

# Ancient Rome: From Republic to Empire

## 1.What were the three periods in the political development of Rome?

Ans:

Three periods of Rome's political development:

- ✂ Monarchy- since the foundation of Rome in 753 BCE
- ✂ Republic –509 BCE
- ✂ Empire –27 BCE

### Monarchy

Romans have a legend about the founding of their city. After the fall of Troy, the gods ordered a Trojan prince called Aeneas to lead his people to a promised land in the West. When Aeneas's group reached Italy, they joined forces with a people known as Latin's. About 800 B.C., a Latin princess gave birth to twin sons fathered by the god Mars. The princess had taken an oath never to have children. Because she broke her word, she was punished. Her sons, Romulus and Remus, were taken from her and left to die on the bank of the flooding Tiber.

Romulus and Remus were found by a she-wolf, which fed and cared for them. One day a shepherd killed the she-wolf and discovered the babies. He took them to his home. When the boys grew older, they decided to build a city on the Tiber. They decided to let the gods choose which brother should rule the city. Each brother climbed to the top of a different hill to watch for a sign from the gods. Then 12 vultures flew over the Palatine. Since Romulus stood atop the Palatine, he claimed to be king. He and Remus then fought, and Remus was killed. Romulus became king of the city, which he named Rome.

After a long and successful rule, Romulus died under obscure circumstances. Many Romans believed he was changed into a god and worshipped him as the deity Quirinus. After Romulus, there were six more kings of Rome. Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) was the last.

## Republic

Around 509 B.C., the Roman republic was established. A republic is quite different from a democracy, in which every citizen is expected to play an active role in governing the state.

Two thousand years ago, the world was ruled by Rome, but Rome could not rule itself. It took two men to wrestle Rome back from chaos and turn a republic into an empire.

In the first century BC, Rome was a republic. Power lay in the hands of the Senate, elected by Roman citizens. But the senators were fighting for power between themselves. Order had given way to anarchy and only might was right.

Julius Caesar was convinced something had to change. Rising through the political ranks, he eventually became governor of Gaul. This gave him the chance to make lots of money, while his abilities as a general brought him power and respect. By 50 BC, Caesar had made many powerful enemies. With his life under threat, he invaded Italy. Over the next few years, he defeated his enemies and seized power for himself. But his rule would be brief. After just two years, he was murdered by senators who were fed up with his autocratic style. Rome was again threatened with chaos.

Caesar's nephew and adopted son, Octavian, emerged as a new leader in 31 BCE. He was later called Augustus Caesar. With his ally, Marc Antony, he fought and killed Caesar's old enemies. Victorious, he divided the spoils: Augustus took Rome and Antony got Egypt. The peace did not last long. Antony was quickly seduced by Egypt's queen, Cleopatra. Augustus suspected that the two wanted Rome for themselves. Before they could threaten him, Augustus attacked.

The Battle of Actium was a huge victory. Around three-quarters of the Egyptian fleet were destroyed and both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide before they could be captured. In 31 BC, Augustus became Rome's first emperor. The transformation from republic to empire was complete. During Octavian's rule, patrician's power decreased and equestrian power increased.

## Empire

With Augustus, we have the beginning of Pax Romana (Roman Peace) and the Roman Empire.

Augustus was a clever politician. He held the offices of consul, tribune, high priest, and senator all at the same time. However, he refused to be crowned emperor. Augustus knew that most Romans would not accept one-person rule unless it took the form of a republic. Augustus kept the assemblies and government officials of the republic. He was careful to make senators feel honored. He talked of tradition and the need to bring back “old Roman virtues.” At the same time, Augustus strengthened his authority in two ways. First, he had every soldier swear allegiance to him personally. This gave him control of the armies. Second, he built up his imperial household to take charge of the daily business of government. He chose people because of their talent rather than their birth. This gave enslaved people and freedmen, or former enslaved people, a chance to be part of the government. Augustus wanted boundaries that would be easy to defend. So, he rounded out the empire to natural frontiers—the Rhine and Danube rivers in the north, the Atlantic Ocean in the west, and the Sahara in the south—and stationed soldiers there. Augustus was not interested in gaining new territory for Rome. Instead, he worked on governing the existing empire. He gave provincial governors long terms of office. This allowed them to gain experience in their jobs. He also paid them large salaries. In this way, they would not feel the need to overtax the people or keep public money for themselves. To make sure that people did not pay too little or too much tax, Augustus ordered a census, or population count, to be taken from time to time. Augustus also made Rome more beautiful. He wrote strict laws to govern the way people behaved in public. He protected the city by setting up a fire brigade and a police force. He encouraged learning by building Rome’s first library. Augustus ruled for 41 years. During that time, he brought peace to Rome. He also gave the Romans a new sense of patriotism and pride. He made Roman citizenship available to people in the provinces. Most important, however, he reorganized the government of Rome so that it ran well for more than 200 years.

## 2.What role did Julius Caesar play in converting Rome to an empire?

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## 3.Describe the factors behind Roman supremacy.

Ans:

<b>Roman Army</b>
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The Roman Army was one of the most successful in the history of the world and its soldiers were rightly feared for their training, discipline and stamina. The soldiers were taught to keep on fighting and never to accept defeat. As a result, the army was a major player in Roman politics and maintaining its loyalty was an essential task for any Emperor.

The Roman Empire was created and controlled by its soldiers. At the core of the army were its legions, which were without equal in their training, discipline and fighting ability. By the time Augustus came to power, the army contained 60 legions. Each of these was divided into ten cohorts of up to 480 men. The minimum term of service for a soldier during the first century AD was twenty years.

Each legionnaire (or 'miles') carried a short sword, called a gladius. This was his main weapon. He also carried a 'pilum' (javelin), a helmet, armor, shield and a pack with supplies. Soldiers were rigorously trained to march long distances, fight in precise formations, and kill expertly with all the weapons they carried. The toughest postings for soldiers were those at the frontiers of the Roman Empire, where legionnaires never had enough supplies, faced hostile local tribes and had to endure tedious routines.

At the northern limit of the Roman Empire was Britain. Soldiers and their families found it to be a cold, remote, hostile place with little to do. Like soldiers ever since, they spent much of their free time writing letters home, asking for news and warm clothing. When they retired, every legionnaire was entitled to a plot of land to farm. Soldiers looked forward to this generous reward for a lifetime of loyal service. Despite the hardships, many who had been posted to Britain settled there, taking plots of land near remote Roman forts.

Capable leadership and strong political institutions– two elected Consuls and a Dictator in emergency.

### Senators

Senators in the first century AD held much less power than their ancestors, although the Senate still had the right to give the title of emperor. This alone ensured that the Senate and its members remained important.

The Roman Senate started life as an advisory council, filled entirely with patricians. In the last two centuries of the republic, however, it had become much more powerful and a major player in politics and government.

Many senators were killed in the civil war that brought Julius Caesar to power in 46 BC: as a result, the Senate was looking a little empty. Caesar increased the number of senators from around 600 to 900. This changed the membership of the Senate considerably. This increase in the number of senators soon reversed itself and, during the first century, the Senate consisted of 600 men. Most were either sons of senators, or were elected quaestors (junior magistrates).

Only Roman citizens aged 25 or over, with both military and administrative experience, could become quaestors, the lowest rung on the government ladder. Potential candidates were nominated by the emperor and the elections were merely a formality.

In addition to their political and judicial powers, senators had special privileges. They alone could hold the highest official offices and judgeships in criminal and civil courts. In addition, senators enjoyed reserved seating at public ceremonies and games.

### Plebeians

Rome's working class, the plebeians had little individual power but there were a lot of them. In bad times, or during political unrest, there was always the risk of the Roman 'mob' rioting or rebelling against the upper classes.

The term plebeian referred to all free Roman citizens who were not members of the patrician, senatorial or equestrian classes. Plebeians were average working citizens of Rome – farmers, bakers, builders or craftsmen – who worked hard to support their families and pay their taxes. Over the course of this period, early forms of public welfare were established by Titus and Trajan and, in difficult times, plebeians could ask Roman administrators for help.

We know much less about daily life for the lower classes, such as plebeians. Unlike the more privileged classes, most plebeians could not write and therefore they could not record and preserve their experiences.

The Emperor Augustus was well aware of this risk and was keen to keep the poorest plebeians happy enough and reasonably well fed so that they would not riot. He began the system of state bribery that the writer Juvenal described as 'bread and circuses'.

Free grain and controlled food prices meant that plebeians could not starve, while free entertainment – such as chariot races and gladiators in amphitheaters and the Circus Maximus – meant that they would not get bored and restless. Bribery it may have been, but it often worked.

Senate comprises about 300 Patricians– the most powerful policy making body during the Republic period.



#### 4.What were the major wars fought by the Romans?

Ans: Rome fought three wars with Carthage between 264 and 146BCE. The wars established Rome as a world power and left Carthage, once a powerful empire, in ruins.

Carthage was a city in North Africa originally founded as a trading post by the Phoenicians. The name *Punic* comes from the word Phoenician (*Phoinix* in the Greek, *Poenus* from *Punicus* in Latin) as applied to the citizens of Carthage, who were of Phoenician ethnicity.

#### First Punic War

By the time of the first Punic War, Carthage had created an empire that stretched across North Africa and into the southern coast of modern day Spain. Merchant sailors from Carthage traded with cities throughout the Mediterranean Sea. To protect its profitable sea trade, Carthage developed a powerful navy.

Meanwhile, the Romans had completed their conquest of the Italian peninsula by 263BCE. Because Rome's economy depended on the plunder of their army, the Roman Senate had to keep the army busy. Otherwise, an idle army might have turned against the Senate. So the Senate turned their sights on Carthage. Rome and Carthage fought the first Punic War over Sicily, a Mediterranean island off the coast of the Italian peninsula. Carthage controlled Sicily in 264BCE, so the Romans found an excuse to declare war. Carthage had imprisoned a small group of Roman fortune seekers, so the Romans went to war in retaliation for their capture. a



Rome had a powerful army, but their new foe was overseas, where they had little experience. They lacked the naval skill to sink ships, so they found a way to fight a land war at sea. Roman sailors used pulleys to lower the bridge to face an enemy ship. The Roman ship would ram into an enemy vessel. The spike attached the two ships and allowed soldiers to cross over and attack in hand-to-hand combat—where Rome was more experienced than Carthage. To try to close the gap in naval power, the Romans captured a Carthaginian warship and used it as a model to build their fleet. They won a few early victories and captured most of Sicily, but the inexperience of the Roman navy left them unprepared for a catastrophic storm that destroyed two-thirds of their fleet and killed thousands of Roman sailors. Rome raised a second and third fleet, but storms also destroyed most of the additional ships.

A Carthaginian general named Hamilcar Barca recaptured most of Sicily, but Carthage did not have the money or manpower to continue to engage in the conflict. In 241BCE, an exhausted Carthage surrendered Sicily to the Romans.

### Second Punic War

A generation after the first Punic War in 218BCE, a young Carthaginian general named Hannibal, the son of Hamilcar Barca, sought revenge from his base in Spain. He led an army of 40,000 soldiers, 8,000 horses and 37 war elephants in a daring and difficult journey over the Alps, a treacherous mountain range that stood between Spain and the Italian peninsula. Hannibal's army won three decisive victories against Rome in northern Italy despite being outnumbered more than two to one. In the Battle of Canae, Hannibal's army surrounded the Romans, killing between 50,000 to 80,000 Roman soldiers. As a result of their humiliation at Canae, Rome changed their strategy. They sent a new army to northern Italy with instructions to withdraw. Hannibal spent the next twelve years destroying the Roman countryside, but his army had no opponent to fight. After years of bloody warfare in Italy, the Roman consul Scipio proposed a daring invasion of Carthage in 203BCE. The Senate reluctantly agreed, and Scipio arrived in North Africa with an army of 7000 men, most of whom were volunteers. Scipio added to his forces when he encountered soldiers in Carthage willing to switch sides. Hannibal was called home to face Scipio, but he had to leave his own loyal army behind in Italy. Without Hannibal in charge, the war on the Italian peninsula turned in Rome's



favor. Back in Carthage, Hannibal was given a mercenary army in place of his devoted soldiers. Mercenaries are foreign soldiers hired to fight. Hannibal was used to his loyal troops, and his new mercenary command was no match for Scipio's army. Rome defeated them and won the Second Punic War.

Though Carthage had been defeated, the antipathy, or bad feeling caused by Hannibal's destruction would last for generations and would lead to the third Punic War and the downfall of Carthage.

### Third Punic War

Carthage was no longer in a position to hurt Rome after the second Punic War, but in 149BCE, Roman antipathy toward Carthage continued to linger. A Roman senator named Cato ended every speech with the cry, "Carthage must be destroyed." Rome attacked Carthage and the two sides fought bloody battles in a war that lasted almost three years. After a siege in 146BCE, the Romans broke through the city walls of Carthage. Once they subdued the Carthaginian army, Roman soldiers went from house to house slaughtering the people in their homes. After destroying Carthage, the Romans sold the remaining citizens into slavery, burned the city and destroyed Carthage's harbor.

Rome annexed Carthage by making the city a part of a Roman province they called Africa. Africa probably comes from a Latin word that means "sunny land without cold." The Punic Wars established Rome as a powerful nation and the wars were an indication that Rome would develop into one of the most powerful empires in history.

### 5.Explain Pax Romana.

Ans: The peace that Augustus brought to Rome was called the Pax Romana. It lasted for 200 years. Of course, revolts and other problems were not unknown during this time. For the most part, however, Rome and its people prospered.

Civilization spread, and cultures mixed.

With peace came increased trade. The same coins were used throughout the empire. There were no tariffs, or taxes placed on goods brought into the country. Goods and money moved freely along the trade routes. The Mediterranean was cleared of

pirates, making it safe for trade and travel. Shipping became a big business. Every summer, hundreds of ships carried grain from North Africa to Italy. Other ships bound for Rome were loaded with cargoes of brick, marble, granite, and wood to be used for building. Luxury items, such as amber from the north and silk from China, passed overland across Roman roads. Increased trade meant more business for Romans. The city hummed. Shopkeepers grew richer. Wine and olive oil were the main items bought by other countries. Italy became a manufacturing center for pottery, bronze, and woolen cloth.

During the Pax Romana, Roman law went through major changes. Because the times were different, the laws first set down on the Twelve Tables were changed. When Rome conquered a new territory, Roman merchants had to do business with non-Romans. Roman judges had to write new laws that would be as fair to non-Romans as to Romans. The Roman judges were helped by special lawyers and legal writers called *juris prudentes*. After a while, the judges and their helpers developed certain principles of law that were fair to everyone. A law was believed to be just because it was reasonable, not because the government had the power to make people obey it. Everyone was considered equal before the law. A person was innocent until proven guilty. By about 125 A.D., Roman law was standardized. This meant that legal procedures were the same in all parts of the empire. This helped Rome govern a large area successfully. In later years, Roman legal principles formed the basis for the laws of most western countries and of the Christian church.

## 6. What were the causes of conflict between Patricians and Plebeians?

Ans: Roman citizens were divided up into two distinct classes: the plebeians and the patricians. The patricians were the wealthy upper class people. Everyone else was considered a plebeian.

**Patricians:** The patricians were the ruling class of the early Roman Empire. Only certain families were part of the patrician class and you had to be born a patrician. The patricians were only a small percentage of the Roman population, but they held all the power.

**Plebeians:** All the other citizens of Rome were Plebeians. Plebeians were the farmers, craftsmen, laborers, and soldiers of Rome.

**In Early Rome:** In the early stages of Rome, the plebeians had few rights. All of the government and religious positions were held by patricians. The patricians made the laws, owned the lands, and were the generals over the army. Plebeians couldn't hold public office and were not even allowed to marry patricians.

**The Plebeians Revolt:** Starting around 494 BC, the plebeians began to fight against the rule of the patricians. This struggle is called the "Conflict of the Orders." Over the course of around 200 years the plebeians gained more rights. They protested by going on strike. They would leave the city for a while, refuse to work, or even refuse to fight in the army. Eventually, the plebeians gained a number of rights including the right to run for office and marry patricians.

**The Law of the Twelve Tables:** One of the first concessions that the plebeians got from the patricians was the Law of the Twelve Tables. The Twelve Tables were laws that were posted in the public for all to see. They protected some basic rights of all Roman citizens regardless of their social class.

**Plebeian Officers:** Eventually the plebeians were allowed to elect their own government officials. They elected "tribunes" who represented the plebeians and fought for their rights. They had the power to veto new laws from the Roman senate.

**Plebeian Nobles:** As time went on, there became few legal differences between the plebeians and the patricians. The plebeians could be elected to the senate and even be consuls. Plebeians and patricians could also get married. Wealthy plebeians became part of the Roman nobility. However, despite changes in the laws, the patricians always held a majority of the wealth and power in Ancient Rome.

### **Interesting Facts about Plebeians and Patricians:**

- A third social class in Roman society was the slaves. Around one third of the people living in Rome were slaves.
- One of Rome's most famous senators, Cicero, was a plebeian. Because he was the first of his family to be elected to the senate, he was called a "New Man."
- Julius Caesar was a patrician, but he was sometimes considered a champion of the common people.
- The Plebeian Council was led by the elected tribunes. Many new laws were passed by the Plebeian Council because the procedures were simpler than in the senate. The Plebeian Council lost its power with the fall of the Roman Republic.

## 7.What was the outcome of the Patrician Plebeian conflict?

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### 8. Outline the process of Rome's decline and fall.

Ans: The Pax Romana ended after about 200 years. From then on, conditions in the Roman Empire grew worse. By 476 A.D., there was no empire left. Instead, much of Western Europe was a patchwork of Germanic kingdoms. The eastern part of the empire, however, lasted about 1,000 years longer as part of the Byzantine Empire. There are many reasons the Roman Empire fell.

The **first** was **political**. The emperors had no written rule about who was to inherit the throne upon an emperor's death. Sometimes, the title was inherited by a son. Sometimes, an emperor adopted an heir to the throne. Between 96 and 180 A.D., all the emperors were adopted. The system worked well until 180 A.D. Marcus Aurelius became emperor in 161 A.D. He was kind, intelligent, and devoted to duty. His son Commodus (kahm' uh duhs), however, was the opposite. He became emperor when Marcus Aurelius died in 180 A.D. He was so cruel and hated that in 192 A.D. he was strangled by the Praetorian Guard, or the emperor's bodyguards. The Praetorian Guard then sold the throne to the highest bidder. This set a terrible example. For nearly 100 years, legion fought legion to put its own emperor on the throne. By 284 A.D., Rome had 37 different emperors. Most were murdered by the army or the Praetorian Guard.



The **second** reason for Rome's downfall was **economic**. To stay in office, an emperor had to keep the soldiers who supported him happy. He did this by giving them high wages. This meant more and more money was needed for the army payroll. As a result, the Romans had to pay higher taxes. In addition to higher taxes, the Romans began to suffer from inflation, or a period of ever-increasing prices. Since there were no new conquests, gold was no longer coming into Rome. Yet, much gold was going out to pay for luxury items. This meant there was less gold to use in coins. As the amount of gold used in coins decreased, money began to lose its value. Prices went up. Many people stopped using money altogether. Instead, they began to barter, or exchange goods without using money.

The **third major reason** Rome fell centered on foreign **enemies**. While the Romans fought each other over politics and money, they left Rome's frontiers open to attack. Germanic hunters and herders from northern and central Europe began to raid Greece and Gaul. Trade and farming in those areas declined. Cities again began to surround themselves with protecting walls.

Two emperors, Diocletian and Constantine I, tried very hard to save the Roman Empire from collapse.

Diocletian, who was the son of a freedman, ruled from 284 to 305 A.D. He made many changes as emperor. He fortified the frontiers to stop invasions. He reorganized the state and provincial governments to make them work better. To keep prices from rising, he set maximum prices for wages and goods. To make sure goods were produced, he ordered workers to stay in the same jobs until they died. He also made city officials personally responsible for the taxes their communities had to pay.

One of the most important changes Diocletian made concerned the position of the emperor. Diocletian established the official policy of rule by divine right. This meant the emperor's powers and right to rule came not from the people but from the gods. Diocletian realized the Roman Empire covered too much area for one person to rule well. So, he divided it into two parts. He allowed someone else to govern the western provinces, while he ruled the richer eastern provinces. In 312 A.D., Constantine I became emperor. He ruled until 337 A.D. Constantine took even firmer control of the empire than Diocletian. To keep people from leaving their jobs when things got bad, he issued several orders. The sons of workers had to follow their fathers' trades. The sons of farmers had to stay and work the land their fathers worked. The sons of ex-soldiers had to serve in the army. To escape government pressure and control, wealthy land owners moved to their villas, or country estates.



Most villas were like small, independent cities or kingdoms. Each produced enough food and goods to meet the needs of everyone who lived on the estate. Despite the changes made by Diocletian and Constantine, the Roman Empire continued to decline in the west.

In 330 A.D., Constantine moved the capital from a dying Rome east to the newly built city of Constantinople in present-day Turkey.

Both Diocletian and Constantine I worked hard to save the Roman Empire.

However, neither emperor succeeded in the end.

German attacks increased, especially in Western Europe. There, the Germans crossed the Danube River in order to escape from the Huns, nomadic herders who had wandered west from Outer Mongolia in Asia. In 378 A.D., a Germanic group defeated Roman legions at the Battle of Adrianople. One reason the Germans were able to defeat the Romans was because of an invention they borrowed from the Huns. This invention was the iron stirrup. Using iron stirrups made cavalry stronger than infantry, even the powerful Roman legions. This was because the force of the charging horse was added to the force of the weapon. By about 400 A.D., Rome had grown quite weak. In the winter of 406 A.D., the Rhine River froze. Groups of Germans crossed the frozen river and entered Gaul. The Romans were not able to force them back across the border. In 410 A.D., the Germanic chief Alaric and his soldiers invaded Rome. They burned records and looted the treasury. The Roman Senate told the people, "You can no longer rely on Rome for finance or direction. You are on your own."

## Other Important Topics :

**Gladiators:** Successful gladiators were the stars of the first century – so famous that free men queued to take their chances in the arena. Bloody, brutal but popular, gladiatorial contests are often seen as the dark side of Roman civilization. Though they belonged to such a civilized and sophisticated society, the Romans' deep attraction to extreme violence remains surprising and strange. Historians have struggled to explain how a country that civilized so much of the world could be so keen on watching men and women fight to the death.

### Ritualized violence

Ritualized, public violence had been a favorite entertainment of the Romans for centuries. The practice began as an ancient Etruscan funeral ritual: when a tribal chief died, his warriors would make a blood sacrifice to his spirit by fighting to the death by his tomb.

This ritual was adapted over time. The nobility began to put on gladiatorial exhibitions in memory of the dead and by the time Julius Caesar was in charge, these exhibitions had become public spectacles.

## Organized games

The games took place in amphitheaters. Gladiators would be sent to the arena – named after the sand which covered the ground and soaked up the blood – to fight to the death before cheering crowds of thousands. As the contests became more organized, gladiators became more specialized.

There were five types of gladiator, each with their own unique weapons.

- The **Mirmillones**
- The **Thracians**
- The **Retiarii**
- The **Samnites**
- The **Bestiarii**

Five type of gladiators:

<b>The Mirmillones:</b>
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The <b>Mirmillones</b> were heavily armed and wore helmets decorated with fish.
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<b>The Thracians:</b>
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the <b>Thracians</b> carried just a shield and scimitar, making them much quicker on their feet.
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### The Retiarii:

The **Retiarii** were armed with just a net, a long trident and a dagger.



### The Samnites:

The **Samnites** had a sword, an oblong shield and a helmet with a visor.



### The **Bestiarii**:

The **Bestiarii** fought wild animals.



### Ancient celebrities

The games were so popular that successful gladiators could become extremely rich and very famous. As a result, while most gladiators were condemned criminals, slaves or prisoners of war, some were freedmen who chose to fight, either as a way to achieve fame and fortune, or simply because they enjoyed it.

Naturally, it was a dangerous career with a high turnover. The few lucky ones would survive years in the arena and retire. Some would then become instructors at gladiator training schools, controlled by the state so that they couldn't be used to train private armies.

### Class divide

Gladiatorial contests were definitely mass entertainment and, over time, some of the upper classes began to get fed up with their brutality. In a letter to a friend, the philosopher Seneca criticized popular enthusiasm for gladiators and advised his friends and acquaintances not to attend.

Despite Seneca's disapproval, the popularity of the games continued and, along with chariot races, would form the backbone of public entertainment for centuries to come.

### **Slavery & Freeman:**

Slavery in ancient Rome differed from its modern forms in that it was not based on race. But it was an abusive and degrading institution. Cruelty was commonplace.

#### **A common practice**

Slavery had a long history in the ancient world and was practiced in Ancient Egypt and Greece, as well as Rome. Most slaves during the Roman Empire were foreigners and, unlike in modern times, Roman slavery was not based on race.

Slaves in Rome might include prisoners of war, sailors captured and sold by pirates, or slaves bought outside Roman territory. In hard times, it was not uncommon for desperate Roman citizens to raise money by selling their children into slavery.

#### **Life as a slave**

All slaves and their families were the property of their owners, who could sell or rent them out at any time. Their lives were harsh. Slaves were often whipped, branded or cruelly mistreated. Their owners could also kill them for any reason, and would face no punishment.

Although Romans accepted slavery as the norm, some people – like the poet and philosopher, Seneca – argued that slaves should at least be treated fairly.

#### **Essential labor**

Slaves worked everywhere – in private households, in mines and factories, and on farms. They also worked for city governments on engineering projects such as roads, aqueducts and buildings. As a result, they merged easily into the population.



In fact, slaves looked so similar to Roman citizens that the Senate once considered a plan to make them wear special clothing so that they could be identified at a glance. The idea was rejected because the Senate feared that, if slaves saw how many of them were working in Rome, they might be tempted to join forces and rebel.

## **Manumission**

Another difference between Roman slavery and its more modern variety was manumission – the ability of slaves to be freed. Roman owners freed their slaves in considerable numbers: some freed them outright, while others allowed them to buy their own freedom. The prospect of possible freedom through manumission encouraged most slaves to be obedient and hard working.

Formal manumission was performed by a magistrate and gave freed men full Roman citizenship. The one exception was that they were not allowed to hold office. However, the law gave any children born to freedmen, after formal manumission, full rights of citizenship, including the right to hold office.

Informal manumission gave fewer rights. Slaves freed informally did not become citizens and any property or wealth they accumulated reverted to their former owners when they died.

## **Free at last?**

Once freed, former slaves could work in the same jobs as plebeians – as craftsmen, midwives or traders. Some even became wealthy. However, Rome's rigid society attached importance to social status and even successful freedmen usually found the shame of slavery hard to overcome – the degradation lasted well beyond the slavery itself.

## **Chariot Races:**

Less violent than the gladiators, chariot racing was still an extreme, dangerous sport, in which drivers could die.

The teams attracted fierce passions from their supporters.

## The Circus Maximus

Chariot races took place in the Circus Maximus, a huge, oval shaped stadium that could seat nearly 200,000 spectators. The stadium had two long parallel sides and one rounded end with seating all around. The other end was filled with stables and starting boxes.

Down the center of the racecourse ran a low wall, or spina, which contained decorative sculptures that would be tilted to let spectators know how many laps had been completed.

### Rough and raucous

Races were rough and raucous – they lasted seven laps and would include as many as 12 chariots at any one time. To be as fast as possible, the chariots had to be very light, which made them very dangerous for their drivers, who were usually slaves or freedmen.

Many drivers were thrown from a broken or overturned chariot. They could then be trampled and killed by the charging horses, or get caught in the reins and dragged to their deaths.

Given the dangerous nature of the sport, chariot racing was very expensive. However, its popularity meant that it was also very profitable, and over time, it became highly organized into an early form of show business.

### Chariot teams

Chariots were organized in four main teams – Red, White, Blue and Green. Each team had its own scouts for finding talented riders and horses, and each team was passionately supported. Like sports fans throughout history, a team's fans were fiercely partisan and would hope for rival teams to fail. This became so common that curse tablets were made to spook the opposing teams.

But not everyone was such a fan. Like the gladiators, chariot races were popular sports for the Roman masses, not the social elites, who disliked the mob behavior of the fans and found the sport unremarkable and childish.

## Imperial passion

One exception was the Emperor Nero. He was passionate about horses and even drove his own chariot. Nero's enthusiasm for such a lowly sport scandalized Rome's elite, but endeared him to the masses. The historian, Tacitus, sneered at the mob for this: "For such is a crowd — eager for excitement and thrilled if the emperor shares their tastes." However, like gladiators, it would take more than disapproval from educated elites to put an end to the sport and chariot races survived for centuries to come.

### The Coliseum:

In Rome, the gladiatorial contests were held in the Coliseum, a huge stadium that first opened in 80 C.E. Located in the middle of the city, the Coliseum was circular in shape with three levels of arches around the outside. In height, the Coliseum was as tall as a modern 12-story building; it held 50,000 spectators. Like many modern professional sports stadiums, the Coliseum had box seats for the wealthy and powerful. The upper level was reserved for the commoners. Under the floor of the Coliseum was a labyrinth of rooms, hallways, and cages where weapons were stored and animals and gladiators waited for their turn to perform. The Coliseum was also watertight and could be flooded to hold naval battles. Special drains allowed water to be pumped in and released. But, naval battles were rarely held there because the water caused serious damage to the basic structure of the Coliseum. The gladiators themselves were usually slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war. Occasionally, the gladiators were able to fight for their freedom. Criminals who were sentenced to death were sometimes thrown into the arena unarmed to serve their sentence. Some people, including women, actually volunteered to be gladiators. They were willing to risk death for the possibility of fame and glory. Many gladiators went to special schools that trained them how to fight. A few gladiators boxed. They used metal gloves to increase cutting and bleeding. Some gladiatorial contests included animals such as bears, rhinos, tigers, elephants, and giraffes. Most often, hungry animals fought other hungry animals. But sometimes hungry animals fought against gladiators in contests called *venationes* ("wild beast hunts"). On rare occasions, the animals were allowed to maul and eat a live human who was tied to a stake.