CHAPTER VI:

THE EARLY ROMAN REPUBLIC, 509-264

MONARCHICAL AND DIVINE EXCESSES

RUSTIC PURITANISM

Almost all have abandoned the theory, popular a generation or two ago, that "the Romans" only copied Greek literary formulas without practicing pederasty. True, Latins like Greeks portrayed reciprocal homosexuality only rarely and poets like Petronius and Martial often apologized for talking dirty. Latin poems, as common to boys as to women, (none were written by boys and almost none by women) showed, as Cicero said, "either slavish adulation or fiery lust" ( ). On the other hand, the theory, pushed especially by Veyne, that the upper classes at least adopted pederasty wholesale from the Greeks ("Greek love can equally be called Roman") is also false. Upper-class Roman males continued to marry girls of 12 to 14 and Roman customs did not change after contact with the Greeks or their conquest of the Mediterranean.
Unlike the Greeks, Romans never institutionalized pederasty. On the other hand, like most primitive societies and all Mediterranean civilizations except Persian and Judaic they apparently did not outlaw it as such or any other form of homosexuality, even prostitution, before the Christian takeover. Like almost all other societies, they did prohibit homosexual rape, undue pressure on subordinates for homosexual favors, and probably seduction of free boys under a certain age. In sharp contrast to the Greek practice of delaying marriage until 30 to brides of 15 to 18, aristocratic boys married on the average at age 16 girls of 12 or 13. Thus unlike the Greeks they had a socially approved, even obligatory, sexual . By the time Rome defeated Carthage, upper-class Hellenizers began to ape Greek manners but they took slave rather than free boys as catamites. Critics of the old school, often political rivals, branded them as effeminates, referring to a mos maiorum--ancestral custom. Supposedly in earlier, purer days of a small agricultural community, Romans had practiced sexual restraint within a monogamous marriage and maintained an economical, simple, hardy lifestyle.

The demography of Roman patricians differed drastically from that of Hellenic aristocrats. Teen-age boys, the minimum age set by law being 14, married at their father's or grandfather's behest girls of 12, the legal minimum age, or 13, the presumed age of puberty. At 12, the bride can hardly be called a wife, uxor
“She sometimes married even earlier. As Soranus tells us in reporting the ignorance of the Romans on the normal shape of the vagina, the deflowering preceded the first menses.”\textsuperscript{65} Some consummated unions before menarche. In the last century of the Republic, divorce became common as alliances among elites shifted. In contrast to classical Greece, the prolific old families endured for centuries.

The oldest male ascendant picked brides for teenage descendants, who had much less say in the choice of mates than mature Greeks of thirty exercised. Patricians wished to ensure their line, to provide security for their old age, gain or cement alliances, and to furnish the threatened city with soldiers. They did not worry, on an underpopulated frontier or in an expanding state, about land for their descendants to farm. They had their sons or grandsons assume the \textit{toga virilis} as early as 14 and rarely after 16.

One might speculate that the condemnation of sexual promiscuity that later Romans, probably justly, attributed to their early republican ancestors may have been a xenophobic reaction first against Etruscans and afterwards c.400, as they began to conquer Greeks, against the sexual habits of these other foreigners, whom they regarded as cowardly and effete.

The bulk of the equestrians and the rest of the middle class, increasingly distanced from the Senators, ever wealthier owing to conquest and corruption, developed a divergent marriage pattern,
most of the evidence for which come from a later period to be sure, of waiting until their mid-20s, by which time their careers or fortunes were well-established, to marry girls of 18 so that an age difference of 9 years tended to show up on their epitaphs. Scholars from Friedlander to Herlihy have tended to think this was typical of Roman marriages and failed to note the statistically insignificant but culturally paramount different pattern of the aristocracy.\footnote{66}

Brunt, whose findings confirm Beloch rather than Frank, along with his colleague Hopkins, has produced the best work on Roman demography, noted that the lower classes, not able to afford to marry or, if they did, to raise children, resorted to abortion, infanticide, abandonment, and contraception and many who survived were unhealthy.\footnote{67} As the small farmers were uprooted by the drafts, wars, and competition of slave labor, and pushed from their farms to urban ghettos, they delayed marriages and often avoided them altogether. With unsafe wooden apartment buildings up to five stories tall, without amenities or privacy to protect women and children from sexual advances, Rome itself sprung gigantic slums. The army could not secure enough healthy recruits.

As in Greece, women could never achieve emancipation from male control before the development of "free marriages" began to substitute for \textit{in manu} during the Late Republic: grandfather, father, brother, husband, son, and grandson. As long as he lived,
the pater familias could flog and even execute even his sons and grandsons and control like that of their female wards their property, marriages, and divorces no matter how old they were, the first exemption being only for the year a son might serve as consul, after which honor he returned to his father's control.

Not yet fully developed sexually, women were often sodomized rather than deflowered on their wedding night.

Their respective regulations for marrying the young women are in accordance with those for their education. Lycurgus made them brides when they were of full age and inclination for it. Intercourse, where nature was thus consulted, would produce, he thought, love and tenderness, instead of the dislike and fear attending an unnatural compulsion; and their bodies, also, would be better able to bear the trials of breeding and of bearing children, in his judgment the one end of marriage. . . . The Romans, on the other hand, gave their daughters in marriage as early as twelve years old, or even under; thus they thought their bodies alike and minds would be delivered to the future
husband pure and undefiled. (Plutarch, Comparison of Lycurgus with Numa Pompilius)

Soranus and Macrobius ascribed the early marriages to the "hot desires" of the brides.68

As in Greece, women did not receive personal names. Unlike Greek, however, Roman law required the consent of the brides, young as they were, to the contract which was between the spouses, not between father and groom as among the Greeks.

First marriages, at least, were normally arranged by the parents of the couple. Although these marriages must often have been intended to suit the interests or ambitions of the parents rather than the inclinations of the couple, the law required that when betrothal and marriage took place both partners should be old enough to understand the vows and both should consent. Since boys were normally older than girls at marriage (a five-year difference was probably most common) and would already have begun some of the activities of a citizen, a son's wishes may have been taken more seriously than a daughter's.69

There is hardly any evidence for soldiers' wives
even at this time, before Augustus debarred legionaries from contracting legal marriages. In my judgement we can safely assume that the rate of nuptiality was exceedingly low among the Roman proletarii. Celibacy was common among freedmen.

. . It is thus unlikely that freedmen were prolific after manumission.

If it be true that slaves and freedmen, at least in the Republic, were less apt to marry and have children than the free-born . . .

Unlike Greek women, however, Roman matrons were not secluded. Even before the beginning of their emancipation during the Middle Republic, Roman women occupied a more honored position than their Greek sisters of the sixth and later centuries and had greater responsibilities in managing their households. To the scandalization of the Greeks, from the earliest times, Roman ladies attended banquets, moved about freely in the streets, and otherwise enjoyed liberties not allowed in Greece:

Much that in Rome we hold to be correct is thought shocking in Greece. No Roman thinks it an embarrassment to take his wife to a dinner party. At home the wife holds first place in the house and is the center of its social life. Things are very different in Greece, where the wife is never present at dinner, unless it is a family party, and spends all her time
in a remote part of the house called The Women's Quarter, which is never entered by a man unless he is a very close relation" (Cornelius Nepos, Praef., 6-8).

Incidentally, Nepos "seems to have been the first to describe pederasty simply as amor Graecorum or "Greek love.""\(^7\)

**EXPANSION AND CONQUESTS**