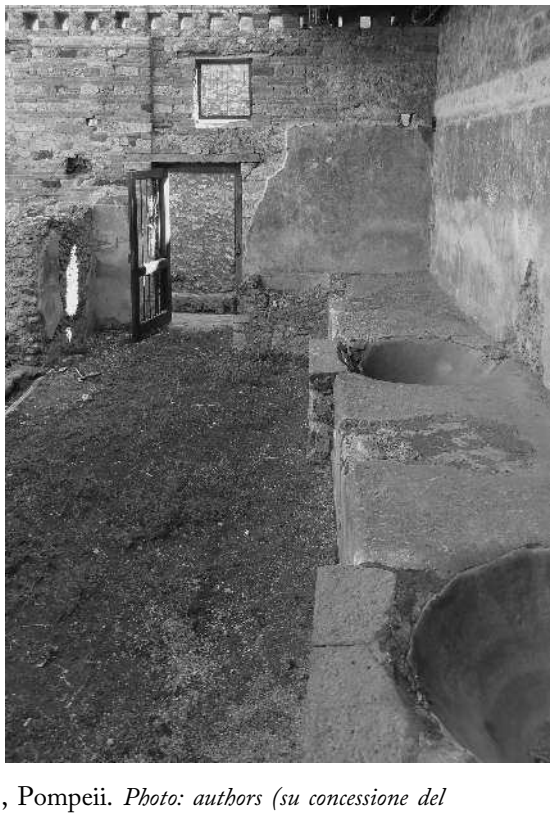
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

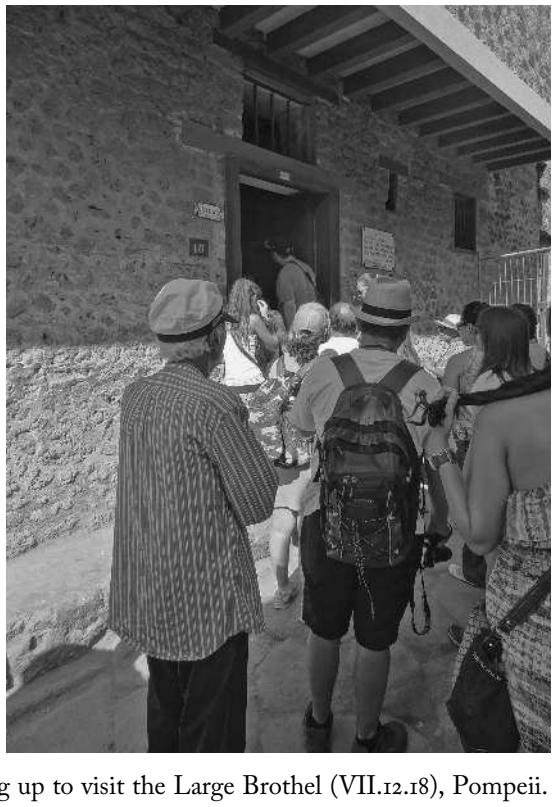
In 79 CE before the eruption of Vesuvius buried the city of Pompeii, the prostitutes in the Large Brothel (VII.12.18) and the workers in a wool-treatment shop (VII.12.17) were next-door neighbors, the entryways of their places of business opening on Vicolo del Lupanare (Figs. 1–2). Both the sex workers and the wool workers were in all likelihood slaves. Side by side, brothel and workshop reveal something of the material life of two groups of slaves in ancient Roman society: at the least, their arrangements of space and equipment show us something of the material conditions of their laborers. In the brothel, prostitutes serviced their customers in the five cramped cubicles, each with its own masonry bed, opening off a central hallway. The erotic paintings on the walls above the doorways, which show couples in different sexual positions, may well display the sex acts performed by the women. Some 134 separate graffiti name sexual activities, the male customers, and the women themselves.[1] There are no surviving pictures of the work in the wool-treatment shop, only a list or calculations written in charcoal and now no longer visible. What exactly took place in the workshop – fulling, dyeing, wool washing – has been the subject of scholarly debate. Yet the features of the shop point to the kinds of movements of the workers and even to their tasks: two large basins; a hearth; a long, low counter with two lead-lined bowls heated by built-in furnaces beneath; and a room with nail holes, perhaps for hanging lines.[2]

Our uneven knowledge in these two cases seems to be a simple matter – sex work is easier to read; however, there is something more where the slave laborers are concerned. Brothel and workshop represent not only the material life of Roman slaves but also the conditions of our knowing them. Today, the attention directed to these workplaces is not equal. A major site on nearly every tour of Pompeii, the brothel is carefully preserved and maintained: it is roofed, and its erotic paintings are well lit. Visitors stream in and out of the brothel, whereas the workshop is kept locked, accessible only by permission (Fig. 3). Its counters, lead-lined bowls, and basins are covered in moss and crumbling. It has no roof,



1. Interior of the Large Brothel (VII.12.18), Pompeii. *Photo: authors (su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei).*
2. Work space of the wool-treatment shop (VII.12.17) next door to the Large Brothel, Pompeii. *Photo: authors (su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei).*

and any paintings or wall decorations were exposed to the elements and disappeared long ago.[3] There are few visitors and then only scholars. At first glance, the brothel appears to make its slave prostitutes present in its cubicles, masonry beds, graffiti, and erotic paintings, accompanied by the explanatory patter of guides. The workshop, decaying, has already made its workers absent. Seemingly, slaves are forgotten in the workshop and remembered in the brothel, yet in fact how the brothel remembers its prostitutes eclipses the slave women who labored here. Tourists and guides alike tell sly, tongue-in-cheek, dirty jokes in nearly every language, and their smug laughter erases the realities of the prostitutes, their labor, and their working conditions. If the women in the paintings above the doors allude to prostitutes at work, we have pictures of slave women. Yet we overlook them, for what we notice are the sex acts: thus, slave women are visible but absent.[4] In effect, slaves are obscured in how they are represented in the carefully maintained



3. Tourists lining up to visit the Large Brothel (VII.12.18), Pompeii. *Photo: authors (su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei).*

environment of the brothel, as they are in a different way in the crumbling remains of the workshop.

The current conditions of the neighboring brothel and workshop stage the central concerns of this book: the absence and presence of Roman slaves in the material remains of the world they inhabited. We look not only at how slaves seem absent in the archaeological record but also at how they are often actively, if unwittingly, made to disappear in guidebooks and scholarly literature: that is, the slaves themselves seem to be forgotten even as their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods are described and discussed. *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* seeks a way to make slaves appear or, more accurately, it searches for ways to see them – to make slaves visible where other evidence tells us they were in fact present. Each of the following chapters explores the dichotomy between visibility and invisibility, appearance and disappearance, in four physical and social locations – urban houses, city streets and neighborhoods, workshops, and villas – and each chapter takes on this dichotomy in ways particular to its topic. The stakes in our project involve the practices of art history, archaeology, and history and how these practices might intertwine. In effect, then, this is also a book about how these fields – how we – remember or forget some of the subjects of our studies.

INVISIBILITY IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Slaves were everywhere in the world of ancient Rome. They worked on the land, served their owners in their homes, labored in workshops, and walked the streets of ancient cities. Yet visitors to the archaeological sites of Pompeii or Ostia walk through a landscape that appears untouched by slavery. For the most part, slave servants and workers did not mark their passages through city streets or within their owners' residences or workplaces. We have objects, some of which were made by slaves, but we can rarely name their makers. Even where we can trace property lines and plantings, the vines tended by slaves, the crops harvested by them, and the animals they raised are, of course, long gone, and so, too, is the presence of slaves on the land. We can often point to service areas in Roman houses and villas, kitchens and stables, where we might expect slaves, but beyond graffiti, only indirect evidence of the slaves' existence survives. Most of the time, we cannot even identify slave quarters (George 1997b, 15).

Because we cannot see the distinctive marks of slaves in objects or architecture, many scholars of antiquity regard slaves as irretrievable in the archaeological remains and therefore, by implication, invisible (Scheidel 2003, 581; Schumacher 2001, 100–1, 238–39; Thompson 2003, 267–70; Webster 2005, 163). Indeed, as Jane Webster points out, the very orientation of Roman archaeology, with its emphasis on agency theory, inhibits even the attempt to look for slaves in the archaeological record because "gross structural inequalities" mean that owners not slaves determined most of what we can now see: for example, the architecture and decoration of a house, the alignment of mills in a bakery, or the location of a fountain at the intersection of two streets (Webster 2008a, 110–11).[5] This is simply to say that masterly power and the state of slaves – owned and usually owning little themselves – leave different and unequal traces in the archaeological remains.[6]

In the last ten years, Ian Morris in Greek archaeology and Jane Webster in Roman archaeology have developed various strategies for finding the material culture of slaves in ceramics, artifact assemblages, houses, and graffiti based on identifiable ethnic markers.[7] Interesting and provocative, their work "focuses primarily on objects and patterns that are associated with resistance and used in the interstices of power" (Mullins 2008, 127). Their approach, however, cannot deal with slaves born and bred in Italy, captives who lost any connection to their cultures of origin, or slaves whose cultural expressions involved evanescent sounds, gestures, or physical demeanors that left the material record untouched (cf. Webster 2008a, 116–17). In other words, the search for distinctive ethnic markers often will not enable us to put the majority of slaves into the predominant archaeological landscape available to modern eyes – the remains of houses, streets, workshops, and villas that seem to bear little trace of slaves' existence.

The Material Life of Roman Slaves takes a different approach. Unlike Morris and Webster, we do not look for material traces that uniquely and exclusively belonged to enslaved men and women. Rather, we view the archaeological record as readable for the material lives of slaves. In a slaveholding society like ancient Rome, slaves were ubiquitous and were critical in producing both the income and social status of the elite.[8] This is not to

say that every object or structure was made by slaves, or that they occupied every or any place that we can see. It is to say that slaves inhabited many of the houses, streets, villas, and farmsteads of ancient Italy that compose our archaeological record. This approach places slaves on the well-traveled paths of spatial theory, historical archaeology in other fields, and Roman archaeology. Theorists as diverse as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Henri Lefebvre, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Edward Soja assume that space and its patterning are essentially social.[9] Not only do its patterns rely on human behavior, but "the meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience," in the words of Soja (1989, 79–80; see also 129–30). More concretely, for historical archaeologists and scholars of material culture like the American historian Rhys Isaac, "a society necessarily leaves marks of use upon the terrain it occupies." These remains signal the particular "relations of a people to the environment" and "the distribution and control of access to essential resources" (1999, 19).

At the same time, a focus on the inequities of power in society has led scholars to emphasize inequities in the material record. Like scholars of other periods, historians of ancient Roman art and society have long discussed material remains as expressions of the possessing classes – the imperial family, senatorial class, and local urban elites – a situation that has resulted in a bias toward interpretation that favors elite men.[10] Indeed, scholarship has tended to make elite men most present, especially in the almost unconscious assumption that their experience and behavior is "Roman" and not one of many possibilities (Revell 2009, 152). In the terms of the Haitian historian and theorist Michel–Rolph Trouillot, scholars participate in creating not only presence but also silence (1995). He argues that silences "enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of retrieval (the making of *narratives*); the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)" (26).

Thinking in terms of Trouillot's "four crucial moments" helps us to "see" the silences in the Roman sources and our scholarship; that is, we begin to grasp that silence is also a matter of invisibility or rather the making of invisibility. The first moment (the making of the sources) is seemingly contradictory: Roman writers and jurists filled their texts with slaves, so that we can see slaves in action. However, without the testimony of the slaves themselves, we can glimpse them only through the veil of these slaveholding authors, who often meld slaves into objects or erase them from the scene altogether (Joshel 2011, 230–39). Further, most Roman slaves had very little, not only as a condition of their lack of economic opportunities but also as a condition of their enslavement. While some slaves did control property in the form of the *peculium* (purse, fund), ultimately its contents belonged to the master (*Digest* 15.1.4) – thus their faint mark on the archaeological landscape. In the making of the archives (Trouillot's second moment), Roman archaeologists concentrated on rooms with painted walls and mosaic floors, spaces associated with owners and the privileged, and ignored or treated carelessly service areas like kitchens, where we might expect to find slaves.[11] Crafting their narratives of ancient material life (Trouillot's third moment), modern historians have often repeated the silences of sources and archives.[12] Accounts of villa life include the philosophical or literary debates held in porticoes and peristyles but omit the

labor of the slaves who served in these leisure spaces, descriptions of the ancient experience in reception and dining rooms rarely mention the slave waiters and foot servants who also occupied these places, and discussions of workshops recount the presence of equipment or the relevant technological processes but often seem to forget the workers.[13]

But as Trouillot suggests, we do not have to stop at the "uneven power" in the production of sources, archives, and narratives; rather, we can "reposition [the] evidence to generate a new narrative" and hence a new way of recounting history (1995, 27). While there may be no new facts per se, we can shift our thinking on where we need to look, what we need to look for, and how we need to look.[14] If Roman archaeological remains preserve the plans and intents of slaveholders, these material expressions of slave owners can be taken as the beginning of understanding the slave's material life. Established by slaveholders, the physical environments of farm, workshop, villa, or house also represent what John Michael Vlach, studying the plantation South in the United States, calls the "contexts of servitude" that shaped the lives of the enslaved who lived and worked in them. Further, slave owners "did not control those contexts absolutely," for slaves disrupted the slaveholders' plans and practices and recrafted the "contexts of servitude." In effect, at least in terms of experience, the same space became a different place for slave and slaveholder (cf. Tuan 1977, 41). Thus, Vlach warns that "appearances can be deceiving. . . . An apparent order on the land may not be the only order present" (1993, xi, 1).

We know that Roman slaves moved around the spaces uncovered by archaeology because some of their movements and actions are represented in literature and law. In effect, the textual sources populate a described physical world with slaves. Cooks work in kitchens or cart their equipment tableside to prepare dishes before the eyes of the guests; waiters move in and out of the dining room and stand about; maids and foot servants wait at their owners' sides, at the foot of their beds, or on the threshold of their rooms; doorkeepers, chained or unchained, watch over the front door.[15] Smiths pound away at their hearths; shoemakers sweat over their lasts; fullers stomp in their tubs; and peddlers fill the streets with noise.[16] Slave owners note, and most often complain about, runaways, wanderers, and slaves idling in the streets, bars, brothels, and public places of the city.[17] Agricultural manuals prescribe the place of workers in farmsteads, their movements in the fields, and the surveillance of overseers. Finally, law defines slaves' status as property, draws out the implications for slaves' work and social lives, and spells out enslaved people's relations to objects and their possession of certain goods or lack thereof.

SILENCING IN TEXTS

Rich as it is on the physical conditions and activities of enslaved men and women, the written testimony presents two problems as evidence for slaves: (1) its point of view, and (2) its relation to the material remains. Any study of Roman slaves copes with a particular condition of silence: since enslaved men and women have left little testimony of their own beyond fables, graffiti, and epitaphs, to know them we must delve into the words of their owners. Roman jurists most often speak to the propertied, not to those who were property.

Excepting Phaedrus and perhaps Plautus, Roman authors, most of them elite men, take the perspective of slaveholders.[18] Even where elements of popular culture were appropriated or re-created in elite literature, they are difficult to see below the surface of the text, and the culture of slaves per se is not easily untangled from "popular" culture in general (Forsdyke 2012, 3, 8, 9, 50). The problem of the sources' perspective, observed by many scholars of Roman society, is more than simply the point of view of slaveholders: it is their very construction of the realities of slavery.[19]

It is useful to think of the observations of lawyers and authors, their depiction of slave owners' relations with the enslaved, their ideals of slave behavior, and their prescriptions for slaves' proper places and movements in the terms laid out by the political theorist James C. Scott (1990). He examines "how the process of domination generates a hegemonic public conduct and a backstage discourse consisting of what cannot be spoken in the face of power" (xii). Roman law and elite literature, then, represent the "hegemonic public conduct," reflecting what Scott calls the "public transcript" – that is, the permitted words and actions employed by dominant and subordinate groups in each other's presence. As a kind of self-portrait, the public transcript "is designed ... to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule" (xii, 18). The "backstage discourse," or what Scott calls the "hidden transcript," is created by the dominated group: it "represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant." Consisting of both words and acts, the hidden transcript occurs not only "offstage" but also in public in disguised form – "partly sanitized, ambiguous, and coded" (xii, 18–19).

Divining the hidden transcript for Roman slaves is difficult, since, without slave testimony, we rely on the words of slave owners – in effect, the public transcript. Working through the dominant discourse means several reading practices.[20] First, we must acknowledge that although Roman slaveholders often criticized the behavior of their slaves, they still provide testimony to the actions themselves, even where the slave's cause or end is difficult to see. Especially important are owners' reports of slaves' daily, mundane acts that so often irritated them: in the owners' terms, malingering, idling, wasting time, damaging property, theft, muttering, making noise, and insolence.[21] The very pervasiveness of these sorts of charges bespeak how they troubled slaveholders, and troubling the slave owner, Scott argues, achieved one goal of the hidden transcript, a critique of power: an expression, albeit masked, of indignation; and a challenge to the authority and control of the master. Second, whatever the act, we have cause to question the masterly characterization of behavior. Roman slaveholders judged their slaves' actions in terms of their own interests, and hence the naming of those actions stakes claims about the slave's motives and character that cannot dispassionately denote the action. Malingering, idling, and wasting time, for example, are all varied instances of not working (or choosing not to work) but framed as the slave's failure or moral flaw.[22] We need to interrogate the relations between the slave's act and what he or she believed or rather is said to have believed. Bowing and groveling may be a performance of deference, solemn loyalty a mask of consent, shirking work or sluggishness a play with masterly stereotypes, dishonesty a diversion. As Scott puts it, "What may look from above like the extraction of a

required performance can easily look from below like artful manipulation of deference and flattery to achieve its own ends" (1990, 34). Roman literature from Plautus to Juvenal reflects how such performances worried Roman slaveholders.[23] Third, we must listen for silences and look for what seem to be moments of slave owners' blindness: not only do they misname or misjudge, they simply cannot see what happens for and to the slave.[24]

Following Martin Hall, we deal with the relations between text and material by viewing transcripts, both public and hidden, as "web[s] of relations that entwine both objects and words" (2000, 16). To borrow Hall's metaphor, by marrying "words" and "things," we assume at the most basic level that Roman legal and literary texts belong to the same world as Roman architecture and artifacts. The bits of evidence when patched together or set in dialogue with each other form a picture of the material life of slaves in Roman Italy in the early Empire. Rather than using texts to fill in lacks in the archaeological record (and vice versa), *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* examines the complex relations of words and things that construct history. At points, the practices indicated in and the discourses of literature and law find their parallels or like in the material world that we observe in archaeological remains: words translate into objects, objects into words. At other points, a misfit of words and things shows what the sources, textual and archaeological, say about one another and about slavery.

SEEING SLAVES: STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

To fathom how owners made and slaves dealt with the "contexts of servitude" we rely on the distinction between strategy and tactic made by Michel de Certeau (1988) because these concepts provide a special emphasis on space and time in the calculation of public and private transcripts.[25] Strategy and tactic differ in the type of operation (of actions) and the role of space (30). For de Certeau, a strategy belongs to the dominating class – for our project, the slaveholder: "I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships. . . . It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats . . . can be managed" (35–36). Thus, de Certeau claims, a strategy is "a *triumph of place over time*" and "a mastery of places through sight" (36). In contrast, a tactic is an "art of the weak" because it is not backed by the power of law and institutions. It lacks its own place and "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it" (37). Without the power to control its own space, "a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'" (xiv). Tactics rely on the "chance offerings of the moment" and "constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities" (37, xiv). "Miniscule" and "quotidian," tactics do not, indeed cannot, reject or alter the imposed order; rather, they use that order "with respect to ends and references foreign to the system that they had no choice but to accept" (xiii–xiv).

Each of the following chapters takes up strategy and tactics in particular spaces and places of the Roman social environment. Yet, at the beginning, it is useful to map the general pattern and concerns shared across all the chapters.

MASTER STRATEGIES

De Certeau's notion of strategy fits well with Roman notions that associate power with the control of space. Romans lawyers track in almost obsessive detail who (owner, possessor, or legitimate user) has the authority to shape urban and rural space. In particular, Romans of various classes thought about architecture in terms of power.[26] The construction or remodeling of houses, villas, and public monuments expressed the builder's assertion of control over nature.[27] Even where the pose of the owner is self-consciously humble, his house or farm bespeaks his ability to shape lived space (Horace, *Odes* 2.18 and *Letters* 1.10, 1.16; Martial 1.55, 3.58, 5.78). For the wealthy elite of Roman society, and even for the moderately propertied, building and the arrangement of space also figured prominently in the representation and practice of social prestige. A man's house or villa symbolized his status. Practically, it made his reputation and was a vehicle for the reception of clients and for the rituals of social power like dinners.[28]

The control of space was often accompanied by the control of objects in space – their arrangement, disposition, and use. In general, Roman law is much concerned with various types of property holding. And jurists' opinions on legacies make clear that the control of a particular space – house, villa, farm, workshop, baths, mill, and so on – entailed the control of objects, whether they counted as equipment or furnishings (*instrumentum* or *instructum*) (*Digest* 33.7).[29] In Latin literature, objects often figure in the accusations of luxury or the ridicule of men's worthless preoccupations, but even in moral discourse, it is clear that things, like architecture, had symbolic and practical uses. They displayed a man's or woman's status and the power to possess and arrange the material world. Practically, possessions functioned as tools of social power, impressing free Romans of equal or lesser rank or simply asserting one's wealth or culture or both.[30] And, as Roman satire makes so clear, things gave their owners indirect power over other free, but poorer, Romans. The deployment of wine, food, oil, cups, and servants in *the patron's home*, for example, enabled the patron to denigrate his client, manipulate his behavior, and determine his experience.[31]

The strategic arrangement and display of possessions extended to the slaves who are included in lists of tableware, clothes, furniture, and tools in both legal and literary texts.[32] Here, the power of the owner over the lives of others directly affected their bodies, behavior, and daily activities. A variety of sources attest to the hairdressing, depilation, skin treatments, and even castration of slave boys used as servants and sexual favorites.[33] Some owners dressed their servants in special outfits and expected that clothes would be worn in a particular way. Agricultural writers prescribe the clothing of farmworkers.[34] Slave owners tried to mold the behavior of bondsmen and bondswomen, and the regime often meant bans on talking, laughing, or even coughing and sneezing, as well as attempts to control the slaves' gestures, timing, and performance of assigned tasks.[35] In effect, slaveholders tried to make particular slaves present and others absent both aurally and visually.

It seems obvious but important to remember that slave owners determined a slave's work and often the organization of labor.[36] Associated with the assignment of job was the assignment of place. The *vilicus* (slave manager) belonged on the farm, the peddler in the

streets, the miller in the bakery.[37] Domestic servants were attached to a particular room or place, like an *ostiarius* or *ianitor* (doorkeeper) at the front door, or to a particular person and his or her location, like an *ancilla* (slave girl) who lay at her owner's feet, stood at the foot of her dining couch, or walked beside her on a stroll.[38] Although certain kinds of work were associated with the farm or the urban establishment, owners could move slaves from their city house to their farm or country villa as they wished.[39]

In the chapters that follow, these aspects of strategy often appear under the theme of the control of movement, much akin to Stephanie Camp's concept of the "geography of containment." Writing on slavery in the antebellum American South, Camp argues that "laws, customs, and ideals [came] together into a systematic constriction of slave movement that helped to establish slaveholders' sense of mastery" (2004, 6–7, 12). Camp's point is not that American slaves were locked up but that law, customs, and ideals enabled and legitimated certain forms of movement and not others.

The Roman "geography of containment" included various practices for controlling slave mobility.[40] The material remains of chains, shackles, and fetters, as well as literary references to chaining, mark the extreme restriction of captives, fugitives, and troublesome slaves.[41] At least by the first century BCE, Roman slave owners had legal means and tried practices for chasing down and recovering slave fugitives. Keith Bradley has given us a synthetic analysis of them. We only emphasize that the use of slave catchers, the help of civic officials, provincial governors, and troops, and the posting in public places of advertisements for runaways created fairly daunting boundaries for slaves who sought to escape slavery.[42] In effect, an invisible net formed by owners and their agents and neighbors, the law, and governmental authorities seems to have circumscribed slave mobility, and this net became particularly important in the urban setting where slaves moved about the city outside their owners' houses and business establishments.

The attempt to tie servants and workers to a particular place, defined by job, location, or person, was only part of the "geography of containment." Keeping slaves in motion at their jobs was as important as place. In the following chapters, the concern with motion figures as a different, but related, aspect of containment, which we call the choreography of slave movement. Three aspects of choreography concern us: (1) the constraint of slaves to prescribed paths; (2) the control of timing; and (3) more literally, the scripting of the gestures and motions of slaves at their jobs. Slave owners often arranged the routes for slaves in a variety of situations.[43] In houses or villas, the movement of servants depended on the desires and activities of owners. Since many domestic slaves served to display their owners' wealth and social importance, the plotting of their movements around master and guests mattered.[44] The control of slaves traveling about the city on errands or business belongs to attempts to prevent what from the perspective of slaveholders was random, unpurposive slave movement defined as truancy or wandering (*Digest* 21.1.17.14). In the workshop, the direction of movement had everything to do with the ordering of tasks and arrangement of equipment. In the agricultural manual of Columella, control of the motions of farmhands is aimed at the efficient operation of the farm, but, as pointed out in Chapter 5, this control had as much to do with mastery as with economics.