

Slavery

How many slaves do you think there are in the world today?

Turn to the end of these notes to find out!

- Roman slaves belonged to their owners.
- They could not marry or own personal possessions or be protected by the courts without their owner's consent.
- Romans, like other Mediterranean people of the time, viewed slavery as a normal part of life.

How did people become slaves?

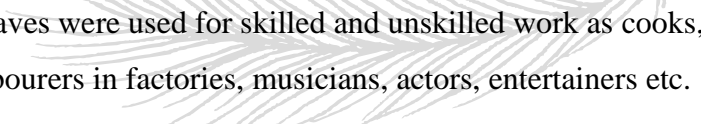
- Prisoner of war
- Piracy
- Born into slavery
- Poor people sometimes sold their children into slavery.

How many slaves lived in Rome?

- By the time of the Emperor Augustus at the start of the first century AD, there were around three slaves for every five free citizens in Italy.
- Most families owned at least one or two slaves.
- Very wealthy men owned hundreds, or perhaps thousands of slaves.

How were slaves treated?

- Employed for every type of work
- Work in the country was rougher and harsher than work in the cities.
- Slaves in the country had to work as labourers, shepherds, cowherds, miners and builders (roads and bridges)
- Sometimes the owner of a gladiatorial school would buy the strongest slaves to train as gladiators

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- In towns, slaves were used for skilled and unskilled work as cooks, gardeners, general servants, labourers in factories, musicians, actors, entertainers etc.
 - Moved freely around the city, went shopping, visited temples and were often present at shows in the theatre and amphitheatre.
 - Foreign visitors to Rome and Italy were sometimes surprised that there was so little visible difference between a slave and a poor free man.
 - Some masters were cruel and brutal, others were kind and humane.
 - Slaves were a valuable commodity, particularly if they were skilled, so it made sense to treat them humanely.

Freeing a slave

- Slaves could be freed for good service
- Were commonly freed after owner's death (if he had said so in his will)
- Laws stated that slaves could not be freed before the age of thirty
- The act of freeing a slave was called manumission.
- It could be performed as a legal ceremony in front of a judge, or simply performed at home by a master declaring in front of witnesses that the slave was freed.

Freedmen

- A freedman could make his own way in the world and many went on to become very wealthy
- However, a freedman could not stand as a candidate in public elections nor could he become a high-ranking officer in the military.
- A freedman had to work for his master for a fixed number of days each year and was expected to help and support him whenever he could.
- Slaves took their master's name as part of their own name when freed.

Horror!

A man called Pedanius Secundus kept four hundred slaves. When one of them murdered him, they were all put to death, despite the protests of the people of Rome.

There are more than 45 million men, women and children in slavery today.