

COLOURS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE: COULD MINORITIES BE AUTHORITIES?

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Abstract: Topic of racism is still very alive in today's world. This article is meant as reflection on question of how racism was understood in ancient cultures. Ancient people, Greeks, Romans, founders of modern Europe and its system of values were in constant contact with nationalities, which were different in many ways, including skin colour. Our aim is to understand, how they saw people of different skin colour – if they condemned dissimilarity or were without prejudice. Based on (not only) literary point of view of ancient authors, this paper tries to answer old question, whether racism against blacks was born already in ancient Rome and the most glorious civilization of Europa's history was based on racial segregation, or the idea of superiority based on colour of one's skin is really modern past's invention.

Keywords: racism, Rome, Greece, blacks, skin colour, prejudice, slavery, mythology, Mediterranean, racial superiority

1 Introduction

Western civilization derives important part of it's modern achievements from traditions dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. Scholarship, literature, architecture, democracy... These all are topics, which are connected by sometimes more direct, sometimes more tortuous lines between today and ancient times. But can we connect with antiquity also matters in our history which we are not so proud about? European modern past is closely linked to racism and even in modern times this issue is still actual. We can ask ourselves a question, whether roots of racist ideologies, which are judging people based on colour of their skin or ethnic background come from ancient cultures. And if the answer is yes, how were these issues perceived by inhabitants of ancient Mediterranean. The aim of this article is to acquaint reader with question of racism in ancient times, especially inside Roman Empire.

The question of racism in ancient cultures used to be very vibrant topic and thanks to that, number of researchers were interested in it's resolving. Unfortunately, in last few decades, only minority of researchers were interested in resolving question of ancient racism and only a few papers or monographies were dedicated to this topic. Because of that, modern literature lacks coherent work that would summarise this topic again with new thoughts, only papers which put together older opinions were recently written – and most of them don't bring much new information. There are four main works of three authors, which summarize this topic. First of them is Frank Snowden Jr., who in his works *Blacks in Antiquity* (1970) and *Before Color Prejudice* (1991) points out his opinion, that nothing like racism in ancient times existed. Second is Lloyd Thompson with *Romans and Blacks* (1989), who says, that racism itself against blacks in antiquity did not exist on skin colour basis, but their skin colour could create some kind of prejudice. The third is Benjamin Isaacs, who in work *The Invention of Racism in Antiquity* (2004) states, that some kind of „proto-racism“ existed, and it became basis for colonial racism of more modern history in 18th and 19th century.

First of all let's define, what racism itself means and how will we perceive it in our work. Today's racism is understood as it was „born“ in colonial era. Colonial European powers and major proponents of racist theories of superiority of white man, especially over blacks and to lesser degree over Asians, had a need to palliate this slave system. We could define racism as theory, that divides and judges society and individuals into social hierarchy based on race or colour of their skin and tries to justify social injustice by biological differences between people. In modern past it was common, that this way of thinking penetrated from human minds into law codes and international treaties. This caused racial segregation, discrimination, refusing of basic human rights to certain groups and led to legal oppression and violence against individuals or entire groups or nations – just

because their colour was different. Here we can ask questions. Did the same happen in ancient Rome? Or those masters of Mediterranean didn't try to justify their racism in any way? Or did they not know what racism in our meaning is? We can also ask, if in antiquity racial prejudices were based in legal codes, as it was common in modern past?¹

While searching for an answer we return back to times not only of ancient Rome and Greece, but even to more ancient civilizations and their traditions. We will be dealing with racism based on skin colour and we will try to learn, if in ancient Rome this dissimilarity from majority population was reason for discrimination or denial of civil rights and freedoms.² We will try to learn if Roman population looked down on black people only because their skin colour or if there were more reasons.

2 Ancient point of view on inferior people

In the beginning, there is important to realise several critical facts about Romans themselves. Roman Empire was inhabited mostly by so called Mediterranean type (racial group), so Romans, Iberians, Greeks, Etruscians and other nations of Mediterranean were looking in antiquity very similarly and based only on „naked“ appearance were very difficult to tell apart. Slight differences in looks of course existed, but were not so striking as for example between Italic and black man from Nubia. This paper will therefore focus on perception of sub-Saharan blacks by common Romans.³ In ancient literature we can find many instances, when authors mention people of black skin, whatever they were negroid or just had skin darker than ordinary Romans. The division of ancient world must not be understood as – Europe white / Africa black. Romans called colour of their skin *albus*, what in translation means white. But when ancient author described Roman, to translate *albus* as white does not seem correct. It is better to translate the term as swarthy or light brown (HALEY, 2010, 31-32). The same opinion shares in his work Lloyd Thompson, who says, that in Roman society no concept of white people, in socio-cultural means, existed or developed. If Romans perceived any differences in skin colour, they had to understood their world as world of browns (THOMPSON, 1989, 10-11).

One of first nations of Mediterranean, that divided „qualities“ of people according to regions of their birth, and which transported this point of view to others, were Greeks. They saw themselves as superior to other nations and ethnics. But this opinion was not based on skin colour, but on geographic terms in which certain nation or tribe lived. Greeks considered themselves superior not only physically, but mainly mentally. Even their expression for foreigner – *barbaros* (βάρβαρος) was not at first meant pejoratively, but as description of people who did not speak Greek. On the other hand, their view of Persians, as trousers wearing weaklings, was typically full of prejudice (Hdt. 5.49). Irony for Greeks was, that after they lost struggle for independence against Romans, they were seen by their conquerors in same light as they saw Persians. It was Hippocrates in his work *Peri aeron hydaton topon*, who shows his idea, that one of the most important factors affecting physical human traits is place, where one lives (Hp. Aer. 3). Greeks believed, that human traits are dependant on place where one was born, are almost unchangeable, are not subject of individuality and to change them is extremely difficult. According to this Greek way of thinking, members of certain society are connected by same traits, both good and bad.

¹ For example in France, Canada, Portugal, USA, Great Britain etc. For more informations see WHEELER (2005).

² We come out from assumption, that skin colour is most easiest to perceive difference among people. Due to majority of „white“ people in mediterranean area, we will try to reconstruct Roman perception of black people and try to learn if being black in Roman world was really a handicap.

³ It is important to state, that north African provinces and areas were inhabited in said period by fairer europoid race or it's mixes, not by purely black negroid racial type.

Strange is Greek perception of black inhabitants of Africa. Greeks had opportunities to meet people with black skin living in contemporary Sudan and Egypt, whom they called Ethiopians, *Aithiopsis* (*Aἰθιοπία*) – literally „those with burned faces“. In Homer's *Iliad* they play important role under leadership of Memnon as allies of Trojans (Hom. *Il.* 7.450). Herodotus writes, that they are good barbarians, have plenty of gold and are tallest, fairest of people and live the longest (Hdt. 3.114). If they reached Greece as slaves, they were considered very expensive and were treated as such.

Greeks thus had opinion, that main factors affecting human traits and abilities of nations are place of nations origin, climate of this place, geographical conditions, amount of freedom this nation has and autochthony.⁴ As weakening factors Greeks considered mild climatic conditions. For example Syrians and Persians came from warm environment and rich lands, thus they were physically weaker. In opposite Celts came from less hospitable and colder environment, thus they were physically stronger (Hp. *Aer.* 12). Even Aristotle held similar opinions, he was a great advocate of slavery (Aristot. *Pol.* 1.4-8). His work was one of those, that helped spread these opinions over Mediterranean (ISAAC, 2004). Very common was also opinion, that if stronger, „better“ nation arrives and settles new region, in time this nation „adopts“ qualities, which belong to this region – because of climatic conditions, to which this nation has to adapt to. As secondary factor affecting „quality“ of people Greeks considered intermarriage with other ethnicities. This should have been avoided by „stronger“ nations. Interaction and intermarriage with others weakens the stronger nation and it is to be avoided – as logic of above written shows, for maintaining of superiority of the „stronger“ people, intermarriage with „weaker“ must be prohibited.⁵ It is interesting to observe this theory in realistic setting. Especially efforts of Alexander of Macedon and some of his successors in the leading positions of hellenistic empires and kingdoms seem to go directly against these principles. Their policy was in great part pursuit of merge between Greek and Macedon settlers (the stronger) and Oriental populations of conquered regions (the weaker, inferior people).

3 Fifty shades of blacks in latin

Let us move further to the west and a little bit closer to contemporary times, to times of overlordship of Roman Empire, which adopted many of Greek intellectual concepts. We can safely assume, that greater part of Roman black population arrived there as slaves. Already in times of Roman republic existed well organized trade connection between Italy and certain African towns, from which black slaves were imported. Most probable places of black slaves import seem to be Egypt and north African towns situated around caravan paths (SNOWDEN 1947, 283). In Egypt black people were known for a long time and trade routes from south used Nile or lead around Red Sea (NOSHY, 1937, 98). In Carthage blacks were known already in classical times and reached town through caravan paths from central Africa. It is probable, that number of blacks came to Rome as prisoners of war from number of conflicts against Ethiopians. Successful, mainly defensive campaign of Petronius⁶ against kingdom of Kush in 23 BC (Plin. *Nat.* 6.181; Cass. Dio *His. Rom.* 54.5.4; Strab. 17.1.54) certainly brought to Rome number of black skinned slaves.

How did the Romans perceive physical dissimilarity of blacks? Even compared to modern anthropological observations, we can say Roman authors were relatively experienced anthropologists. Their description of negroid type easily equals modern definition. In Roman literature we have three main descriptions of black inhabitants of Africa. First can be found in poem *Moretum* (App. Verg. 2.4.32-33), where Vergil describes his

black maid as woman with broad nose, thick lips and curly hair, and it is probably the most detailed description of negroid person preserved in Roman literature. Second comes from *Satyricon* of Petronius (Petr. 102) and third from Pliny the Elder (Plin. *Nat.* 2.189). In gigantic amount of latin literature could these three more extensive descriptions seem as not so much, but we should realize, that anthropological information about far-away nations were not so important in the eyes of common public. Exceptions could be nations in conflict with Rome (THOMPSON, 1989, 96). Description of elder Pliny is probably influenced by Greek point of view, which says, that human looks and traits are affected by natural conditions of ones origin. Romans universally accepted this Greek idea, because it's paraphrasing can be found in other Roman authors like Lucretius, Ovid, Vitruvius and also in Digest of Emperor Justinian (*Dig.* 21.1.31.21).

Latin language is very rich on expressions describing skin colour. Before we move on, we will try to interpret the most used expressions. Some latin words can not only tell us tinge, but also context, in which they are intended. The most common word used by Romans to describe black man or negroid type is, same as with Greeks, *Aethiops* (SNOWDEN, 1947, 268; 1948, 31-44). Originally Greek authors like Homer, Hesiod, Mimnermus, Aeschylus, Euripides and Apollonius of Rhodes used it perhaps to describe mythical or semi-mythical creatures, while authors of prose like Herodotus, Strabo or Heliodorus tried to use it to describe African realia (BEARDSLEY, 1967, 6). Herodotus himself deals with Ethiopians (Hdt. 7.69-70) in considerable detail, even divides them into two groups – eastern and western. In his description remains a lot of ambiguity though – he even calls Egyptians Ethiopians (Hdt. 2.104). This could lead, in later times, Roman readers to not distinguish between Egyptians and Ethiopians.⁷ Term *Aethiops* was for Romans connected with black man or with expression for black skin itself, which was otherwise referred to with words *niger* or *fuscus*. Other expression for black skinned person was *afēr/afra*. It's most well known use is again in poem *Moretum*. It seems not impossible, that Roman *cognomen Afēr* could refer to black person – for example inscription in Pompeii *Helpis Afra rog(at)*⁸ [CIL IV 2993z, c]. But we must approach this idea with caution, example of Gneus Domitius Afēr shows us, that *cognomen Afēr* did not necessarily have to mean black skinned person. Also example of Roman dramatic Publius Terentius Afēr is interesting, especially when we compare expressions used describing him by Suetonius (Suet. *Ter.* 5.3) and already mentioned poem *Moretum*. Suetonius uses two important expressions – *afēr* and *fuscus*. Same are used in *Moretum* to describe black slave maid. Word *fuscus* used to describe skin colour of Terentius, which Romans considered typical while describing black skinned man, cannot be left unnoticed. Terentius supposedly came from Carthage, and if we agree that black population was much more common there then in Italy (BERTHOLON, 1896, 972-974; DELATTRE, 2012), we cannot rule out his possible negroid roots. But until researchers get more examples of *cognomen Afēr* connected clearly with negroid descent, the question of his origin and skin colour cannot be definitely answered.

There are examples of more semantically related expressions in literature, such as *Maurus* and *Indus*. *Maurus* stands also for nation of African Moors, *Indus* for inhabitants of India. Expression *niger Indus* can theoretically be considered as mention of Ethiopians, however there is no clear proof in Roman literature, that Romans would describe Indian people as black. *Maurus* is used also by Juvenal in connection with *nigri* – black colour indicates sinister appearance (Iuv. 1.5.53). Martial in turn writes: „*retorto crine Maurus*“ (Mart. 6.39.6), that refers to one aspect of black people – curly hair. Word *Maurus* does not necessarily have to mean black person, but it is most probable.

It is even more complicated with expressions *niger* and *fuscus*. Both are used by Roman authors to describe skin of blacks – Ethiopians. They are used very often also to describe people with

⁴ Original, indigenous, were for example Athenians in Attica.

⁵ Athenians during Pericles's rule in 451/450 BC passed law, in which citizenship is allocated only to children, whose both father and mother are citizens. Until this law, only father had to be citizen. This very narrowed number of citizens who enjoyed civil benefits. Athenians considered themselves to be even better than other Greeks (Plut. *Per.* 37.2-5; Aristot. *Ath. Pol.* 26.4).

⁶ About person of Petronius see BAGNALL (1985).

⁷ Horatius also uses expression *Aethiops* for Egyptians (Hor. *Carm.* 3.6.14).

⁸ For more information see SNOWDEN (1970, 270).

uncertain descent, who were probably dark skinned. These expressions were used to describe people with origin outside of Europe, or to describe skin colour of Europeans, who, for some reason, had darker skin than their surroundings (SNOWDEN, 1947, 274). Word *niger* can be in latin even synonym for *Aethiops*. That is attested in case of legendary Ethiopian king Memnon – Catullus calls him *Memnonis Aethiopi* (Catul. 66.52), meanwhile Ovid and Vergil use *nigri Memnonis* (Ov. Am. 1.8.3-4; Ov. Pont. 3.3.96-97; Verg. A. 1.489). In this case, term *niger* serves to describe Ethiopian, if we accept the fact, that in kingdom of Kush population was mainly of negroid type (SNOWDEN, 1947, 276). *Fuscus* then most probably describes person with slightly lighter skin colour than *niger*, as is mentioned in Sidonius (Sid. Ep. 2.10.4) and also in Ovid (Ov. Ars 2.567-568). This term was also used in description of racial origin of Ethiopians, as is shown in poem *Moretum* (App. Verg. 2.4.32-33) and also for example in *Elegiae* of Propertius (Prop. 4.6.78).

Expression *decolor* served to describe skin colour of people from India and Mauretania (SNOWDEN, 1947, 280). Juvenal used it to describe biracials, mulats and children coming from black father and white mother in expression *decoloris heres* (Iuv. 2.6.600). Very similar was term *discolor*. Last expression used to describe skin colour is *rubens*. Its use to describe skin colour can be found only in Statius as *rubentum Aethiopum* (Stat. Theb. 5.427). Vergil uses the same term to describe colour of boiled crab or crayfish (Verg. G. 4.47-48), which means bronze or reddish colour. Tribes of blacks with red skin are known in Africa even today, for example southafrican Himba people. Question is, if these people could get so far to the Roman controlled world.

If we track names of high-ranking Roman politicians and officials in times of the republic, we cannot miss, that fairly often *cognomen* or *gentilicium* in form of latin expression may try to hint us about colour of one's skin (BROUGHTON 1951; 1952; 1986). This is even more often in times of principate or dominate, when these terms can be tracked even to pretenders to Roman throne (for example Gaius Pescenius Niger). It is tempting to say, that Romans with names such as Afer, Niger, Nigro, Afranius etc., were black. But the issue of these names is much more complicated and surely not based only (or at all) on colour of one's skin. Process of obtaining names was influenced by many factors – place of origin, achievements, or nicknames which characterise more one's personality or his ancestry. Because of lack of more biographical information about these Roman citizens, we cannot link their names to their skin colour or ethnicity. Maybe more study of this issue will reveal, whether these Romans or their ancestors were of black skin colour or not.

4 Blacks in ancient literature

In ancient literature are negative references to black skinned people fairly common and quite often attribute black skinned people with same bad properties. It is not something to be surprised by, in Roman society people's imagination was penetrated with negative symbolism of black colour, which could result in bad attitude toward blacks. This attitude could be changed only in sporadic cases, if there was deeper knowledge of the individual (THOMPSON, 1989, 92). More negative association was caused for example by Charon, eternally gloomy ferryman to the Underworld, who is often described not only to have black skin, but also to have negroid characteristics. In the same way are described other demons of the Underworld, Eurynomos and Menoites. Cassius Dio tells us in his work about event, when emperor Domitian scared to death senators and high society Romans by having a feast in black and dark room and having them served by black painted boy-slaves, while telling them stories about torture and murder. Senators were preparing for the worst, but emperor send them back home with gifts (Cass. Dio His. Rom. 67.9). Another negative references are directly stories about black skinned people. For example superstitious emperor Septimius Severus ordered black soldier out of his sight during campaign in Britannia, for he feared bad omen (H. A. Sev. 22.4). Negatively write about blacks, Egyptians

and people with darker skin in general, in their satyrs Juvenal and Martial. Juvenal counts many bad things in Roman society. He mentions certain newcomers and not original residents, among them very often blacks, and is not afraid to criticize them so harshly to say, that oriental and syrian prostitutes are pushing Roman out of bussines (Iuv. 1.3.60). He advises Romans to scoff blacks not only because of their skin colour, but also because of their splayfeet (Iuv. 1.2.23). Then he connects one black Egyptian flute player with cannibalistic religious cults (Iuv. 15.49) and considers adultery of Roman woman with black man as abomination, for the husband would have coloured heir (Iuv. 2.6.600). He considers black people, as well as blue eyed and fair haired Germans as deviations and aberration from normal appearance (Iuv. 5.13.162-166). More negative perception of black people comes from north Africa. From late antiquity we have short, very abusive poem of unknown author:

„faex Garamantarum nostrum processit ad axem
et piceo gaudet corpore verna niger,
quem nisi vox hominem labris emissa sonaret,
terrere visu horrida larva viros.

dira, Harumeta, tuum rapiant sibi Tartara monstrum:
custodem hunc Ditis debet habere domus.“⁹ (Anth. Lat. 183)

We can find number of positive references too. According to surviving references we know, that in both lower and higher circles of Roman Empire could happen, that even citizen with black skin could reach very good position. Nevertheless, in the eyes of rich Romans all poor people were equally ugly and skin colour was not primary distinguishing factor. To the high-ranking class of „white“ Romans, even rich black person could arouse some kind of antipathy, primarily due to his looks, for not meeting the Greco-Roman ideal of *kalokagathia*.

Many educated Romans had great sympathy towards Ethiopians and considered them very capable. Lucian of Samosata attributes them with invention of astrology, which was in turn adopted by Egyptians (Luk. Astr. 3.4). In Roman Empire blacks were generally prized as skilled and strong boxers. Several depictions of black boxers have survived until modern times, especially in form of small sculpture. Very well known are hellenistic statues of two boxers, today in British Museum, made of terracotta, which clearly show their negroid features and African origin. One of black boxers in Rome was man named Nicaeus, whom we don't know from any sculpture, but Pliny the Elder calls him one of the most famous boxers of his time (Plin. Nat. 7.12.51). Black people were probably very praised as athletes. From *Anthologia Latina* we know about poem dedicated to famous charioteer, who is said to have never been defeated. Poem compares him to famous Memnon, son of Eos, goddess of dawn, who was killed in Troy by Achilles. About the charioteer the poem says, that there never was and never will be any Achilles born, who could defeat him. He is Memnon in looks, not in fate (Anth. Lat. 251).

Name Memnon is also connected to black scholar and protege of Herodes Atticus. According to Philostratus Atticus mourned over death of Memnon, as if he was his own son. Also because Memnon was noble and honorable young man, eager to study and worthy of being raised in his house (Philostr. Vit. Ap. 3.11). There even exists a bust, which is presumed to be depiction of this young man. It clearly shows black man, even though the sculptor tried to show Romanised looks and refined Roman, full of proper Roman values. We can say, that at least in some cases Romans were willing to believe, that black skin doesn't have to be obstacle in acquiring Roman values and qualities. In theory every Roman, regardless of skin colour, could show same skills and *virtus* as any other citizen.

⁹ „Garamantian filth came to our part of the world and black slave rejoices in his pitch-coloured body. Terrible ghost, which would scare by appearance, if only sound of his lips would not give away man. Hadrumeta, let underworld take away this monster: he should guard house of underworld god.“ Own translation. Term *faex* is translated very decently, it's true meaning can be much more stronger, much more vulgar.

In Latin Romantic poetry we have several examples, that many Romans found black women very attractive and that black skinned women became often objects of love poems. In Ovid Sappho says, that even Andromeda, with a touch of colour from her native Ethiopia, enchanted Perseus with her beauty (Ov. *Her.* 15.35-38). Another example can be Asclepiades, who says, that in front of beauty of Didyme, he melts like wax in front of fire, although her skin has colour of coal (*Anth. Pal.* 5.121). Even Martial claims, that he was chased by girl white as ebony, but he was attracted to one, who was darker than ant or tar (Mart. 1.115).

5 Conclusion

Let's have a look now, on how and when the blacks got to Rome. Probably one of the oldest literary reference of blacks in Italy is description of a nurse in comedy *Poenulus* (Pl. *Poen.* 5.2.154) by Plautus. Another reference is by Terentius (Ter. *Eu.* 165-167) - in his work he talks about black slave woman, himself being of uncertain origin. These come from end of third century BC and first half of second century BC and by itself don't necessarily mean, that that there was any significant number of black slaves in Rome - but it cannot be ruled out either. During campaign of Hannibal Barca in Second Punic War (218 - 201 BC) we can safely assume, that in his army and thus in Italy was present number of black skinned troops. From same time dates emission of bronze coins with head of black person on the obverse and with depiction of Hannibal's elephants on the reverse side. These coins were minted in Etruria and were probably used to supply Hannibal's Italian allies (SELTMAN, 1960, 250; SNOWDEN, 1947, 284). After the war many slaves are „imported“ to Rome - one example can be Terentius himself and we can safely assume, that among them a large number of blacks were present. In the era of principate the references of blacks inside empire increase. It is nothing to be surprised about, if we think about Roman presence and activity in Africa. Based on all to us known ancient sources, literary, epigraphical, numismatic, artistic or archaeological, we can state, that presence of black skinned people was not an exception in Roman Empire (SNOWDEN, 1947, 250). Although there are no specific statistics, we have sufficient evidence to assume, that number of blacks within Roman population was greater than it is today generally supposed (BARROW, 2010, 208-229; DUFF, 1928, 1-11).

The position of slave was, at least during beginning of Roman expansion into Mediterranean, most common status for black people. It did not have to be and was not their only legal occupation. Thanks to „globalization“ of Roman world, immigration, freedmen and distribution of citizenship, it was quite possible to meet full-Roman citizens of black skin colour.

Greeks and later Romans considered themselves ideal rulers of others, because thanks to their good geographical origin, they possess best mixture of traits. They are not only strong but also smart enough, and are only ones who combine both in perfect ratio. But their superiority is not given by their colour or by affiliation to certain race. But by, in their own opinions, living in ideal climatic and geographic conditions. We can say, that because of this, Romans were not racists in sense, in which this term is understood today. Of course, we can see in many occasions, that black inhabitants of the Empire were targets of ridicule or criticism. Black colour is also connected with negative symbolism and general population could be scared in presence of men of other, darker, skin colour, especially, if they never met someone similar before. In higher and more educated society this prejudice was cast aside. Social status of parents, property, one's own manners and charms were more important here than colour of one's skin.

Romans did not have to excuse slave system based on better or worse race as it was in colonial age. Many modern authors understand „races“ in sense of cultures and times, which they themselves come from and try to put them into context of their own ideas of how it could have worked in Rome. It is to be avoided, for very often it is misinterpretation based on one's own personal conviction. In 19th century most authors were

persuaded, that Romans thought of oriental slaves as worse than for example northern, because many British (and Europeans) in that time saw oriental people as „inferior“. If we exaggerate a little, we can label Romans as slavers of „equal opportunities“. In choosing of slaves, they did not focus only on one gender or place of origin or race. Slaves came from different religious, legal and political background and Roman law did not see them as human (at least for very long period). There ruled opinion in society, that colour black is an omen of evil, death and disaster (App. *Bell. Civ.* 4.134; Flor. *Epit.* 2.17.7-8; Plut. *Brut.* 48; H. A. Sev. 22.4-5; Iuv. 5.53-54), nevertheless existence of such rumors did not prevent Romans to come to contact with black skinned people. By all accounts in Roman Empire colour of skin was not an obstacle in acquiring citizenship or good social standing. Romans themselves don't even have for racism or segregation based on skin colour any term. Black slaves were treated in the same way as any other slaves of any other colours were. Only on accounts of Greek and Roman prejudice of quality of nations based on place of origin, they could have been selected for different professions. Against systematic aversion also testifies absence of any law, that would prohibit marriages of Roman citizens with people of black colour. And according to archaeological and literary evidence, these marriages were not unknown to Romans (Mart. 6.39.6-7; Iuv. 6.595-601; Flacc. *Decl.* 2; Plin. *Nat.* 7.12.9).

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