Culture of ancient Rome

“Roman society” redirects here. For the learned society, see Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

The culture of ancient Rome existed throughout the almost 1200-year history of the civilization of Ancient Rome. The term refers to the culture of the Roman Republic, later the Roman Empire, which at its peak covered an area from Lowland Scotland and Morocco to the Euphrates.

Life in ancient Rome revolved around the city of Rome, its famed seven hills, and its monumental architecture such as the Flavian Amphitheatre (now called the Colosseum), the Forum of Trajan, and the Pantheon. The city also had several theaters, gymnasias, and many taverns, baths, and brothels. Throughout the territory under ancient Rome’s control, residential architecture ranged from very modest houses to country villas, and in the capital city of Rome, there were imperial residences on the elegant Palatine Hill, from which the word palace is derived. The vast majority of the population lived in the city center, packed into insulae (apartment blocks).

The city of Rome was the largest megalopolis of that time, with a population that may well have exceeded one million people, with a high end estimate of 3.6 million and a low end estimate of 450,000. A substantial proportion of the population under the city’s jurisdiction lived in innumerable urban centers, with population of at least 10,000 and several military settlements, a very high rate of urbanization by pre-industrial standards. The most urbanized part of the Empire was Italy, which had an estimated rate of urbanization of 32%, the same rate of urbanization of England in 1800. Most Roman towns and cities had a forum, temples and the same type of buildings, on a smaller scale, as found in Rome. The large urban population required an endless supply of food which was a complex logistical task, including acquiring, transporting, storing and distribution of food for Rome and other urban centers. Italian farms supplied vegetables and fruits, but fish and meat were luxuries. Aqueducts were built to bring water to urban centers and wine and oil were imported from Hispania, Gaul and Africa.

There was a very large amount of commerce between the provinces of the Roman Empire, since its transportation technology was very efficient. The average costs of transport and the technology were comparable with 18th-century Europe. The later city of Rome did not fill the space within its ancient Aurelian walls until after 1870.

The majority of the population under the jurisdiction of ancient Rome lived in the countryside in settlements with less than 10 thousand inhabitants. Landlords generally resided in cities and their estates were left in the care of farm managers. The plight of rural slaves was generally worse than their counterparts working in urban aristocratic households. To stimulate a higher labor productivity most landlords freed a large number of slaves and many received wages. Some records indicate that “as many as 42 people lived in one small farm hut in Egypt, while six families owned a single olive tree.” Such a rural environment continued to induce migration of population to urban centers until the early 2nd century when the urban population stopped growing and started to decline.

Starting in the middle of the 2nd century BC, private Greek culture was increasingly in ascendancy, in spite of tirades against the “softening” effects of Hellenized culture from the conservative moralists. By the time of Augustus, cultured Greek household slaves taught the Roman young (sometimes even the girls); chefs, decorators, secretaries, doctors, and hairdressers all came from the Greek East. Greek sculptures adorned Hellenistic landscape gardening on the Palatine or in the villas, or were imitated in Roman sculpture yards by Greek slaves. The Roman cuisine preserved in the cookery books ascribed to Apicius is essentially Greek. Roman writers disdained Latin for a cultured Greek style. Only in law and governance was the Italic nature of Rome’s accretive culture supreme.

Against this human background, both the urban and rural setting, one of history’s most influential civilizations took
shape, leaving behind a cultural legacy that survives in part today.

1 Social structure

Main article: Social class in ancient Rome

The center of the early social structure, dating from the time of the agricultural tribal city state, was the family, which was not only marked by blood relations but also by the legally constructed relation of patria potestas. The Pater familias was the absolute head of the family; he was the master over his wife (if she was given to him sub manu, otherwise the father of the wife retained patria potestas), his children, the wives of his sons (again if married sub manu which became rarer towards the end of the Republic), the nephews, the slaves and the freedmen (liberated slaves, the first generation still legally inferior to the freeborn), disposing of them and of their goods at will, even having them put to death.

Slavery and slaves were part of the social order. The slaves were mostly prisoners of war. There were slave markets where they could be bought and sold. Roman law was not consistent about the status of slaves, except that they were considered like any other moveable property. Many slaves were freed by the masters for fine services rendered; some slaves could save money to buy their freedom. Generally mutilation and murder of slaves was prohibited by legislation, although outrageous cruelty continued.

Apart from these families (called gentes) and the slaves (legally objects, mancipia i.e. “kept in the [master’s] hand”) there were Plebeians that did not exist from a legal perspective. They had no legal capacity and were not able to make contracts, even though they were not slaves. To deal with this problem, the so-called clientela was created. By this institution, a plebeian joined the family of a patrician (in a legal sense) and could close contracts by mediation of his patrician pater familias. Everything the plebeian possessed or acquired legally belonged to the gens. He was not allowed to form his own gens.

The authority of the pater familias was unlimited, be it in civil rights as well as in criminal law. The king’s duty was to be head over the military, to deal with foreign politics and also to decide on controversies between the gentes. The patricians were divided into three tribes (Rammenses, Titientes, Luceres).

During the time of the Roman Republic (founded in 509 BC) Roman citizens were allowed to vote. These included patricians and plebeians. Women, slaves, and children were not allowed to vote.

There were two assemblies, the assembly of centuries (comitia centuriata) and the assembly of tribes (comitia tributa), which were made up of all the citizens of Rome.

In the comitia centuriata the Romans were divided according to age, wealth and residence. The citizens in each tribe were divided into five classes based on property and then each group was subdivided into two centuries by age. All in all, there were 373 centuries. Like the assembly of tribes, each century had one vote. The Comitia Centuriata elected the praetors (judicial magistrates), the censors, and the consuls.

The comitia tributa comprised thirty-five tribes from Rome and the country. Each tribe had a single vote. The Comitia Tributa elected the Quaestors (financial magistrates) and the patrician Curule Aedile.

Over time, Roman law evolved considerably, as well as social views, emancipating (to increasing degrees) family members. Justice greatly increased, as well. The Romans became more efficient at considering laws and punishments.

Life in the ancient Roman cities revolved around the Forum, the central business district, where most of the Romans would go for marketing, shopping, trading, banking, and for participating in festivities and ceremonies. The Forum was also a place where orators would express themselves to mould public opinion, and elicit support for any particular issue of interest to them or others. Before sunrise, children would go to schools or tutoring them at home would commence. Elders would dress, take a breakfast by 11 o’clock, have a nap and in the afternoon or evening would generally go to the Forum. Going to a public bath at least once daily was a habit with most Roman citizens. There were separate baths for men and women. The main difference was that the women’s baths were smaller than the men’s, and did not have a frigidarium (cold room) or a palaestra (exercise area).

Different types of outdoor and indoor entertainment, free of cost, were available in ancient Rome. Depending on the nature of the events, they were scheduled during daytime, afternoons, evenings, or late nights. Huge crowds gathered at the Colosseum to watch events like gladiators, combats between men, or fights between men and wild animals. The Circus Maximus was used for chariot racing.

Life in the countryside was slow but lively, with numerous local festivals and social events. Farms were run by the farm managers, but estate owners would sometimes take a retreat to the countryside for rest, enjoying the splendor of nature and the sunshine, including activities like fishing, hunting, and riding. On the other hand, slave labor slogged on continuously, for long hours and all seven days, and ensuring comforts and creating wealth for their masters. The average farm owners were better off, spending evenings in economic and social interactions at the village markets. The day ended with a meal, generally left over from the noontime preparations.
1.1 Clothing

Main article: Clothing in ancient Rome

In ancient Rome, the cloth and the dress distinguished one class of people from the other class. The tunic worn by plebeians (common people) like shepherds was made from coarse and dark material, whereas the tunic worn by patricians was of linen or white wool. A magistrate would wear the tunica angusticlavi; senators wore tunics with purple stripes (clavi), called tunica laticlavi. Military tunics were shorter than the ones worn by civilians. The many types of togas were also named. Boys, up until the festival of Liberalia, wore the toga praetexta, which was a toga with a crimson or purple border, also worn by magistrates in office. The toga virilis, (or toga pura) or man’s toga was worn by men over the age of 16 to signify their citizenship in Rome. The toga picta was worn by triumphant generals and had embroidery of their skill on the battlefield. The toga pulla was worn when in mourning. Even footwear indicated a person’s social status. Patricians wore red and orange sandals, senators had brown footwear, consuls had white shoes, and soldiers wore heavy boots. Women wore closed shoes of colors such as white, yellow, or green.

The bulla was a locket-like amulet worn by children. When about to marry, the woman would donate her bulla (sometimes called partha) to the household gods, along with her toys, to signify maturity and womanhood.

Men typically wore a toga, and women wore a stola.

The woman’s stola was a dress worn over a tunic, and was usually brightly colored. A fibula (or brooch) would be used as ornamentation or to hold the stola in place. A palla, or shawl, was often worn with the stola.

1.2 Food

Main articles: Ancient Roman cuisine and Grain supply to the city of Rome

Since the beginning of the Republic until 200 BC, ancient Romans had very simple food habits. Simple food was generally consumed at around 11 o’clock, and consisted of bread, salad, olives, cheese, fruits, nuts, and cold meat left over from the dinner the night before. Breakfast was called ientaculum, lunch was prandium, and dinner was called cena. Appetizers were called gustatio, and dessert was called secunda mensa (or second table). Usually, a nap or rest followed this.

The family ate together, sitting on stools around a table. Later on, a separate dining room with dining couches was designed, called a triclinium. Fingers were used to take foods which were prepared beforehand and brought to the diners. Spoons were used for soups.

Wine in Rome did not become common or mass-produced until around 250 B.C. It was more commonly produced around the time of Cato the Elder who mentions in his book De Agri Cultura that the vineyard was the most important aspect of a good farm.[1] Wine was considered a staple drink, consumed at all meals and occasions by all classes and was quite cheap; however, it was always mixed with water. This was the case even dur-
ing explicit evening drinking events (comissatio) where an important part of the festivity was choosing an arbitrer bibendi (Judge of Drinking) who was, among other things, responsible for deciding the ratio of wine to water in the drinking wine. Wine to water ratios of 1:2, 1:3, or 1:4 were commonly used. Many types of drinks involving grapes and honey were consumed as well. Mulsum was honeyed wine, mustum was grape juice, mulsa was honeyed water. The per-person-consumption of wine per day in the city of Rome has been estimated at 0.8 to 1.1 gallons for males, and about 0.5 gallons for females. Even the notoriously strict Cato the Elder recommended distributing a daily ration of low quality wine of more than 0.5 gallons among the slaves forced to work on farms.

Drinking non-watered wine on an empty stomach was regarded as boorish and a sure sign of alcoholism whose debilitating physical and psychological effects were already recognized in ancient Rome. An accurate accusation of being an alcoholic—in the gossip-crazy society of the city bound to come to light and easily verified—was a favorite and damaging way to discredit political rivals employed by some of Rome’s greatest orators like Cicero and Julius Caesar. Prominent Roman alcoholics include Mark Antony, Cicero’s own son Marcus (Cicero Minor) and the emperor Tiberius Claudius Nero whose soldiers gave him the unflattering nickname Biberius Caldius Mero (lit. boozers of pure wine, Sueton Tib. 42,1). Cato the Younger was also known as a heavy drinker, frequently found stumbling home disoriented and the worse for wear in the early hours of morning by fellow citizens.

During the Imperial period, staple food of the lower class Romans (plebeians) was vegetable porridge and bread, and occasionally fish, meat, olives and fruits. Sometimes, subsidized or free foods were distributed in cities. The patrician’s aristocracy had elaborate dinners, with parties and wines and a variety of comestibles. Sometimes, dancing girls would entertain the diners. Women and children ate separately, but in the later Empire period, with permissiveness creeping in, even decent women would attend such dinner parties.

1.3 Education

Main article: Roman school

Schooling in a more formal sense was begun around 200 BC. Education began at the age of around six, and in the next six to seven years, boys and girls were expected to learn the basics of reading, writing and counting. By the age of twelve, they would be learning Latin, Greek, grammar and literature, followed by training for public speaking. Oratory was an art to be practiced and learnt and good orators commanded respect; to become an effective orator was one of the objectives of education and learning. Poor children could not afford education. In some cases, services of gifted slaves were utilized for imparting education. School was mostly for boys, however some wealthy girls were tutored at home, but could still go to school sometimes.

2 Language

Main articles: Latin and Languages of the Roman Empire

The native language of the Romans was Latin, an Italic language in the Indo-European family. Several forms of Latin existed, and the language evolved considerably over time, eventually becoming the Romance languages spoken today.

Initially a highly inflectional and synthetic language, older forms of Latin rely little on word order, conveying meaning through a system of affixes attached to word stems. Like other Indo-European languages, Latin gradually became much more analytic over time and acquired conventionalized word orders as it lost more and more of its case system and associated inflections. Its alphabet, the Latin alphabet, is based on the Old Italic alphabet, which is in turn derived from the Greek alphabet. The Latin alphabet is still used today to write most European and many other languages.

Most of the surviving Latin literature consists almost entirely of Classical Latin. In the eastern half of the Roman Empire, which became the Byzantine Empire; Greek was the main lingua franca as it had been since the time of Alexander the Great, while Latin was mostly used by the Roman administration and its soldiers. Eventually Greek would supplant Latin as both the official written and spoken language of the Eastern Roman Empire, while the various dialects of Vulgar Latin used in the Western Roman Empire evolved into the modern Romance languages still used today.

The expansion of the Roman Empire spread Latin throughout Europe, and over time Vulgar Latin evolved and dialectized in different locations, gradually shifting
into a number of distinct Romance languages beginning in around the 9th century. Many of these languages, including French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish, flourished, the differences between them growing greater over time.

Although English is Germanic rather than Romanic in origin—Britannia was a Roman province, but the Roman presence in Britain had effectively disappeared by the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions—English today borrows heavily from Latin and Latin-derived words. Old English borrowings were relatively sparse and drew mainly from ecclesiastical usage after the Christianization of England. When William the Conqueror invaded England from Normandy in 1066, he brought with him a considerable number of retainers who spoke Anglo-Norman French, a Romance language derived from Latin. Anglo-Norman French remained the language of the English upper classes for centuries and one of the number of Latinate words in English increased immensely through borrowing during this Middle English period. More recently, during the Modern English period, the revival of interest in classical culture during the Renaissance led to a great deal of conscious adaptation of words from Classical Latin authors into English.

Although Latin is an extinct language with very few contemporary fluent speakers, it remains in use in many ways. In particular, Latin has survived through Ecclesiastical Latin, the traditional language of the Roman Catholic Church and one of the official languages of the Vatican City. Although distinct from both Classical and Vulgar Latin in a number of ways, Ecclesiastical Latin was more stable than typical Medieval Latin. More Classical sensibilities eventually re-emerged in the Renaissance with Humanist Latin. Due to both the prevalence of Christianity and the enduring influence of the Roman civilization, Latin became western Europe’s lingua franca, a language used to cross international borders, such as for academic and diplomatic usage. A deep knowledge of classical Latin was a standard part of the educational curriculum in many western countries until well into the 20th century, and is still taught in many schools today. Although it was eventually supplanted in this respect by French in the 19th century and English in the 20th, Latin continues to see heavy use in religious, legal, and scientific terminology, and in academia in general.

3 The Arts

3.1 Literature

Main article: Roman literature

Roman literature was from its very inception influenced heavily by Greek authors. Some of the earliest works currently discovered are of historical epics telling the early military history of Rome. As the Republic expanded, authors began to produce poetry, comedy, history, and tragedy.

During the reign of the early emperors of Rome there was a golden age of historical literature. Works such as the ‘Histories’ of Tacitus, the ‘Gallic Wars’ by Julius Caesar and ‘History of Rome’ by Livy have been passed down through generations. Unfortunately, in the case of Livy, much of the script has been lost and it is left with a few specific areas: the founding of the city, the war with Hannibal, and its aftermath.

Virgil represents the pinnacle of Roman epic poetry. His Aeneid was produced at the request of Maecenas and tells the story of flight of Aeneas from Troy and his settlement of the city that would become Rome. Lucretius, in his On the Nature of Things, attempted to explicate science in an epic poem. Some of his science seems remarkably modern, but other ideas, especially his theory of light, are no longer accepted. Later Ovid produced his Metamorphoses, written in dactylic hexameter verse, the meter of epic, attempting a complete mythology from the creation of the earth to his own time. He unifies his subject matter through the theme of metamorphosis. It was noted in classical times that Ovid’s work lacked the gravitas possessed by traditional epic poetry.

Catullus and the associated group of neoteric poets produced poetry following the Alexandrian model, which experimented with poetic forms challenging tradition. Catullus was also the first Roman poet to produce love poetry, seemingly autobiographical, which depicts an affair with a woman called Lesbia. Under the reign of the Emperor Augustus, Horace continued the tradition of shorter poems, with his Odes and Epodes. Martial, writing under the Emperor Domitian, was a famed author of epigrams, poems which were often abusive and censured public figures.

The genre of satire was traditionally regarded as a Ro-
Roman innovation, and satires were written by, among others, Juvenal and Persius. Some of the most popular plays of the early Republic were comedies, especially those of Terence, a freed Roman slave captured during the First Punic War.

A great deal of the literary work produced by Roman authors in the early Republic was political or satirical in nature. The rhetorical works of Cicero, a self-distinguished linguist, translator, and philosopher, in particular, were popular. In addition, Cicero’s personal letters are considered to be one of the best bodies of correspondence recorded in antiquity.

3.2 Visual art

Main article: Roman art

Most early Roman painting styles show Etruscan influences, particularly in the practice of political painting. In the 3rd century BCE, Greek art taken as booty from wars became popular, and many Roman homes were decorated with landscapes by Greek artists. Evidence from the remains at Pompeii shows diverse influence from cultures spanning the Roman world.

An early Roman style of note was “Incrustation”, in which the interior walls of houses were painted to resemble colored marble. Another style consisted of painting interiors as open landscapes, with highly detailed scenes of plants, animals, and buildings.

Portrait sculpture during the period utilized youthful and classical proportions, evolving later into a mixture of realism and idealism. During the Antonine and Severan periods, more ornate hair and bearding became prevalent, created with deeper cutting and drilling. Advancements were also made in relief sculptures, usually depicting Roman victories.

3.3 Music

Main article: Music of ancient Rome

Music was a major part of everyday life in ancient Rome. Many private and public events were accompanied by music, ranging from nightly dining to military parades and manoeuvres. In a discussion of any ancient music, however, non-specialists and even many musicians have to be reminded that much of what makes our modern music familiar to us is the result of developments only within the last 1000 years; thus, our ideas of melody, scales, harmony, and even the instruments we use would not be familiar to Romans who made and listened to music many centuries earlier.

Some of the instruments used in Roman music are the Tuba, Cornu, Aulos, Askaules, Flute, Panpipes, Lyre, Lute, Cithara, Timpani, Aulos, Auloi, Drums, Hydraulis and the Sistrum.

3.4 Architecture

Main article: Roman architecture

In its initial stages, the ancient Roman architecture reflected elements of architectural styles of the Etruscans and the Greeks. Over a period of time, the style was modified in tune with their urban requirements, and civil engineering and building construction technology became developed and refined. The Roman concrete has remained a riddle, and even after more than two thousand years some ancient Roman structures still stand magnificently, like the Pantheon (with one of the largest single span domes in the world) located in the business district of today’s Rome.
The architectural style of the capital city of ancient Rome was emulated by other urban centers under Roman control and influence,[3] like the Verona Arena, Verona, Italy; Arch of Hadrian, Athens, Greece; Temple of Hadrian, Ephesos, Turkey; a Theatre at Orange, France; and at several other locations, for example, Lepcis Magna, located in Libya.[6] Roman cities were well planned, efficiently managed and neatly maintained. Palaces, private dwellings and villas, were elaborately designed and town planning was comprehensive with provisions for different activities by the urban resident population, and for countless migratory population of travelers, traders and visitors passing through their cities. Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, a 1st-century BCE Roman architect's treatise “De architectura,” with various sections, dealing with urban planning, building materials, temple construction, public and private buildings, and hydraulics, remained a classic text until the Renaissance.

4 Sports and entertainment

The ancient city of Rome had a place called the Campus, a sort of drill ground for Roman soldiers, which was located near the Tiber river. Later, the Campus became Rome's track and field playground, which even Julius Caesar and Augustus were said to have frequented. Imitating the Campus in Rome, similar grounds were developed in several other urban centers and military settlements. In the campus, the youth assembled to play, exercise, and indulge in appropriate sports, which included jumping, wrestling, boxing and racing. Riding, throwing, and swimming were also preferred physical activities. In the countryside, pastimes also included fishing and hunting. Females did not participate in these activities. Ball playing was a popular sport and ancient Romans had several ball games, which included Handball (Expulsim Ludere), field hockey, catch, and some form of Football.

Board games played in ancient Rome included dice (Tesserae or tali), Roman chess (Latrunculi), Roman Checkers (Calculi), tic-tac-toe (Terni Lapilli), and ludus duodecim scriptorum and tabula, predecessors of backgammon.

There were several other activities to keep people engaged like chariot races, musical and theatrical performances, public executions and gladiatorial combat. In the Colosseum, Rome's amphitheatre, 60,000 persons could be accommodated. There are also accounts of the Colosseum's floor being flooded to hold mock naval battles for the public to watch.

In addition to these, Romans also spent their share of time in bars and brothels, and graffiti[5] carved into the walls of these buildings was common. Based on the number of messages found on bars, brothels, and bathhouses, it's clear that they were popular places of leisure and people spent a deal of time there.

5 Religion

Main article: Religion in ancient Rome

The Romans thought of themselves as highly religious, and attributed their success as a world power to their collective piety (pietas) in maintaining good relations with the gods. According to legendary history, most of Rome's religious institutions could be traced to its founders, particularly Numa Pompilius, the Sabine second king of Rome, who negotiated directly with the gods. This archaic religion was the foundation of the mos maiorum, “the way of the ancestors” or simply “tradition”, viewed as central to Roman identity.

The priesthoods of public religion were held by members of the elite classes. There was no principle analogous to "separation of church and state" in ancient Rome. During the Roman Republic (509 BC–27 BC), the same men who were elected public officials served as augurs and pontiffs. Priests married, raised families, and led politically active lives. Julius Caesar became Pontifex Maximus before he was elected consul. The augurs read the will of the gods and supervised the marking of boundaries as a reflection of universal order, thus sanctioning Roman expansionism as a matter of divine destiny. The Roman triumph was at its core a religious procession in which the victorious general displayed his piety and his willingness to serve the public good by dedicating a portion of his spoils to the gods, especially Jupiter, who embodied just rule. As a result of the Punic Wars (264–146 BC), when Rome struggled to establish itself as a dominant power, many new temples were built by magistrates in fulfillment of a vow to a deity for assuring their military success.

Roman religion was thus practical and contractual, based on the principle of do ut des, “I give that you might give.” Religion depended on knowledge and the correct practice of prayer, ritual, and sacrifice, not on faith or dogma, although Latin literature preserves learned speculation on the nature of the divine and its relation to human affairs. Even the most skeptical among Rome's intellectual elite such as Cicero, who was an augur, saw religion as a source of social order.

For ordinary Romans, religion was a part of daily life.[6] Each home had a household shrine at which prayers and libations to the family's domestic deities were offered. Neighborhood shrines and sacred places such as springs and groves dotted the city. The Roman calendar was structured around religious observances. In the Imperial era, as many as 135 days of the year were devoted to religious festivals and games (ludi).[7] Women, slaves, and children all participated in a range of religious activities. Some public rituals could be conducted only by women, and women formed what is perhaps Rome’s
most famous priesthood, the state-supported Vestal Virgins, who tended Rome’s sacred hearth for centuries, until disbanded under Christian domination.

The Romans are known for the great number of deities they honored. The presence of Greeks on the Italian peninsula from the beginning of the historical period influenced Roman culture, introducing some religious practices that became as fundamental as the cult of Apollo. The Romans looked for common ground between their major gods and those of the Greeks, adapting Greek myths and iconography for Latin literature and Roman art. Etruscan religion was also a major influence, particularly on the practice of augury, since Rome had once been ruled by Etruscan kings.

Imported mystery religions, which offered initiates salvation in the afterlife, were a matter of personal choice for an individual, practiced in addition to carrying on one’s family rites and participating in public religion. The mysteries, however, involved exclusive oaths and secrecy, conditions that conservative Romans viewed with suspicion as characteristic of “magic”, conspiracy (conjuratio), and subversive activity. Sporadic and sometimes brutal attempts were made to suppress religionists who seemed to threaten traditional morality and unity, as with the senate’s efforts to restrict the Bacchanales in 186 BC.

As the Romans extended their dominance throughout the Mediterranean world, their policy in general was to absorb the deities and cults of other peoples rather than try to eradicate them, since they believed that preserving tradition promoted social stability. One way that Rome incorporated diverse peoples was by supporting their religious heritage, building temples to local deities that framed their theology within the hierarchy of Roman religion. Inscriptions throughout the Empire record the side-by-side worship of local and Roman deities, including dedications made by Romans to local gods. By the height of the Empire, numerous international deities were cultivated at Rome and had been carried to even the most remote provinces, among them Cybele, Isis, Epona, and gods of solar monism such as Mithras and Sol Invictus, found as far north as Roman Britain. Because Romans had never been obligated to cultivate one god or one cult only, religious tolerance was not an issue in the sense that it is for competing monotheistic systems. The monotheistic rigor of Judaism posed difficulties for Roman policy that led at times to compromise and the granting of special exemptions, but sometimes to intractable conflict.

In the wake of the Republic’s collapse, state religion had adapted to support the new regime of the emperors. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, justified the novelty of one-man rule with a vast program of religious revivalism and reform. Public vows formerly made for the security of the republic now were directed at the wellbeing of the emperor. So-called “emperor worship” expanded on a grand scale the traditional Roman veneration of the ancestral dead and of the Genius, the divine tutelary of every individual. Imperial cult became one of the major ways Rome advertised its presence in the provinces and cultivated shared cultural identity and loyalty throughout the Empire. Rejection of the state religion was tantamount to treason. This was the context for Rome’s conflict with Christianity, which Romans variously regarded as a form of atheism and novel superstition.

From the 2nd century onward, the Church Fathers began to condemn the diverse religions practiced throughout the Empire collectively as “pagan.” In the early 5th century, Constantine I became the first emperor to convert to Christianity, launching the era of Christian hegemony. The emperor Julian made a short-lived attempt to revive traditional and Hellenistic religion and to affirm the special status of Judaism, but in 391 under Theodosius I Nicene Christianity became the official state church of the Roman Empire, to the exclusion of all others. Pleas for religious tolerance from traditionalists such as the senator Symmachus (d. 402) were rejected, and Christian monotheism became a feature of imperial domination. Heretics as well as non-Christians were subject to exclusion from public life or persecution, but Rome’s original religious hierarchy and many aspects of its ritual influenced Christian forms, and many pre-Christian beliefs and practices survived in Christian festivals and local traditions.

6 Philosophy

Mosaic from Pompeii depicting the Academy of Plato

Two major philosophical schools of thought that derived from Greek religion and philosophy that became prominent in Rome in the 1st and 2nd century AD was Cynicism and Stoicism which, according to Cora Lutz were “fairly well merged” in the early years of the Roman
Empire. Cynicism taught that civilization was corrupt and people needed to break away from it and its trappings and Stoicism taught that one must give up all earthly goods by remaining detached from civilization and help others. Because of their negative views on civilization and of their way of life, in where many of them just wore a dirty cloak, carried a staff, and a coin purse, and slept outdoors, they were the targets of the Roman aristocracy and of the emperor and many were persecuted by the Roman government for being “subversive”. The philosopher Lucian attacked the Cynics in his book “The Philosophies for Sale” in which he mocked the Cynics by stating “First...stripping you of your luxury...I will put a cloak on you...Next I will compel you to undergo pains and hardships, sleeping on the ground, drinking nothing but water...Leading this life you will say that you are happier than the Great King...Frequent the most crowded market place...and in [it] desire to be solitary and uncommunicative....”

7 See also

- Ancient Rome
- Classical antiquity
- Gallo-Roman culture
- Mos maiorum
- Roman Britain
- Romanization
- Romanization of Hispania
- Sexuality in ancient Rome
- Social class in ancient Rome
- Theatre of ancient Rome
- Roman graffiti

8 References


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## 10 External links

• An interactive Roman map

• Rome Reborn – A Video Tour through Ancient Rome based on a digital model
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