

Department of Classical Studies
Course Outline
CS 9450B: THE ROMAN FAMILY
WINTER 2026



INSTRUCTOR: Dr. K. Olson (kolson2@uwo.ca) (she/her)

OFFICE: Lawson Hall 3227 (661-2111 x 84525)

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays, 4:00-5:00 PM, or by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- S. Dixon. 1992. *The Roman Family*. Johns Hopkins (\$45). = **Dixon 1992**
- Other readings: see the 'course readings' section of our OWL site

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course will analyze the different ways in which, from 200 BCE -200 CE, Romans lived together as families. We will examine the strategies they developed to secure the continuation of the family and its property; how families and their constituent members fitted into public life, and how these issues affected individuals of different social backgrounds. Using literary and artistic source, we will study what concepts such as childhood, adolescence, and familial affection meant to Romans; what sentiments were invested in the various family-related roles and how these sentiments differed from our own. We will also look at such topics as slavery, adultery, and the dissolution of marriage, and their effects on family.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- To become familiar with the main evidence for the Roman family in the central period.
- To become aware of the problems with and limitations of that evidence.

- To investigate modern reactions to, interpretations of, and preconceptions about that evidence.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS:

- To develop critical, analytical and problem-solving skills through the writing of an essay and through the close analysis of ancient texts and artefacts in seminars.
- To gain a knowledge of the different types of evidence available for this area of Roman history, primarily the main literary texts and the archaeological evidence.
- To gain an appreciation of the historiographical and analytical skills needed to handle these sources.
- To gain an ability to use these different sources together to assess the main issues in the interpretation of the Roman family.
- To develop and enhance skills in oral presentation through participation in seminars.
- To develop the skills necessary for conducting in-depth research.
- To develop an ability to discuss these issues in written work with coherent and logical arguments, clearly and correctly expressed.

GRADES:

Essay	40%
Presentation	25%
TWO article reviews (15% each)	30%
Questions on student presentations	5%
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	100%

This will be a discussion-based seminar which will require participation from **all** students. I do not give a 'participation grade' as such, but factor a willingness to speak up in class into the final grade.

ESSAY AND PRESENTATIONS:

- **Essays** should be 5000 words, and are due **Monday Apr 27th**.
- I encourage you to write the essay on a topic of interest to you (in consultation with me). Although we cover many topics pertinent to the family in ancient society in the class readings and discussion, some we simply do not have time to examine. One of those may be appropriate for your paper: for instance, the Roman family and the house; the family in art; the early Christian family; domestic religion and the family, etc.
- **Presentations** should be about 15-20 minutes in length (in other words, conference-paper length, or **8-10** double-spaced typed pages). You will choose a date for your

presentation in the first week or two of classes; if you need to cancel or change your date **you must find a classmate willing to take your place.**

- Your essay should incorporate and address questions, suggestions, and comments raised during your presentation; thus, the essay and presentation are on the same topic.
- **Article reviews:** students are required to choose **TWO** of our readings in advance and prepare questions and comments for discussion in class. (Our textbook is **excluded** from these). For each article presentation, in 10-15 minutes:
 1. please summarize the article in question
 2. tell us what the author set out to do, and using what evidence
 3. if s/he achieved this, in your opinion
 4. Tell us what you liked or didn't like about the article or chapter.
 5. Please also pose questions to us about the content
 6. Please type up your report and turn it in to me (it should be 1-2 double-spaced typed pages, or thereabouts).

Use of AI:

In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT, etc.) **is prohibited**. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.”

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity.

“Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students” https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, here:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/scholasticdisciplineundergrad.pdf>.

Mental Health Support Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are

experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

SOGS

Additional student-run support services are offered by SOGS: <https://sogs.ca>

COURSE OUTLINE:

Jan 7th: Introduction/demography: size and shape of the Roman family:

Questions for discussion:

A. “The ratio of hard work to intellectual reward is lamentably meager” (K. Hopkins). Is this a fair assessment of the attempts made to study ancient demographic trends using ancient ‘statistical’ evidence?

B. What were the important demographic patterns in Roman antiquity? How would they have affected Roman family experience?

Reading:

- Parkin, T. 2011. The Roman life course and the family. In B. Rawson (ed). *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell: 276-290.
- Meyer, E. 1990. Explaining the epigraphic habit in the Roman empire: the evidence of epitaphs. *JRS* 80: 74-96
- Scheidel, W. 1996. *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire* (*JRA* Suppl. 21). Providence R.I.: 139-163

C. How did the Romans define ‘family?’ Should we reconstitute the Roman family as nuclear or extended?

Reading:

- Dixon 1992: 1-35, 133-59
- George, M. 2005. Family imagery and family values in Roman Italy. In M. George (ed). *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 37-66.

Jan 14th: Transmission of property and patterns of inheritance:

Questions for discussion:

- A. “The will is in essence a vehicle for moderated deviance from the rules of intestacy.”
Does this adequately convey the importance and purpose of Roman will-making?

Reading:

- Saller, R.P. 1994. *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 155-180.
- Gardner, J. 2011. Roman “horror” of intestacy? In B. Rawson (ed). *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell: 361-376.
- Gardner, J. 1999. Status, sentiment and strategy in Roman adoption. In M. Corbier (ed). *Adoption et fosterage*. Paris: de Boddard: 63-79.

- B. Under which circumstances could women inherit in Roman antiquity?

Reading:

- Gardner, J. 1986. *Women in Roman Law and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press: 163-204
- Saller, R.P. 1994. *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 204-224

Jan 21st: *Patria potestas* and its implications:

Questions for discussion:

- A. What were the legal rights of the *pater*? Were these mitigated in any way by social or demographic considerations, and if so, how?

B. “Half of Roman men no longer had a father by the time they were twenty and were *patres familiae* in their own right; others remained minors until they were at least twice that age. The juxtaposition of these two realities must have aggravated resentment and revolts” (P. Veyne). Do you agree?

Reading:

- Saller, R.P. 1986. *Patria potestas* and the stereotype of the Roman family. *Continuity and Change* 1: 7-22
- Saller, R.P. 1994. *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 181-203
- Shaw, B. 2001. Raising and killing children: two Roman myths. *Mnemosyne* 54: 31-77.

- C. What were the implications of *tutela* for women’s legal, social, and economic position?

Reading:

- Dixon, S. 1986. Family finances: Terentia and Tullia. In B. Rawson (ed). *The Family in*

Ancient Rome: New Perspectives. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press: 93-120.

- Gardner, J. 1986. *Women in Roman Law and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press: 5-30

Jan 28th: Marriage and marriage patterns:

Questions for discussion:

- A. What were the main types of marriage, for the Romans? Did marriage patterns vary according to class?

Reading:

- Dixon 1992: 61- 97
- Syme, R. 1987. Marriage ages for Roman senators. *Historia* 36: 318-32.
- Saller, R.P. 1987. Men's age at marriage and its consequences in the Roman family. *CP* 82: 21-34.
- Scheidel, W. 2007. Roman funerary commemoration and the age at first marriage. *CP* 102: 389-402.
- Crook, J. A. 1990. 'His and hers:' what degree of financial responsibility did husband and wife have for the matrimonial home and their life in common in a Roman marriage? in J. Andreau and H. Bruhns (eds). *Parente et strategies familiales dans l'antiquite Romaine*. Rome: Ecole Française de Rome: 153-72.
- Treggiari, S. 1991. *Roman marriage : lusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 3-36

Feb 4th: The sentimental idea of the Roman family and the idea of companionate marriage:

Questions for discussion:

- A. "The effort to write Roman family history in terms of trends of affection is methodologically misconceived." Discuss.

Reading:

- Dixon, S. 1991. The sentimental idea of the Roman family. In B. Rawson (ed). *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 99-113
- Dixon, S. 1997. Continuity and change in Roman social history: retrieving 'family feeling(s)' from Roman law and literature. In M. Golden and P. Toohey (eds). *Inventing Ancient Culture: Historicism, Periodization and the Ancient World*. London and New York: Routledge: 79-90.
- Rawson, B. 1966. Family life among the lower classes at Rome in the first two centuries of the empire. *CP* 61: 71-83.
- Treggiari, S. 1991. *Roman marriage : lusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 183-261
- Bradley, K. R. 1998. The Roman family at dinner. In I. Nielsen and H. S. Nielsen (eds). *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World*. Aarhus: Aarhus Univ. Press 36-55.

Feb 11th: Divorce and remarriage; manumission and marriage

Questions for discussion:

- A. How frequent were divorce and remarriage in Roman society? Did it depend to some extent on class? What were the factors encouraging divorce and remarriage?

Reading:

- Bradley, K. R. 1991. Remarriage and the structure of the upper-class Roman family. In B. Rawson (ed). *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 79-98.
- Treggiari, S. 1991. *Roman marriage : lusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 435-482
- Braund, S. 2005. Marriage, adultery, and divorce in Roman comic drama. In W. S., Smith (ed). *Satiric Advice on Women and Marriage: From Plautus to Chaucer*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press: 39-70.
- Bradley, K. R. 2000. *Romanitas* and the Roman family: the evidence of Apuleius' *Apology*. *Canadian Journal of History* 35.2: 215-39.
- Huemoeller, K.P.D. 2020. Freedom in marriage? Manumission for marriage in the Roman world. *Journal of Roman Studies* 100: 123-39.

Feb 25th: Augustan legislation, propaganda, and the visual representation of the family:

Questions for discussion:

- A. What types of rewards and penalties did the Augustan marriage legislation set out? How did Augustus' legislation on marriage and sexual behavior fit into his wider social and political programme?

Reading:

- Cohen, D. 1991. The Augustan law on adultery: the social and cultural context' in D. Kertzer and R. Saller (eds). *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press: 109-126.
- Treggiari, S. 1991. *Roman marriage : lusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 60-80
- Edwards, C. 1993. *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press : 34-62
- Ramsby, T.R, and Severy-Hoven, Beth. 2007. Gender, sex, and the domestication of the empire in art of the Augustan age. *Arethusa* 40 (1): 43-71.
- Kleiner, D.E.E. 1978. The great friezes of the Ara Pacis Augustae: Greek sources, Roman derivations and Augustan social policy. *MEFRA* 90: 753-85.

Mar 4th: Birth control, *expositio*, infanticide:

Questions for discussion:

- A. Was *expositio* the same thing as infanticide? What were the factors influencing the decision to expose a newborn?

Reading:

- Evans-Grubbs, J. 2010. Hidden in plain sight: *expositi* in the community. In V. Dasen and T. Späth (eds). *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 293–310.
- Evans-Grubbs, J. 2013. Infant exposure and infanticide. In J. Evans Grubbs and T. Parkin (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press: 83–107.

- B. What methods of birth-control were available in antiquity? How effective were they?

Reading:

- Riddle, J. 1992. *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press: 1–15, 57–65, 74–86
- Frier, B. 1994. Natural fertility and family limitation in Roman marriage. *CP* 89: 318–333.
- Flemming, R. 2021. Fertility control in ancient Rome. *Women's History Review* 30.6: 896–914.

Mar 11th: Pregnancy and childbirth; child mortality

Reading:

- Dasen, V. 2011. Childbirth and infancy in Greek and Roman antiquity. In B. Rawson (ed). *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dasen, V. 2005. Blessing or portent? Multiple births in ancient Rome. In K. Mustakallio et al. (eds). *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 33: 61–73.
- Carroll, M. 2018. *Infancy and Earliest Childhood in the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 82–117.

- A. Did the ancients care when their children died?

Reading:

- Huskinson, J. 2007. Constructing childhood on Roman funerary memorials. In A. Cohen and J. Rutter (eds). *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*. Princeton, NJ: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. *Hesperia* supplement no. 41: 323–338.
- Carroll, M. 2012. ‘No part in earthly things:’ the death, burial and commemoration of newborn children and infants in Roman Italy. In M. Harlow and L. Larssen Lovén (eds). *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London: Continuum Books: 41–63.

Mar 18th: Attitudes to children and childhood:

Questions for discussion:

A. “The Romans had no concept of childhood.” Is this a valid statement?

Reading:

- Garnsey, P. 1991. Child rearing in ancient Italy. In D. Kertzer and R. Saller (eds). *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press: 48-65
- Laes, C. 2004. *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press: 13-49
- Laes, C. 2017. Touching children in Roman antiquity: the sentimental discourse and the family. In C. Laes and V. Vuolanto (eds). *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London and New York: Routledge: 60-78.
- Dolansky, F. 2017. Roman girls and boys at play: realities and representations. In C. Laes and V. Vuolanto (eds). *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London and New York: Routledge: 116-36.
- Rawson, B. 1997. The iconography of Roman childhood. In B. Rawson and P. Weaver (eds). *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 205-232, with 233-236 (Huskinson)

Mar 25th: Slavery and the Roman family**Reading:**

- Edmondson, J. 2011. Slavery and the Roman family. In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*. Online.
- Dolansky, F. 2016. Strained relations, gender differences, and domestic ideals: the significance of two Roman family festivals. In S. L. Budin and J. M. Turfa, eds. *Women in Antiquity: Real Women Across the Ancient World*. London and New York: Routledge: 905-14.
- Perry, M. 2014. *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press: 43-68
- Penner, L. 2012. Gender, household structure and slavery: re-interpreting the aristocratic columbaria of early imperial Rome. In R. Laurence and A. Strömberg, *Families in the Greco-Roman World*. London: Continuum: 143-58.
- Mouritsen, H. 2011. The families of Roman slaves and freedmen. In B. Rawson (ed). *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell: 129-44.

Apr 1st: Old age and death in the Roman family:**Questions for discussion:**

A. Is it possible to reconstruct the Romans’ emotional attitudes towards death?

B. What was old age like in the ancient world? Which factors influenced what kind of an old age one had?

Reading:

- Hope, V. 1997. A roof over the dead: communal tombs and family structure. In R.

Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds). *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*. Portsmouth R.I.: *ORA* Suppl. 22: 69-88.

- Parkin, T. 1997. Out of sight, out of mind: elderly members of the Roman family. In B. Rawson and P. Weaver (eds). *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 123-148.
- Parkin, T. 2003. *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press: 203-35
- Hope, V.M., 2018. Dead people's clothes: materialising mourning and memory in ancient Rome. In Z. Newby and R.E. Toulson (eds). *The Materiality of Mourning*. London and New York: Routledge: 23-39.

Apr 8th: *Student presentations