World History Name:

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Social History of Rome Block:

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One of the striking features of Roman life, whether under the Republic or Empire, was that Rome was specifically an urban culture -- Roman civilization depended on the vitality of its cities. There were perhaps only a handful of cities with populations exceeding 75,000, the typical city having about 20,000 permanent residents. The city of Rome, however was greater than 500,000 and some scholars have projected a population of one million or more. Like people who today visit a place like New York City, London or Paris for the first time, most people must have been overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of Rome. Rome must have been a rather horrifying place at the same time.

The very wealthy lived in private homes called *domus*, which were usually single-storied houses with several rooms and a central courtyard. Although these homes were quite large, only a small percentage of Rome's population lived in them (yet they occupied one third of the available space). Public buildings of all kinds took up about one quarter of Rome. What this meant is that less than half of the available territory in the city of Rome was used to house the vast majority of Rome's population. Most Romans lived in multi-storied apartment buildings called *insula*. Amenities were few and the buildings were hot in the summer, cold in the winter and full of smoke from the fires of small, cooking stoves. Without central plumbing, the residents had to make many trips to wells or fountains for water. Chamber pots had to be emptied, usually into large vats on the landing of each floor, but sometimes their contents were emptied into the streets from a window.

Although life in the city offered many cultural benefits to its people, daily life was actually quite precarious. Because the floors of apartment buildings were supported by wooden beams, and because there was no running water, fires usually meant disaster. And the dark of night brought other problems. Again, the words of the satirist, Juvenal, speak volumes:

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| Look at other things, the various dangers      of nighttime. How high it is to the cornice that      breaks, and a chunk beats my brains out, Or some slob heaves a jar, broken or      cracked from a window. Bang! It comes down with a crash and      proves its weight on the sidewalk. You are a thoughtless fool, unmindful of      sudden disaster, If you don't make your will before you      go out to have dinner. There are as many deaths in the night as      there are open windows Where you pass by, if you're wise, you      will pray, in your wretched devotions. People may be content with no more      than emptying slop jars. |

**Of Patrons and Clients**  
Since the earliest days of the Republic, Roman society was a society of status. Institutionalized in what is called the patron-client system, Roman society was really a network of personal relationships that obligated people to one another in a legal fashion. The man of superior talent and status was a patron (*patronus*). It was he who could provide benefits to those people of lower status, who then paid him special attention. These were his clients who, in return for the benefits bestowed upon them, owed the patron specific duties. Of course, since we are talking about a network of relationships, a patron was often the client of a more superior patron.

There were various forms of benefits as well as duties. Political careers and loans on easy terms could all be had with the proper patron-client relationship. Clients had to serve their patrons at all times -- this was true whether the issues at stake were legal, financial or political. The clients of a patron would also accompany him to the forum every morning, and the more clients that accompanied the patron, the greater his status and prestige. The patron-client relationship was an important one and was built upon the Roman idea that social stability would result from maintaining the social hierarchy that managed to link all people to one anther.

**The Roman Family**  
At the heart of the Roman family was the *paterfamilias*, the father of the family. It was the *paterfamilias* who possessed the *patria potestas*, or power of a father, over his children, regardless of their age. This power made the father the sole owner of all property acquired by his sons. You can imagine the kind of difficulties this might create. A son would work hard and acquire wealth but that wealth was not his, but his father's. And although it was typical for both parents to have died by the time their child may have reached thirty years of age, if a father managed to live to old age his son may have built up so extreme a resentment, that he may have resorted to the murder of his father. By law, the *paterfamilias* could kill his wife if he found her in bed with another man.  He could not only sell any of his children into slavery, he could kill them as well.  And the Romans are known for practicing infanticide.

The Roman household was quite large and could include the *paterfamilias*, his wife, his sons with their wives and children, unmarried daughters and slaves. The household, then, could be considered to be a small state within a state.

Most marriages were arranged but mothers and daughters could, and often did, influence final decisions. Family life was similar to today: some marriages were happy, others not. Divorce was introduced in the 2nd century B.C. and was relatively easy to obtain -- no one needed to prove grounds. Girls were pushed into marriage at an early age. Although the legal age for marriage among women was twelve, fourteen was more common in practice. For example, Tullia (c.79-45 B.C.), the daughter of the Roman orator, Cicero (106-43 B.C.), was married at sixteen, widowed at twenty-two, married at twenty-three, divorced at twenty-eight, married again at twenty-nine, divorced again at thirty-three and died in her thirty-fourth year.

Roman women were not segregated as they had been at Athens.  Wives were appreciated as enjoyable company and were the center of the social life of the household. Women talked in public, visited shops, went to the games, temples, and theaters.  In other words, unlike ancient Athens, Roman women led a very visible existence.  However, women could not participate in public life.  The basic function of motherhood was to shape the moral outlook of her children.  Roman upper-class women had considerable freedom in early Empire.  They could acquire the rights to own a control as well as inherit property and some women owned and operated businesses in shipping and trade.  And although women could still not partake in politics they could forcibly influence their husbands: for instance, what would Augustus have been without Livia, or Trajan without Plotina?

During the *Pax Romana*, there was a decline in the number of children, especially among the upper classes of Roman society.  The situation got so bad that there were imperial laws requiring parents to raise more children, but still the birthrate dropped. The Romans practiced infanticide, contraception and abortion in order to limit the number of children born to the Roman family.  In terms of contraception, the Romans used amulets, magic potions, formulas, potions, oils and appointments.  Most were ineffective. The Romans did have condoms made from the bladder of a goat but they were very expensive

**Education**  
In the early days of the Roman Republic, Rome did not have any public education.  What education there was, and we're speaking of education for the citizens of Rome, was done within the context of the family.  In other words, it was within the family that children learned the basic techniques of farming, developed physical skills for war, learned Roman traditions and legends, and in the case of young boys, became acquainted with public affairs. However, in the second and third centuries B.C., contact with the Greek world during the Macedonian Wars stimulated new ideas and education.  The wealthiest classes wanted their children exposed to Greek studies, especially rhetoric and philosophy.  This was necessary, so they thought, to make them fit for successful public careers. This was a practical ideal because these children would eventually serve Rome as administrators, officials, and perhaps even members of the Senate. Incorporated in this new educational ideal was the concept of *humanitas*, an education in the liberal arts or humanities.  It was hoped that such an education in the liberal arts would prevent overspecialization and instead promote sound character. A sound knowledge of Greek was positively essential and schools taught by professional scholars began to emerge.  And, of course, the Romans already had the example of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum.

The very wealthy provided Greek tutors for their children. For the less wealthy there were private schools in which Greek educated slaves would instruct students.  Children learned the basic requirements of reading, writing and arithmetic.  By the age of twelve or thirteen, and if the child had shown promise, he could attend the *grammaticus*, or grammar school.  The standard curriculum in the liberal arts included literature, dialectics (or the art of reasoning), arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.  At the core of this curriculum was, of course, Greek literature.  So, students were exposed to Homer's [*Iliad*](http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.html) and [*Odyssey*](http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.html), Hesiod's *[Theogony](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Hesiod/theogony.html)* and [*Works and Days*](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Hesiod/works.html), as well as Pindar's [*Odes*](http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Pindar.html). The philosophies of [Plato](http://www.iep.utm.edu/p/plato.htm), [Aristotle](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/a/aristotl.htm) and[Zeno of Elea](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/z/zenoelea.htm), the histories of [Herodotus](http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/herodotus/) and [Thucydides](http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/THUCY.HTM) and dramas of [Sophocles](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/sophocles.htm) and Aeschylus were also standard fare. One result of all this is that the Romans were bilingual -- they knew Latin and Greek.  And with the growth of empire, students also knew a third language, their local dialect.  Very promising students would end their education by studying Greek oratory, the best schools being found at Athens.  Schools in the Empire were important vehicles for spreading Roman culture and ideas.  The influx of Greeks scholars, language, and writers also stimulated the Roman mind.  And there were first rate Roman writers: Virgil's [*Aeneid*](http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.html), Ovid's [*Metamorphosis*](http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.html), the [*Odes*](http://www.merriampark.com/horace.htm) of Horace, Livy's [*History of Rome*](http://classics.mit.edu/Livy/liv.html), Tacitus'[*Histories*](http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/histories.html), and the [*Satires*](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/juv-sat1eng.html) of Juvenal are just a few examples.

Many of these writers simply copied Greek themes of the past and incorporated them into their own works. [Virgil](http://virgil.org/vitae/) (70-19) is the prime example. For instance, his [*Georgics*](http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/georgics.html) had its model in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, but the purpose was clearly didactic -- Virgil clearly celebrated the virtues of the cults, traditions and greatness of Rome. His [*Aeneid*](http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.html) traces the return of Aeneas after the Trojan War.  But Aeneas does not go to Syracuse as did Homer's Odysseus.  Instead he lands at Rome. The *Aeneid*, written during the reign of Augustus, does not glorify of the excellence of the Greek hero, but the civic greatness of Augustus Caesar.

With all this literature, there were also libraries to hold books. Books were treasured possessions but were usually owned privately.  So, in many wealthy Roman households, we could find slaves called "copyists" who copied texts. By A.D. 400, Rome had more than thirty libraries in existence, the most important one was located at Alexandria, and was literally a storehouse of Greek knowledge.

**Medicine**  
The Roman idea of medicine and medical treatment was borrowed directly from the [Greeks](http://www.med.virginia.edu/hs-library/historical/antiqua/texti.htm). This meant that cures and treatments were herbal in nature.  The father of the family would prepare remedies to heal wounds and treat illnesses and  this information was passed down from generation to generation and was bound up with religious practices. One formula to prevent baldness included a mixture of wine, saffron, pepper, vinegar and rat dung. Besides herbs and ointments borrowed from Greek practice, the Romans also borrowed the Greek god of healing, Aesculapius.  Temples found throughout the Empire testify to the power of Aesculapius in Roman medicine.  Usual remedies included going to the temple, sniffing herbs, praying to Aesculapius, composing poetry, bathing, exercising, and studying philosophy.

During the late Republic and throughout the Empire, the Romans also use professional doctors, who were quite fashionable and at times quite hated.  They didn't pay taxes and their cures were often worse than the illness itself.  The Roman army had its own doctors, so too did gladiatorial schools.  One most famous doctor to emerge from the gladiatorial schools was the Greek physician, [Galen](http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/library/historical/artifacts/antiqua/galen.cfm) (129-199), who was the court physician to Marcus Aurelius. Being situated at the gladiatorial school, Galen was well-placed to observe human anatomy firsthand.

**Slavery**  
The number of slaves increased dramatically during the reign of Augustus and continued to increase for almost two centuries. Slaves were obtained during warfare, a bankrupt citizen could sell himself into slavery, and the *paterfamilias* could sell any of his children into slavery as well.  As a result of this increase, slaves were highly visible during the Empire.  The homes of the rich and were filled with slaves.  The more slaves a man owned the greater was his status and prestige in Roman society.  Roman slaves served as hairdressers, footmen, messengers, accountants, tutors, secretaries, carpenters, plumbers, librarians, and goldsmiths.  Some slaves possessed high status jobs and served as doctors, architects, managers of business, and many educated slaves were members of the imperial bureaucracy.

Slaves could be acquired like any other form of property, that is, by inheritance, gift, or purchase.The historian Pliny the Elder knew of one large landowners who owned more than 4000 slaves.  It is probable that most people of middling income and prominence had less than 10 slaves and more often than not, only one or two. Slaves were bound to promote their master's welfare at all times and without question. For example, if a master had been murdered, all his slaves were put to death without trial.  Since they had not prevented the murder as they should have, they were all considered accessories to the crime. This notion was also applied to those slaves of a master who committed suicide.  Although the majority of slaves lived and died in bondage, the intelligent and enterprising slave lived in the hope of eventually buying his freedom, a practice known as *manumission*. Full *manumission* brought freedom and Roman citizenship at the same time. Slavery is a prime example of how a Roman strength became an eventual weakness during the later Roman Empire.

Slavery, as an economic institution, is efficient, but only up to a point. That point was reached as the Romans built their entire economy around slavery.  With *manumission*, the number of slaves declined. Of those slaves that remained in slavery, few care to work hard and they were unwilling to produce more children.  So, in the late Empire, manpower was declining, and this is one **[](http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/rome_social.html)**possible cause for Rome's ultimate decline.

The conditions under which a slave existed varied according to the whim of his master.  Some masters were kind and just, others were not. If slaves who worked in the mines experienced the worst conditions, household slaves experienced perhaps the best.

**Bread and Circuses**  
Beginning with Augustus Caesar, the city of Rome provided bread, oil and wine to its urban population.  What this meant, is that almost 250,000 inhabitants of Rome consumed about 6 million sacks of grain per year, free.  Rome provided citizens with food -- it also provided them with entertainment.  Of the poor, the poet Juvenal could write:

*with no vote to sell, their motto is "couldn't care less," Time was when their plebiscite elected generals, heads of state, commanders of legions: but now they've pulled in their horns, there's only two things than concern them: BREAD and CIRCUSES.*

For instance, at the *[Venatio](http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/consortium/gladiator5.html)*, animals were led into an amphitheater where heavily armed men fought and killed them.  This was a popular pastime which was provided to the urban poor and aristocracy by the benevolence of the emperor.  These events were held in a structure called the Circus Maximus which was built during the second century B.C. between the Capitoline and Aventine Hills in Rome. After being destroyed by fire, it was reconstructed in A.D. 200 and had a capacity for 250,000 spectators. Races were held there until 549.

The Romans were fascinated with wild animals -- they like looking at them, seeing them perform tricks, or watching them being hunted and killed. Wolves, bears, bores, deer, and goats were indigenous to Rome and other animals were brought to Rome by imperial conquest.  Elephants, ostriches, leopards and lions were imported in the first century B.C., followed by hippopotamus, rhinoceros, camels and giraffes. There were no zoos in Rome and most animals were privately owned as status symbols. Monkeys were dressed as soldiers and rode atop goats harnessed to a small chariot. The elephant was the most popular show animal and was initially used to transport wealthy men and women to dinner.  However, [animals](http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/gladiatr/animals.htm) were not only used for show but for what we can only call blood sports.

During the reign of Augustus Caesar, 3500 animals died during the days devoted to twenty-six festivals. 9000 were killed at the games celebrating the completion of the Coliseum in A.D. 80.  Finally, 11,000 were killed at the celebration of a military victory in A.D. 107, a celebration lasting 123 days.

There were three kinds of blood sports: armed men fighting animals, animals fighting animals, or armed men and women exposed to starving vicious beasts, the latter usually reserved for [criminals](http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/gladiatr/cappunsh.htm).  The victim was tied to a stake, wheeled out into the arena, and exposed to a starving lion. The Romans also engaged in public hunting in which animals were simply killed in front of an audience.  Before any sort of public display the animals were usually starved and perhaps beaten with a whip. The Romans also had public events called the *Ludi*, or the Games of Rome.  By the 4th century A.D., nearly 177 days per year were devoted to the Games, held at the circus.

[Gladiatorial contests](http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/arena.html) were originally an Etruscan practice and so date back to the days before the Roman Republic was founded.  For the Etruscans, armed combat between individuals was connected to religious practice.  Men fought to the death beside the tomb of their chief in order to strengthen their spirits as well as the spirits of others. The first Roman practice of these contests took place in [264 B.C](http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/gladiatr/origins.htm). By the reign of Augustus Caesar, however, the gladiatorial contests were made public and although gladiatorial contests were a source of entertainment for everyone, there were those like [SENECA](http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/seneca.html) who thought differently. The gladiators were usually criminals, slaves or prisoners of war.  The Romans, as is well-known, forced the gladiators to attend combat schools where they would learn the necessary skills of killing.  At these schools, there were three groups of gladiators, based on defense: those who were heavily armed and wore helmets; those who carried a light shield and sword; and those who carried a net, trident and dagger.

The Romans also had other events during the gladiatorial contests.  In one case, boxers wore leather gloves laden with metal studs.  Artificial lakes were often created and ships conducted a mock battle (called the *Naumachia)*. These "sea" battles were often recreations of past victories.

The [chariot races](http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/circus_sources.html) were the passion of all social classes and bound wealthy and poor together.  There were keen rivalries between teams -- Reds, Whites, Blues and Greens. Each team had its own faction who would find the best horses and riders. Carried out in the Hippodrome, there were 12 starting boxes, six on either side of the gate above which sat the starter.  The drivers cast lots for their starting position.  The races were usually seven laps in length, counted by the lowering of an egg or figure of a dolphin, and lasted about 20 minutes.  Each race was run for a sum of money and prizes were given for second, third, and fourth place.  When two or three chariots from one faction raced, they did so as a team and not individually. There is evidence, as in all sports, of cheating, bribery, throwing an event, and even the doping of horses. The chariot races occupied an entire day of festivities, and there were usually about 24 races.  The Romans were not that much fascinated with the skill of either driver or horse, but rather, which color crossed the finish line first. In other words, allegiance was to color and not to skill.  Obviously, the major attraction of the races was to place bets and people bet both at the course and off.  In fact, the Romans are known for betting on the outcome of just about anything.