

The purpose of my paper is to re-examine the evidence for *concupinae* in Rome using both inscriptional evidence and literary evidence. According to much of the secondary literature on *concupinae*, these women were very similar to Roman wives. Beryl Rawson, in her seminal 1974 article entitled “Roman Concubinage and Other *De Facto* Marriages,” has discussed the marital nature of Roman concubinage (Rawson, 1974). Other scholars have also examined various aspects of concubinage (Treggiari, 1981 and McGinn, 1991). However, when I have looked at the epitaphs and compared them to the literature, it appears that the marital nature of concubinage is not as apparent as first thought.

*Concupinae* create several interesting problems when researching the Roman Family. The largest problem is the paucity of evidence; *concupinae* are mentioned only infrequently in Roman literature and epitaphs. In CIL 6, there are thirty-nine inscriptions that contain the stem “*concupin.*” In all volumes of CIL, there are 107 *concupinae* inscriptions and only seventy of these have the *concupina* as the commemorated. This is not a large sample when compared to the more than 5,000 inscriptions that use a variation of the term *coniunx* to commemorate a legal spouse of either sex. Similarly, in Latin literature, there are only 121 passages that use a term based on the root “*concupin.*” Several of these do not refer to female concubines. Another forty-six of these passages are from Roman legal texts which, though useful, do not always provide a reflection of social reality. It is this social reality that I would like to discuss in this paper. Due to time constraints, I will present a selection of examples from the literary and inscriptional evidence.

By comparing descriptions of legal wives to those of concubines in both literature and, in particular, epitaphs, I will illustrate that the *de facto* marital nature of the concubinage relationship as argued by Beryl Rawson (1974) needs to be reviewed. Very few *concupinae* inscriptions use epithets to characterize the relationship between the *concupina* and her commemorating partner. Those that do use epithets use them in a pattern that is startlingly different from that used for wives commemorated as *coniuges* or *contubernales*. For example, *amantissima*, an epithet that means “most loved” or “very beloved” is found in three of the seventy epitaphs commemorating *concupinae*. An example of this is CIL 6.22293: *V C Matius C l Logus sibi et concubinae suae v Pompeiae mulieris libertae Sigeni amantissumae*. *Amantissima* is used twenty-two times on epitaphs commemorating wives as *coniuges*—which at first appears to make it a much more common epithet until the total number of *coniuges* epitaphs—over 5,000—is taken into account. I will demonstrate that the trend in this small group of *concupinae* epitaphs is not at all similar to the trends seen in the larger marital groups. From this comparison, it becomes clear that *concupinae* did not aspire, as has previously been thought, to the ideals held for legal wives.