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Professor Oh

Romans in their Environment

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Personal Narrative: Mamercus Arrius Scaevola, Fisherman

My name is Mamercus Arrius Scaevola, I am a 56-year-old fisherman. My family originally were Roman citizens living in Macedonia. We came to this city 20 years ago, after a trading relationship with Macedonia was established. My family came from an urbanized Macedonian city where the cost of housing was much higher, coming here meant we could own our own home. For generations, my family has always been fisher people, and I brought with me Macedonian fishing techniques to our new home. In Macedonia many river dwelling fish fed upon Hippurus, an insect resembling a fly, wasp, and bumblebee, that hovered over the water. To mimic this creature, as a child my father taught me to wrap scarlet wool around the hook of my fishing rod, which was around six-feet long, and then attach two wax-colored feathers to the wool.¹ The fish would mistake the hook as the insect and eat the hook. Coming to this new city, I was able to integrate myself into the developing fishing economy and was able to build my own fishery, which included a processing plant with salting vats and pots to produce fish sauce, or garum,² because as a fisherman, I both caught and bred fish as well as salted and processed them.³ I take pride in the fact I feed much of the people of the city I have watch grow into what it is now, but I also export preserved fish and garum to trading partners, local and foreign, including Macedonia.

¹ Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals*, 15.1

² Mylona, *Fish Processing in the Mediterranean: Varying Traditions, Technologies and Scales of Production with Particular Reference to the Eastern Mediterranean*, pp. 426

³ Marzano, *Fish and Fishing in the Roman World*, pp. 444-5

I married my wife, Numeria the younger, when I was 23 years old and she was 14⁴. When we came here, she left behind her family, and we brought my mother, Decima, and my nephew, Tullus, the son of my deceased brother and sister-in-law, who I adopted as my son. Our first child was conceived when I was 39, after we had left Macedonia, a boy who did not survive infancy. He was cremated, with my mother and Numeria the younger overseeing the rites and burial, performing the obsequies⁵, because the child was an infant we did not perform full funeral rites, and were not as attached to the child since it did not live for very long, but I mourned all the same. We had loved the child, but we already had the assurance that Tullus would take care of us in old age and after death, as a caretaker and a practitioner of our funeral rites and burial.⁶ During the birth of our first child, I was at sea but when I returned, I took a break for a short period of time to accompany her during confinement.⁷ Two years later, Numeria got pregnant again with twins, a girl and a boy, Arria Decimilla and Volusus Arrius Scaevola. This time we had gotten a Hellenistic statutory offering for a safe delivery at childbirth depicting a small, swaddled babe⁸ but Numeria the younger still struggled greatly and was bedbound for much of her confinement. In the early stages of our children's lives, I was expected to be the primary example of "cultivated speech" to the children, while Numeria the younger was secondary but still expected to be just as eloquent.⁹ I was often at sea, and we could not afford servants or slaves. Therefore, Numeria the younger and my mother were the primary caretakers of my children, but I was still involved in the process of child rearing.¹⁰ All of my children attended the first level of primary

⁴ Girls age at marriage, Clark, *Roman Women*, pp. 200

⁵ Mother performing funeral rites, Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp. 113

⁶ The practical aspects of grieving a child, Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp. 114

⁷ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp.106

⁸ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp.105-6

⁹ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp. 110

¹⁰ On the topic of the father being involved in the raising of children, Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, pp. 111

education, being taught by a litterator,¹¹ once they all completed their education, I began to teach my sons my craft as a fisherman and took them on as apprentices, and prepare Arria Decimilla for marriage, she is a grown woman and ready for marriage, but has yet to menstruate. To remedy this, her mother and I have been giving her regular massages, encouraging gentle exercise, feeding her good food, and providing her with diversions.¹²

I often saw the shrine to Lares grundiles, symbolizing fertility,¹³ when I was coming back home from the sea. I noticed it even more when I and Numeria the younger were trying for children, and I began to worship it regularly in hopes of a strong, healthy son. As a free adult male citizen, I regularly participate in civic religious festivals and rituals, even supplying the fish and sauces for religious festival banquets, and as paterfamilias it is my responsibility to tend to my family's relationship with the gods and ancestors. I keep religion strongly tied to daily life within my household and daily life, in our kitchen, where our hearth to make offerings to is, is a shrine to the household lares¹⁴ to oversee the preparation of the families food¹⁵ and in the humble atrium of my home, I have another shrine with an aedicula in honor of the lares and penates of my household, inside which and around I display bronze statuettes of the household penates,¹⁶ including Neptune and Pan. I am proud of my virtuous and pious household, which has flourished underneath my direction and my family who are so faithful because of my guidance.

¹¹ Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, pp. 139

¹² On encouraging menstruation, Clark, *Roman Women*, pp. 200

¹³ Symbol of fertility, Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden*, pp. 106

¹⁴ Kitchen gods, Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden*, pp. 48

¹⁵ Shelton, *As the Romans Did*, pp.487

¹⁶ Penates, Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden*, pp. 50

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