

Roman Names 3: Freedmen and Freedwomen

Roman society was heavily reliant on slaves. Often they were prisoners of war, or the children of slaves, born in captivity. It was usual for a slave to have only one name, e.g. *Felix* or *Melissa*.

If a male slave was given his freedom, he became a *libertus* (freedman), while a female slave became a *liberta* (freedwoman). Freed slaves were allowed to become Roman citizens, wear the toga (if they were men), and take on new citizen-style names. But they did not have a free choice about these names. They had to adopt part of the name of the master who had freed them. Their old master would then become their **patron** and the freedman would become one of their **clients**, each supporting the other, although never as equals.

Freedmen

A new freedman could now have a name with three parts, just like a Roman citizen man: a *praenomen*, a *nomen* and a *cognomen*. As a mark of respect, he adopted the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his master. He then added his old slave name onto the end like a *cognomen*.

A slave called *Felix*, freed by a master called *Marcus Aemilius Vitalis* became *Marcus Aemilius Felix*.

But there was a catch. The Romans thought status was very important, and liked to know about people's backgrounds. To make sure that the freedman *Marcus Aemilius Felix* was not mistaken for a Roman citizen from an old Roman family, he was expected to include the initial letter of his master's *praenomen* and the letter *L* for *libertus* just before his old slave name:

M. Aemilius **M.L.** Felix
(Marcus Aemilius **Marci libertus** Felix)
Marcus Aemilius Felix, **freedman of Marcus**

Some of our best primary evidence for freedmen and freedwomen are the funerary portraits that they chose for themselves. They show the men wearing togas, and people side by side as couples or family groups. These were important signs of their freedom - slaves were not allowed to wear togas, get married or call their children their own.

Freedwomen

A new freedwoman could now have a two-part name, just like a Roman citizen woman. For her first name, she took on a feminine version of her master's *nomen* and she kept her slave name as a second name. So:

A slave called *Melissa*, freed by a master called *Marcus Aemilius Vitalis* became *Aemilia Melissa*.

But when writing her name down, she also had to include the the initial letter of her master's *praenomen* and the letter *L* for *liberta*.

Aemilia M.L. Melissa
(Aemilia **Marci liberta** Melissa)
Aemilia Melissa, **freedwoman of Marcus**



A. A New Name for a New Life

How would these slaves write down their names once they've been freed?



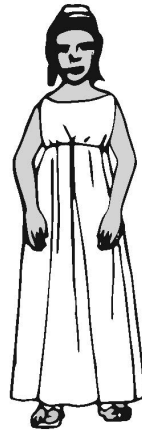
Myrtis

freed by her master
Marcus Claudius Paulinus



Gallio

freed by his master
Lucius Mussius Dexter



Anna

freed by her master
Gnaeus Dellius Lentulus



Dionysios

freed by his master
Publius Cornelius Taurus

B. Reading Latin Inscriptions

You are going to see some pictures of real Latin inscriptions. Try copying down the names highlighted in red, and say whether they belong to a freedperson or a free-born citizen by circling the correct word.

1. _____ Freedperson / Freeborn
2. _____ Freedperson / Freeborn
3. _____ Freedperson / Freeborn
4. _____ Freedperson / Freeborn
5. _____ Freedperson / Freeborn