

Freedmen: new citizens

The archive of Venidius Ennychus

Thirty-nine writing tablets were found on the top floor of a house in Herculaneum. They give an insight into the life of an ex-slave called Venidius Ennychus, and some of the most important tablets document his journey to gaining citizenship.



House of the Black Hall, Herculaneum (the archive was found on the first floor).

Ennychus was a “Junian Latin”. This was a special group of freedmen who had been freed before they were 30 years old, who could get full Roman citizenship (unlike ordinary freedmen) by having a child from a legal marriage, i.e. a marriage to another free(d) person. Venidius Ennychus’ archive shows the steps he went through to claim this citizenship.

Birth declaration, 24 July AD 60

In the consulship of Gaius Velleius Paterculus and Marcus Manilius Vopiscus, on 24 July, Lucius Venidius Ennychus has solemnly declare that a daughter has been born to him by his wife Livia Acte. Transacted at Herculaneum.

[followed by a list of witnesses]

Roman documents use the consuls to tell you what year it is.

The Greek-sounding name “Acte” is typical for an ex-slave.

Why do you think it was necessary to witness this document?

Edict of the urban praetor, 24 July AD 60

Lucius Servenius Gallus, praetor, declares: 'Marcus Ofellius Magnus and Tiberius Crassius Firmus duumvirs and [...] Marcus Nonius Celsinus have reported to me a decree in which the town councillors of Herculaneum in accordance with the *lex Aelia Sentia* had sanctioned the case of Lucius Venidius Ennychus and of Livia Acte, on the grounds that they had a one-year-old daughter born from them at Herculaneum as a result of their lawful marriage, and so since the case in question has been confirmed, I approve that they are Roman citizens.'

Transacted on 22 March, in the consulship of Publius Marius and Lucius Afinius Gallus.

[followed by a list of witnesses]



This is an authenticated copy of a document that would have been on display at the Forum of Augustus in Rome.

In this edict, the praetor confirms the citizenship of Ennychus and Livia Acte, based on the evidence he has received from the councillors at Herculaneum.

Wooden tablet from the Venidius Ennychus archive (Herculaneum).

What legal steps did Ennychus and his wife have to go through to obtain citizenship?
Why do you think the process was so involved?

What reasons might Ennychus have for keeping these documents safe?

Why do you think the Junian Latins were different from normal freedmen?
Can you think of reasons why the process of gaining citizenship worked in this way?

Further reading

- On the status of Junian Latins: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606413.001.0001/acref-9780198606413-e-3602#>
- On degrees of freedom including the Junian Latins: <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199582570.001.0001/acprof-9780199582570-chapter-9>
- The House of the Black Hall: <https://sites.google.com/site/ad79eruption/herculaneum-1/insula-vi/house-of-the-black-hall>

On Venidius Ennychus, see:

- Wallace-Hadrill, A. (2011) *Herculaneum Past and Future*. Frances Lincoln. p.142
- Cooley, A. & Cooley, M. (2014) *Pompeii and Herculaneum: a Sourcebook*. Routledge. p.213-215