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Matthew J. Perry, City University of New York (CUNY), USA

### **Gratitude for Freedom: Men, Women, and the Looming Possibility of Re-enslavement**

**Abstract:**

At the beginning of his textbook on Roman law, the jurist Gaius notes that the foundational division in the law of persons is that an individual is either free or enslaved. From a legal perspective, there was no greater distinction in status for a human being. Yet jurists and others recognized that this key dividing line was not rigid; it was not uncommon for individuals in the Roman world to pass from one status to the other—being enslaved or manumitted. This talk explores the permeability of the line between freedom and enslavement through the lens of gratitude and obligation, in particular the figure of the “ungrateful freedperson.” There was a prevalent cultural assumption that manumitted individuals were perpetually indebted to their former masters, making the release from slavery something less than ascendancy to complete freedom. Roman law granted patrons the ability to levy a charge of ingratitude against any of their freedpersons who violated prescribed standards of respectful conduct, which could result in a range of penalties, including re-enslavement. The arena in which the interplay between gratitude, debt, and freedom was perhaps most visible was the case of a marriage between a freedwoman and her patron. Altogether, the place of gratitude and obligation in Roman understandings of liberty and enslavement help to explain the enduring modes of both freedom and unfreedom in the Roman world.

**Bio:**

Matthew J. Perry is an associate professor at the City University of New York (CUNY), with appointments at the Graduate Center (Classics) and John Jay College of Criminal Justice (History). His research focuses on Roman social and legal history, especially issues of gender, citizenship and slavery. He published *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman* with Cambridge University Press in 2014. His most recent article, “The *Lex Scantinia* and the Public Response to *Stuprum*” will appear in the 2023 volume of *Eugesta: The Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity*.