

CHAPTER 4 FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

A social system under strain

Precisely when the Republic ended and the Empire began is debatable. Several events marked the transition from Republic to Empire, including Julius Caesar's appointment as perpetual dictator (44 BC); the Battle of Actium (31 BC), at which Octavian decisively defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra; and the granting of the honorific title Augustus to Octavian by the Senate (27 BC).

This is not the place for that debate. Suffice to say that during the last years of the Republic, from about 100 BC onwards, the trend in Roman AAFMs continued as before. Most aristocrats married early. Usually, in such families, there was plenty of "old money" invested in great estates. They were not constrained by economic necessity to delay their marriages, as were many among the middle and lower classes. A female endowed with a fortune could indulge in a run of extravagant living, or bankroll her husband's political success in a corrupt electoral system. However, even for wealthy aristocrats the early marriage option was not always available. Strain and dislocation in the social system complicated matters during this period of intense internecine conflict, compounding the problems that appeared during the previous century as a result of Rome's successful imperialistic expansion.

By the last century BC, cum manu marriages were displaced by sine manu unions: the bride would now remain under the authority of her birth family; any property she took with her into the marriage would no longer be transferred, as before, to her husband's family. Legal instruments of property transfer, including dowries, trusts, inheritances, etc., became ever more complicated and varied, with all that implies for property interests, inheritances and commemoration on epitaphs. No-fault divorce was introduced and became progressively easier and more common. Further changes were added to the considerable economic and social dislocation among peasants.

While custom still favored traditional marriages under paternal governance, we see signs of rebellion and evasion on the part of young men. Some married women older than themselves for financial or other reasons, and more

extreme forms of political matchmaking occurred than had previously been the case. Accusations of homosexual debauchery became a routine weapon against rivals. Both genders of the old aristocracy became looser in their sexual conduct, with less interest in children and family life. Finally, ambitious "new men" showed a tendency to marry somewhat later than aristocrats from the established families.

Actual marriages in this period

Of the 19 biographical examples in our appendix data which belong to this period, four men never married. Of the remaining 15, ten have AAFMs within or even below the normal 17-22 range, while five are scattered among higher ages. Of these, no satisfactory explanation can be given for the apparent first marriages at age 31 of Publius Crassus and Brutus. The former had an active military career, but that did not prevent others before and after from marrying young. The latter, however, a famous enthusiast for Greek philosophy, could possibly have been influenced by Hellenic marriage customs, according to which men commonly delayed their marriages to about age 30. In the case of Crassus the Triumvir, it must be kept in mind that his marriage was to the widow of one of his two older brothers. Unfortunately, we do not know these brothers' AAFMs. It may be that Crassus was not intended for marriage as long as the marriages of the older brothers – all the brothers were living as one household in their father's house – endured. He may have been past the normal AAFM for this reason; in any case, the information about him is *ante quem*, so his true AAFM could have been much earlier. The fairly late first marriages of Cicero and Agrippa at 27 and 26, respectively, may be associated with their status as new men – those rising into the aristocracy on the basis of talent and service to those higher up. Unlike the already established aristocrats, such men had something to prove, and could hope for a suitably rewarding match as their fame or fortune increased.

This period in Roman history witnessed an unusual number of young men marrying older women. Cicero's younger brother married Pomponia at his elder brother's request. Pomponia was the sister of Atticus and some five years older than her husband. Another case involves the second marriage of the 21-year-old Octavian to Scribonia, the mother of his daughter Julia. Publius Cornelius Dolabella married Fulvia for her money when he was 17 but divorced her when 19 or 20. This phenomenon should be considered when discussing the average age differential of Roman husbands and wives. While the well-attested phenomenon of older men taking young girls as second or subsequent

wives would elevate the average age difference between spouses, this effect would be offset by the less common instances in which a man married an older woman, even for his first marriage. The most striking example of the former practice is probably Cato the Elder, who was about 80 when he married the presumably teenage daughter of his client Saloni

The sources from this period indicate a considerable degree of rebelliousness on the part of young Roman males. Mark Antony, for example, married, Fadia, the daughter of a freed slave, and fathered several children by her before he married his cousin Antonia. The date of his first marriage is uncertain, but it was probably well before he reached the age of 25. Both Cicero's nephew and his son, respectively Quintus Tullius and Marcus Tullius, apparently took advantage of the chaos of civil war to evade their fathers' attempts to arrange marriages for them. Quintus was 21 or 22 at the time his elders were making their plans. Marcus was 20, leading a dissolute life in Athens. Both joined one of the contending armies soon after this time. Quintus died in the proscription of 43 BC; Marcus survived the civil wars, but no marriage has been recorded for him. Marcus Antonius Antyllus, son of Mark Antony, was executed at 16 by Octavian in Egypt in 30 BC, when the boy had received his toga virilis but was not yet married.

Thus we see various kinds of disruption of normal family life and marriage patterns in this period of political violence. Nevertheless, even in these years an impressive number of young men can be found with AAFMs in the normal range. Manlius Torquatus, Pompey the Great, the son of Marius, Julius Caesar, Ahenobarbus, Cato the Younger, Sestius, Calpurnius Piso, and Octavian all married at 22 or younger. Julius Caesar's AAFM was even below the normal minimum age of 17. He married either at 16 or at 14, depending on his true birth year. Two married at 17, one by 19, two at 20, three by 21, and one at 22. Again, the large number of ante quem dates suggests that the average AAFM among men in this period fell into the late teens. In some cases, as with the son of Marius, the early marriage is clearly related to the political ambitions and wishes of the father. In other cases, such as those of Julius Caesar and Pompey, the young man himself chose to marry early even without a living father or grandfather to push him to that step. Octavian's marriage at 20 to the daughter of Mark Antony was a kind of shotgun affair, entered into at the request of both men's armies. The most unusual feature here, however, was not the political nature of the match, nor the fact that the bride was only 11 or 12, nor even that Octavian soon divorced her. What excited the wagging pens

of the ancient commentators was that Octavian claimed to have returned her "intact", as a virgin.

Of the seven female AAFMs dating to this period, six fall within or just above the expected range of 12 to 15: Clodia at 12, Fausta Comelia at 13, Caecilia Attica at 14, Octavia Minor and Livia Drusilla at 15, and Tullia at 16. Julius Caesar's daughter's apparent first marriage at 24, however, is so far out of line that numerous scholars have felt compelled to offer revisions. One has suggested that Julia's birth year be corrected from 83 BC to 76 BC. Another has suggested the year 75 BC. The revised dates would make her 17 or 16 at her first marriage, still a little late, but not greatly so.

The Empire: evidence grows more abundant

The most abundant evidence for AAFMs across a wide spectrum of Roman society comes from the time of the Empire. There is a wealth of information in the written sources on the imperial families as well as aristocrats both old and new. In the legal sphere, Augustus's laws reflected the tradition of early upper-class marriage on the one hand, while creating a class of professional soldiers forbidden to marry until late in life on the other hand. Social enactments of the emperors Nerva (ruled 96 AD – 98 AD) and Trajan (ruled 98 AD – 117 AD), meanwhile, indicate that early marriages still prevailed in the countryside in the first century AD among the common people. Finally, the imperial period produced a very large number of gravestones with inscriptions yielding data mainly on the urban middle classes and freed slaves. Some scholars have tried to reassess AAFMs for the entire Latin West based on a dubious method of interpreting these epigraphic data.

The remainder of this chapter will examine the fruits of this range of evidence under separate headings. The last evidential source mentioned above, gravestone inscriptions, give rise to complex issues which are considered in the following chapter.

Literary evidence: the imperial families

Among the Julio-Claudians, the Empire's founding dynasty of five emperors, who ruled until the death of Nero in 68 AD, Augustus exemplified tradition, arranging early marriages for both males and females in his extended household. Tiberius continued this practice, but also displayed intensely negative aspects of patriarchal power, delaying and preventing marriages and

other rites of passage among his relatives. Both are examples of the scope of *patria potestas* in action. The careers of Augustus and Tiberius show the tremendous influence that a long-lived and strong-willed male might exert over the destinies of several generations of descendants. Thus, longevity need not be statistically common for *patria potestas* to have been a powerful factor in Roman life. Even a less long-lived man, such as Constantine, managed to marry off most of his sons at young ages.

The Julio-Claudians were admittedly exceptional. It may be objected that in Augustus it is his exceptional political clout rather than his power as *paterfamilias* that is being measured and that Tiberius's use of judicial murder and other forms of repression to cross the marital careers of several family members was beyond the grasp of ordinary aristocrats. But Augustus was eager to preserve republican appearances and conservative family values. He passed laws to restore public morals to their earlier rigor and advertised the old-fashioned virtues of his wool-spinning womenfolk. His behavior in arranging marriages for his family members could not, therefore, have been unusual. Moreover, it was not criticized by the writers; only his too-hasty snatching up of the pregnant Livia was roundly ridiculed, although there was a precedent even for this case: the mighty Sulla (c. 138 BC – 78 BC), took his pregnant stepdaughter away from Manius Acilius Glabrio and gave her to Pompey.

Thirteen Julio-Claudian males appear in our appendix data. Eleven of them married; two at 15, one at 17, two at 19, one at 20, one at 21, and two at 22. All of them were effectively under patriarchal authority rather than independent during their marriages since their marriages and lives were determined and sometimes terminated by the current emperor, regardless of whether or not he had legally adopted them, as he almost always did. All of the marriages fall within the normal range except the two at 15, which was somewhat early. The average age was 18.8.

The nine Julio-Claudian women in our appendix show AAFMs ranging from 11 to 20. The 11-year-old was Octavia, bride of the 15-year-old Nero. Agrippina the Younger also may have been as young as 11. Livilla at 13, Augustus's daughter Julia at 14, and Agrippa's daughter Julia at 15 have AAFMs in the normal range. Tiberius's granddaughter Julia, Drusilla and Julia Livilla at 17, 17 and 16, respectively, seem a little high. The dates are somewhat uncertain, however, and the AAFMs for these three could each be a year earlier. The most interesting of the entire group is Antonia Minor, who married the 22-

year-old Drusus when she herself was already 20. The ages of both bride and groom are much closer to what would today be considered normal and healthy. The question is, how did these two young people manage to resist the pressures of tradition and of imperial politics for so long?

The ten AAFMs of Flavian, Antonine, and Severan males also conform generally to the normal pattern. The first of these three dynasties commenced with the start of Vespasian's reign (69 AD) and the last of the three ended with the assassination of Alexander Severus (235 AD). Six of these males were married as teenagers: Caracalla at 14, Elagabalus at 15, Commodus, Alexander Severus and Gordian at 16, and Domitian at 18. Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius were married at 24, Septimius Severus at 30, and Lucius Verus at 33. Fully half of these AAFMs could be considered unusually early, probably reflecting the special pressures and opportunities inherent in imperial status. On the other hand, several of the unusually late marriages can be attributed explicitly to dynastic considerations. Hadrian was married to a relative (granddaughter) of Trajan. While it is not clear that this match to Sabina was the only one that was dynastically feasible for Trajan's heir, we may assume that he waited a few years beyond the usual age so that the bride might reach a suitable age for marriage: Sabina was either 12 or 15 in 100 AD when the marriage took place. The delayed AAFM of Marcus Aurelius was more explicitly the result of dynastic considerations: Aurelius at age 18 had to break his previous engagement and wait another seven years until the daughter of Antoninus Pius, Faustina, reached marriageable age in 145 AD. Lucius Verus, meanwhile, who had been Faustina's original fiance, had to wait from 138 AD, when the engagements were rearranged, to 164 AD, when one of Marcus Aurelius's daughters finally reached marriageable age. The late first marriage of Septimius Severus may be associated with the need of this ambitious provincial from the African colony of Leptis Magna to politick in Rome for an extended period before settling on a match. All in all, the unusually early marriages in this sample are offset by the delayed ones. In other words, imperial status tended to accelerate inordinately or delay the AAFM of a male, but we would be no more justified to regard the delayed AAFMs as normal than to so regard the ones under age 17. The overall average age for this group is 20.6.

The aristocracy: consummated child marriage

The Roman Empire up to 284 AD, a period known as the Principate, was characterized by a concerted effort on the part of the emperors to preserve the illusion that the Republic was still in being. For the aristocracy as well as for

the constitution it was an anomalous and exceptional period. Under the Principate, the Roman nobles failed to replenish their numbers, and the senatorial ranks had to be renewed continually from outside. This is virtually the only era and class in Roman history for which delayed male marriages could be said to have been normal.

Pliny the Younger stated that "even one child is too many". He also suggested that the ideal bridegroom should be around 30, and considered it normal for girls of this class to marry at 12. While the female AAFMs suggested by Pliny's remarks are only slightly earlier than the usual Roman norm for that gender, the tendency of males from this special class to delay their marriages far beyond the traditional norm, and their disinclination to have children, were already causing concern in Augustus's time – and the situation did not improve in the first century AD.

Information gleaned from Greek and Roman doctors shows that upper-class girls married when barely pubescent. Indeed, Hopkins's review of the textual evidence for early marriage among the Romans showed that very young and even prepubescent brides were not uncommon. The fact that medical authorities felt they needed to comment on the drawbacks of consummating marriages with prepubescent girls shows that the practice cannot have been vanishingly rare. Roman and Greek medical authorities and other writers of the second through fifth centuries AD consistently reported female puberty as occurring at 13 or 14, and modern evidence on the effect of diet and other environmental factors on the age of puberty strongly suggests they may have been correct. Thus a girl who married at the age of 12 would typically have been prepubescent.

Extensive modern data for European and other developed countries clearly indicate a dramatic fall in the average age of menarche from around 16-17 in the mid-19th century to 12-13 early in the 21st. With the first indications of puberty typically beginning around two years ahead of menarche, this would imply the onset of puberty having fallen from 14-15 to 10-11. In a number of underdeveloped countries average age at menarche was still being reported at around 16-17 until the later years of the 20th century. All in all, there is every reason to suppose the ancient doctors were right in their estimates about the Roman age of puberty. The one cautionary note that should be added is that the patients these doctors saw would typically have been from the upper social classes: the lower orders could not have afforded their fees. Their patients, old and young, would have enjoyed a somewhat richer diet than the poorer

classes. In that respect it would have been somewhat closer to the nutritional regimes of modern developed countries than undeveloped ones, so that puberty in upper class girls may have been at an earlier age than that of lower class ones. Thus we need not be surprised to discover their average age of puberty girls in the lower and middle classes (i.e. by far the greatest number of girls) was around 14-15.

Roman life had many features shocking to modern sensibilities, such as slavery and the often grotesquely violent entertainments of the gladiatorial arena. The evidence that such things happened is overwhelming. We accept the reality and have perhaps become inured to the shock. Not so with *consummated* prepubescent marriage. Pre-teen, and even infant, marriage has long been recognised as a feature of many societies where arranged marriages are the norm. However, the usual assumption is that these are merely secured betrothals, which are neither meant to be consummated, nor are in fact consummated, until the young newlyweds grow up.

But is this true? Not necessarily, as evidence from more recent times demonstrates. The consummation of marriages with prepubescent girls in India was reported in considerable detail by ethnographer and colonial administrator Sir Herbert Hope Risley, an expert in the caste system of India and much else in Indian life, in his book *The People of India*, published in 1908. Risley cites the laws of Manu, or *Manava Dharma Shastra*, one of the standard books in the Hindu canon, dating from around 200 BC, which presents norms of domestic, social, and religious life in India. These laws do *not* prescribe the prepubescent consummation of marriage, but they do indicate that arranged marriages with a great age difference between husband and wife were prescribed. Risley wrote:

According to Manu, a man of 30 should marry a girl of 12, and a man of 24 a girl of 8. Later writers fix the higher limit of age in such cases at 10 years or 8 years, and reduce the lower level to 7, 6, and even 4 years.

Traditionally, such marriages were not followed directly by cohabitation. The bride would continue to live with her parents for many years, until physically ready for a consummated marriage, readiness marked by a ceremony called the *gauna*. The bride would usually, but not always, cohabit with her husband *after* this ceremony. Among the upper castes in Bengal in Risley's day, though, it was more usual for the child bride to cohabit immediately, a custom entrenched there for at least a hundred years. Risley remarked upon "the

monstrous abuse that the girls of the upper classes commence married life at the age of nine years, and become mothers at the very earliest time that it is physically possible for them to do so." Risley also cites a trusted witness, an orthodox Hindu of high caste, who had written to him: "The evil effects of the pernicious custom, which not only tolerates but directly encourages unnatural indulgence, need no demonstration. Among other things, it forces a premature puberty..."

We are not told of any evidence in support of this claim about premature puberty; interestingly, though, it echoes the opinion of the Roman physician Soranus, who thought that consummation before puberty could result in premature conception. Whether these commentators were correct or not is less to the point than that neither of them would have felt the need to make such observations unless, as Hopkins concludes with regard to Rome, prepubertal marriages "did occur, probably on some scale". He also notes that legal opinion does not appear to have been censorious against very early marriage: from lawyers there is no "sneer or censure against marriage before 12". Plutarch, he points out, characterised the Romans as giving their girls in marriage at 12 or younger; Cassius Dio, Roman consul and historian (150 AD – 235 AD), opined that "a full 12 years is considered the right time for girls to marry".

Moreover, Roman law, while it set the legal age of marriage for males at 14 and females at 12, did not *prevent* a prepubescent from marrying. The readiness of Romans to take brides even under the legal age is further indicated, says Hopkins, by the existence of laws pertaining to the practice, none of which are prohibitory: "the sole limitations placed on illegally early marriages was that none of the legal consequences of marriage followed until the girl was 12". In Friedlander's opinion, "...probably the daughters of noble houses entered into the marriage immediately from the nursery".

The two female AAFMs in our appendix which relate to this class of women are "the wife of Quintilian" and "the daughter of Agricola", who were married at 12 and 13, respectively. Writers who mentioned the marriages of Octavia and Agrippina, at ages 11 and 12 respectively, made no adverse comment about the ages, even when they found much to censure about the Julian dynasty. What did excite comment were the few instances in which a very young bride was returned to her parents with her virginity intact – as if this were behavior so rare as to be scarcely credible. On the contrary, males were eager to possess psychologically malleable virgins, and 14-year-olds were already

considered to be "ladies" actively courting the attentions of males, according to Epictetus.

Thus the ancient textual evidence, whether medical, legal, philosophical, or scandal-mongering, shows that early and very early first marriages of females "occurred on a scale that would make it an accepted and by no means abnormal practice". Hopkins, like Friedlander before him, clearly demonstrated that Roman law, custom, and opinion assumed the eligibility for marriage of even prepubescent girls and were wholly disposed to encourage the marriage of females in their early teens. Confirming from these same sources that practice followed opinion is difficult only because the matter was, perhaps, so routine as to excite almost no interest among the ancient historians.

The old category of "new man" lost significance. Members of the decadent old families married late or not at all, and ambitious provincials such as Severus also delayed marriage. But if a provincial or equestrian had ready access to a prestigious mate, marriage could be relatively early, or at least not delayed, as in the case of Agricola and Tacitus (married at 21 and 22 respectively). Agricola's father was already a senator and both Agricola and Tacitus advanced without hindrance once in Rome. Elagabalus and Alexander Severus (married at 15 and 16 respectively) were clearly provincials, but it is not their Syrian origins which should be emphasized but rather their connection to the court through Julia Domna, their mothers' aunt and long-reigning empress.

Legal evidence: military reforms and marriage law

The general evolution of laws pertaining to marriage and property transfers during the late Republic and early Empire are discussed elsewhere. However, two specific sets of legislation enacted under Augustus deserve mention. Firstly, there were his military reforms, which affected marriage; secondly, there were reforms aimed at encouraging early marriage and having families.

The Augustan military reforms created a class – the professional legionaries – who were forbidden to marry until the end of their term of service. This measure remained in force for over two centuries until it was revoked by Septimus Severus. Since the legionaries volunteered for 25-year stints, two to three hundred thousand men within the Empire were consistently forced to delay their official marriages to middle age. Thus the professional legionary of the first and second centuries AD stands in complete contrast to the early-marrying citizen-soldier of republican times.

A connection between the two groups can be seen, however, in the recruitment statistics. Volunteers for service as a professional legionary ranged in age from 13 to 36, but the bulk (75%) were between 18 and 23 with a peak at 20. This picture agrees with the impression of generally young recruits in the Roman armies of the second century BC. It also indirectly supports the assumption that lower class Roman men also married young. The normal AAFM was 17 to 22, but this is precisely the age range of the bulk of the recruits for the professional army.

The Augustan legislation resolved a long-standing conflict between between the state's need for soldiers to serve lengthy terms in faraway provinces and the soldier's need to tend to his family at home. Under the new rules, a young man who saw no prospects for marriage and employment in civilian life or who was by nature inclined to a military career had a clear-cut alternative. The advantage to the state was that it could post the volunteer legionaries for very long periods wherever they were most needed, without needing any longer to consider the soldiers' concerns about their (legal) spouse, offspring, and associated property back home. For the soldier, the rules provided a guaranteed living, including room and board and a lump sum with which he could establish himself comfortably at the end of his term of service.

Meanwhile, human nature was not entirely frustrated. There is considerable evidence that Roman soldiers in Britain, along the Rhine, and elsewhere mingled freely with women and established informal liaisons with them in the settlements that arose near the legionaries' camps – liaisons which could be formalized once the official term of service expired. So Augustus's army legislation established a class of people with artificially delayed AAFMs. However, the numbers of men involved were very small in proportion to the population of the Empire and much smaller than the average of 13% of adult males serving in the armed forces of Rome in the second century BC.

The other pieces of Augustan legislation that are especially significant for our topic are the Julian marriage law and the Papia Poppaea law, named after the two consuls who proposed it. The Julian marriage law was promulgated in 18 BC, while the Papia Poppaea law was added in 9 AD. These laws imposed penalties on those members of the senatorial class who were unmarried and childless within certain ages (25-60 for men and 20-50 for women). In effect, the law demanded that legal marriage and procreation take place by the minimum ages stated and also required those divorced or widowed to marry

again. The penalties provided that an unmarried person was entirely incapable of receiving inheritances or legacies, with all property so designated devolving to the state. A married person who was childless would lose half of any inheritance or legacies to the state. Clearly, a person of this census class had not only had to be married but also to show live offspring in order to prevent the potential loss of significant amounts of property.

At first sight this seems very draconian but the penalties did not apply to inheritance from *close* relatives, so the danger of losing a fortune should not be overstated: it would have barred no doubt extremely welcome bequests from distant relatives, but these would hardly have been as usual or as anticipated as inheritance from close relatives, especially a father. These would not be affected.

The law provided a grace period too. A bachelor was given a hundred days in which to remedy the situation. He could marry in that time, but he would still be childless and half of the property in the will could still be lost on that account. The law also provided that property in a will which would be forfeited to the state due to the single or childless status of the designated recipient might be transferred to that heir's father or paternal grandfather. While this provision in the law does not explicitly evoke the power of the *paterfamilias* over the property of descendants under his authority, it nevertheless brilliantly illustrates the logical operation of this principle. The exemption in the law recognizes the fact that a living father or paternal grandfather ultimately controlled the property of his offspring.

It also conforms to the inherent logic and intent of the Julian marriage law: a man who has children who can be the beneficiaries of a will has thereby fulfilled the requirement of having married and produced legitimate offspring. This exemption would preserve for the family any willed property coming to it from outside the direct line of paternal succession as long as the current *paterfamilias* was alive. Upon the death of the qualified *paterfamilias*, however, the parts of his property that were due to go to unqualified offspring would be lost in whole or in part depending on the degree of the incapacity – single or merely childless – of the potential heir.

Clearly, any senator who contemplated passing on property to a distant relative or an adopted heir would want to make sure that the offspring in question would be qualified to receive such property according to the Augustan laws. In order to remove the incapacity resulting from being

unmarried, under the age parameters set by the law, a son or daughter could be married as late as age 24 or 19, respectively.

But this would only preserve half of the property. To be sure of fulfilling the second qualification and thus preserving the entire inheritance, the process of legitimate marriage and procreation had to be set in motion much earlier. Considering the risk of miscarriages, stillbirths, and infant mortality in this population as well as the relatively frequent incidence of spousal death, prudence would dictate that marriages be contracted and consummated several years prior to the deadlines stated in the law. Reasonably, a daughter should have been married by 15 or 16 and a son by 21 or 22 at the absolute latest in order to ensure that the heirs would have met the demands of the Julian marriage law and the Papia Poppaea law. Augustus was concerned to re-establish virtuous, traditional Roman family life. He would have chosen age parameters that gave those who contracted marriages according to customary AAFMs a reasonable chance to meet the requirements of his law. All in all, the Julian marriage law and the Papia Poppaea law provide additional strong circumstantial evidence that AAFMs of 22 or under for males and of 15 or under for females were normal in Roman society.

Marriages of the common people

While the Augustan era family laws referred only to the senatorial class, the social enactments of emperors Nerva and Trajan a century or so later concerned the common people. These enactments provided welfare for poor children and orphans. The scheme included general funds, as well as food and subsidized education. The provisions are sometimes referred to as the *alimenta* of Nerva and Trajan, *alimenta* being the plural of the Latin *alimentum*, meaning nourishment, or food, with also a wider possible connotation of sustenance and maintenance. The word *alimenta* had long been used in connection with the supply of grain to Rome, including the free ration known as the grain dole, which was available to anyone willing to wait in the bread line.

The *alimenta* of Nerva and Trajan strongly imply that the offspring of lower and lower-middle class Italian townsmen and farmers were expected to marry very early, like the aristocracy. Under this scheme, local landowners subscribed to imperially funded long-term loans secured against their properties on which they paid a fixed interest of 5% annually. The interest payments were distributed among a selected pool of poor children in the local area. The two

localities for which we have detailed records, the vicinity of Machia in Campania and the town of Veleia in Apulia, show that the number of recipients was about 115 children in the first case and 300 in the second. The rate of support was 16 sesterces per month for freeborn boys and 12 sesterces for freeborn girls. It would not have gone very far, but was no doubt a welcome supplement to any other income the poor would have had: a loaf of bread cost roughly half a sestertius in the first century AD; a tunic 15 sestertii and a donkey 500. Pliny the Younger had already instituted a somewhat similar alimentary scheme as patronus (patron, or protector) of Comum in northern Italy. As stated by Pliny, the purpose of Trajan's legislation was to aid poor free families in bringing up those children which confidence in Trajan's beneficent reign had inspired these poor people to beget.

Only a small proportion of the eligible poor actually received the modest level of support on offer from the alimenta, and it is doubtful whether any such purpose was substantially achieved. The significant thing about the scheme for present purposes, though, is the information it gives as to the likely marriage age of ordinary Romans. This comes from the ages at which the child support was terminated: 16 for boys and 14 for girls. Pliny tells us that the boys were then expected to enlist in the army while the girls were supposed to return the state's investment in their upbringing by getting married and procreating. If, as some claim, ordinary Roman females only married at 18 or 19, why cut off the support at 14? This cut-off point makes sense only if we accept that AAFMs for lower class Roman girls were in the same range as that of their senatorial sisters. The major difference between the customs of the nobility and the practice of the commons implied by the rules of the alimenta is that poor working people did not impose marriage upon prepubescent children of 11 and 12.

At 14 or 15, most girls would have been physically capable of the role Pliny prescribed for them. As for the boys, we have seen that volunteers for the professional army tended to be 18-23 years old, although they could be as young as 13. Cutting off the alimenta for boys at 16 forced these young men to look seriously at their future prospects. Those who had the opportunity to earn a living would have to do so right away; and if they could earn a living they could also marry in their late teens, not ten years later. If no such opportunities came to hand in a year or two, the young man might well opt for the legions. Alternatively, he might migrate to the city of Rome, possibly with a teenage wife in tow, to keep up the numbers of the proletariat living there on the grain dole.