

## The Achievements of Ancient Rome

### Ancient Roman Law

As the empire developed, the emperor stood at the top of the administrative system. He served as military commander in chief, high priest, and source of law. All this power was intensely personal: soldiers swore their oath to the emperor. Personal ties of patronage, friendship and marriage had always bound together Roman society. Military loyalty, bureaucracy, and imperial succession were all viewed in personal terms. This concentration of power produced a court in which government officials and the imperial family competed with poets, doctors, slaves, and actors for the emperor's attention and favor. The emperor's own slaves and freedmen dominated the clerical and financial posts and formed the core of imperial administration. Deep ties of loyalty bound Roman freedmen and slaves to their patrons so that they faithfully served even the most monstrous emperors.

### The Twelve Tables

The Twelve Tables are the Roman laws that were engraved in copper and permanently displayed in public view. The twelve copper tables were a simple set of rules governing the public, private and political behavior of every Roman. Here are some examples:

1. Death sentences now were only allowed to be issued by the law courts.
2. It was an offense to cast or have a witch cast any spells on someone else.
3. Marriage between patricians and plebeians was forbidden.
4. For the theft of crops there was the death penalty (clubbing to death)
5. For slander there was the death penalty (clubbing to death)
6. The levels of punishment for assault were also defined; the level varied according to the status of the person who had committed the crime. Harsher for a plebeian, milder for a patrician. And should the victim of the crime be a mere slave, the sentence was reduced yet further.

### Funeral Rites

The Roman sense of family life applied also to a person's death. Ideally members of the family were to be present when a Roman died. On the point of death he was picked up and laid down on the bare earth and one of his closest relations would catch his last breath with a kiss, before closing his eyes. When he had died, those present would call the dead man loudly by name.

The preparation of the body began trained people washing the body with water, then anointed and embalmed it. A small coin was placed under the deceased's tongue, for him to pay for the journey to the underworld. The dead man was then dressed in his best clothes and was displayed in the *atrium* of the house. The corpse was alas either buried or cremated after the funeral ceremony. Cremation eventually became the more widely used practice, with burial being merely for the poor. Funerals of the poor and of children were done at night, while the nobles were performed during the day with a large ceremony.

The funeral procession was preceded by pipers and musicians playing various instruments. Next came torch bearers and hired women who wailed and cried in grief. Dancers and clowns might even be part of the procession. More so, jokes would be made at the dead man's expense and onlookers might even jeer and shout abuse. The eventual last rites had to be performed outside the city limits. This dated back to the ancient Laws of the Twelve Tables.

### The Census

Every five years, each male Roman citizen had to register in Rome for the census. In this he had to declare his family, wife, children, slaves and riches. Should he fail to do this, his possessions would be confiscated and he would be sold into slavery. But registration meant freedom. A man wishing to free his slave needed only to enter him in the censor's list as a citizen. Registration was the only way that a Roman could ensure that his identity and status as a citizen were recognized. Primarily the census served to count the number of citizens and to assess the potential military strength and future tax revenue.

To the Romans the census made them more than a mere crowd; it made them a people, capable of

collective action. To the Roman the census was one of the foundation stones of their civilization. With the census itself being of such importance, the job of compiling the lists was not simply left to anonymous scribes. It was overseen by two censors. These men were incorruptible and men of substance who were appointed for their proven integrity and authority. It was their role to scrutinize each man, and to place him in his rightful place within the civic hierarchy of Rome. In assessing the lower ranks of Roman society, little was taken into account but their material belongings. However, for the citizens of high position in the hierarchy were subjected to the most penetrating gaze of the censor.

And it was an uncomfortable thing indeed, to be inspected in such a way because a lot was at stake. The censors, looking into a man's public and private lives, might decide to move a citizen a few rungs down the social ladder if he had, for example, turned a blind eye to his wife's adulteries, committed perjury, fathered no children, or failed to cultivate his land properly.

### The Roman Roads

The ancient Romans had a good system of roads, one that required systematic planning and maintenance. We can tell from an ancient administrative document of the first century, drawn up by the geometer Siculus Flaccus, that the Romans classified their roads in order depending on their importance. The most important roads were public roads, which were funded by the state. Of secondary importance were military roads, built at the expense of the army; these became public roads. Local roads come after this, and finally there were private roads, built and maintained by the owners. A Roman road is made up of a foundation and a surfacing.

### Roman Aqueducts

The Roman waterway known as the Aqueducts provided running water, indoor plumbing and a sewer system carrying away disease from the population. The Aqueducts stand as a testament to Roman engineering. The aqueducts were built from a combination of stone, brick and the special volcanic rock. The bulk of the Roman waterway system ran below ground. Channels went through rock, or dug below the surface carried water where it was convenient. The aqueducts were built only to carry the flow of water in areas where digging, burrowing, or surface grades presented problems. The entire system relied on the use of gravity to maintain a continuous flow; and the engineering at the time was remarkable.

When water reached Rome it flowed into enormous cisterns maintained on the highest ground. These large reservoirs held the water supply for the city and were connected to a vast network of lead pipes. Everything from public fountains, baths and private villas could tap into the network. The water system was as politically motivated as any other massive public works project.

Maintenance of the water system was a continuous task, and paid laborers, slaves and the legions all had parts in building parts of the water system. 11 separate aqueducts supplied the city of Rome and were built over a span of 500 years.

### The Civilized City

The entire concept of Roman life seemed to center around the city. The countryside was a nice place to retire to for a while in order to stay in touch with nature. Romans were after all social creatures, which craved being part of a society. The truly civilized citizen had to be more than educated or successful; they needed a community, a family, and friends around him. The city was the place for this.

The idea of living of cities represented advancement from the mere existence as a peasant living off the land. In the Roman mind, cities formed its inhabitants into greater, abler, nobler beings. No-one more so than the highborn Roman was a citizen. And it was in their eyes that he was to show himself a worthy person, respectful to his parents, loyal to his patrons, able in raising his family and just towards his slaves. Just as the Roman craved society, so was he made to prove himself worthy of membership.

The Roman Achievements

Achievements	Describe the Roman Achievements	What was the impact of the achievement on Rome?
Ancient Roman Law		
The Twelve Tables		
Funeral Rites		
Census		
Roman Road System		
Aqueducts		
Civilized City Life		