus, these paintings depict a time when individuals could assemble in group leisure. Romans considered dinner the most social of the meals. Martial, for instance, believed dining alone led to depression and bad patrons invited no one to dinner (II.69; X.18). Second, many wall paintings portray drunkenness, which Romans also associated with night.¹⁵ By keeping slaves busy at night, a master demonstrated his control and increased his social standing.



Image 3: House of the Chaste Lovers, Pompeii

What these paintings do not show is equally important. Slaves are not reclining nor are they talking. Indeed, only as a mark of favor from a master could slaves recline at a banquet, as Trimalchio did to his chagrin when a horde of his slaves crowded the couches because he had permitted a few to lie down (70).¹⁶ Slaves reclined at banquets during the topsy-turvy holiday of Saturnalia—when master became slave, and slave became master. Images 3-5 aim to show a master who, despite being inebriated, has not lost control of his household. Reclining and

¹⁵ Most cultures associate alcohol and nighttime, see McGovern, 267. Listing the countless references of Romans linking drunkenness with night would be a tangential overkill. However, I will give a few remarks that demonstrate the link between drunkenness and night, especially a late night. Martial, for instance, forgave a person for enjoying late nights with too much wine (II.89). Propertius asked how someone could not be drunk by midnight (II.33A:23-44).

¹⁶ Dunbabin, 13.

talking slaves, on the contrary, would reveal the opposite: a weak master whose own slaves do not fear him. As Patterson wrote “all power strives for authority”.¹⁷ For the same reason, these wall paintings also do not show slaves chatting, thus giving further credence to Seneca’s description. Instead of reclining, talking, or lingering, slaves in Images 2-5 are working. Hence, by keeping his slaves busy, a master demonstrated his control because whether forced inactivity or forced activity the key point is forced action defines slavery.

Images 2-5, however, misrepresent the real banquet experience because inaction must have dominated most of the slaves’ time. All the slaves on the wall paintings are performing ephemeral jobs. The slave in image 2 did not clean a single foot for hours, nor could the slave in image 3 have poured wine continuously in the same jug. Hence, the images represent the ideal moment of a slave working. Seneca more accurately depicted the slave reality—silent inactivity, which I call inertia. Slave inactivity abounded during a banquet. Instead of giving slaves greater freedom, banquets reinforced the chains of bondage. The difference between free and slave remained apparent. Hence, for these slaves night continued to highlight their status. Masters ate; slaves served. Masters drank; slaves poured. Masters reclined; slaves stood. Masters talked; slaves silenced. Serving, pouring, fanning, and standing, instead of liberating slaves, night brought confined inactivity. They too must have suffered nocturnal boredom similar to Cnemon. Their nights were full of waiting, and a good slave could endure boredom like a good wife could. In contrast to their masters, slaves were *part of the environment*, not *in the environment*. That is, slaves did not participate in nocturnal action, but formed an element of the background to the action occurring. A silent slave and a silent night both represented ideal nocturnal harmony. Nocturnal silence—be it over nature or a slave—signified order and control. While, with

¹⁷ Patterson, 35.

exception of music, nocturnal noise—be it from a slave or miscreants outside—signified subversion.

What about slaves who did not serve at banquets? For some slaves night was family time. Though Roman law did not recognize *contubernia* as legal marriages, relationships between slaves existed. Varro, for instance, indicates that rural slaves often had relations with slaves on neighboring estates (*R.R.* I.15.1). Slave companionships had the potential of diverting attention and energy away from the master and rendering their property inaccessible.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, Romans found socializing outside of the household more troubling than socializing within it.

Different codes of slave behavior at night can also be seen regarding the the sex lives of female slaves. Sources from Roman fiction painted scenes in which female slaves find male lovers outside the household and behind their masters' backs (Apul. *Met.* III.13; Pet. Satr. 61.9). Christian sources condemn or reveal punishments slave girls suffered for debauchery or marrying outside the household (Tert. *Ad uxorem* 2.8.1; Basil Caes. Ep. 199.18; John Chrys. In Ephes. 15.3). One agricultural writer recommended his readers to encourage their female slaves to procreate by promising them freedom if they produced four sons (Col. VIII.19). The genre—and therefore the goal—of these sources partially explains this discrepancy. Licentious female slaves help Roman fiction writers seeking to keep their audiences entertained. Abusive masters and licentiousness helped moralizing Christian writers seeking to condemn sin and encourage a behavioral change. Creating more laborers for free contributes to the goal of the gentleman farmer.

¹⁸ Digest 38.10.10.5, Paul; Rawson, 72. The number of slaves who lived in families remains highly contentious, mainly because it is linked with the issue of slave supply and slave numbers, whether a slave population reproduces itself. William Harris who believes few slaves lived in families lies on the extreme. Walter Scheidel lies on the other side who believe in a prevalence of slave families. Harris, 62-75, Scheidel, 156-69; cf. Mouritsen, 129-44; Harper, 261-273.

Besides different genres accommodating the desires of different audiences, these sources might be reconcilable to a degree. For instance, the number of slaves in a household might have affected whether masters tolerated nocturnal slave socialization. Besides encouraging slave reproduction and the occasional amiable master, elite households had so many slaves who performed jobs so specialized that masters had little use of them at night. Indeed, Roman society recognized that night was easier for highly-skilled slaves and those who had rich masters. Having been obliged to go to a harbor at night, Sosia complained that slaves of wealthy masters must endure great hardships (Plaut. *Amp.* 153-62). Plautus designed Sosia's moaning to draw the sarcastic pity from the audience, who knew that slaves of rich masters had it easier during the night. Sosia and Plautus' audience expected nights free from servitude. Some masters were simply unconcerned with their slaves nocturnal activities. John Chrysostom averred that masters rarely think about their slaves except for the services they provide. When the rare instance of a master thinking of his slaves for another reason arose, it was for the sake of his own rest so that their slaves do not get into trouble by stealing, drinking, or visiting brothels (*In Tit.* 4.3).

Unlike their brethren in wealthy households, slaves in poorer households typically served their masters in multifaceted ways. Demipho listed the tasks he expected one female slave to perform as weaving, grinding, chopping wood, making yarn, sweeping the house, enduring a beating, and cooking the day's victuals for the household (Plaut. *Merc.* 395-99). Weaving and yarnning were hallmark nocturnal activities. Susan Treggiari has remarked, "it was the mark of a poor household that one person had several functions".¹⁹ This meant more work. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter demonstrates, Gripus worked at night to alleviate his master's poverty, the joke not being that he worked at night but that he worked with such cheerful

¹⁹ Treggiari (1975), 61; cf. Wiedmann, 27.

enthusiasm (Plaut. *Rud.* 194-203). Thus, poorer households were more likely to need their few slaves during the night.

The conflicting sources might be reconciled by another issue related to slave socialization: accessibility. Did a slave have to leave the premise for these relationships to occur? This mattered because to visit a slave from another household meant becoming inaccessible property.

Accessibility

Trimalchio liked to show off. He boasted that no one can dance as well as one of his slave girls. He bragged how he owned 100 silver bowls, each capable of holding three gallons. He gloated that his cooks could broil a whole calf. Anyone entering Trimalchio's house should have expected such braggadocio because his front door had a sign that read "any slave who goes out without his master's permission will receive 100 lashes" (Petr. 28.7).²⁰ Petronius uses this sign to portray Trimalchio as a tactless parvenu. First, Trimalchio placed the sign facing those entering his house; thus, making his guests, not his slaves, the intended audience. Furthermore, a powerful—and therefore competent—master would not need such a sign. A master's authority alone should imply do not leave. Instead, this freedman feels the need to ensure his guests know who is in control of this household. The sign, however, reveals an undercurrent of thought within Roman society. By flaunting control over his slaves, Trimalchio's sign reveals society's concern over the location of its slaves. Though the sign does not mention "night" it has nocturnal connotations written on it since Petronius has the scene take place at the start of dinner. Night challenged a slaveholder's authority, which could affect his public image.

²⁰ *QUISQUIS SERVUS SINE DOMINICO IUSSU FORAS EXIERIT ACCIPIET PLAGAS CENTUM.* (Letters capitalized in text, 28.7)

Other literary references demonstrate the value of slave accessibility throughout the night. In book 14 of his epigrams Martial attempts to see the world through the perspective of various objects. A silver spoon complains of grammarians calling it a *lingua* instead of a *ligula*. A snail pick proclaims it can handle eggs just as well as it does slimy delicacies. A chamber pot also got a chance to let the world hear it roar. During its two lines of fame, the chamber pot says “While I am demanded with snapping fingers and the home-born slave delays coming, oh so many times a mattress has become my rival!” (Martial XIV.119; cf. VI.89).²¹ This chamber pot and its owner expected slave accessibility at all hours of the night. The slave’s delay frustrated both chamber pot and master. Because of their expected twenty-four hour service, domestic slaves slept within earshot of their masters either within the house itself or nearby. Sources attest to how pervasive slaves were within their master’s house at night. Slaves slept all over the place. Some slept on their master’s floor (Propertius III.15.29-32; Greg. Naz. Or 18.32). Others slept on a straw floor (John Chrys. *Virgin* 70.2) or in a mules’ stall (John Chrys. *In act apost* 45.4). Sometimes they had their own in separate quarters (Aug. *Locut Hept.* 116).²² Michele George has noted that a slave’s job often determined where he slept.²³ At least some slaves were assumed to be within the vicinity of their masters’ bedrooms during the late hours of the night. Tarquin threatened to place a dead slave near Lucretia’s corpse if she screamed for help (Livy I.58). When the Senate debated the fate of 400 slaves whose master was murdered in his sleep by one of them, a senator argued that the other slaves must have been aware of the impending crime, since the murderer obtained a weapon, passed the watch, opened the bedroom door,

²¹ *Dum poscor crepitu digitorum et verna moratur,
O quotiens paelex culcita facta mea est!*

²² Harper, 234.

²³ George, (1997) 22-23; cf. D’Ambra 129.

carried a light inside, and killed their master without any of the slaves knowing (Tac. *Ann.* XIV.44). The purpose of their proximity was accessibility.

Many masters desired and expected round-the-clock availability of the slaves, which caused large amounts of nocturnal inactivity. Summoning slaves “on call” meant knowing their location, which most conveniently would have been in their masters’ home. As a result, nighttime did not liberate slaves but placed many of them in inertia—a period of confined inactivity. A wealthy household’s slaves typically could not have all worked at a banquet or performed their specialized tasks. Thus, society grappled with what to do with these unoccupied slaves, specifically should they remain or leave the master’s premises. To be or not to be accessible—that was the question.

Wall paintings also demonstrate that Roman society valued nocturnal slave accessibility. Image 2 shows multiple slaves serving at a banquet. The slave to master ratio approaches 1:1, which not only reinforces the master’s status but also the individual attention devoted to each free person. For example, in image 4 the clothed woman in the background is a slave who waves a fan to awaken the man on the right who has passed out drunk.²⁴ This wall painting demonstrates the ideal, accessible slave who was present when needed.

²⁴ Female slaves often fanned their masters on hot summer nights in antebellum America. Aaron, *The Light and Truth of Slavery, Aaron’s History*, 25.



Image 4: House of the Chaste Lovers, Pompeii

Helping their inebriated masters find their way home, slaves served as Ancient Rome's designated drivers (Petr. *Satr.* IV.26). Walking in the city at night could be challenging, especially for the intoxicated or those who did not know the area. Returning home in the city without a torch or a slave could become an ordeal for a drunken individual, stumbling around for an hour with bloody feet from the shards in the street (Petr. *Satr.* VI.79). Without slaves nocturnal society could not have functioned.

In Image 5 the slave on the left has sprung to action catching a tipsy guest, who is tilting and on the verge of spilling her wine. Similar to the other wall paintings, image 5 captures the moment of slave action. It shows the ideal accessible, nocturnal slave. The mistress depends on her slave to get home safely. Similar to images 2-4, this wall painting fails to depict the static majority of time, which the slave would have spent silently waiting in the background. John Clarke has argued that wall paintings depicting drunkenness were intended to be funny, with the

viewer seeing the difference between himself and the individuals in the image.²⁵ Without the slaves' presence, these scenes lose their humor because the viewer would wonder "where is the slave" and "why are the slaves not helping the inebriated guest?" An inaccessible slave was no laughing matter.



Image 5: House of the Chaste Lovers, Pompeii

Moreover, slaves formed part of their masters' nocturnal retinue by carrying torches during nighttime strolls in the city (Mart. VIII.75; Suet *Aug* 29; Apul. *Met.* II.32). Just as in daytime when lictors and litters marked social status, an individual's rank remained discernible because carrying a torch indicated lower status. Torch carriers freed up the master's hands. Those in a group with empty hands demonstrated their higher social status than those carrying objects. Therefore, the masters needed their slaves to provide them with light, protection, and status.

²⁵ Clarke (2003a), 227-33.

The same accessibility masters demanded from their slaves at banquets carried over to the bedroom. For the sake of convenience, a slave was sometimes present during sex, as various wall paintings from Pompeii demonstrate.²⁶ Just as I did with the dinner party scenes, I aver that the Roman audience would have assumed these depictions of sex took place at night because their culture associated drunkenness and sex with the dark hours.²⁷ The ideal represented in images 6 and 7 reveals that a slave must be ready to spring to action on a moment's notice such as the slave who caught a tipsy guest in image 5; therefore, slaves must watch! Performing tasks similar to those at a banquet, these bedroom slaves remained close by to fetch water (image 7), bring clothes, or helping their masters as the need arose.

Image 6: Casa della Farnesina, cubiculum D, Rome



²⁶ Cf. George, 390; Clarke (2003b), 32-33.

²⁷ See pages 7-8.

Romans had fewer concerns over privacy than modern Westerners. Convenience overrode privacy. While voyeurism formed part of the nocturnal slave experience, one should not view the master as exhibitionist or expect qualms over privacy since slaves were socially dead.²⁸ After all, in both image 6 and 7 the eyes of the lovers are fixed on each other, ignoring the slave in the background, thereby signifying the attendant's insignificance and the imbalance of power. Any awkwardness that came from a slave's presence in the Roman bedroom during sex resembles the awkwardness from a pet's presence in today's bedroom. Pets and slaves are subhuman creatures. In fact, Epictetus ranked the status of slaves between that of a free man and a dog (II.23, 24).

Images 6 and 7 depict an inactive and active slave, respectively. In image 6 the bedroom servant behaves as Seneca portrayed slaves at a banquet: silent and accessible. This inactive slave remains ready for his master. Standing at a distance, he looks at the couple with his hands free. Image 7, on the contrary, shows a moving slave. Though taking place in the bedroom, the image evinces the same ideal of the accessible nocturnal slaves as images 3 and 4. Similar to the servants in those previous wall paintings, this slave serves by bringing water to the couple. The image is more ideal than realistic because of the slave's smallness. However, the image shows how elites wished to depict the ideal of the accessible and active nocturnal slave who conveniences his owners. The slave in image 7 is looking at the viewer instead of the couple. He is naked, holding water, and standing closer to them than image 6.

²⁸ I borrow Patterson's term "socially dead" for slaves. Patterson, *passim*.

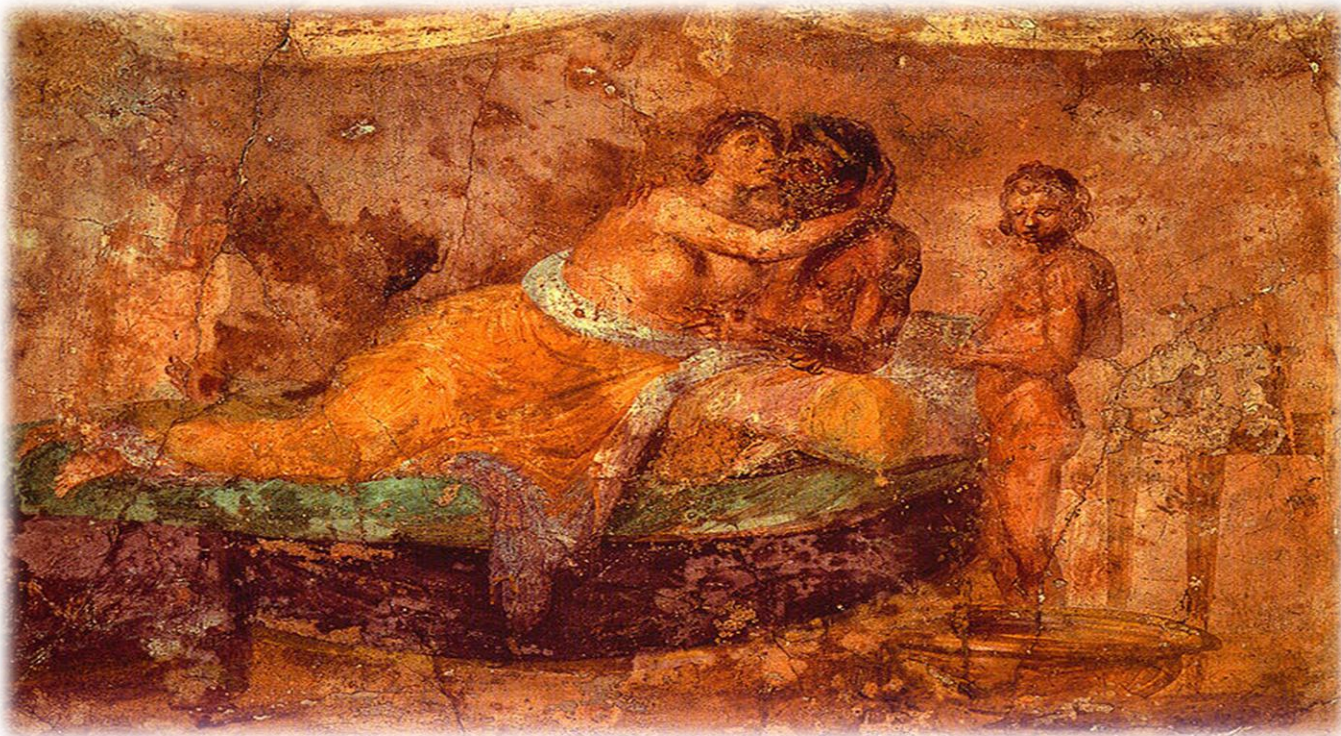


Image 7: Casa della Farnesina

Since slaves were talking tools, rumors of their masters' sexual exploits occasionally surfaced. Jerome and John Chrysostom indicate that slaves consoled themselves by inventing rumors (Jer. *Ep.* 117.8; John Chrys. *Subintr.* 10.10).²⁹ Though it is easy to scoff at Suetonius' prurient gossip of Roman emperors, bed chamberlains might have witnessed such sexual deviances as Tiberius' minnows and Nero's bear. Slaves with access to the bedroom saw and heard things not intended for broadcast.³⁰ A slave-girl not only knew of her mistress' alcoholism but even insulted her in private by bringing up that unflattering information (Aug. *Conf.* IX.8.18).³¹ As a teenager, Melania the Younger tried to dissuade her chaperones from informing

²⁹ Harper, 22. Cicero noted the inevitability of gossip within a large household and advised politicians should attempt to make it favorable *Commentariolum Pet* 17; *Cael* 6. S. Treggari (1998), 5.

³⁰ In one of Martial's epigrams, a lamp, which bedroom slaves must have resembled, tells the audience that it will not squeal about the secret pleasures it has witnessed (Mart. XIV.39).

³¹ Cooper, 16.

her parents that she was becoming an ascetic.³² However, when Petronius broadcasted Nero's sexual idiosyncrasies, the emperor blamed a senator's wife who had seen and let know what had transpired in his bedroom (Tac. *Ann.* XVI.20). It did not enter Nero's mind—or maybe Tacitus'—to blame a slave, perhaps because none were present or perhaps the emperor did not conceive that his bed chamberlain would talk.

Many household slaves remained on call throughout the night. This obligation of being available, though not necessarily used, meant that for some slaves night remained a period of confined inactivity. Even while they slept, owners expected their slaves to be available. For example, in the *Golden Ass* a cuckholded husband came home unexpectedly, pounded on the door, yelling at the slave girl to open it (Apul *Met.* IX.20). Similarly, in *An Ethiopian Tale* a maid brought in a lamp for her master to perform a sacrifice (III.93 cf. VIII.250-1). While in an army camp during the third watch, Brutus summoned his servants because he saw a ghost (Plut. *Brut.* 36). For any reason a slave had to be ready to be awakened for his master.

Similar to banquet serving and guard duty, nursing entailed a significant amount of nocturnal inactivity. Although nursing was unsupervised, it still restricted slave women to one room of the house and the need to remain awake well into the night. Roman housing also attests to achieving slave accessibility. Nurses were kept close to the bedroom. Image 8 demonstrates the proximity of nurses to their masters in one upper class household. With bedrooms near one another, the house's layout kept slaves and especially nurses close to their masters, thereby increasing accessibility. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has argued that the ideal building was hierarchically arranged, with low-status areas, such as service rooms and slave quarters, clustered.³³ Many rural slaves, however, slept in much worse conditions.

³² Cooper, 16-17.

³³ Wallace Hadrill, 56.

Image 8: Layout of a Roman house, from A. Wallace-Hadrill, (1988), p 53.

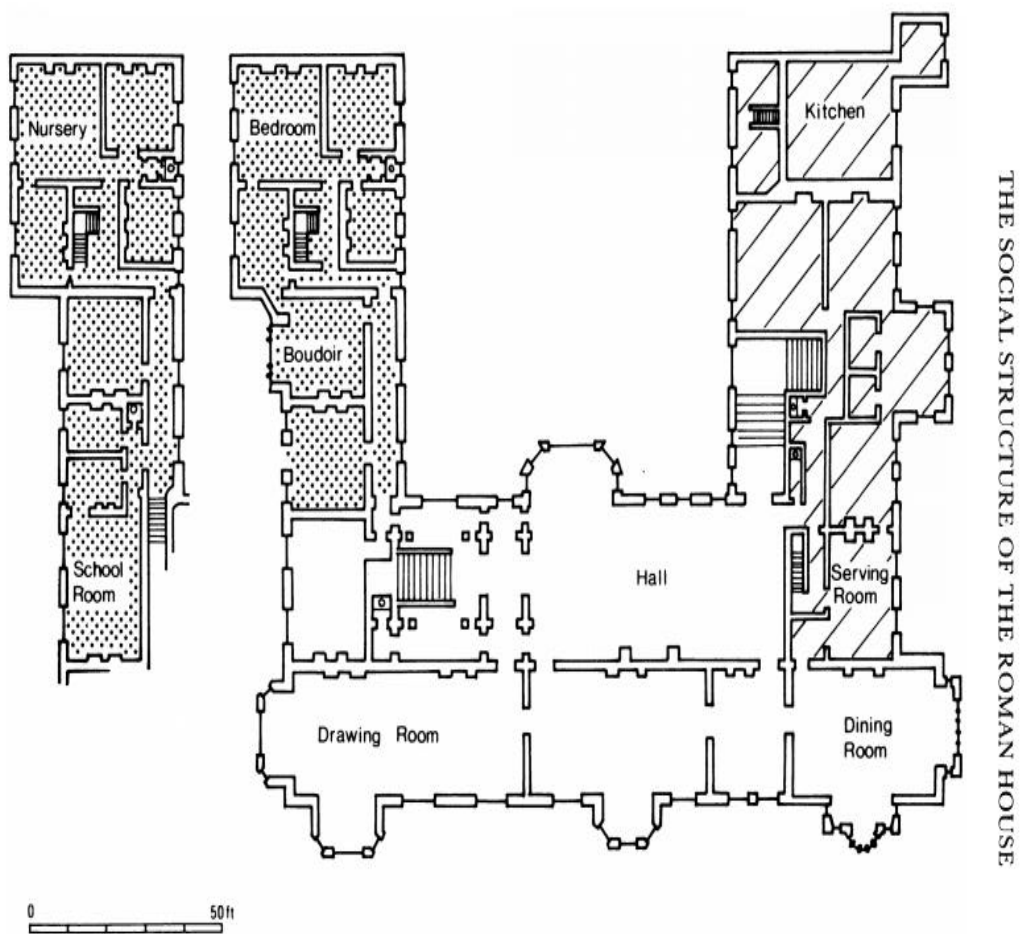


FIG. 2. Thorsby Hall, Nottinghamshire (1864-75): ground floor, with children's rooms on first floor of family wing (after Girouard). Family rooms are dotted, service quarters are shaded

Rural sunsets

What about slaves in the countryside? Did sunsets liberate rural slaves from their daytime nightmare? K.D. White noted that economically-minded masters would have spared no effort to keep their slaves employed because of the “heavy capital outlay” of slavery.³⁴ Hence, masters should have worked their slaves well into the night to the point of exhaustion because an idle hour was a wasted hour. With this assumption some historians have concluded that rural slaves were “the most wretched and impoverished creatures in the Roman Empire.”³⁵ Notwithstanding White’s economic rationalism, at first glance it would seem logical that rural slaves enjoyed nocturnal freedom: the landlords were absent, the nights dark, the work diurnal. Moreover, many archaeologists believe the typical *villa rustica* possessed between 50 and 100 slaves.³⁶ Surely, that was too many slaves to keep track of, thus increasing nocturnal freedom. To the contrary, both these views are incorrect. Rural slaves did not enjoy unbridled nocturnal freedom nor was it common for them to work at night. Instead, slave holders sought to cast their rural slaves into nocturnal inertia—a state of inactive confinement—and rested up for work the next day. Despite often having an absent master, rural slaves lived under greater nocturnal control than their domestic counterparts. Accessibility and convenience did not compel owners of rural slaves to bring about tighter regulations. Instead the distance between master and slave motivated this regulation.

Farming did not always end at sunset as Columella envisaged (XII.1.3). Night gave farmers relief from daytime heat.

³⁴ White, 390 n.1.

³⁵ Samson, 100.

³⁶ John Chrys. *Hom in Mt* 63.4; Samson, 102.

Average monthly temperature in the city of Rome³⁷

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Avg high	74	81	88	87	81
Avg low	51	57	62	62	57

Furthermore, numerous writers attest to a belief in the agricultural potency of moonlight.³⁸ Cato advised his readers to graft figs, olives, apples, pears and vines at night: activities that a hot sun might have hampered (40). Columella advised farmers to pick beans in the dark to protect them from pesky weevils. (II.10.12). In one novel a woman culled herbs at night because she believed moonlight made them stronger (Ach. Tat. V.26). Ideally, farmhands hauled and spread manure at night, and every evening someone needed to feed the farm animals (Cato 29, 50, 54; Pliny *H.N.* XVIII.322; Colum. *R.R.* II.5.1; 15.9). Pruning vines during a full moon in the sign of *Leo*, *Scorpio*, *Sagittarius*, or *Taurus* protected them from mice (Colum. *de Arb.* 15; cf. Plin. *N. H.* XVII.215). Ditches should be dug at night during a full moon (Pliny *N.H.* XVIII.322). Hence, plenty of odd nocturnal jobs existed to keep slaves busy at night. Moreover, many free daylaborers likely did not continue their tasks into the night.³⁹ For example, a man accused of murder in Classical Athens stated in his defense speech that at sunset he encountered a friend who was returning to the city after working on his farm (Lysias, *Erat.* 22).

³⁷ Retrieved November 14, 2011, from <http://www.weather.com/outlook/travel/vacationplanner/vacationclimatology/monthly/ITXX0067>.

³⁸ Tavenner asserted that “the underlying thought behind the lunar lore was grow or increase, attend to during the waxing moon; whatsoever you wish to dry, or cure, or decrease without decay, “attend to during the waning moon; whatsoever you would have remain unchanged, attend to during the dark of the moon”. Tavenner, 80. Appian attests to Scipio Aemilianus marching his army at night to avoid daytime heat (Spanish wars 88/134). Similarly, in the Ethiopian Tale night was chosen as the time for travel because of the heat (Hel. 8.254).

³⁹ The Book of Job also seems to indicate farming ended at sunset for day laborers and slaves, stating “Do not mortals have hard service on earth? Are not their days like those of hired laborers? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired laborer waiting to be paid, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.” (Job 7:1-3).

Servile farming at night, however, was probably an exception. First, Columella envisaged slaves entering the fields at dawn and returning at twilight (XII.1.3). Second, Roman writers recommended these nocturnal activities because of their agricultural benefit, not as methods to keep slaves busy at night. Therefore, it is possible that family farms undertook moonlight agriculture more than slave ones. In fact, for good reason no agronomist advises slaves do these jobs because night offered a cover to escape (Ps-Caes. Resp.3). Army deserters escaped at night (Caes. *B.C.* 2.27; 3.13). Kidnapped victims escaped at night (Apul. *Gold. Ass* VI.29). Slave bounty hunters prowled at night (Lib. *Prog.* 7.1.8). Slave narratives from Antebellum America indicate that most African-American slaves escaped and traveled during the night and hid during the day.⁴⁰ While it is true that adducing comparative evidence seems risky in this respect because skin color easily differentiated slave from free in antebellum south, rural Roman slaves had no crowd to blend into; therefore, they might have stood out. Furthermore, because of their appearance, branded slaves and those wearing collars or a *bulla* might have needed night to get a head start and travel, while using the daytime for hiding and sleeping.⁴¹

Indeed, archaeological evidence shows that preventing rural slaves from escaping was the top concern for masters at night. Masters of rural slaves took two precautions: bed checks and dungeons (*ergastula*). Ideally, the *vilicus*, who was the farm overseer and a slave himself, regimented and locked down the night, giving different freedoms to different slaves. Cato envisaged him as “he should be the first person awake and the last one to sleep. Before going to sleep, the overseer should check that the farm is closed, each slave is sleeping where he is supposed to, and the animals have food” (Cato *de agr* V.5).⁴² This nocturnal regulation differs

⁴⁰ William Anderson, 27; Charles Ball, 103; Henry Bibb, 58-9; Leonard Black, 22; Sarah Bradford, 17,60

⁴¹ Thompson, 238-240

from the ones we see concerning domestics. The sources on domestic slaves fail to indicate that a slave's location should be checked at night. Even Trimalchio's sign was only a warning, passively designed to deter slave wandering. A bed check, however, entailed surveillance, which in essence, instituted a curfew on rural slaves by attempting to regiment nighttime and keep them under their master's control. Therefore, in an ideal world rural slaves did not enjoy unrestrained nocturnal freedom but detention.

Sleeping quarters demonstrate nocturnal inertia of rural slaves. Excavations at Boscotrecase—located in Campania dating to the first century BCE—reveal the cramped living conditions with a row of nine *cella* measuring less than 6m² (2.8 x 1.9m).⁴³ The floors were trodden earth.⁴⁴ Each *cella* had a window, hearth, a niche in the wall for a lamp, and monochrome plaster wall.⁴⁵ Though an individual *cella* afforded unfettered slaves some privacy, the design stresses control. If all 50 slaves slept in one open room, then spotting a single slave's absence would have been difficult. However, several small rooms in a row allow for an efficient bed check by simply walking through a hall. Excavations at Gragnano and Prato La Corte reveal a similar layout, with a row of *cella*, each measuring 3 x 2m and 3 x 3.5m, respectively.⁴⁶ In image 9 the *cella* at Borscoreale—Villa of Tiberius Claudius Eutychus—are lined up on the right side, numbers 1-9. The *cella* at Gragnano are numbers 5-9, which were safely tucked away in the courtyard far from an exit.

⁴² *Primus cubitu surgat, postremus cubitum eat. Prius villam videat clausa uti siet, et uti suo quisque loco cubet et uti iumenta pabulum habeant.*

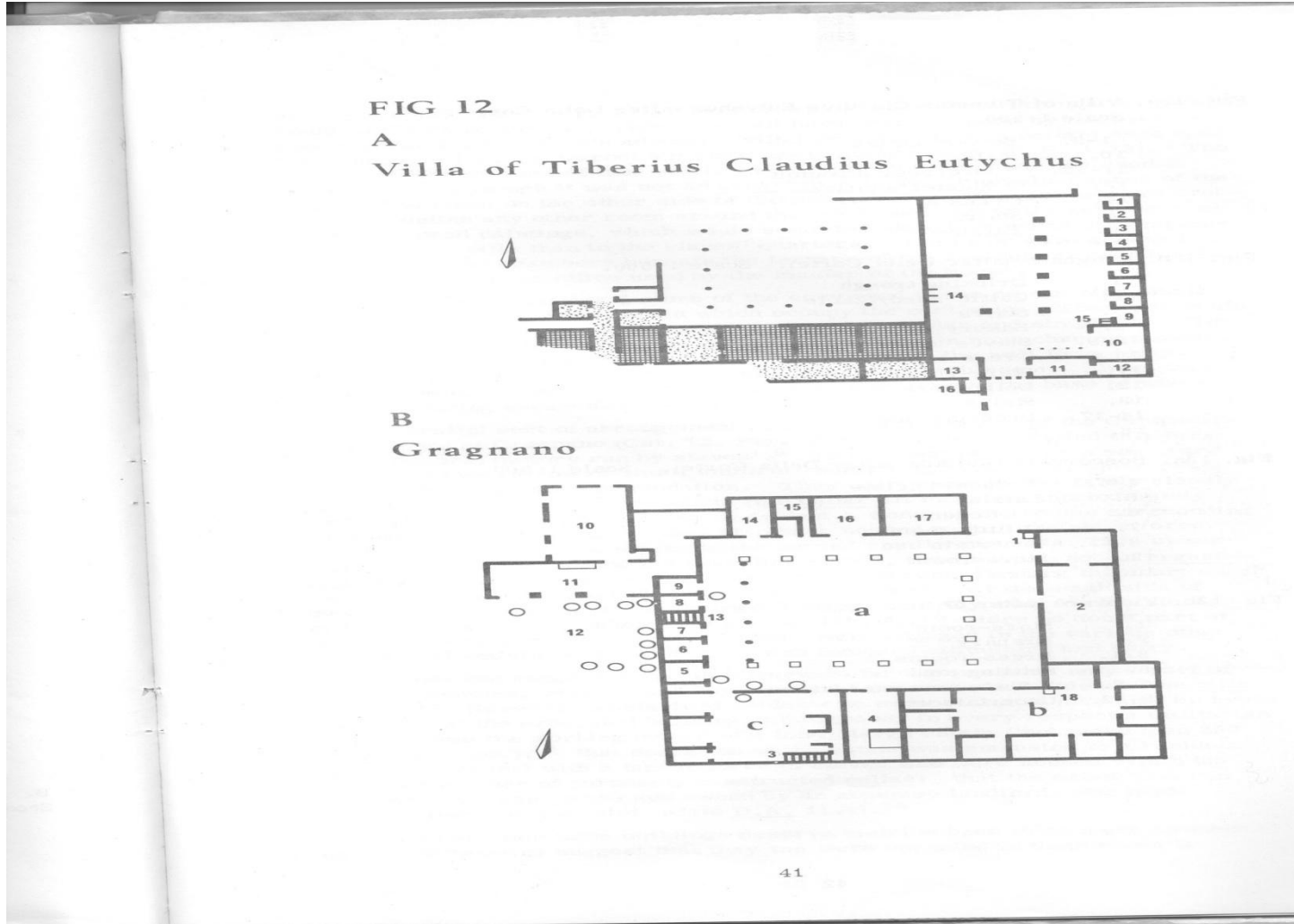
⁴³ Roth, 50; Rossiter 43. Cf. George, 386-388.

⁴⁴ Rossiter, 43.

⁴⁵ Rossiter, 43.

⁴⁶ Rossiter, 45.

Image 9: Rural slave sleeping quarters, from J. Rossiter, 41.



However, not all rural slaves had the luxury of sleeping in their own *cella*. Slave owners built underground prisons (*ergastula*) to house troublemakers at night (Columella I.8.16; Juv XIV.24).⁴⁷ Columella recommends that the only light to enter the *ergastula* should come from narrow windows too high from the ground to be touched (Columella I.6). Contrary to the *cella*'s individuality, these dungeons housed approximately 15 slaves together in a single room (Apul. Apol. 47). The inhumanity of the *ergastula* concerned the Roman government enough that inspections were made and eventually Hadrian abolished them (Suet. Aug 32; Tib 8; H.A. Hadr.

⁴⁷ Granaries, quarries, and corn-mills might also have housed slaves, though archaeology so far has not indicated it. Thompson, 24; Bodel, 319.

18).⁴⁸ Hence, slaveholders envisaged lockdown—the ultimate form of control—as characterizing nighttime for rural slaves. For the wretched slaves living in the *cella* or the *ergastula* the sunset brought inactivity, not freedom, which contrasted with some of their urban brethren who frequented taverns and brothels. In fact, few avenues of nocturnal enjoyment appear to have been open for rural slaves. Evidence from antebellum America attests to slaves fishing at night but under the supervision or instructions of their masters.⁴⁹ Thus, rural slaves entered inertia at night for the sake of their masters' control.

For many rural slaves night provided a respite from hard labor. The typical experience of Roman slaves in the countryside must have resembled Henry Bibbe's, who wrote, "I have often laid my wearied limbs down at night to rest upon a dirt floor, or a bench, without any covering at all ...after having worked hard all the day."⁵⁰ Here, we witness K.D. White's view of slaves being worked to exhaustion during the day, leaving them enervated at nightfall. John Brown indicated that slaves typically did not eat between 12pm and 9pm because a diurnal dinner wasted precious daylight hours; thus, the evening provided a much needed meal.⁵¹ Ideally, rural slaves would have been worked so hard during the day that they could do little but rest at night, thus entering a state of confined inactivity.

Conclusion

⁴⁸ Davis, 210; cf. Buckland, 37.

⁴⁹ John Brown, p. 70; Charles Ball, pp. 215-17.

⁵⁰ Henry Bibb, 15.

⁵¹ John Brown, 19.

What was it like to be a Roman slave? The answer to this question will always be elusive, yet it is on the mind of everyone who studies the history of slavery. Patterson noted that slavery imposes a parasitic relationship between master and slave, in which the former depends on the latter.⁵² Indeed, scholars of ancient slavery assert that without slaves there would have been no Greece or Rome.⁵³ This social dependency remained into the night. When Trimalchio proclaimed “days are for work; nights are for fun”, slaves often aided in the quest for enjoyment because for nocturnal playtime to occur masters needed accessible domestic slaves to perform tasks, such as, carrying torches, serving at banquets, helping the drunk *dominus* home, and assisting during sexual intercourse (V.64).⁵⁴ In exchange for their master’s fun, slaves must have been bored for long periods of the night. Even while sleeping, masters depended on slaves to swat away mosquitos and to guard the house. This dependency explains why a slave’s whereabouts at night concerned Roman society. Because masters’ dependency required accessibility, night for many slaves was not a time of companionship or fun but of inertia. In the countryside at night masters gained peace of mind knowing their property was chained in a dungeon or checked by an overseer.

As I argued in the previous chapter on boredom, night froze Romans until dawn. Although some slaves no doubt enjoyed more freedom at night by going to bars and brothels as attested by Nero’s disguise, for many of those in bondage darkness brought neither freedom nor continued work. Instead, night detained most slaves, who remained “socially dead” during the dark hours.⁵⁵ Indeed, as the next chapter on beds will show, night reinforced a person’s status

⁵² Patterson, 335.

⁵³ Finley (1998), 80; “Was Greek Civilisation based on Slave Labor?”. For an opposing view, see Starr, 20.

⁵⁴ *Interdiu severa, nunc hilaria*.

⁵⁵ Patterson, 38-76.

because in the Roman mindset, where you slept determined who you were. But, maybe in their sleep slaves dreamt of elevating to a higher status because no master no matter how oppressive could ever touch that most liberating of experiences—our dreams.

Chapter 4: Beds in Roman Culture¹

Mark Antony had a gambling problem. It was so uncontrollable that Cicero decried because of this wastrel's lost bets slaves were sleeping on purple sheets, which had once belonged to Pompey (*Phil.* II.67).² Cicero wants our blood to boil. Slaves were not supposed to sleep on elegant sheets. Antony's behavior created a topsy-turvy Rome in which slaves slept like a Roman hero. Cicero knew that his audience believed you could tell a lot about a man by his bed. To Romans the bed indicated who you were—your civilization, your place in society, and even your character.

Indeed, Seneca remarked “you are asked ‘what you do, how you dine, how you sleep’, and it is discovered; therefore, you should live circumspectly” (*Ep.* 43).³ Sleeping formed one criterion upon which Romans judged each other. In fact, it was as important an indicator as eating, drinking, and working. Seneca also expected these three activities to align. If a man eats lavishly, then he must sleep lavishly. Historians have demonstrated how food, clothing, and even walking marked identity.⁴ Beds conveyed the same marking because everyone must perform these are daily activities. Alexander, for instance, remarked that sleeping and sex were the only things that reminded him that he was mortal (*Plut. Alex.* 22). Yet, as with most luxury,

¹ I thank Joe Figliulo-Rosswurm, Chris Keggeris, Angela Holzmeier, James Conrad, Jessica Elliot, Tracey Watts, Frances Hahn, Joanne Shelton, Anna Anguissola, Raffaella Cribiore, Harriet Fertik, Laura Nissinen, Matthew Perry, and Jeffrey Tatum for their comments on this chapter as well as the participants who heard this chapter at the workshop on “Public and Private Space in the Roman House” held at NYU in October 2012.

² *suggerabantur etiam saepe (non enim semper iste felix) damna aleatoria; conchyliatis Cn. Pompei peristromatis servorum in cellis lectos stratos videres.*

³ *Quid agas, quemadmodum cenes, quemadmodum dormias, quaeritur, scitur: eo tibi diligentius vivendum est.* The bible also analogized beds with luxurious foods, declaring “You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves” (*Amos* 6:4 cf. *John Chrys Hom in Gen.* 1.10). The “you” in this bible verse shows how beds separated Romans just as eating food did. Cf. Lendon, 36-39.

⁴ Garnsey, 62-81; Woolf, 32-33; George, 42-3; O’Sullivan, *passim*.

some individuals far exceeded what was necessary to separate themselves from the common herd. This is where Seneca's use of "circumspectly" (*diligentius*) gains significance because one could incur harsh judgments by sleeping the wrong way. Romans asked, discovered, and judged because sleeping revealed something about a person.

This chapter focuses on these discoveries and judgments concerning the bed. What attitudes did Romans have about beds? What judgments did Romans make about the person sleeping in various types of beds and why? By examining these questions, I will argue that many Romans believed in what I call the "matching principle"—that is Romans expected beds to match an individual's standing in society. Beds comprised one of many markers of identity, separating people into categories. Beds indicated the degree of civilization achieved. Beds signified a person's status. A bed's softness revealed a man's character and affected his body. Ultimately, just as the previous chapter on slaves argued, this examination of Roman beds reveals how hierarchy and segregation remained at night. Although beds were associated with multiple functions, such as birth, sex, illness, and death, this chapter will be devoted to its most typical nocturnal activity—sleeping.⁵

Civilization marker

Beds distinguished the civilized from the uncivilized. In his brief ethnography on the Huns, Ammianus sketches this tribe's strange customs. Originating from a distant land near some unknown frozen ocean, the Huns scar their children's faces; eat raw food; have no buildings; wear garments made from the skins of mice. Then, Ammianus notes (XXXI.2.6):

⁵ One difference between Greek and Roman beds is that the Greeks ate and slept on the same bed. The Romans, however, had a *lectus* for eating and a *grabatus* for sleeping, Andrianou, 232. Purple was the only colorfast dye in antiquity, Reinhold (1969), 301. With respect to the birth bed, Soranus advocated two beds for birth: a soft one for the mother to rest in after delivery and a hard one during delivery (II.2.3). Andrew Riggsby has identified six associations of the *cubiculum*: rest, sex, adultery, controlled display of art, murder/suicide, and reception, Riggsby, 37-43.

They are practically attached to their horses, which are tough and disfigured. They perform their daily business on these creatures sometimes sitting like women. On horseback each man in this nation spends all night and day buying and selling, eating and drinking, and they lean over their horses' narrow necks dropping off into a deep sleep and continue on to their different sort of dreams.⁶

Our jaws are meant to drop. These are barbarians *par excellence*. These quasi-centaurs lacked so many markers of civilization, such as cooked food, housing, normal clothing, and beds.⁷ By forming a part of Roman ethnography, the bed indicated the degree of civilization obtained.⁸ In similar manner, Diodorus noted how the Cynegi in Ethiopia sleep in trees to hide from wild beasts (III.25.1-2). Possessing beds did not make Rome a singular civilization, but the absence of beds highlighted the otherness of the Huns and Cynegi, who were uncivilized sleepers; therefore, Romans viewed the bed as prerequisite to civilization. The uncivilized slept and conducted their daily business in the same spots, thus failing to demarcate the world of night and day. Both peoples slept outdoors, thus having little protection from the elements and making their nights public. Hence, Romans considered privacy, permanence, and a separation from the day to be civilized. It is unsurprising that earlier in his description Ammianus compared the Huns' absence of shelter to Roman homelessness since in both cases, peoples wandered, sleeping in ephemeral spots, thereby demonstrating their excommunication from civilized society (XXXI.2.4).⁹ Transitory sleeping locations, along with many other nomadic traits, marked otherness.

⁶ *verum equis prope adfixi, duris quidem sed deformibus, et muliebriter isdem non numquam insidentes funguntur muneribus consuetis. ex ipsis quivis in hac natione pernox et perdius emit et vendit, cibumque sumit et potum, et inclinatus cervici angustae iumentum in altum soporem ad usque varietatem effunditur somniorum.*

⁷ Ammianus also implies Hun women and children slept in wagons (XXXI.2). Even the animals in distant lands slept differently. Diodorus believed that elephants sleep differently. Unlike other four-legged animals, elephants cannot bear their bulk by bending their knees so they must sleep by resting against a tree (Diodorus III.27.1-2).

⁸ For the bed as a marker of civilization, see Gray and Gray, 47.

⁹ Roman homeless had a reputation for sleeping around tombs as well as under stairs of *insulae*, in cellars, and on rooftops all of which offered a windbreak (Digest 47.12.3.11; cf. Suet. *Jul.* 39). Hilarion, for instance, slept in a

Blurring the lines between animal and human sleep also made the sleeping arrangements of the Huns and Cynegi uncivilized. Jesus remarked, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to rest his head” (Matt. 8.20).¹⁰ Beds were unnatural, man-made objects that sheltered humanity.¹¹ Therefore, they indicated the degree of civilization reached because humanity should sleep differently from animals. As a result, a correlation developed—the more artificial the bed, the greater the distance from animals, the higher level of civilization (and social status) reached. Those who slept close to animals, such as the Huns on their horses or the Cynegi hiding from predators, were less civilized. Even sleeping with skins was frowned upon (Diod. III.28.5). Skins tied sleepers to the animal world, while fabrics linked them with civilization’s man-made world. Martial condemned his reader to sleep on hay taken from a mule’s stall (Mart. XIV.162). In the midst of a Job-like downfall from the deaths of his parents and the rejection of his brother, Leobardus’ suffering culminated in sleeping on hay in a barn, like an animal. His righteousness was confirmed when he woke up and thanked God for his life (Greg. Tours *Vit. Pat.* I.20.1). Cheap straw that comprised mattresses was not much of an upgrade from what farm animals have slept on for centuries.

Civilized sleeping was elevated. Strabo remarked how “all the mountaineers [in Iberia] are simple, they drink water, sleep on the ground, and have long hair like women” (III.3.7).¹² Iberian mountaineers slept on the ground like animals.¹³ Romans, on the other hand, slept high up (Suet. *Cal.* 51; Apul. *Gold. Ass.* I.12). Suetonius found it surprising that Augustus slept on a

different spot every night because of robbers (Jer. *Hil.* 4). Though vagrancy does not appear to have concerned the government, laws nevertheless were enacted prohibiting sleeping around tombs.

¹⁰ Αἱ ἀλώπεκες φωλεοὺς ἔχουσιν καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνώσεις, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἔχει ποῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνει

¹¹ Juxtaposing this quote from Matthew with Polycarp’s burning pillow, Jan Kozłowski has argued that the pillow symbolized worldly shelter, Kozłowski, 153-157.

¹² ἀπαντες δ’ οἱ ὄρειοι λιτοὶ ὑδροπόται χαμαιεῦναι βαθεῖαν κατακεχυμένοι τὴν κόμην γυναικῶν δίκην:

low bed with ordinary covers (*Aug.* 73). As a biographer, Suetonius wants to provide us with glimpses of the real man, and beds provided such revelations. Sleeping low revealed the emperor's unpretentious personality. Augustus rejected the expected pampered nocturnal lifestyle, choosing instead to sleep in simplicity. Behind the pomp, circumstance, and power lay a simple man. Augustus could have slept on whatever bed he desired but chose a simple one. Similarly, Marcus Aurelius used to sleep on the ground and sometimes on a couch with a spread of skins to show his rejection of luxury (*H.A. Marc. Aur.* 2-4).¹⁴

Beds did more than separate humans from animals. They also distinguished dogs from each other since some fortunate Roman canines snuggled with their masters at night.¹⁵ One epitaph to a dog reads "Margarita, was never chained up. She lay on her master's lap and always knew where to find a cosy on which to sleep off her weariness."¹⁶ To underscore Margarita's exceptionalism the epitaph begins by indicating she "was never chained up". The typical Roman dog slept on the floor, chained up, and guarding the house, as the *cave canem* mosaic in image 10 demonstrates (cf. *Cato Agr.* 124). Margarita, on the contrary, lived a life of luxury by sleeping on her master's lap. Such exceptional access demonstrated great favor and affection for a dog. Martial likewise tells of a lap dog named Issa who (*I.* 109.8-13):

snuggling close to her [master's] neck, she sleeps so softly that no breathing is heard. If she needs to use the restroom, not a drop would stain her master's covers. Instead, she nudges her master with her charming paw and asks to be put down so that she can relieve herself.¹⁷

¹³ The German word for bed (*bett*) derives from its term for ground (*boden*), see Hubschmid, 225-263.

¹⁴ The Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus Phocas and the French King Loius VII also slept on floors.

¹⁵ About 21 percent of dog owners regularly sleep with their dog. Retrieved March 14, 2014, from <http://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2011/01/22/a-furry-dilemma-sleep-with-your-pet-catch-his-bugs/>

¹⁶ Translation by Toynbee. Toynbee, 121.

¹⁷ *Collo nixa cubat capitque somnos,
ut suspiria nulla sentiantur;
et desiderio coacta uentris* 10

Image 10: House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii



Issa possesses many anthropomorphic qualities. The bed humanized her; she thinks, communicates, and even has manners. Dogs did not make the bed bestial. The bed made the dog human, literally and figuratively elevating them from the typical Roman mutt. This anthropomorphizing demonstrates the bed as a marker of civilization.

Beds also manifested cultural values. In a passage dripping with Roman anachronism, Plutarch envisaged Lycurgus ordering that every house in Sparta should have (*Lyc.* 13.3-5):¹⁸

a ceiling made with an axe, and the doors made only with a saw. He permitted no other tools. This idea, which Epaminondas is later said to have expressed at his own table—that there was no treason in such a meal—first occurred to Lycurgus, in that there was no place for luxury or extravagance in a house of this type, nor was there anybody so lacking in taste and intelligence as to bring into a plain, common house beds with legs of silver and bedspreads of purple, as well as gold goblets and the extravagance consequent upon them. Instead, of necessity the bed fits the house and matches it, while the same is true of the bedcovers in relation both to the bed and to the rest of the furniture and fittings...¹⁹

*gutta pallia non fefellit ulla,
sed blando pede suscitatur toroque
deponi monet et rogatur leuari.*

¹⁸ Many scholars of Sparta believe that Plutarch's statements on archaic Sparta are anachronistic. Thus, his statements likely reveal just as much about Roman culture as Spartan. Hansen, 23-25; cf. Ducat, 23-32.

¹⁹ ἐτέρα δὲ πάλιν κατὰ τῆς πολυτελείας, ὅπως οἰκία πᾶσα τὴν μὲν ὀροφὴν ἀπὸ πελέκεως εἰργασμένην ἔχη, τὰς δὲ θύρας ἀπὸ πρίονος μόνου καὶ μηδενὸς τῶν ἄλλων ἐργαλείων, ὅπερ γὰρ ὕστερον Ἐπαμεινώνδαν εἰπεῖν λέγουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ τραπέζης, ὡς τὸ τοιοῦτον ἄριστον οὐ χωρεῖ προδοσίαν, τοῦτο πρῶτος ἐνόησε Λυκούργος, ὡς οἰκία τοιαύτη τρυφὴν οὐ χωρεῖ καὶ πολυτέλειαν, [4] οὐδ' ἔστιν οὐδεὶς οὕτως ἀπειρόκαλος καὶ ἀνόητος ὥστε εἰς οἰκίαν ἀφελῆ καὶ δημοτικὴν εἰσφέρειν κλῖνας ἀργυρόποδας καὶ στρωμνὰς ἀλουργεῖς καὶ χρυσᾶς κύλικας καὶ τὴν τούτοις ἐπομένην πολυτέλειαν, ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη συναρμόζεσθαι καὶ συνεξομοιοῦν τῇ μὲν οἰκίᾳ τὴν κλίνην, τῇ δὲ κλίνῃ τὴν ἐσθῆτα, ταύτῃ δὲ τὴν ἄλλην χορηγίαν καὶ κατασκευὴν.

To make Sparta a *polis* of austerity Lycurgus placed restrictions on houses and beds. In fact, silver bed legs and purple sheets were to get out of Dodge. By limiting the tools to just axes and saws, Sparta stunted its potential for extravagance. This restriction also demonstrates the importance of *how* beds were built. Requiring chopping and sawing, Spartan beds were made nearby; thus, demonstrating the Spartan value for local exertion. Purple sheets and silver legs, on the contrary, were made at a distant place—out of sight, out of mind—with someone else’s labor. Spartan beds evince a culture of self-reliance, masculine exertion, and austerity. Plutarch stresses how beds match the house (συνεξομοιοῦν τῇ μὲν οἰκίᾳ τὴν κλίνην), and therefore the culture, because a culture’s identity mirrored how it slept. Sleeping without a bed indicated the Iberian mountaineers’ simplicity and purity. Here we see the implicit juxtaposition of ethnography. Iberian mountaineers live antithetically to Romans who exist in a complicated and unnatural world drinking wine, sleeping on fancy beds, and trimming their hair. Beds were artificial, superficial, and corrupting. A bed was not necessary to live but was requisite to being a Roman.²⁰

Gregory of Tours’ portrait of the Christian ascetic Monegundis also demonstrates that a locally constructed bed signaled austerity (*Vit. Pat.* I.19.2):

She did not have a soft bed made of hay or even straw, but only of interlaced twigs...she put this on the ground or her bedframe. It served as her bench, mattress, pillow, and bedspread. She taught others how to make this mat, which helped cure sick people.²¹

Monegundis’ twig bed matched her ascetic identity because she shunned numerous societal values regarding sleeping. Like wearing sackcloth and ashes, Monegundis’ refusal of hay and straw in favor of twigs demonstrates her ascetic grit. In addition, by building a bed with her own

²⁰ Wallace Hadrill (1990a), 86, 88.

²¹ Translation by Edward James, 121-2.

hands, Monegundis rejected the value that beds should be exotic imports. In fact, our expression “to make a bed” derives from filling a sack with straw.²² Creating one’s own bed was a humble effort. The twigs linked her bed to nature, thus rejecting civilization and fitting her ascetic identity. Like the Spartans, she must rely on herself for her bed. In fact, she conflates teaching how to construct a twig bed with preaching.

Aristocratic sleepers, on the contrary, expected slaves to maintain the bed. Philogelus tells of a fool who wanted to sleep but had no pillow. He ordered his slave to fetch him a pot. When the slave replied that a pot is hard, the fool quipped “fill it with feathers” (21). A slave typically slept on the floor of his masters’ bedroom to assist their sleep, performing such tasks as laying out sheets or fetching a chamber pot.²³ The Spartans and Monegundis had no such sleep helpers.

Plutarch’s statement “the bed fits the house and matches it” demonstrates the connection between the bed and a culture’s identity. Similar to Huns sleeping on horses, the Cynegi sleeping in trees, and the Iberian mountaineers on the floor, Spartans slept in austerity. Each sleeping location matched each culture.

These Roman ethnographies also manifest the two competing views of the bed. For those like Ammianus and Diodorus beds were status symbols, demonstrating the lofty position of Roman culture. Sleeping arrangements embedded hierarchy, confirming who belonged to the elite and who did not. For others like Plutarch and Strabo, beds revealed one’s true character and moral fiber. Choosing to sleep in simplicity marked one as uncorrupted by luxury, like the Spartans and Iberian mountaineers.

²² Wright, 18.

²³ George, 22.

Status symbol

In 68 Nero was on the run. Declared a public enemy, abandoned by friends, and pursued by henchmen, the emperor fled from his palace in Rome and hid in his freedman's villa on the outskirts of the city. Having earlier refused to lie low in a gravel pit and demanding his servants spread a cloak for him to walk on, Nero (Suet. *Nero* 48.3-4):

Waited for a little bit, while his clandestine entrance into the villa was being prepared, he drank from his hand water from a nearby puddle and said "This is Nero's beverage". Then he picked off the twigs sticking to his cloak that had been torn up by thorns, and crawled on all fours through a tight tunnel. Entering the first room he came to, Nero lay down on a bed with a mean mattress over which an old cover had been tossed.²⁴

Nero's new bed signified his downfall from the pinnacle of power to disheveled fugitive. His days of extravagance were over.²⁵ Now the profligate emperor must humbly spend his remaining hours in squalor as a commoner, drinking puddle water, wearing raggedy clothing, and sleeping on a grungy bed.

When celebrities go from the red carpet to jail, we relish hearing details of their confined and unadorned new life. Romans also loved such riches to rags stories. Similar examples abound in Roman literature when a change in bed signified downfall. The divinely beautiful Charicleia spent her first night as brigand booty lamenting her plight and lying on a simple bed (Heliod. I.15). After entering Evander's dilapidated shack, Aeneas slept on a mattress made of leaves and a bear pelt (Verg. *Aen.* VIII.366-8). The mismatch of omnipotent tyrant, beautiful woman, and Trojan prince with a peasant's bed heightens their misfortune. Being demoted to a simple bed hit home. A shoddy bed provided the *bam!* moment by powerfully demarcating the

²⁴ *parumper commoratus, dum clandestinus ad villam introitus pararetur, aquam ex subiecta lacuna poturus manu hausit et 'Haec est' inquit, 'Neronis decocta.'* 4 *Dein divolsa sentibus paenula traiectione surculos rasisit, atque ita quadripes per angustias effossae cavernae receptus in proximam cellam decubuit super lectum modica culcita, vetere pallio strato, instructum; fameque et iterum siti interpellante panem quidem sordidum oblatum aspernatus est, aquae autem tepidae aliquantum bibit.*

²⁵ In fact, once the Senate declared him a public enemy, Nero's servants stole his bed linens and left the palace after obtaining a prized possession (Suet. *Nero* 47).

former lifestyle of luxury from the new one of austerity. Bed demotions highlighted the downtrodden's plight by implicitly reminding the audience and the victim of how one used to sleep. The bed demotions Nero, Charicleia, and Aeneas suffered indicated the loss of the good life and their new identities as fugitive, prisoner, and vagabond. Losing their bed stripped them of their membership card in high society because beds matched status.

When a mismatch between bed and person occurred, mistaken identity arose. To be surrounded by luxury during the day but not when one slept was hollow and even phony. It only made sense to live in luxury throughout the day and night. In the *Golden Ass* a rich banker wanted to avoid public office. So, to conceal his wealth he slept on top of bags of gold, wearing rags, and smeared with dirt (IV.9). Such deception could occur only if Romans viewed the bed as a status symbol.

Mistaken identity went in the other direction too. In 43 B.C. the Second Triumvirate proscribed a certain Panotion. To save himself Panotion clothed a loyal slave in his aristocratic vestments and ordered him to lie in his bed. The soldiers walked into Panotion's bedroom and killed his slave (Val. Max. VI.8; Macrob *Sat.* I. 11; cf. App. *B.C.* IV.44; Dio Cassius 47.10; Sen. *De Benef.* III. 25). Judging by the numerous references to this incident, Panotion's ingenuity tickled Roman ears. His elite bed served a purpose. It allowed for a case of intentional mistaken identity. In a world devoid of photographs facial recognition had limited value, but not the bed.²⁶

²⁶ The trope of slaves sleeping in the master's bed as a form of trespassing by blurring the lines between master and slave also occurs in Greek history. Athenaeus (quoting Theopompus) recounts how the Spartans, having lost many men in a battle, were desperate to conceal their paltry numbers. So, they put helots in the beds of those who had died in battle. After the emergency resolved itself the Spartans promoted those helots to citizens calling them Epeunacti because "they had been put into the bed" (Ath. VI.101).

Beds did more than indicate identity. They also affected health. Martial's friend Laetinus had an unwanted guest. Wherever Laetinus went and whatever he did, this annoying guest followed him—reclining in his litter, dining on his mushrooms, drinking his fine wine, chugging his snow water, and sleeping in his down and purple bed. This aggravating guest was not a person though, but a fever. Martial advised Laetinus that his fever had no reason to leave because it is living so comfortably with him (XII.17). Similar to soft beds weakening soldiers (as will be discussed in pp.122-3), the comfortable lifestyle engendered by luxurious sleep also weakened one's health. First, comfort attracted Laetinus' intractable fever. Then, the fever became addicted to living the good life, refusing to leave and find another host. Laetinus' bed is as much a part of high society as his litter, mushrooms, and snow water. His fever had adopted an elite identity believing it belonged to high society. So, what aspects of the bed did Laetinus' fever and Roman society consider so refined?

First, the best beds were purple.²⁷ But not just any purple. They had to be Tyrian purple—the designer brand of this color. Catullus alerted a bride that her husband was waiting on a Tyrian bed (61).²⁸ Chariton depicted a royal chamber with a beaten gold bed and a cover of Tyrian dye and Babylonian sheets (VIII.1.14). Combination of Tyre and Babylon gave this bed geographic diversity—the antithesis of Sparta's and Mogundis' locally constructed beds.

Southern Italy, North Africa, and Sicily also made purple dyed sheets from snail shells, and

²⁷ Pliny states that the finest purple matches the color of clotted blood and shines when it hits the light (NH IX.62). Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus received his nickname “born in purple” because of the room and presumably the beds in which he was born in were that prestigious color.

²⁸ Pliny details how wools were dyed purple (NH IX.62). However, what Catullus or Pliny the Elder precisely meant when they refer to beds as Tyrian or Delian remains unknown (NH XXXIII.144). These adjectives could refer where the sheets were made or in the style made or even the origin of the bed's artist, Andrianou, 234.

cheap imitations of Tyrian purple existed as well.²⁹ But, Tyrian purple had the greatest prestige.³⁰ In Roman eyes Tyre began manufacturing purple seven generations before the Trojan War when Hercules' dog bit a *murex*, emitting newly discovered color (Onomasticon I.45-48).³¹ In addition to the dye's mythological origins, the distant effort required to make purple sheets also added to their prestige. Though not specifying Tyrian purple, Diocletian's price edict attests to the color's exorbitant cost:

African cloak	500
Dalmatian tunic	2000
hooded cloak, Laodicean	4500
soldier's winter tunic	75
wool from Tarentum	75
White silk	12,000
Purple silk	150,000

Because few Romans could afford this color, Tyrian purple sheets matched an elite's identity. All of this shows as Meyer Reinhold argued over 40 years ago that the belief the imperial family had a monopoly on purple is a canard.

While the best sheets came from the East, the best mattresses came from Gaul.

Leuconian stuffing was a must-have item. "The poor man" wrote Martial "buys straw instead of Leuconian wool", thus, making this mattress stuffing the difference between the haves from the

²⁹ Reinhold (1970), 53. Reinhold has demonstrated that the Roman government never abolished all trade in purple and private use of the color. The canard stems from late fourth-century and early fifth-century legislation that restricted several high grades of purple wools and silks, such as those from Tyre, to the imperial household. Cheap imitations from animal, vegetable, mineral mixtures remained unregulated. Reinhold (1970), 65-6; cf. Reinhold (1971), 283.

³⁰ Jensen, 107; cf. Strabo XVI.2.23.

³¹ Purple had been manufactured from at least the Minoan age, and had been a status symbol in West Asia since at least the fourteenth century, see Stieglitz, 53 and Reinhold (1970), 10.

have nots (XIV.159-160).³² Using the same wool that made cloaks, Leuconian stuffing was renown for its softness. Martial remarked how tragic it was for a mattress to lose its Leuconian stuffing (11.21). Like tearing the hood ornament off a Mercedes, this was a castration of status. Similar to imitation Tyrian purple, circus stuffing—chopped up marsh reed—was the poor man’s alternative to Leuconian mattresses. Thus, possessing Leuconian wool reinforced elite identity by distinguishing their sleep from that of commoners.

Andrew Dalby has shown how Roman luxury involved consuming the products of empire.³³ Be it dining on food from afar or watching exotic animals in the arena, Romans loved items that traveled long distances to reach one location for their enjoyment. The bed was one of these products. The best beds felt foreign, comprised of items, that had traveled far to give their owners’ comfort.³⁴ Roman luxury items tended to be foreign in general and eastern in particular.³⁵ The contagious luxury, which Vulso brought to Rome from Asia in 187 BCE, infected and conquered the Roman bedroom. Foreignness highlighted the bed’s unnaturalness. Someone had to exert enormous effort to import these beds. The great distance demonstrated the high degree of civilization and status.

Political power?

Invited as a dinner guest, Diogenes of Sinope strolled through a rich man’s house one evening. The owner showcased his exquisite paintings adorning the walls, impressive floor

³² *Oppressae nimium vicina est fascia plumae? (159)*
Vellera Leuconicis accipe rasa sagis.
Tomentum concisa palus Circense vocatur. (160)
Haec pro Leuconico stramina pauper emit.

³³ Dalby, 243.

³⁴ Linens from Egypt carried high status in the Old Testament (Proverbs 7:16).

³⁵ Zanda, 8-9; Griffin, 91-92.

mosaics depicting gods, polished furniture dotting the room, and a beautiful bed. After viewing these things Diogenes spit in a rich man's face because "the only thing not in harmony was yourself, and since the general custom is to spit where it will do the least harm, I had no other recourse" (Galen, *Exhortation to the Study of the Arts especially Medicine: To Menodotus II*).³⁶ Interacting with Diogenes was never a good idea. Diogenes' host expected the bed to impress his guests as much as the mosaics, paintings, and fine furniture. Indeed, Diogenes said everything matched—except their owner. Hence, the bed formed one component in the game of showboating status. It was just as much a work of art as paintings and mosaics, but could the bed be used to bolster one's political standing? Scholars have recognized the ability of food and funerals to evoke political power, but did Romans view the bed as a symbol of authority?

Jostling for honor, elite Romans received guests and transacted business in their homes and even bedrooms.³⁷ Cicero noted how a big, crowded house dignified its owner, while an empty house discredited (*Off.* 1.138-39; cf. *Att.* 18.1).³⁸ Typically, the bedroom's owner outranked his guests.³⁹ For instance, Lysimachus' visit to the house of a local potente caused the latter to relinquish his bed to the Macedonian commander and sleep on straw (Diod. XXI.12.4). As previous chapters have shown, the Roman government left night unchecked. I have found no sumptuary laws combatting luxurious beds, directing their attention towards banquets, foods, and funerals.⁴⁰

³⁶ Translation by Walsh, 507-529.

³⁷ Riggsby, 41; Zanda, 16; For the *domus* as a status symbol, see Saller, 349-55; cf. Cooper, 5.

³⁸ Zanda, 16.

³⁹ Riggsby, 41; Clark, 601. cf. Cooper, 12.

⁴⁰ Zanda, *passim*.

Elites had to use the bed in a certain way to obtain prestige from it. In early-modern Europe, especially France, lying in bed connoted status. Beginning in the fourteenth century and lasting until the seventeenth, European kings and aristocrats used the bed as a throne, engaging in practices called *lit de justice* and *lit de parade*—the act of conducting business and receiving clients while lying in bed.⁴¹ Lying in bed indicated a status higher than that of guests who stood or kneeled. Such an act would have horrified the Romans. Even the most depraved emperors—Caligula, Nero, Commodus, Heliogabalus—did not receive court in bed. Only at night did society permit lying in bed. During the daytime social rules dictated a *look but don't touch* policy, and violators provoked scorn. Varro, for example, scolded Roman women (*R.R.* II.10.8):

when you came to Liburnia, you saw mothers simultaneously carrying firewood and their children, whom they are breastfeeding, some women can do one at a time, others two. These women demonstrate that our newly-delivered mothers, who lie under their mosquito-nets for some days, are worthless and despicable⁴²

Don't lie in the bed during daytime hours! Even women who had recently given birth were not exempt. Juxtaposing Roman mothers with Liburnian, Varro highlights the sloth attributed to lying in bed during daytime hours. While Liburian women multitask between breastfeeding and fetching wood, Roman mothers do nothing.

Varro does not mention the bed *per se* but one of its accessories—the mosquito net. By sheltering and separating the person from the harsh reality of the world, the use of the mosquito net during the day connoted out-of-touch elitism. When Byzantine epigrammatists Paulus Selentiarius and Agathias let the mosquito nets speak, they repeatedly boast of their impenetrability. One net boasts that “my defensive skill, which is in no way inferior to a city's

⁴¹ Eden and Carrington, 72-3; Gray 72-79; Wright 56-59; Reynolds 70-94; Louis XI felt the bed connoted royalty just as much as the throne. Sixteenth-century European women often lay in their beds, when they received congratulations and condolences from guests, Colman and Greenblatt, 60.

⁴² *cum in Liburniam venisses, te vidisse matres familias eorum afferre ligna et simul pueros, quos alerent, alias singulos, alias binos, quae ostenderunt fetas nostras, quae in conopiis iacent dies aliquot, esse eiuncidas ac contemnendas.*

wall, keeps a man who would avoid the sting of flies uneaten” (Paul. Sil., *Greek Anth.* IX.764).⁴³

Another net brags, “one may say that I save from death the winged creatures while I guard the beds of men. Can anyone be more righteous than I?” (Agth., *Greek Anth.* IX.766).⁴⁴ During the night Romans could laud mosquito nets as “righteous”. But, during the day those hiding behind them were “worthless” and “despicable”. The fact that most beds lacked this accessory also added to the mosquito-net’s elitism. Meleager expected that a net would not impede the mosquito whom he ordered to whisper in his paramour’s ear (*Greek Anth.* XXXIV.5.152). One mosquito net boasted that it belonged to wealthy bridal beds and the Queen of Paphos (Paul. Sil. *Greek Anth.* IX.765).

Because of its association with sloth, lying in bed did not confer authority like it did in early-modern Europe. But, what about seeing the bed? Could the sight of a bed instill *auctoritas* similar to seeing an aristocrat surrounded by lictors? Roman wall paintings confirm how viewing the bed created prestige for its owner. Clarke has posited that elite Romans did not desire erotic wall paintings to be realistic depictions, but to create an image of upper class luxury.⁴⁵ The bed in image 6 supports Clark’s point. The presence of a slave in the background, and purple sheets with gold inlays impress the view of its owner’s wealth and status. However, political prestige was not necessarily gained from this painting.

⁴³ ἀλεξήτειρα δὲ τέχνη
ἀνέρα μυιάων κέντρον ἀλευόμενον
ἐκ θαλίσσης ἀβρώτα μεσημβριάοντα φυλάσσει,
οὐδὲν ἀφαιροτέρη τείχεος ἀστυόχου. I admit this reference refers to the siesta, not nocturnal sleeping.

⁴⁴ ὄρνεά που σφάζω: μερόπεσσι δὲ λέκτρα φυλάσσω.
ἢ ῥά τις ἡμείων ἐστὶ δικαιότερος;

⁴⁵ Clarke, 601.

Moreover, Augustus' and Marcus Aurelius' humble beds did not diminish their *auctoritas*. When clients greeted their patron in the morning, they did not enter the bedroom. Therefore, the bed was not a political symbol, like a gaggle of clients or an extravagant funeral.

Private space

Roman bedrooms were cramped. Our notion of having a room set aside just for sleeping was invented in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ Depending on one's status, age, gender, as well as the season, Romans slept in rooms that served multiple functions, thus making ancient sleeping arrangements less private than our own.⁴⁷ Like most Roman dogs, slaves might not have a place for sleeping and therefore often found slumber in any room of the house or the foot of their master's bed.⁴⁸ Penelope Allison astutely noted a correlation between status and privacy—the more publicly one slept, the lower the status; the more privately, the higher the status.⁴⁹

Romans often shared their beds, giving them a communal feel—and not all bed sharing was conjugal. Family members of different sexes could sleep in the same bed (Apul. *Gold. Ass* IV.26). The numerous references to the comic mishaps that happen during non-conjugal bed sharing from the late-antique jokester Philogelos suggest how common was the practice (Philogelos 44, 45, 117). Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has found that the widths of most beds were between 100 and 139cm, comparable to modern day twin and queen-sized beds, which are 99cm and 152cm, respectively.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the sick were sometimes grouped together on the same

⁴⁶ Allison (2007), 273; Riggsby, 170-71; Eleanor Leach has demonstrated how *cubicula*, along with other Latin room names, do not correspond exactly to our English definitions, Leach, 50-72.

⁴⁷ Leach, 59; Allison (2004), 135.

⁴⁸ George, 22; Wallace Hadrill, 39.

⁴⁹ Allison (2007), 273.

⁵⁰ Wallace-Hadrill(1991), 224-25.

bed. Gregory of Tours imagined ten individuals (nine lepers and a saint) sleeping on a single bed in a Leperarium (Life of Fathers I.1.4).⁵¹ The illnesses need not be similar either since an epigram in the Greek Anthology mentions a lethargic and a frenetic sleeping in the same bed (IX.141).⁵²

How did bed sharing affect Roman notions of private space? I have not found any references to Romans storing valuables underneath their mattresses, even though that practice must have been common. Philogelus tells of two nincompoops sleeping in a bed. When a thief steals their blanket, one fool tells the other to go get him. The other replies “when he returns for the mattress, the two of us will seize him then” (211).⁵³ They shared a blanket; they shared a mattress. Those were communal parts of the bed. However, there was one part of the bed that Romans did not share and offered its occupant individuality and some private space—the pillow.

What is underneath your pillow? This question feels intrusive because underneath the pillow lies the bed’s private space—the contents of which should only be known between you and few—if any—others.⁵⁴ Consequently, you could tell a lot about a person by what he or she placed there.⁵⁵ Sometimes pillows functioned as a safety deposit box. Philip II slept with a valuable cup under his pillow (Ath. IV.42). Alexander knew that underneath his pillow was the safest place to hide a letter implicating his doctor’s supposed assassination attempt (Plut *Alex* 19; Curt. Ruf. III.6). But, the pillow’s private space also revealed a man’s character. Plutarch

⁵¹ Medieval hospitals in the Latin West often had multiple patients on a bed, even though Byzantine medical writers advocated for one bed per patient, Miller, 14, 146-7.

⁵² Rolleston, 37.

⁵³ Ὁκνηρῶν δύο κοιμωμένων εἰσελθὼν τις κλέπτῃς τὸ σάγιον αὐτῶν ἔλαβε. τοῦ δὲ ἐνὸς νοήσαντος καὶ εἰπόντος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον. Ἀνάστα, δίωξον αὐτόν, ἔφη. Ἄφες. ὅταν ἔλθῃ λαβεῖν τὴν τύλην, κρατοῦμεν αὐτόν οἱ δύο.

⁵⁴ Persians also believed that under the pillow could be a depository. Anton Hilhorst has made a convincing argument that the phrase *underneath the pillow* (1 Esdras III. 8) had a figurative meaning of a treasure chamber adjoining the king’s bedroom. Hilhorst, 161-163.

⁵⁵ Charlemagne hid a writing tablet under his pillow with which he vainly practiced writing his name (Einhard 25).

envisaged Alexander sleeping with the Iliad and a dagger under his pillow, underscoring his lionization of Achilles (Alex 8, 19; cf. Julian *Ep.* 12). Diogenes told a suppositious son to sleep with his prized gold under his pillow (Diog Laert 62). Suetonius reveals that Otho and Domitian slept with daggers under their pillows, highlighting the emperors' insecurity and paranoia, respectively (Otho 11, Dom 17). This private space had many benefits: quick access, the ability to hide and guard prized possessions. Thus, the space underneath the pillow highlighted what was important to the individual.

Luxury was directly proportional to the number of pillows on a bed. Narrating the prelude to a sex scene between a donkey and an aristocratic woman, Apuleius wrote (*Gold. Ass* X.20):

Four eunuchs immediately made a bed for us on the ground with many pillows puffed up airily with soft feathers, over which they carefully spread a sheet embroidered with gold and dyed with Tyrian purple; and on top of all they scattered a heap of very small pillows, dainty airs such as those on which refined women are accustomed to rest their jaws and necks.⁵⁶

The pillow could be a symbol of decadence. Apuleius links pillows with femininity by the phrase “refined women are accustomed to rest”. The four eunuchs and heap of pillows evoke femininity. Apuleius stresses their puffiness, airiness, the soft feathers, and especially their smallness. The refined pillow was soft and small. This was excessive softness. Moreover, having four eunuchs make one bed and the “heap of pillows” matches the woman’s elite identity by showcasing her excess. A head only needs one pillow. Her pampered excess of eunuchs and pillows matches her Tyrian purple sheets. Instead, the multitude of pillows elevates the bed’s softness, and therefore its femininity. Image 11 shows the woman reclining over a fluffy pillow, heightening her femininity.

⁵⁶ *Quattuor eunuchi confestim pulvillis compluribus ventose tumentibus pluma delicata terrestrem nobis cubitum praestruunt, sed et strangula veste auro ac murice Tyrio depicta probe consternunt ac desuper brevibus admodum, sed satis copiosis pulvillis aliis nimis modicis, quis maxillas et cervices delicatae mulieres suffulcire consuerunt, superstruunt.*

Men, on the contrary, should have only one pillow. Any more and the pillow effeminized him—sleeping too comfortably to be a real man. Benedict's rules, for example, dictated that monks should only possess one pillow, along with a mat, a woolen blanket, and a

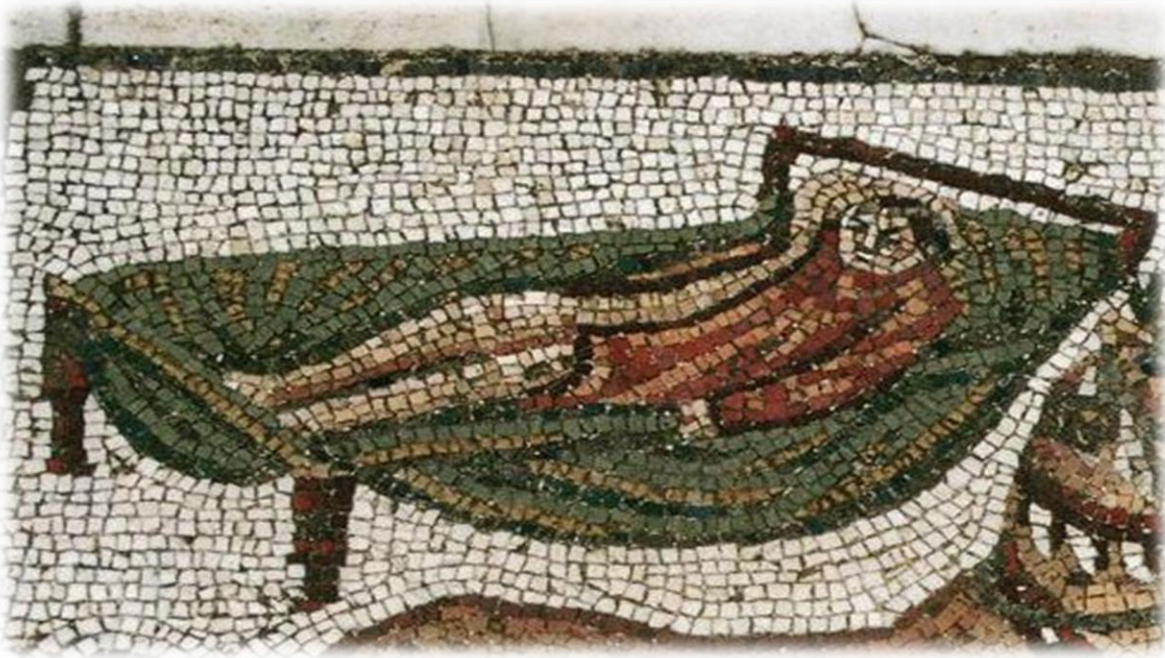


Image 11: Love Scene Mosaic, Centocelle

lighter covering (Rule of St. Ben. 55.13).⁵⁷ Athenaius mentions a profligate young man who sleeps with three pillows under his head and two under his feet (6.255e). The council of Acragas lavishly bestowed two pillows for their guards (Diod. XIII.84.6). The man in image 12 has the bare essentials, including no pillow but his hand. Images 12 and 13 also show men with either no pillows or one.

⁵⁷ Augustine preached that one could maintain prayer while sleeping (Sermon 80.7), Adkin (1996), 61-66.

Image 12: The Horse Mosaics, Carthage ca. 300 CE



Similar to having multiple pillows, wealthy Romans also possessed multiple beds to showcase their status.⁵⁸ Lyco earned praise from Diogenes Laertius because he bequeathed beds to three of his freedmen, demonstrating the philosopher's carefulness and wise management (V.74).⁵⁹ John the Subdeacon gave up the easy life, writing "I used to have beds decked with gold and precious covers and for these god gave me a mattress of papyrus and skins (Sayings of Desert Fathers X.76)."⁶⁰ John reveals his former lifestyle not only by the gold and precious covers but also by owning multiple beds. Like the pillows, multiple beds boasts of excess, for it reveals possessing multiple *cubicula*. To John the Subdeacon beds not only

⁵⁸ Wallace Hadrill (1991), 57.

⁵⁹ Shakespeare bequeathed his second best bed to his widow while leaving his best one to his daughter Sussanah and her husband John Hall. This arrangement signified their status after the bard's death, Burgess, 81.

⁶⁰ Translated by Waddell, 143.

indicated the occupant's lifestyle but also broadcast his character. In this case, an ascetic bed marked his a conversion, similar to Nero's demotion.

Smell the status

The best beds were not just seen and felt. They could be sniffed out. Indeed, if a Roman randomly woke up in a dark bedroom, his nose could tell the social status of the room's occupants.⁶¹ Martial describes how a poor bedroom could smell at night (XII.32.13-2):

A chamberpot was leaking through a cracked side; the neck of a amphora was surrounded by mildew; the putrid smell from a jug revealed that the anchovies had gone bad, and this stench was arguably worse than that which comes from a fishpond. Neither a block of Tolosan cheese nor a four-year-old crown of black pennyroyal, nor ropes trimmed of their garlic and onions, nor a mother's pot full of nasty resin was missing [from this room].⁶²

Poverty reeks. Not only did cracked chamberpots emit foul smells but odors from the kitchen (cheese, garlic, onions) stifled the air and invaded the bedroom. Rich houses, on the contrary, demarcated smells, banishing unwanted ones to their proper location, i.e. away from the bedroom. To keep offensive smells at a distance from their bedrooms elites located latrines and cesspits next to the kitchen.⁶³ Rich Romans preferred a pleasant-smelling bedroom over food sanitation. Cicero noted how architects relegate drains to the rear of the house to keep them

⁶¹ This hypothetical Roman could probably have also distinguished whether he was in a public or private space because different places and events had certain smells, Smith, 60-1; Kelly Olson remarked that the way a person smelled revealed a Roman's rank and moral character. Olson, (2008) 113 cf. Toner, 145. This was not unique to the Romans either. Socrates averred that slaves and freemen smell differently. This reference comes from Classen, 17-18.

⁶² *Matella curto rupta latere meiebat;*
Foco virenti suberat amphorae cervix;
Fuisse gerres aut inutiles maenas 15
Odor inpudicus urcei fatebatur,
Qualis marinae vix sit aura piscinae.
Nec quadra deerat casei Tolosatis,
Quadrina nigri nec corona pulei
Calvaeque restes alioque cepisque, 20
Nec plena turpi matris olla resina,

⁶³ Alex Scobie goes on to state that few dwellings in Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii were connected with the sewers, thus implying that chamber pots were the norm, Scobie 409; cf. Seneca *Ep.* 104.6

away from their masters (*De Natura Deorum* II.56.141). Indeed, as one scholar of the senses has remarked “odours form the building blocks of cosmologies, class hierarchies and political orders; they can enforce social structures or transgress them.”⁶⁴

Daytime was smelly. Farming is sweaty work, and those in the city fared no better. Dyers, fishmongers, butchers, tanners, and cooks brought their odors home by wearing them on their clothes (Mart. XII.59; Plaut. *Cap.* 813).⁶⁵ Rotting refuse, fish stands, public latrines, and tanneries using urine to cleanse clothes emanated within the urban landscape.⁶⁶

Night was an attempted escape from daytime odors. Romans bathed in the late afternoon washing away daytime filth (Plut. *Alex.* 23; Apul. *Gold. Ass* V.2; IX.17; H.A. *Hadr.* 22).⁶⁷ Darkness gave ancient litterbugs the opportunity to empty chambers pots out of windows (Juv. 3.277). It was unusual for Romans to sleep in the same clothes they wore during the day since ascetics had a reputation of sleeping in their daytime clothing (Const. of Lyon, *Germ.* 4).⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Classen et al, p. ii.

⁶⁵ According to Strabo, the dye factories in Tyre and Sidon were located down-wind so that residences could avoid their unpleasant smells XVI.2.27 cf. Jesen, 107.

⁶⁶ Classen et al, 17-18.

⁶⁷ Laurence, 158; Nielsen, 135. For a discussion on the morality of baths, see Toner, 53-64.

⁶⁸ Romans appear to have been casual bed dressers. For example, A sexually frustrated Propertius lamented “she hardly ever lets me in, and typically rejects me: or if she comes, she sleeps clothed at the edge of the bed (III.21.7-8). Martial noted “a breast-band, a tunic, and opaque robes conceal you; but for me no girl lies naked enough” (Martial XI.104.7-8). Men also appear to have worn little at night. At dusk Vitellius’s soldiers suddenly seized him in his bedroom at and hailed him emperor while he was wearing his house-clothes (Suet Vit. 8.1). The man in figure 3 evinces Roman’s unpretentious nightwear. Ammaninus also noted how the Huns never take off their shirts when sleeping (Amm. XXXI.2). In Bethlehem Jerome scolded a rival who when an earthquake struck in the middle of the beds, night awoke us all out of our sleep, you, the most prudent and the wisest of men, began to pray without putting your clothes on” (Jer. *Contra Vigilantius* 11). Temperature certainly played a role. For more on Roman sleep wear, Adkin (1999-00), 619-20; Olsen (2003), 209-10; cf. Dionisotti, 108. Riggsby has stated that the bedroom was a place for a casual dress, Riggsby, 46-7.

But night was not a complete escape from foul smells. Romans loathed the burning smells associated with night. To alleviate hysteria some doctors used foul-smelling odors from extinguished lamp wicks (Soran. III.29):

The majority of the ancients and almost all followers of the other sects have made use of ill-smelling odors (such as burnt hair, extinguished lamp wicks, charred deer's horn, burnt wool, burnt flock, skins, and rags, castoreum with which they anoint the nose and pitch, cedar resin, bitumen, squashed bed bugs, and all substances to have an oppressive smell) in the opinion that the uterus flees from evil smells.⁶⁹

Most of Soranus' ill-smelling odors are related to burning. Plutarch envisaged Aeschines criticizing Demosthenes for his speeches smelled of lamplight (Plut. *Dem.* 8.5). Romans also disliked the smell of lamp oil, and the wealthy sought to mask its unpleasant odor by adding perfume to it (Petr. *Sat.* V.70).⁷⁰ The purple sheets *en vogue* came with a stench (Pliny NH IX.127; Mart. IV.4; IX.62).⁷¹

Romans turned to the bed to shield them against undesirable odors.⁷² In fact, a good bed not only fought against foul odors but stimulated the senses.⁷³ As one Christian apocryphal text from the third-century described, "her bedroom is bright with light and breaths the aroma of balsoam and all spices and gives out a sweet smell of myrrh and Indian leaf and within which are myrtles strewn on the floor, all kinds of scented flowers (Acts of Thomas 6).⁷⁴ Aelius had a bed with four high cushions filled with rose petals and lilies (H.A. *Ael.* 4-6). Rose, saffron, and

⁶⁹ Translation by Temkin, 152. For ancient medicine's use of aromas, see Albert, 102-10.

⁷⁰ Classen et al, 20.

⁷¹ Classen et al, 20.

⁷² Hobson, 105-15.

⁷³ Homer and the Bible too saw the bedroom as a refuge when he wrote that Aphrodite took Paris out of battle and to Helen's sweet-smelling bedroom (Il. 3.382); Myrrh, aloe, and cinnamon also enlivened bedrooms (Proverbs 7:17) Cinnamon was exotic smell. The Romans imported it from East Asia through Arabia and Africa. Connors, 305.

⁷⁴ Translation from Dalby, 244. The Byzantine empress Zoë's bedroom, comparable to a blacksmith's shop, had slaves working burning braziers around her bedroom, mixing and bottling perfumes year round (Michael Psellus, *Chron.* VI.64) .

violet were some of the Romans' favorite smells, and beds show that.⁷⁵ Dried petals of saffron filled pillows of the rich.⁷⁶ Aurora left Tithonus's saffron bed (Ver. *Aen.* IX. 460). Athenaeus (admittedly quoting Aristophanes) mentions bedcovers smelling of roses (Ath. 2.48c) and it was no accident that after writing of perfumes in Homer Athenaeus immediately followed it with Homeric beds (I.29). Romans also perfumed their walls with scented water and their floors with rose-petals.⁷⁷ Like Tyrian sheets and Leuconian wool, the best perfumes were foreign.⁷⁸ Cyphi, an Egyptian perfumed made of 16 ingredients, was the Chanel No.5 of bedroom perfumes because it aided sleep, brought pleasant dreams, and removed stress (Plut. *Isis and Osr.* 80).

Perfumed nights and beds came with more than a financial cost. First, Romans associated pleasant-smelling beds with femininity.⁷⁹ Propertius notes that women's bedrooms smelled good with citronwood and orician terebinth (III.7.49).⁸⁰ Catullus ridiculed Flavius for his effeminate bed because it "shouts that you do not spend unmarried nights laying vainly quiet, fragrant with garlands and Syrian oil, cushions and pillows here and there" (6).⁸¹ Pleasant smells

⁷⁵ Kennett, 82. The rose often symbolized excess. Cleopatra and Nero showered banquet guests with rose petals. In fact the former's guests stood knee-deep in rose petals; Vitellius strolled across a battlefield on a path of roses (Athenaeus *Deipn.* 4.147-48; Suet. *Ner.* 31.2; Tac *Hist.* 2.70). Barrow, 183-202.

⁷⁶ Kennett, *History of perfume*, 80.

⁷⁷ Kennett, 81; Classen, 18.

⁷⁸ Griffin, 93; For the costs of some perfumes, see Brun, 299-300.

⁷⁹ Butler, 94, n.18.

⁸⁰ Orician terebinth is a tree known for possessing aromatic substances.

⁸¹ *nam te non viduas iacere noctes
nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat
sertis ac Syrio fragrans olivo,
pulvinusque peraeque et hic et ille*

and soft beds complimented each other—and both were objects of scorn.⁸² Roman moralists loved to note the frivolity of bed luxuries, such as perfume. Martial, for instance, wrote (II.16):

Zoilus is sick: his bedspread has given him a fever. If he was healthy, what would his scarlet sheets do? What would his bed from the Nile do? What would his bed steeped in the perfumes from Sidon do? Unless he is under distress, why does he flaunt such foolish wealth? Why do you receive doctors' visits? Fire all your Machaons. Do you want to get well? Use my sheets.⁸³

Zoilus possesses an elite bed—dyed covers, exotic fragrance, and a flashy Egyptian import. Everything matches, except the fever. Resembling forensic oratory more than an epigram, this passage gives evidence of a debate within Roman society over how beds affected the body. It pitted status-seekers, such as Zoilus, against self-righteous moralists like Martial. Similar to an orator, Martial first addresses his audience by asking why. Why does Zoilus care about these things—the bed’s color, smell, and location? Interestingly, Martial never implicates comfort as the cause for Zoilus’ illness. It is easy to understand why someone wants a comfortable bed. Instead Martial directs his scorn on the non-practical—and therefore luxurious—aspects of an elite bed. Martial then switches to the second person (*tibi, dimitte, vis, sume*) with a question, followed with advice. Martial also attacks the bed’s foreign origin. Everything foreign—a Nile bed, Sidonian perfume, Machaonas doctors—needs to be thrown away. Martial’s own sheets, which presumably are Roman in accordance with the *mos maiorum*, will remedy the illness.

Active beds

⁸² Sweet-smelling however, need not be linked with eroticism since Catullus also wrote that Ariadne's chaste bed smell of myrtles from the Eurotas (Cat. 64. 87). Lilja, 47-52, 76-77.

83 *Zoilus aegrotat: faciunt hanc stragula febrem.*
Si fuerit sanus, coccina quid facient?
quid torus a Nilo, quid Sidone tinctus olenti?
ostendit stultas quid nisi morbus opes?
Quid tibi cum medicis? dimitte Machaonas omnis. 5
Vis fieri sanus? stragula sume mea.

The inhabitants of Agragas needed to get tough when the Carthaginians besieged their city. So the Agragantini called an emergency meeting. At this meeting the town council issued a decree that would surely get their soldiers ready to defend the city:

no guards should have more than one mattress, one cover, one sheepskin, and two pillows. When such a measure was their most rigorous kind of bedding, one can get an idea of the luxury which prevailed in their living generally (Diod. XIII.84.5-6).⁸⁴

We are supposed to chuckle at Diodorus' farcical comment. First, why would guards receive sleeping gear? But, that only forms half of the joke. The amount of bedding these guards received was also comical: a cover, a sheepskin, a mattress, and two pillows. Two pillows! This underscores the ludicrous luxury in which the Agragantini slept. Luxury pampered these people so greatly that even under dire circumstances they permitted their guards not only to sleep, but also to do so comfortably. So comfortably, in fact, that the average Roman would have felt fortunate to sleep in such a manner. The beds of these pampered guards demonstrate the Agragantini's soft character, begging the question of how could the Agragantini ever withstand a siege from the formidable Carthaginians.

By way of example, let's juxtapose the Agragantini's beds with Plutarch's image of the Spartans' (Plut. *Lyc.* 16.6-7):

Their entire education was aimed at cultivating total obedience, perseverance under stress, and winning battle. Therefore, as they approach their prime, their training lasts throughout the year, they shave their heads, walk barefoot, and train naked so that they become inured to many things. When they are 12 years old, they lose their tunic, and wear just one cloak for the whole year. Their bodies were dirty, for they do not bath or oil up: only on a few days each year did they partake in such humanity. They slept in their squadron and herded together on mattresses, which they gathered for themselves, which grew from the tips of reeds that growing along the Eurotas River, snapped off with their hands without a tool. In the winter they throw in something they call "twilight" and mix it into their mattresses, because they believed it can give off heat like wood.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ διὰ δὲ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς κατὰ τὴν πόλιν εὐπορίας τοσαύτην συνέβαινε τρυφὴν εἶναι παρὰ τοῖς Ἀκραγαντίνοις, ὥστε μετ' ὀλίγον τῆς πολιορκίας γινομένης ποιῆσαι ψήφισμα περὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς φυλακείοις διανυκτερευόντων, ὅπως μὴ τις ἔχῃ πλεῖον τύλης καὶ περιστρώματος καὶ κωδίου καὶ θυεῖν προσκεφαλαίων. [6] τοιαύτης δὲ τῆς σκληροτάτης στρωμνῆς ὑπαρχούσης, ἔξεστι λογίζεσθαι τὴν κατὰ τὸν λοιπὸν βίον τρυφὴν.

⁸⁵ ἡ δ' ἄλλη πᾶσα παιδεία πρὸς τὸ ἄρχεσθαι καλῶς ἐγίνετο καὶ καρτερεῖν πονοῦντα καὶ νικᾶν μαχόμενον. διὸ καὶ τῆς ἡλικίας προερχομένης ἐπέτεινον αὐτῶν τὴν ἄσκησιν, ἐν χροῷ τε κείμενοι καὶ βαδίζοντες ἀνυποδότητοι παίζοντες τε γυμνοὺς ὡς τὰ πολλὰ συνεθίζοντες. γινόμενοι δὲ δωδεκαετῆς ἄνευ χιτῶνος ἤδη διετέλουν, ἐν ἱμάτιον εἰς τὸν

The Acragantini's luxurious beds matched their luxurious culture, while Sparta's hyper-masculine beds matched their culture. The Acragantini slept on two pillows, while Plutarch omits any Spartan pillows – unfathomable items for these Greeks. The Acragantini were given their beds at the behest of their council, while Spartan boys had to construct their own beds with their own hands with tools. The Acragantini were unaccustomed to their beds, which were only temporary, while Spartan boys would sleep on reeds well into adulthood because it was part of their education. Each of the Acragantini enjoyed individualized sleep by being given his own mattress and blankets, while Spartans slept together like farm animals. Last, while the Acragantini were presumably grown men, the Spartans were twelve-years-old boys. In short, the Acragantini slept like pampered humans. The Spartans, however, slept like farm animals, grouped together and on reeds.

What did these two beds lead to? First, we are meant to mock the Acragantini for their soft living. Their beds would not equip them for the horrors and stresses of a siege from the redoubtable Carthaginians. Beds would enervate the Acragantini. On the contrary, Spartan beds are meant to intimidate. How could anyone sleep under such uncomfortable conditions? Doing so led to obedience, perseverance, and victories. Twelve-year-old boys underwent this training because rough sleeping inured bodies.

The Acragantini, Spartans, and Romans would agree on one thing, however. Soldiers should sleep rigorously. Soft beds were dangerous. They only disagree on what constituted rigorous sleeping. Romans had anxiety over how their soldiers slept because they believed beds

ἐνιαυτὸν λαμβάνοντες, αὐχμηροὶ τὰ σώματα καὶ λουτρῶν καὶ ἀλειμμάτων ἄπειροι: πλὴν ὀλίγας ἡμέρας τινὰς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ τῆς τοιαύτης φιλάνθρωπίας μετεῖχον. [7] ἐκάθευδον δὲ ὁμοῦ κατ' ἴλην καὶ ἀγέλην ἐπὶ στιβάδων, ὥς αὐτοῖς συνεφόρου, τοῦ παρὰ τὸν Εὐρώταν πεφυκότος καλάμου τὰ ἄκρα ταῖς χερσὶν ἄνευ σιδήρου κατακλάσαντες. ἐν δὲ τῷ χειμῶνι τοὺς λεγομένους λυκόφονας ὑπεβάλλοντο καὶ κατεμίγνυσαν ταῖς στιβάσι, θερμαντικὸν ἔχειν τι τῆς ὕλης δοκούσης.

mold characters. To underscore how battle-harden Alexander's soldiers were, Charidemus tells Darius that the Macedonian army uses the earth as its bed (Curt. Ruf III.2.15). Pliny the Elder decried soldiers along the German frontier collecting goose feathers for their officers beds (NH 10.54).⁸⁶ Ammianus similarly scolded Roman soldiers for giving up the stone beds of old in favor of feather beds (XXII.4.6).⁸⁷ Army life was hard, and beds should match that. How could someone march for hours, go without food, and fight during the day, yet spend night sleeping in pampered luxury? Seneca explained that comfortable beds make soldiers afraid to die and act like men since their life becomes invested with value (Ep. 124). Seneca links beds with unmanliness. William Arrowsmith wrote it best "luxury makes a man lose his specific function".⁸⁸ It is not that a weakling chooses a soft bed. It is that a soft bed made a weakling.

Soft beds were dangerous to soldiers, but not to everyone. Celsus advises a soft bed for patients who need to fatten up and a hard one for those who need to shed some pounds (I.3.15-16). Galen similarly advised that cool beds fatten while warm ones thin (*In Hippocratis librum vi epidemiarum commentarii* VI. 21). The bed's ability to mold a person gave it potential and danger. The correct bed depended on the person. Galen shunned hard beds, writing "immediate causes of diseases are: overheating, chills, sleeplessness, distress, worries, indigestion, sleeping on a hard bed, toil, drunkenness and other such things" (Hippocrates' Nature of Man II.162).⁸⁹ Galen equated hard beds with overexertion, anxiety, and drunkenness. Soft beds, on the

⁸⁶ Wallace Hadrill (1990a), 89. In some editions of *the Natural History* the reference is listed as 10.27.

⁸⁷ Luxury softening soldiers was another trope. Florus attributes Roman victory over Antiochus to the Hellenistic king's easy luxurious living (History I.24) cf. Berry, 67. For Ammianus' contempt at the loss of Roman *virtus*, see Earl, 102-21.

⁸⁸ Arrowsmith, 317.

⁸⁹ Translation by W.J. Lewis, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgajpd/medicina_antiqua/tr_GNatHom.html Retried on February 20, 2014.

contrary, he asserted gave salutary effects to old men that were comparable to those obtained of bathing, sleep, and eating (*De Marcore* V). Similarly, Soranus advised women who had recently given birth to sleep on a soft bed (II.3). However, he goes on to state “one should place a flat, thin leaden plate beneath the linens at nighttime; the women should use a threadbare coat for a cover and the bed should not be soft” (III.12.46).⁹⁰ Virtues and body types were connected with the bed. As we have seen, Martial implicated luxurious beds as the cause of a couple of illnesses (II.16; XII.17).

For moralists, however, the bed was just a mundane object that did not affect the body. Seneca wrote “that which makes poverty burdensome for us also makes wealth burdensome. In the same way that it makes no difference whether you rest a sick person on a wooden or golden bed. Regardless of where you carry him, he brings his own illness with him” (Ep. I.17.12).⁹¹ While beds appear differently, their effects were the same—nothing.

Bedbugs unite

Although Romans believed beds separated the civilized from uncivilized, rich from poor, macho from effeminate, there was one thing that everyone—Roman, barbarian, and animal—could agree on. Bed bugs. The Romans hated bed bugs!⁹² I have been unable to find a single instance when an ascetic sought out a bug-infested bed even though fleas and lice were the antithesis of luxury and comfort (Mart. XI.32, cf. Cat. 23.1-2).⁹³ The only good bed bug was a

⁹⁰ Translation by Temkin, 169.

⁹¹ *Illud quod paupertatem nobis gravem fecerat et divitias graves fecit. Quemadmodum nihil refert utrum aegrum in ligneo lecto an in aureo colloces - quocumque illum transtuleris, morbum secum suum transferet.*

⁹² Greeks also complained of bed bugs, Aristophanes *Wealth* 534-46; *Frogs* 114.

⁹³ Gregory of Tours’ remark on a saint who slept with nine lepers in the same bed shows that ascetics looked for challenging sleeping locations (Greg Tours, *Life of Fathers* I.1.4).

dead one. Soranus had to tell his patients that the smell of squashed bed bugs would not remedy hysteria (III.29).⁹⁴ It is no accident that some Romans linked destroying bed bugs with regaining one's sanity. The thought of these pests—be they bed bugs, lice, or fleas—made Romans squirm.⁹⁵

Ridding the world of, or at least escaping, humanity's nemesis made people feel better about themselves by alleviating their torments. Lucian, for instance, wrote of a fool who kept being bitten by a bedbug. To elude his harasser, the fool extinguished a lamp, stating "now you cannot see me, flea" (Greek Anth. XI.432).⁹⁶ Lucian joke underscores the inescapability of bedbugs. He cannot kill it; cannot find it; cannot evade it. He can only hide in the dark, and we know how effective that will be.⁹⁷

Numerous references to bedbugs attest to how their inescapability and ubiquity (Mart XI.32, 56). A world without bedbugs was unimaginable.⁹⁸ Aristotle's belief in spontaneous generation, which the Romans left unchallenged, implies their universality. He posited that fleas come from putrefying matter, bugs from the moisture of living animals, and lice from animal flesh (*Hist Anim.* V.30). Since putrefying matter and animals exist throughout the land, so too must these pesky insects. In fact, bedbugs even resided underwater, pestering the sleep of fish. Underscoring bedbug ubiquity, Pliny the Elder wrote (NH IX.71):

I may say that there is no land production which has not its like in the sea; no, not even those insects which

⁹⁴ The belief that bedbugs had medicinal benefits continued into the twentieth century. Potter, 14; Busvine, 176-181.

⁹⁵ The Romans included many species under the term *cimex*, Smith, 250; cf. Scarborough, 85, 87. Pliny thought that they had healing powers against snake bites. Pliny NH 24.4; Busvine, 67-70.

⁹⁶ "Ἐσβεσε τὸν λύχον μῶρος, ψυλλῶν ὑπὸ πολλῶν δακνόμενος, λέξας. "Οὐκέτι με βλέπετε"

⁹⁷ Greasing the bed with ox gall and vinegar was one Roman recommended extermination method, Varro *R.R.* I.2.25; Columella II.9, cf. Smith and Secoy, 1053.

⁹⁸ Cf. Busvine, 126.

frequent our public-houses in summer, and are so troublesome with their nimble leaps, nor yet those which more especially make the human hair their place of refuge; for these are often drawn up in a mass collected around the bait. This, too, is supposed to be the reason why the sleep of fish is sometimes so troubled in the night. Upon some fish, indeed, these animals breed as parasites.⁹⁹

Bed bugs were everywhere! Even if Lucilius' fool grew gills, he would not escape his tormentor. Pliny corresponds the torments fish suffered with that of humans. If these nocturnal bloodsuckers tormented fish, they must also have tormented the entire world; thus, Romans expected bed bugs to be part of the sleeping experience. Hence, Romans recognized universal hatred of bed bugs. Common enemies create common identities. The inescapability and hatred of bedbugs unified man and animal kind, thus, transcending culturally-constructed divides.

Conclusion

When scholars focus on a narrow topic, they run the risk of inflating their subject's importance. It would be wrong to conclude that Romans obsessed over beds. Most Roman writers never mention them and when they do, it is usually tangential to their topic. For instance, to praise Lyco's careful management of his estate Diogenes Laertius noted that the philosopher even included beds in his will (Diog.V.74). To illustrate the abstruse concept of the forms Plato chose the bed because of its mundaneness (*Rep.* X.596a-598a). Moreover, most Roman beds must have resembled those of Lucius' master in the *Golden Ass*, who was so poor that he could not afford the simplest bedding (IX.32). The bed was (and remains) an object easily taken for granted. However, some Romans, such as Propertius and Martial, were obsessed with the bed. This is exactly what beds reveal about nighttime. They separated people.

Beds refute the idea that darkness and sleeping equalized people. Instead, these mundane objects separated people: civilized from uncivilized, rich from the poor, trendy elitists from self-righteous moralists. The bed's matching principle demonstrates that Romans believed sleeping

⁹⁹ Translation by Bostock and Riley, 458-9. This passage is sometimes listed as NH 9.71.

reinforced daytime status. Night continued daytime luxury, and moralists disdain for it. When Diodorus denounced individuals' luxurious habits of eating, drinking, and sleeping, he saw nocturnal activity as a continuing into the day and vice versa (I.45.2).

Furthermore, Romans were judging and being judged at night, just like the day. The blinkers did not go off at sunset. Prying, judgmental eyes remained, as Seneca indicates people ask how you sleep and they find out. In contrast to hiding a person's character, night revealed it. But, even here we see how rich and poor Romans slept differently.¹⁰⁰ Hence, beds demonstrate that night was a continuation of the day. Soft beds led to wimpy soldiers on the battlefield, and purple beds conferred the same elite status as consuming delicacies during the day.

Last, to argue that the lower classes owned the night cannot be correct, or at least not entirely correct, because the bed, and by derivation nighttime, reinforced an individual's place in society. Like us, the Romans spent most of the night sleeping, when rich and poor did not transcend social hierarchy. That was true for the dog sleeping outside, the prostitute in her *cella*, the Hun on his horse, and the aristocrat in his Tyrian sheets. For all these reasons I find the Roman bed to have been a divisive object. Indeed, the only thing about the bed that everyone could agree on was its smallest aspect—bed bugs.

¹⁰⁰ Cooper, 17.

Conclusion

I began this dissertation by analyzing how Gallus used darkness to conceal his identity. I finished by arguing where a Roman slept revealed his identity. With Gallus we saw an individual who desired night to be a change from day. With beds we saw how Roman society desired night to be a continuation of day. This quintessential struggle between an individual who wanted nocturnal change and a society that demanded continuity underlies two larger, dichotomous feelings about darkness: confidence and anxiety. For Roman society as a whole, continuity brought confidence, while change gave it anxiety. Slaves grounded to their masters' premises and beds that matched an individual's daytime status and character instilled confidence because night did not upset social order.

At the individual level too, night brought anxiety and confidence, whereby darkness emboldened some individuals, and the very confidence some people obtained, also made others nervous. Darkness created a time of impunity, or at least perceived impunity. The issue of nocturnal confidence combines two strands of argument running throughout this dissertation: night intensified emotions and maintained social divisions among Romans. With nocturnal confidence and anxiety, we see an emotional divide as distinct as day and night. Just as the literate rich had more outlets to alleviate boredom, beds reeked of status, and slaves played their part at night by remaining detained, so too did nocturnal violence separate the confident from anxious, the perpetrator from victim. Night freed some and imprisoned others.

Unwritten rules of scholarship dictate that historians should not ask *what if* questions. Yet, the easiest way to distinguish day from night and discern the influence of darkness is by asking *what if this had happened during the day*. Applying this hypothetical question to evidence presented in this dissertation reveals how night increased the power of sounds,

imprisoned lonely individuals, and threatened slave-owners' control over their human property. With exception of my argument that darkness intensified boredom, many of my conclusions support an assertion Palmer made that night acts as "a frontier of possibility."¹

This dissertation's title informs readers that they are embarking on a social history. Indeed, we have seen how masters desired to confine their slaves, how beds indicated identity, social constructions of sounds, and remedies of boredom. But this study on Roman nighttime was more than just social history: it was also environmental history. How night affected Romans and how Romans engaged with darkness formed the bedrock of this study. Similar to how music adds emotional power to a movie scene, night created a backdrop that pushed Romans further to the extremes of human experience. By combining environmental history and the history of emotions, this dissertation has pictured Roman nighttime as a struggle. Darkness created a struggle to keep emotions in check and a struggle to maintain continuity with the daytime.

Unlike other parts of the environment—say a tree, water, or air—night is paradoxically ephemeral, eternal, and cyclical. No one can prevent night from occurring. No one can escape it. This dissertation has explored how one ancient civilization dealt with something as universal as death and taxes. It examined how night affected Romans, and how Romans experienced and socially regulated the night. I have repeatedly asserted that darkness intensified emotions. When Seneca wrote, "night displays our anxieties; it does not hide them" he understood that darkness is more of a psychological than physical change (Ep. VI. 56).²

In addition to examining social, emotional, and environmental history, this dissertation implicitly studied the effects of technology, for the elephant in the room—or in this case, on the pages—was electricity. Many histories of nighttime have sought to recreate the lost world of

¹ Palmer, 15.

² *nox exhibet molestiam, non tollit...*

night before electricity. This dissertation has provided a small piece of investigation into how technology and night, which is part of the environment, affect people. Indeed, there is a triangular relationship among technology, people, and the environment: each affect and are affected by each other. This study has explored the big questions of how electricity changed nighttime and how the dark hours have remained the same.

This question of nocturnal confidence—and many others asked in this dissertation—explored *how Romans felt at night*. However, why is nighttime in ancient Rome important? After all, the Romans have been dead for a solid 1500 years, and electricity has replaced fire as a mainstay of nocturnal technology, such as fire has become obsolete. This dissertation's importance is not in demonstrating that night intensified emotions and divided people. No, the more important, more interesting, and near impossible analysis is not to compare ancient daytime to ancient nighttime but to ask *did the Romans feel more comfortable with night than we do*. It not only gets back to the idea of nocturnal confidence, but also forms part of the larger mission of social historians: to learn *how has life changed and how has it remained the same*.

In her book on the history of insomnia, Eluned Summers-Bremmer argued that our pre-modern predecessors possessed greater nocturnal literacy—awareness of complex interactions of different kinds of darkness.³ In other words, electricity may not have made us more comfortable with night, but more separated from it. The average Roman certainly knew more about constellations and when the next full moon would occur than the typical American. But, separation does not indicate comfort.

The Romans certainly had more anxiety over sea travel, childbirth, and food supply than modern Americans do. Even the months of August and September caused more unease because

³ Summers-Bremmer, 8.

late summer was a season of death in Italy (Juv. IV.56).⁴ A change in nocturnal confidence between the ancient and modern world, however, is tougher to pin down. Plenty of ancient nocturnal worries have become less prevalent. Ancient city dwellers feared fires—a disaster far more likely to occur at night because of lamps, torches and candles—far more than we do (Juv III.197-8). Although we today still recognize our vulnerability while sleeping, for a society with as many slaves as Rome that vulnerability must have felt more acute (cf. Tac. *Ann.* XIV.44). Nevertheless, fires and slave murderers happened irregularly in antiquity, perhaps being as frequent as an earthquake or familial slaughter in our own. To determine a society's comfort with the night one must examine continuity between day and night. Continuity breeds confidence. For instance, the phrase “day and night” reoccurs throughout our literary sources and across genres. This phrase reveals a night that had no effect. A person maintained a steady course despite the shift from light to darkness. That is what Roman society wanted with their beds.

Much of the nocturnal experience has stayed the same. My argument in the first two chapters on sounds and boredom asserted that night intensified emotions, which we can identify with today. Darkness still creates more excitement, fear, and boredom than light. Darkness and the unknown still make us nervous, and night remains a time of violence and for us to imagine the worst. My argument in the last two chapters on slaves and beds asserted that night divides us also remains recognizable. Not only does night separate those who work from those with leisure, but also those with virtue from those without it. Moralists then and now recognize darkness empowers the miscreants of society. Seneca, who averred that virtue is sunburnt, while pleasure searches for darkness, would have agreed with today's aphorism that nothing good happens after 2am (*De vita beata* 7.3).

⁴ Shaw (1996) and Scheidel (1996).

By exploring the history of nighttime we learn about ourselves: how society shapes us and how our instincts program us. To what extent does our common biology versus our common culture drive the similar views on nighttime, I leave for others to explore. In fact, the history of night is a large topic, and many questions about it remain. In this dissertation readers did not find a tapestry, but just two threads—emotion and status—in the tapestry of Roman nighttime. In fact, my examination of Roman nighttime resembles a museum. What you have seen on display represents only a fraction of the material I unearthed, which in itself represents only a fraction of what remains to be discovered and what happened. I hope others who see the ancient and modern world so differently will explore ancient nighttime.

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