

Social structure in ancient rome



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After few months of study of the ancient Europe, from the ancient Greek polis to the Roman Empire to the development of Christianity to the Medieval Europe, the concept of “ Europe” gradually has become more and more clear to me, so do the meaning of unity in its diversity and the diversity in its unity. Among the different times, the Ancient Rome appears more fascinating and interesting to me, especially in the area of its social structure. Therefore, in this term paper, the social structure of the Ancient Rome is selected as my topic, general information of the subject and analysis of its impact are outlined in the following.

Main Body When I first saw this topic—Social Structure in Ancient Rome, the first thing that came to my mind is what really is “ social structure”? And where should I start to get the relevant references and materials, given that the Ancient Roman is of 1300 years of history. I realized it is necessary to give the definition of “ social structure” and find the focus of the time for my topic so that I can have a more comprehensive and in-depth study of my subject. Here comes the definition from Wikipedia,

“ The notion of social structure as relationships between different entities or groups or as enduring and relatively stable patterns of relationship” emphasises the idea that society is grouped into structurally related groups or sets of roles, with different functions, meanings or purposes. One example of social structure is the idea of “ social stratification”, which refers to the idea that society is separated into different strata (levels), guided (if only partially) by the underlying structures in the social system. This approach has been important in the academic literature with the rise of various forms of structuralism.

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It is important in the modern study of organizations, because an organization's structure may determine its flexibility, capacity to change, and many other factors. Therefore, structure is an important issue for management. Social structure may be seen to influence important social systems including the economic system, legal system, political system, cultural system, and others. Family, religion, law, economy and class are all social structures. The "social system" is the parent system of those various systems that are embedded in it."

I have searched the definition in other source. The following is from another website: "Social structure refers to patterns around which society is organized. Henslin (1999: 96) defines social structure as "the framework of society that was already laid out before you were born." Social mobility is often achieved by routes provided by the social structure. In a bureaucracy, the patterns are well defined (in the army one moves up in rank). There are micro aspects of social structure such as statuses and roles. Larger social structures include groups and institutions (e. g., government, education, religion). Still larger are more obscure structures, (like those related to the economy). Often, ordinary people are not even aware of their existence. These obscure structures none-the-less have great impact on the character of society overall."

After summarizing the ideas about social structure, I take the approach to discuss the class system, the different institutions and groups, including the household unit, the government, the education and the economic, which make up the social structure of Ancient Rome.

As about the Ancient Rome, it is generally divided into 3 periods— the monarchy time of Rome, the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire in the sense of change of political structure. Therefore, I will start my essay by the above components with reference to specific periods in Ancient Rome. In the society of ancient Rome, the largest urban center is the city Rome, which had a population about 1 million, with maximum up to 14 million. It was bustling with the sound of people and the wheels and the hooves.

There were numerous urban centers of more than 10000 of habitants and military settlements, with forums and temples—such a high rate of urbanization. In terms of social class, the ancient rome is indeed hierarchical. There were generally three classes of people: the first class is the free born citizens, the cives; the freemen, the liberti, in the middle class; and the slaves, the servi, at the bottom. In the class of free men, there were also the difference between the Patricians and the Plebeians.

Generally, the Patricians are of prestige and enjoy higher social status. The man who could count a concul is a noble and the first man in his family to count a concul was called the novus homo, meaning the new man, such as the Ciero and the Marius. In classification of people by the wealth they held, the richest people formed the senatorial class, where they had great influence in the politics and the army. The equestrians, who could afford war horses, formed the mercantile class. And then there came the proletarii, the people who had no property at all and they were not allowed in military service and their social status was just above the free slaves.

In the republic time, the voting right depended on the class. People formed the voting tribes but the number of the poor exceeded the rich, therefore, the proletarii was all counted as 1 tribe. Also, people voted in class order, which means the rich has the privilege to vote first, and the voting ceased as most of the tribes were voted. Often was the case that the poor were unable to vote and this showed that the great voting power was obviously not in the majority of the poor, but in the rich minority.

As regards to the status of women, female enjoyed the basic rights like the males but their citizenship was not fully regarded as they did not possessed the right to vote and could not participate in the politics. However, their status was raised after the emancipation that they were free from the paterfamilias, that's the master, usually the father, in the family, and they could own their property and enjoy juridical rights although it was still impossible for them to vote and get in the politics area.

The unit of the society was the household. In a household, the class was also obvious: with the greatest power was the father who was the master in the household, and then came the wife of the man, the children, the relatives and then the servants and slaves. The father's power was so big that he could force the marriage and divorce, sell his offspring to the slave market, claim the property as his, and even punish and murder his family members (but this "power" was banned later). Only when the father passed away could the grownup son come into power in the household.

When related households were grouped together, they formed the great family, which was usually based on blood ties or as a kind of economic

alliance or political alliance. It was a time where marriage meant alliance of two households than affection of a man and a woman and this was true especially in upper class of the society. In the component of education, it was usually the parents, sometimes the educated slaves, who taught their children about different topics including the language, roman traditions, the wars, the farming, the politics.

After the conquest of the Hellenic kingdoms in the 3rd century B. C, and with the influence of the Greek culture, at the age of 7, children were sent to private schools called *Indus* and taught by a *magisterludi*, who was usually of a greek origin, in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Greek. After 4 years of study, they went to secondary school and taught by *Grammaticus* in literature of Greece and Rome.

When came to the age of 16, the children went to rhetoric school for the pavement for the legal careers. It seems the education system is quite similar to today's that there are different subjects in different stages for different ages of the children and like us, the children have school every day and they also enjoy summer holidays and other religious holidays and festivals as we do. As about the government in the society of Rome, there were the kings, who were elected in major tribes, in the monarchy Rome, A king has the absolute power in the military and was the head of the state religion.

There were 3 bodies that were under the kings, namely the senate, which served as an advisory body, the *comitia curiata*, where the law was ratified and endorsed, as well as the *comitia calata*, which was an assembly of the

priestly college. In the Roman Republic time, due to the class struggle, there were the democratic and oligarchy government. For the economic aspect, since the Rome owned and conquered a large piece of land across the Mediterranean Sea, which provided abundance of natural resources as well as human resources.

The main economic activities were farming and trading. By the 1st century B. C., there were many grape and olive estates and two-tier crop rotation was practiced despite the productivity was not high (e. g. 1 ton/ha). There were also industrial and manufacturing activities like mining and quarrying, mainly for making construction materials. Factories at that time were in small scale of less than 12 at a workshop. In the republic time, since there was a large supply of cheap slaves owe to the victory of wars with foreign states. These slaves served as both skill and non-skilled labor force, comprising of 20% of the total population and 40% of the Rome's population at that time.

Till to the Empire, the prices of those slaves raised for there were fewer conquests which made the ownership of a slave much more costly. It was more often for people to hire slaves at that time. Barter was a common form of exchange for trading of goods and services. However, a coinage system was also invented. There were brass, bronze and premium coins circulated in the market. The transport of goods were expensive and slow because the horses were costly and other animals were inefficient for transporting goods, also the roads were not designed for wheels.

All these factors contributed to a high cost in transport of commodities by land. Therefore, a cheaper and more efficient way is adopted, that is the

trading by sea, by transporting goods on vessels. For example, the maritime trading from Grades to Alexandria through Ostia took less than 1 month of time and carrying a large volume of commodities. It was the common and popular way for trading. The Ancient Rome had already developed a complete and sophisticated social structure, which serves as a model for descendent. In many components of the social structure, like the government, the political and educational system, the law system, and other culture elements, all these have influenced the whole civilization of the Europe, and have its presence in later stages of European history which is the “ unity” element in the whole history stroll of Europe.