



The Family in Late Antiquity

The Rise of Christianity and
the Endurance of Tradition



Geoffrey Nathan

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Geoffrey S. Nathan



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To Nobuko, Emily and Lucas, my own family

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GSN

Los Angeles
February 1999

ABBREVIATIONS

AM	Anno Mundi (in the year of the world)
cos.	consul
fr.	fragment
LI.	Libertus/Liberta (freedman or woman)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
or.	oratio
pr.	praefatio
s.c.	senatusconsultum

Sources

Note: numbers in parentheses after legal or canon citations indicate the date.

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Epigraphique</i> (1888–)
Amb., <i>Comm. in Iac.</i>	Ambrose, <i>Commentarium in Iacobum</i>
<i>de ob. Theo.</i>	<i>de obitu Theodosii</i>
<i>de off.</i>	<i>de officiis</i>
<i>de vid.</i>	<i>de viduis</i>
<i>de virg.</i>	<i>de virginitate</i>
<i>de mysteriis</i>	<i>de myster.</i>
<i>Ep</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
Ambr., <i>Quaest. vet. et nov. Testam</i>	Ambrosiaster, <i>Quaestiones veteris et novi Testamenti</i>
Amm. Mar.	Ammianus Marcellinus, <i>Res Gestae</i>
Anon. Val.	Anonymous Valesianus
App., <i>Bell. Civ.</i>	Appian, <i>Bella Civilia</i>
Apul., <i>Apol.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Apologia</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
Aug., <i>Conf.</i>	Augustine, <i>Confessiones</i>
<i>de bono coniug.</i>	<i>de bono coniugali</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

de cat. rud.
de civ. Dei
de cur. pro mort. ger.
de doc. Christ.
de fide et oper.
de Gen. ad litt.
de incomp. nupt.
de nat. et gratia
de quant. anim.
de sanct. vir.
de serm. Dom. in mon.
Enarr. in psalmos
Ep.

Serm.
Aul. Gel., *Att. Noct.*
Aur. Vict., *Caes.*
Epit.
Aus., *Ep.*
Ep. in patrem
Epi.
Epita.
Par.
Prof.
Av. Vienn., *Ep.*
Basil, *Ep.*
Bede, *Comm. in I Thess.*
Ben., *Reg.*
Boethius, *Cons. Phil.*
Caes., *ad virg.*
Ep.
Serm.
Caesar, *Bell. Gall.*
Cass., *Div. Inst.*
Var.
Cato, *De Ag.*
Chron. Min.
Chron. Pasch.
Cic., *Att.*
de leg.
de Nat. Deor.
de off.
de repub.

de catechizandis rudibus
de civitate Dei
de cura pro mortis gerenda
de doctrina Christiana
de fide et operibus
de Genesi ad litteram
de incontinentibus nuptiis
de natura et gratia
de quantitate animae
de sancta virginitate
de sermone Domini in monte
Enarrationes in psalmos
Epistulae. Note: an * after the number
indicates it is one of Augustine's
new letters.

Sermones
Aulus Gellius, *Atticae Noctes*
Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*
de Caesaribus Libri Epitome
Ausonius, *Epistulae*
Epicidion in patrem
Epigrammata
Epitaphia
Parentalia
Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium
Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*
Basil, *Epistulae*
Bede, *Commentarium in I Thessalonicensem*
Benedict, *Regula*
Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*
Caesarius, *ad virgines*
Epistulae
Sermones
Caesar, *de Bello Gallico*
Cassiodorus, *Institutiones Divinae*
Variae
Cato the Elder, *de Agricultura*
Chronica Minora (MGH AA 9:660)
Chronicon Paschale
Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*
de legibus
de Natura Deorum
de officiis
de republica

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Fam.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Familiares</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Orationes Philippicae</i>
<i>pro Cael.</i>	<i>pro Caelio</i>
<i>pro Clu.</i>	<i>pro Cluentio</i>
<i>pro Flac.</i>	<i>pro Flacco</i>
<i>pro Marc.</i>	<i>pro Marco</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1863–)
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus</i>
Claud., <i>Epith. de nup.</i>	Claudian, <i>Epithalamium de nuptiis</i>
<i>Hon. Aug.</i>	<i>Honorii Augustii</i>
Clem. Al. <i>Paed.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Col., de Re Rust.</i>	Columella, <i>de Re Rustica</i>
Comm., <i>Inst.</i>	Commodianus, <i>Instructiones</i>
<i>CTb</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
Curt.	Quintus Curtius Rufus
D.	<i>Digesta</i>
Dio	Dio Cassius
Don., <i>Comm. Terenti</i>	Donatus, <i>Commentarium Terentii</i>
En., <i>Trag.</i>	Ennius, <i>Tragedies</i>
Enn., <i>Ep.</i>	Ennodius, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep. ad cast.</i>	<i>Epistula ad castitatem</i> (PL: <i>Supplementum</i> i coll. 1482–3)
Epi., <i>adv. Haer.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>adversus Haereses</i>
Euch., <i>de laud. her.</i>	Eucherius, <i>de laudibus heremi</i>
Eug., <i>V.S. Sev.</i>	Eugippius, <i>Vita Sancti Severini</i>
Eus., <i>HE</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Mart. Pal.</i>	<i>Liber de martyribus Palaestinae</i>
<i>V. Cons.</i>	<i>Vita Constantini</i>
Eutrop., <i>Brev.</i>	Eutropius, <i>Breviarium</i>
<i>FIRA</i>	<i>Fontes Iuris Romani AnteIustiniani</i> (1941)
<i>FIRA</i> ²	<i>Fontes Iuris Romani AnteIustiniani</i> (1954)
<i>Frag. Vat.</i>	<i>Fragmenta quae dicuntur Vaticana</i> (<i>FIRA</i> ² ii, 464–540)
Fronto, <i>Ep.</i>	Marcus Fronto, <i>Epistulae</i>
G.	Gaius, <i>Institutiones</i>
Galen, <i>de Hyg.</i>	Galen, <i>de Hygenia</i>
Gaud., <i>Serm.</i>	Gaudentius of Brescia, <i>Sermones</i>
<i>Tract.</i>	<i>Tractates</i>
Gel., <i>Ep.</i>	Gelasius, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>fr.</i>	<i>fragmenta</i>
Greg. Mag., <i>Dial.</i>	Gregory the Great, <i>Dialogi</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
Greg. Nyssa, <i>V. Mac.</i>	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Vita Macrinae</i>
Greg. Tuor., <i>Hist. Franc.</i>	Gregory of Tours, <i>Historia Francorum</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

Herm., <i>Shep.</i>	Hermas, <i>Shepherd</i>
Hipp., <i>Ref. Haer.</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutatio omnium Haeresium</i>
Hor., <i>Sat.</i>	Horace, <i>Satires</i>
Ign. <i>ad Polycarp</i>	
Ign. Ep. <i>ad Phil.</i>	Ignatius of Antioch.
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> (1892–1916)
Inn., <i>Ep.</i>	Innocentius, <i>Epistulae</i>
Jer., <i>Adv. Helv.</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Helvidium</i> (<i>de virginitate Mariae</i>)
<i>Adv. Jov.</i>	<i>Adversus Jovinianum</i>
<i>Chron.</i>	<i>Chronicon</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Hom. in Psalm.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Psalmos</i>
Joh. Cass., <i>Conl.</i>	John Cassian, <i>Conlationes</i>
Jos. <i>Bel. Jud.</i>	Flavius Josephus, <i>Bellum Judaicum</i>
Just. Mart., <i>Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Apologia</i>
Juv., <i>Sat.</i>	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>
Lact., <i>Div. Inst.</i>	Lactantius, <i>Divinae Institutiones</i>
<i>Mort. Pers.</i>	<i>de Mortibus Persecutorum</i>
<i>Laud. Tur.</i>	<i>Laudatio Turiae</i> (ILS 8393)
Leo, <i>Ep.</i>	Leo, <i>Epistulae</i>
Lib., <i>Ep.</i>	Libanius, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes</i>
<i>Lib. Pont.</i>	<i>Liber Pontificalis</i>
Lux., <i>Ana. in med.</i>	Luxorius, <i>Anacreontium in medicum</i>
Mar., <i>Epi.</i>	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
Marc. comes	Marcellinus comes
Min. Fel., <i>Oct.</i>	Minucius Felix, <i>Octavius</i>
Mus. Ruf., fr.	Musonius Rufus, <i>fragmenta</i>
N. Anth.	<i>Novella Anthemii</i>
N. Jus.	<i>Novella Iustiniani</i>
N. Maj.	<i>Novella Maioriani</i>
N. Marc.	<i>Novella Marciani</i>
N. Sev.	<i>Novella Severi</i>
N. Th.	<i>Novella Theodosii II</i>
N. Val.	<i>Novella Valentiniani III</i>
Nepos, <i>Att.</i>	Nepos, <i>Attica</i>
Nic. Call., <i>HE</i>	Nicephorus Callistus, <i>Historia</i>
<i>Ecclesiastica</i>	
Olymp., fr.	Olympiodorus, <i>fragmenta</i>
Opt., <i>contra Par. Don.</i>	Optatus, <i>contra Parmenianum Donatistum</i>
Oros., <i>Hist. adv. pag.</i>	Orosius, <i>Historia adversus paganos</i>
Ovid, <i>Met.</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Oxy. Pap.	<i>Oxyrhynchi Papyri</i> (1898–)

ABBREVIATIONS

Pach., <i>Praec.</i>	Pachomius, <i>Praecepta</i>
Pall., <i>Hist. Laus.</i>	Palladius, <i>Historia Lausiaca</i>
<i>Pan. Lat.</i>	<i>Panegyrici Latini</i>
<i>Pass., Ss. Perp. et Fel.</i>	<i>Passio Sanctis Perpetuae et Felictae</i>
Paul. Mil., <i>V Amb.</i>	Paulinus of Milan, <i>Vita Ambrosii</i>
Paul. Nol., <i>carmen</i> <i>Ep.</i>	Paulinus of Nola, <i>carmina</i> <i>Epistulae</i>
Paul. Pella, <i>Euch.</i>	Paulinus of Pella, <i>Eucharisticus</i>
Paul., <i>Sent.</i>	Paulus, <i>Sententiae</i>
Pet., <i>Sat.</i>	Petronius, <i>Satyricon</i>
Plaut., <i>Men.</i>	Plautus, <i>Menippus</i>
<i>Merc.</i>	<i>Mercator</i>
<i>Most.</i>	<i>Mostellaria</i>
Pliny, <i>Ep.</i>	Pliny the Younger, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panegyricus (ad Traianum)</i>
Pliny, <i>Nat. Hist.</i>	Pliny the Elder, <i>Naturalis Historia</i>
PLRE	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> (1970–92)
Plut., <i>Brut.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Brutus</i>
<i>Caes.</i>	<i>Caesar</i>
<i>Cat. min.</i>	<i>Cato the Younger</i>
<i>de Am. Prol.</i>	<i>de Amore Proliis</i>
<i>Mor.</i>	<i>Moralia</i>
<i>Quaest. Rom.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Romanae</i>
Poss., <i>V. Aug.</i>	Possidius, <i>Vita Augustini</i>
Proc. <i>Anec.</i>	Procopius, <i>Anecdota</i>
Prop.	Propertius
Prosp. Tiro, <i>Chron.</i>	Prosper Tiro, <i>Chronicon</i>
Prud., <i>lib. cath.</i> <i>praef.</i>	Prudentius, <i>liber cathemarinon</i> <i>praefatio</i>
Ps-Aug., <i>Serm.</i>	Pseudo-Augustine, <i>Sermones</i>
Ps.-Clem., <i>Recogn.</i>	Pseudo-Clement, <i>Recognitiones</i>
Ps.-Plut., <i>de lib. educ.</i>	Pseudo-Plutarch, <i>de liberalis educandis</i>
Ps.-Quin., <i>Decl.</i>	Pseudo-Quintillian, <i>Declarationes</i>
Pub. Syr., <i>Max.</i>	Publilius Syrus, <i>Maxims (Sententiae)</i>
<i>Quer.</i>	<i>Querolus</i>
Quint., <i>Inst.</i>	Quintillian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>Reg. Mag.</i>	<i>Regula Magistri</i>
Ruf., <i>HE</i>	Rufinus, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Rut. Nam., <i>de red. suo</i>	Rutilius Namatianus, <i>de reditu suo</i>
Salv., <i>de gub. Dei</i> <i>Ep.</i>	Salvian, <i>de gubernatione Dei</i> <i>Epistulae</i>
Sen., <i>ad Luc. ep.</i> <i>de ben.</i> <i>de clem.</i>	Seneca, <i>ad Lucam epistulae</i> <i>de beneficiis</i> <i>de clementia</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>de cons. sap.</i>	<i>de constantia sapientis</i>
<i>de prov.</i>	<i>de providentia</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep. Mor.</i>	<i>Epistulae Moralia</i>
Sen. Maior, <i>Cont.</i>	Seneca the Elder, <i>Controversiae</i>
Serv., <i>Comm. in Verg.</i>	Servius, <i>Commentarium in Vergilium</i>
Sext. <i>Sent.</i>	Sextus, <i>Sententiae</i>
<i>SHA</i>	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
Sid. Ap., <i>Ep.</i>	Sidonius Apollinaris, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Sirm. Cons.</i>	<i>Constitutiones Sirmondianae</i>
Soc., <i>HE</i>	Socrates, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Sor., <i>Gyn.</i>	Soranus, <i>Gynaikeia</i>
Soz., <i>HE</i>	Sozomen, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Suet., <i>Aug.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Augustus</i>
<i>Caes.</i>	<i>Caesar</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	<i>Claudius</i>
<i>de gramm.</i>	<i>de grammaticis</i>
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Tiberius</i>
<i>Vesp.</i>	<i>Vespasianus</i>
Sulp. Sev., <i>Chron.</i>	Sulpicius Severus, <i>Chronicon</i>
<i>V. S. Mar.</i>	<i>Vita Sancti Martini</i>
Symm., <i>Ep.</i>	Symmachus, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Tab. Herc.</i>	<i>Tabula Herculanum</i>
<i>Tac., Agr.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Agricola</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
<i>Ger.</i>	<i>Germania</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Historiae</i>
Tert., <i>ad Ux.</i>	Tertullian, <i>ad Uxorem</i>
<i>de Mod.</i>	<i>de Modestia</i>
<i>de Mon.</i>	<i>de Monogamia</i>
<i>de Pud.</i>	<i>de Pudicitia</i>
<i>de test. ani.</i>	<i>de testimonia animae</i>
<i>de Virg. Vel.</i>	<i>de Virginis Velandis</i>
<i>Ex. ad cast.</i>	<i>Exhortatio ad castitatem</i>
Theo., <i>Ad Auto.</i>	Theophilus, <i>Ad Autolyicum</i>
Theo., <i>Chron.</i>	Theophanes, <i>Chronicon</i>
Theod., <i>Ep.</i>	Theoderet, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>HE</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
Ulp., <i>Reg.</i>	Ulpian, <i>Regulae</i>
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus
Varro, <i>de Agr.</i>	Varro, <i>de Agricultura</i>
Vig. Tri., <i>Ep.</i>	Vigilius Tridentinus, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>V. Mel.</i>	<i>Vita Melaniae</i>
Zos.	Zosimus, <i>Historia Nova</i>

1

INTRODUCTION

In one of his many unrelentingly caustic letters, Jerome described a man who had recently buried the latest of his twenty-two wives in the city of Rome. His deceased spouse had had twenty husbands of her own.¹ Jerome passively witnessed the funeral with bemusement. Later in his missive, the cleric subjected the old widower to all his withering sarcasm and vitriol, attacking from a position of self-assured moral and religious superiority. And yet the image of that day in 384, despite Jerome's mocking disdain, impresses upon the mind an essential question about Roman social life: in the age of a supposedly Christian empire, to what degree did the new religion permeate that most basic of societal units, the family?

To be sure, the question in itself raises fundamental questions about the later Roman Empire and the way in which scholars have recently looked at the period. In the last thirty years, late antiquity has transcended the fuzzy and ill-defined boundary between the ancient and medieval worlds and has become a field of study in its own right. The era is marked by profound and distinctive political, religious and cultural characteristics, which helped to create the basis of Western European society for 1,500 years and also helped to forge the direct successor to the Roman Empire, Byzantium. Our new interest has been largely focused on the social history of the age, leaving behind – if only momentarily – the political and military upheavals which have so dominated Roman history-writing since the days of Gibbon.

In light of these interests, this present study is meant to be a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, examination of the family in late antiquity. It will, out of necessity, be somewhat anachronistic and vernacular: when discussing the late Roman Empire, there will always be enormous temporal and regional variation. Nevertheless, as what will hopefully be a work which will spark further research, it is my intent that this book will serve as an introduction to the topic and provide the basic outlines of familial identity, societal ideals concerning responsibilities and obligations within the kin group, and general notions of comportment and behavior. In short, it is an attempt to parallel recent works on the classical family as well as those concerning the modern European family.²

Work on the classical family since the 1970s provides both the methodological and the epistemological boundaries for this task. As with research on late antiquity, history of the family has grown into a thriving discipline: there is an increasing scrutiny of ‘private life’ in general and the role of the family in particular. Yet for all of the modern work written on this important and ever-expanding topic, relatively little has been produced on the family of the later Roman Empire. This lacuna is all the more glaring given late antiquity’s current attraction. The number of sources available, combined with their variety, would seem to make such studies practical, obvious and valuable. And yet scholars have, with a few exceptions, failed to make such studies. The one notable exception, of course, are those who examine the extensive legal codes of the fifth and sixth centuries, but the focus on these codes has mostly been to extrude information about earlier periods.³ In sum, modern interest in the family has relegated the later Roman era to footnotes or has placed it in larger works discussing the broader changes in European civilization.⁴

The natural result of this omission has been a tendency either to treat the Roman family monolithically,⁵ varying not at all from century to century, or simply not to think about differences in the later period at all. Even worse, the study of Christian attitudes and perceptions of sex, marriage, widowhood, virginity, as well as other areas of private life, have skewed what we do know about the family of late antiquity. Recent interest in sexuality and dialogues of the body have stressed the intellectual and social actions of the day.⁶ While this is an important field, scholarship on the body has said little about the nature or behavior of the individual within the household. They characterize affective relationships in an essentially unidimensional manner and peripherally address issues of children and other relations. Moreover, while these recent works do say something about morality *vis-à-vis* personal relations with one’s family, they tend to focus more on the theological bases behind such attitudes.

In the last ten years, this state of affairs has begun slowly to change. While nascent, scholars have started to focus on hitherto neglected issues of continuity and change in the Roman family. Some authors have touched upon the topic directly, while others have dealt with topics intimately related to kin groups and households.⁷ Nevertheless, there is still much that has yet to be explored. Most interest, for example, has tended to focus on the legal record concerning private life, since it is the most abundant single source of information we have on the family, ancient or medieval. While important, however, there are limitations to the legal record and writers on the subject have had to use other sources as supplementary material.⁸

In conjunction with presenting a generalized view of late Roman family life, then, our second purpose here is to give a more balanced, synthesized vision of the Roman family in the late ancient world. As Jane Gardner points out, law does not describe how people behave, nor even what they think. Instead,

it gives people the option to behave in a certain way or *not* to behave in that manner.⁹ As valuable as Roman law is, it cannot predict, or even reflect, a family's behavior, actions, attitudes or customs – unless specifically attested to in the body of a ruling. And while it provides us with an unparalleled abundance of source material,¹⁰ it is essential that law not be given inordinate historical value by virtue of its quantity. The feelings expressed by a husband in a piece of correspondence, a canon from a local Church council regulating slave-master relations, or the description of a mother's qualities in an epitaph are all threads in a densely woven tapestry.

Finally, this study must address the issue of Christianity itself. As Antti Arjava has asked in his recent study of Roman women and law during this period, to what degree did the religion of Constantine and his successors change the social fabric? Did it, as Christian authors of the day imply, change custom and action in the family or were its effects negligible?

Scope of study

With only a few exceptions, most work done on the classical Roman family has centered on activity in the West and particularly in Italy.¹¹ This is hardly surprising: Republican Rome by definition refers specifically to the denizens of that city and its environs. Moreover, as most of the literary evidence deals with the great statesmen of that city, our view of family life not only concentrates on Rome, but on the upper classes as well. The imperial period broadens the geographical and conceptual areas slightly. Those studies of family in the Empire interpret that term more loosely: 'Roman' is basically understood to be those people within the borders of the Empire. For the purposes of this study, however, those areas where Roman and Italian colonization was the strongest shall be our focus. That would include Gaul, Spain and North Africa. True, the literature for the most part supports only an examination of the upper classes and that must by elimination be our primary focus; but again, this is hardly surprising, since the literature of the age was produced for and by the cultural and power elite. Even modern examinations of ancient society's lower classes—such as slaves or freedmen – are always made in the context of the aristocratic world.¹²

Epigraphy does allow the scholar to cast his net beyond the shallow waters of upper class existence. The variety of individuals and their places in Roman society are extensive.¹³ Yet despite the tens of thousands of surviving inscriptions, their venue is remarkably limited. As public writings, they generally commemorate only specialized, and thus limited, kinds of events. Most common are funerary inscriptions, and it is from them that the vast majority of the epigraphic information about family life comes. The majority of these provide only prosopographical information, although they do occasionally discuss an individual's behavior and its relation to Roman ideals – and in rarer cases, those of a class.¹⁴ So despite the relative wealth of the evidence,

inscriptions are of limited value or at least must be examined in limited contexts. They do, however, recapitulate the sense that Roman society extended beyond Italy. When similar societal ideals, religious notions, and liturgical formulae are expressed in places thousands of miles from one another, as well as being expressed in the same language, the idea of Rome as a culture rather than a place is more sharply defined.

Nevertheless, this study's scope will, like other studies on the Roman family, try to be limited to those places where Roman ideas and customs remained most prevalent in the Empire. The differences between the Eastern and Western halves were considerable in innumerable aspects, but even within the Western Empire, we know that regional variation in behavior and beliefs could be considerable.¹⁵ Although there appears not to have been a conscious attempt to maintain a local cultural identity, one scholar has noted that such endurance was almost unintentional.¹⁶ One can, however, speak with some confidence of Italy as a more or less unified area linguistically and culturally, with extensive contact and interdependence spanning back centuries to the early Republic and even further.¹⁷ Southern Gaul, too, has some cultural relation to Italy, since the area was intensively colonized and Romanized in the first centuries BCE and CE. Given that for our purposes, 'Romans' refer to those people who inhabited these core Western regions, the period of time covered in this survey is a second issue. This is somewhat problematic: late antiquity has several different connotations in different fields of study. Roman historians, classicists, Hellenistic historians and Judaic scholars could all give different answers. Common sense would dictate, however, that the first alternative is best, in part since this study centers on areas in the West. Moreover, since most studies of family history seem to cover the 'classical' age of Rome – that is, from the beginning of the first century BCE to the early third century CE – the period after might be properly understood to be late antiquity.¹⁸ Leaving apart for the moment that the third century was an important and critical age in the life of the Roman Empire, we can with some assurance speak of a different and new age when Diocletian in 284 assumed the purple and carried out substantive and long-lasting changes.

But if the reign of Diocletian can be truly considered a new age, at what point are the major political, economic and cultural underpinnings of that new era in place? Certainly, the best known social movement, the recognition of Christianity by the government as a legitimate religion and its acceptance by the bulk of the urban population, was an ongoing process throughout the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁹ The main focus of our examination, then, will be on the family after 350: the official condemnation of polytheism, the rise of administrations actively involved in Christianization,²⁰ and crucial theological disputes that defined a Christian ideology all fell after this date. This is not to say that the third and early fourth centuries will be ignored. The development of Christian ideals regarding marriage, divorce, widowhood, children and parenting became clearly enunciated in those years. The role of Constantine,

too, was also significant in the development of an official ideology of the family. But these ideals *vis-à-vis* the new religion were most articulately expressed by the authors of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. It is unsurprising that the great 'pagan response', if we can speak of such a thing, came at the same time.²¹

Of some importance, too, were the marked demographic changes accelerating in the mid-fourth century. Germanic tribes, always on the margins of Roman society, had in preceding centuries caused substantial if not overwhelming problems, and now began to migrate on a large scale into the southern lands of Europe. In the 360s and 370s, a confederation of Visigoths pushed into the Empire, presenting the Romans with their first significant military loss in almost 400 years at Adrianople in 378.²² Their entrance began a series of movements of northern European peoples, which only ended in the West in 568 with the Lombard invasion of Italy. In practical terms, while their numbers were relatively small compared to the indigenous population, their settlement affected practical matters of governance, organization of the military, the economics of the cities and countryside, and the tenor of religious debate. More imponderable changes included the nature of social interaction, educational goals and means, and moral and religious beliefs. In this context, then, the mid-fourth century acts as an important demarcation point.

The next question concerns duration: how long does this distinctive period of late antiquity last? Again, it is a difficult problem, especially since it also suggests the broader question of when the ancient world ends. In the particular case of Italy, and perhaps of southern Gaul, the society is still identifiably Roman into the mid-sixth century. The imperial bureaucracy, although bereft of an emperor, still functioned tolerably well until the great reconquest of Justinian in the 530s. The senatorial aristocracy, despite some occasional difficulties with Germanic nobles covetous of their lands, retained much of their wealth and ancient privilege under Ostrogothic rule. The great cities of Italy proved to be economically resilient, capable of producing impressive games and subsidizing *literati*.²³ Sicily still produced bountiful harvests and Narbonensis potable wine. Despite the large numbers of migratory peoples settling in all areas of the Roman Empire, they were, as mentioned above, a small minority of the population. In sum, although there were a number of political realignments in Italy, Gaul and the rest of the West, life among the Romans of the Mediterranean was not totally different from that of the fifth century.

The change, at least for Italy, seems to have come in the course of Justinian's dream of universal Empire. From 536 to 552, the eastern emperor struggled with the Ostrogoths to regain control of the peninsula. It was a Pyrrhic victory. In the process of reconquest, much of the countryside had been ravaged. Rome, Naples and other cities were denuded of their population and suffered severe physical damage.²⁴ The infrastructure of government had largely vanished except for Ravenna, Milan and a few other cities, as the letters of Pope Gregory affirm

a few decades later.²⁵ Those letters also attest the remarkable poverty of the Italian peninsula and the unenviable duty of the Church: attempting to fill the void left by the absence of troops, material and infrastructure.²⁶ The *coup de grâce* was the Lombard invasion in 568. The Italy of 600 was quite different from the Italy of 500.²⁷

The closing date of this study then will be set before these turn of events, roughly the mid-sixth century. There is some support for this in the historiography of family life as well. Both Jack Goody and David Herlihy take the sixth century as a turning point (or more accurately, a starting point) for their larger studies on European family types.²⁸ More recently, David Kertzer and Richard Saller's edited collection of essays on the family in Italy, which covers the last two thousand years of that country's history, seems to place the demarcation point between ancient and medieval somewhere in the mid-sixth century.²⁹ Following what is clearly thought of in the historiography and other more general studies as the end of the ancient world, then, the period roughly covered in this study will be 350–550 CE.

Definitions and models

When thinking of family today, a number of notions and images tend to spring to mind. Parents and siblings are the images from youth. If independent, one might think of spouses and children as family. More liberal thinkers might think that the cohabitation of individuals, whether in a sexual or platonic relationship, could be understood or recognized as a family. However the word's meaning might be construed, it is necessary that the term, broadly and specifically in the context of the Roman world, be discussed in some detail.

Although we are primarily dealing with the period after 350 CE, it first seems important to develop a working definition or model of the Roman classical family.³⁰ It is impossible to speak of changes, whether in a quantitative or a qualitative sense, without speaking of what the family changed from. Moreover, the great majority of work that has been done on the classical period allows for an extensive if not definitive picture. The recent scholarship of the Roman family also stresses certain features that can be tracked over time: these include predominant opinions (at least in the upper classes) about ideal family life, marriage practices, heirship strategies, and the use and abuse of slaves. Therefore, before looking at the families of late antiquity, I must include their predecessors.

The most obvious starting point is an understanding of how the Romans themselves perceived and defined the term.³¹ The word 'family' is not a direct cognate of the Latin term, *familia*, at least in meaning;³² *domus* is perhaps a closer approximation in the sources to what is understood as kin.³³ Moreover, at least in the sources, there is a notable change in the use of these two terms as time progresses. Their meanings, indeed, almost become transposed in the legal sources.

Second, related to the question of Roman definitions of the family is the notion of modern perceptions of what constitutes the familial unit. Quite beyond daily existence and experiences and recent interest in so-called ‘family values’, there are a number of almost *a priori* accepted ideas when trying to build our own conceptual frameworks. Many of these preconceptions stem from nineteenth-century studies, and much of that work was tied to the politics and social conditions of industrialization. In England, for example, Friedrich Engels attempted to connect changes in the family to the transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial one.³⁴ Pierre Le Play went even further: he created an entire taxonomy of family types, the most important classification for the modern world being the so-called nuclear family.³⁵ Such notions of ‘nuclear’, ‘extended’, and ‘stem’ families are modern constructions; and the modern historian finds that such types are not always applicable to the Roman world, even within the theoretically heterogeneous aristocracy. The works of Engels, Le Play and others subsequently, however, did inspire other studies in England, France and America.³⁶

Taxonomy of families is also a product of anthropology. Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of our own, interests in kinship structures, marriage customs, matriarchal and patriarchal authority, and many similar behavioral patterns became features for understanding a society. Margaret Mead, David Kroeber, Claude Lévi-Strauss and others created a vocabulary for describing ‘primitive’ and historical cultures, their particular features and the means by which their members interact. Yet anthropology, too, presumes that the family (and society as a whole) can be classified: the classical Roman family might be called patriarchal, patrilocal, exogamous, agnatic, conscious of extended family and possessing extensive kinship lines. To some degree these labels are roughly valid, accepted even by Romans (or at least, by Roman jurists); but the literary and epigraphic evidence presents so many contrary examples to these constructions that such classifications are not terribly useful, or even germane, to creating a generalized understanding of the family.

Third, when we consider the Roman family, there must be an awareness of the conditions and limitations imposed on its definition. There is considerably more knowledge about the upper classes than about the lower classes. Relatively little is known about regional differences. There may have been common features in Italy and perhaps southern Gaul, but beyond that, even in the Latin West, native systems of family and community may well have endured or even prevailed. Much, too, is based on legal sources, which, despite their indispensability, can present various pitfalls. The evidence is also generally more focused on the male rather than the female, more on the adult than the child, and more on the older adult than the younger one. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, most of the literary evidence was written by men well into their adulthood. The issue of change over time, of course, is one focal point

in this thesis. These factors, as well as other more subtle ones, need to be recognized in any attempt to generate a usable definition.

These three issues, then – Roman understanding of what a family constituted, modern conceptions of family, and the natural limitations of the evidence when categorically defining a family – should remain foremost in any attempt to generate a model for Rome. With that caveat in mind, I want to give brief definitions of the terms that will be used throughout the study.

The word ‘family’ in this work will refer for the most part to those co-residing individuals associated by marriage or by kinship. Occasionally, it may be used to also refer to other kin not residing in the same domicile, such as siblings, cousins and other relations.³⁷ The term, then, is based more or less on our own modern concepts of what comprises family, and like us, Romans often understood it to mean more than one thing. In contrast to family is the Latin word ‘*familia*,’ which had a considerably broader meaning. Technically, it refers to all persons and things under the control of the eldest ascendant male in a household, the head of the family (*paterfamilias*). In addition to kin, it could refer to slaves, clients, boarders and even chattel property. As will be discussed in the next *chapter*, *familia* presumed a certain legal status of those people and things under the power of the *paterfamilias*. This status, as we shall see, did not always reflect the realities of a situation, but *familia* refers to a specific legal definition.³⁸

In addition, the word household will often be used and generally has two meanings. In the most literal sense, it refers to the physical house, along with properties associated with it. In a more general sense, it refers to the semi-official entity that represented the family and the *familia*. This was particularly important in upper-class households, where a family and its dependents as a whole could wield considerable influence and even a quasi-official authority. Closely associated with this latter meaning is the word ‘*domus*’. In the broadest usage, *domus* could be properly considered an agglomeration of related families in some ways similar to the old Roman *gens*.³⁹ *Domus*, then, could also be extended to past generations of a family. Since, too, in a strictly legal sense, a *familia* survived through the male (agnatic) relations, whereas a *domus* could also refer to a daughter and her descendants as well. In sum, household and *domus* have more elastic meanings than either family or *familia*.

Using these definitions as rough guidelines, it would be tempting to go further and try to construct a basic model of the Roman family. Many concepts have been put forward. Some have opted for a legalistic model, especially since the Romans (or at least upper-class Romans) were obsessed with jurisprudence and, as mentioned above, it is the most abundant single source about the family we possess. But a legal approach provides little insight to the nature of the family, only setting the context within which the family can be defined. It presents the modern researcher with options for constructing types of familial behavior and composition, but the legal record can provide little more. It instead often acts as an ‘out-of-bounds’ marker. Clearly, the familial unit must

be understood in a different context or at least in one that has a richer and broader theoretical basis.

There are also various forms of kinship models, including nuclear and extended families, multi-generational households, and the like. It is clear from the sources that Roman interest centered on the married couple and their children. But there are too many legal, statistical and behavioral factors arguing against its use as an effective model. Roman families, especially during the classical period (100 BCE–200 CE), were often broken up and reformed in what can best be described as serial monogamy and blended households. Siblings, half-siblings and step-siblings could be living in the same household or entirely different ones. Those siblings might be separated by decades in age. Kinship is a key element in defining the family, perhaps the essential one, but there are other factors involved, too.

Sociologists have offered a third approach, preferring to emphasize location and household as a more accurate means of defining the family.⁴⁰ A sociological definition also emphasizes the idea of a role or function carried out in the house: that is, people gathered at a specific place to complete a task, whether it be service, commerce or otherwise. Also, by using residence as a model, there is no necessity to make a distinction between the nuclear and extended family nor concern ourselves with relation at all. The problems with such a model, however, are more numerous than those that take a legalistic or kinship approach. In general, it confuses family with residence.⁴¹ Again, the distinction in Roman minds between who was family and who simply lived at a residence is clear. There are other problems with co-residency in the context of our concerns with the extended family model, but it is enough to say here that defining the family in terms of household creates more problems than it solves. It artificially blurs lines of relationship that were recognized then (and now) as being distinct.

After rejecting three different approaches, is there then anything substantive to be said regarding a Roman family model? I believe there is. While it seems difficult to place the Roman family in a definitive typology, mostly because of its wide variability, Keith Bradley has offered a useful alternative to trying to build a model. He prefers instead that the Roman family be identified by certain features. These features do not necessarily form a comprehensive definition, but they provide markers by which we can gauge changes in family structure and behavior. In short, Bradley's alternative is more descriptive than it is definitive. His own list of features of the classical family is perhaps worth quoting in full here:

1. the arranged nature of most marriages, especially those controlled by the world of politics, and the relative unimportance of sentiment in compacting marital unions;
2. the impermanence of the marriage bond and the ease of its dissolution;

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3. the frequency of premature death and consequent availability of a surviving spouse to enter a new union;⁴²
4. the likelihood that an individual's children would be broadly spaced in age;
5. the likelihood that some of an individual's children would belong to the same generation as his or her grandchildren;
6. the likelihood that husband and wife would either be significantly distanced in age or belong to different generations;
7. the immanence of the belief that marriage and procreation were culturally induced social obligations, not the result of individualistic choices;
8. the creation through serial marriage of networks of marital relationships which extended beyond the immediate household.⁴³

To these features, two others are worth mentioning. First, the importance of the ideal family to Romans themselves should be added. The literature and the epigraphy both show an emphasis placed on *concordia* (harmony), the obedience and modesty of the wife, the high status of the *univira* (a woman who had only a single husband),⁴⁴ the filial devotion of children to their parents and especially their father, and the financial obligations of a father to his progeny upon his death. Second, the presence of slaves even in modest households made them ubiquitous. The prevalence of slaves (and freedmen), along with their roles as surrogates for sex and procreation, forces us to recognize their function, treatment and status in the family.⁴⁵ The essential point of the preceding discussion has been to look beyond definitions and models, and instead try to see how family behavior affected and was affected by social and cultural factors.

Plan of study

To accomplish that goal, we must first examine more closely the classical family. The first part of the second chapter is devoted to this topic. In discussing the classical family unit, we will concentrate on two areas. First, what constituted the ideal vision of the Roman family? Any kind of description will, of course, be largely subjective: various authors depicted the family in a number of ways. More precisely, the ideal family to a poet or a moralist might be quite distinct from the ideal family of a jurist. Different members of the family might be described in different ways as well. Moreover, there were a number of changes within the classical age, a period of approximately three centuries. Certainly, the family of 100 BCE and the family of 200 CE were hardly the same. But when speaking of ideals, the differences may not be as extensive as the realities. Even in late antiquity, literature often espoused underlying classical values. It should therefore be possible to create a synthesis which will allow a comparison with the ideals of the late Roman period.

The second area of concentration will center on the realities of family life and existence. Behavior, customs and attitudes will be the central issues discussed. There is also enough material on the economy of the private home – literary, epigraphic and archeological – to say something of household make-up and division of labor. Letters from Cicero, Pliny, Fronto and others provide some insights and personal examples of the dynamics of marital relations and familial obligations, although they are admittedly told from a male perspective. Historians who relate sensational scandals (regardless of their veracity⁴⁶), philosophers who explore moral conundrums, and poets who discuss a whole range of social and emotional ills all help to define attitudes about personal comportment. Again, there is some degree of change in the classical period, and most of our information deals with the upper classes. But the aim here is to give only a rough overview of the classical family, and not to present another study on that topic. The subtler and deeper questions about the nature of private life in the late republican and early imperial ages need not be explored.⁴⁷ Instead, tracing with broad strokes the outlines of the Roman family will provide a guide for its counterpart in late antiquity.

Our attention will then turn to the early Christian family or at least the ideals surrounding them. Information about family life as it actually existed is notoriously patchy. While more attention is starting to be focused on this period – most recently by Halvor Moxnes⁴⁸ – it is still largely untouched in the historiography. True, the early Christian age prior to Constantine is not clearly defined by distinctive changes in contemporary impressions of what family meant nor in how it apparently functioned, but significant developments which came to fruition in the fourth century began at the religion's inception.

The age of Constantine, too, is a period of enormous significance, at least legally, and will be briefly explored. While the effects of Christianity on the emperor's social legislation have been rightly questioned of late, it is a significant age in that it represented the theoretical confluence of the Roman and Christian worlds.

The rest of our attention will be exclusively focused on the family of the later Roman Empire. A primary area of interest will be the effect of religion on perceptions of family life and on customary behavior. This is not simply to discuss the family in the context of Christianity, although this will be a central theme in this study. Rather, this means that, with the rise of the new religion in the fourth century, the ideological lines between pagan and Christian were brought more sharply into focus. For the first time, opinions were fully expressed. Such opinions thus offered a new phase in the development of literature relating to the family. There was not as radical a difference in the new religion's attitudes toward marriage and child rearing, for example, as one might at first think. Indeed, in certain areas, there was little, if any, difference at all. Nevertheless, there was a paradigmatic shift in an overall conception of the family and how that shift was expressed. Defining 'Roman'

and ‘Christian’ opinions and observations will be a major endeavor of this work.

The primary focus, however, will be concerned with various familial relationships. One may logically infer that this examination will include, in considerably more depth, many of the issues relating to the classical family. Of paramount importance was the role of marriage in late antique society. The process of contracting a marital union, the marriage itself, and life after marriage will all be explored. Alternatives to the married state, notably concubinage, will also be an important area of interest, not least because pagans and Christians both engaged in the practice. The legal, economic, religious and even biological demands of marriage in late Roman society will be considered. Even in a society where Christian alternatives to marriage first appeared (celibacy and virginity), the married state remained the singularly most important human relationship.

Another issue will be child rearing. The activities of raising and educating a child are the place where there is perhaps the greatest level of disagreement between pagans and Christians. While the latter never really developed a true alternative to the classical educational system, they altered and added to it. Moreover, feelings in the late Roman world about the means by which a parent raised his offspring had also changed. Thus, this particular facet of family life is important.

A third area which has been largely been ignored by scholars, extended family, is also of great importance, largely because of its elusive nature. The fuzziness, legally and otherwise, of an individual to his extended relations, is a constant in the modern mind. Given that the Romans themselves saw the family, *familia*, and *domus* in a number of ways, kin of more distant relation is an issue that needs closer examination. Indeed, the extended family in the classical age needs greater discussion.

A final topic will be the role of the domestic slave in the late Roman household. They, too, were technically members of the *familia*, although their place in the family structure was complicated both by their legal status and their frequent lack of blood ties to the principal family. Their place in the Roman family accordingly raises a number of questions. How did proximity, physical and emotional, affect attitudes and behavior? How, if at all, did Christianization influence opinion? What other factors – cultural, legal, economic or otherwise – helped to shape the understanding of the unfree person within the structure of society’s most basic unit of organization?

Having catalogued the changes between the classical Roman age and the later Roman period – and looking at the late antique family in its own right – a final task will be to give some account as to why certain underlying trends in Roman society acted as catalysts or obstacles for such changes. Much of the evolution, as I intend to prove, was illusory. While Christianity tended to place new moral and legal restrictions on the functioning of the family, it failed to create deep-seated changes in the structure and behavior of this unit.