Roman Citizenship

**Civitas**, citizenship in ancient Rome. Roman citizenship was acquired by birth if both parents were Roman citizens (cives), although one of them, usually the mother, might be a peregrinus (“alien”) with connubium (the right to contract a Roman marriage). Otherwise, citizenship could be granted by the people, later by generals and emperors. By the 3rd century BC the plebeians gained equal voting rights with the patricians, so that all Roman citizens were enfranchised, but the value of the voting right was related to wealth because the Roman assemblies were organized by property qualifications. Civitas also included such rights as jus honorum (eligibility for public office) and jus militiae (right of military service)—though these rights were restricted by property qualifications.

As Rome expanded its control in Italy, those who lived in communities with Latin Rights (a status originally granted the cities of Latium) or in municipia (autonomous communities) governed their own local affairs while enjoying most rights of Roman citizenship except the right to vote. Also, Latin allies who moved to Rome permanently gained full citizenship, including the franchise. The socii (allies), bound to Rome by treaty, ordinarily did not then have the rights of Roman citizens, yet they were bound to do military service and to pay taxes or tribute, depending on the treaty’s terms. Unhappy with their increasingly inferior status, the socii revolted; the ensuing conflict was called the Social War (90–88 BC), at the close of which full citizenship was conferred on all of Italy south of the Po River.

Beginning in the reign of Julius Caesar (c. 48 BC), colonies and municipia were established outside the Italian peninsula. Then Roman civitas was extended to provincials, but not en masse; granting Roman citizenship to soldiers and aristocrats of provincial origin hastened the pace of Romanization in the western provinces. The significance of Roman citizenship declined in the empire, however, because military service was no longer compulsory, and suffrage was invalidated by the abolition of republican government. In AD 212 the Edict of Caracalla granted citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire.

Civitas also denoted a favoured provincial community. Some were exempted from tribute payment and Roman judicial jurisdiction. Others received grants of self-government and were not subject to military occupation