

Women in roman society



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The women who came from the wealthy levels of the society had the daily chores done by the slaves since the lives of women were determined by their position in their society. The chores performed by the slaves included washing the females master face, rubbing her with scented oils and also setting her hair into curls while the wealthy women spent all their time socializing and planning how they will be entertained with their friends.

Marriages in roman (also known as Manus marriage) were organized by the parent of the couple. The girl in roman would be exposed to marriage at the age of thirteen whereby she takes all her toys and clothing and gives them to Goddess Venus or to household gods called lares and penates. A pig would be sacrificed and a prayer made to Juno. The marriage contract is signed by the bride's father and the gifts from her family given to the grooms' family. Then the groom will pretend to take away the bride from her mother as a remembrance of early stories from the sabian women in early Rome. The married girls often died while giving birth or because they are weakened from having too many children without reprieve for instance a woman called Venturia was married at the age of eleven, gave birth to six children and died at the age of twenty seven.

The work of women was to take care of their children and manage the house while their husbands went out to work and later on relaxed and finally they would return home to their wives expecting to find everything in the house in order. Women got pregnant more often since there were no birth control methods. Managing the house would include responsibilities of providing fuel for the fire in the cold months, cleaning the house and also shopping for

the necessities like food, most of it all women were responsible for knitting clothes for the members (Shelton 300).

Mothers in ancient Rome were under the rule of their mother-in-law though she can gain a little authority when she had her first baby boy. In this context, women had few rights in their marriage, she could be divorced if she did not bear a son or if she did not bear any child at all. Also a woman was not supposed to inherit all her husband's property after he dies nor could she leave all her money to her children (Williams 7). Divorce was a legal though an informal affair which involved a wife leaving her husband's house. In 230BC is when the first divorce was recorded where Spurius Carvilius Ruga divorced his wife on grounds of barrenness (McGinn 457). Remarriage was an alternative if at all the widow or woman divorced can bear children. Nevertheless women who remained wedded to one man were highly celebrated for their devotion since marriage was considered devotion for Roman women. Domestic violence by a husband or his wife was not allowed by Roman law for example Nero; an Emperor who was an abusive husband. He had his wife Octavia murdered after subjecting her to torture and imprisonment. He then married his mistress Poppaea Sabina who he later battered to death when she criticized him.

Ancient roman culture refers to the culture of the roman republic (empire) which covered areas from Cambria, Morocco up to the Euphrates. The life in the ancient Rome revolved around Rome city also known as seven hills and its monumental structures such as Colosseum, the forum of Trajan, and the pathion. The city also had theaters, gymnasiums and taverns. The city of

Rome was the largest megalopolis of the time with a population of around one million people.

The public places in Rome were resounded with such a din of hooves and clatter of iron chariot wheels that Julius Caesar had proposed ban chariot traffic at night (Shelton 37).

In the introduction of *As the Romans Did*, Jo-Ann Shelton discusses how the Romans “took the remarkable action of granting Roman citizenship to every person within the Roman Empire”. According to *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, by Richard A Baumann says that “the public position of women was so unfavorable that it has even been doubted whether they were Roman citizens. The doubts are unfounded ...”(Shelton 3.). These shows that they had higher position than the Athenian women who were not considered in the as citizens neither were they allowed to participate in any political activities. Tacitus immortalized the woman Epicharis for her part in the Pisonian conspiracy where she attempted to gain the support of the Romans fleet and she was instead arrested.

Women had interest in politics years earlier when Romans initiated the Oppian Laws. The laws prohibited women from buying any luxury items for example jewelry or fancy clothes since they could not be allowed to buy any costly thing (Shelton 299). Twenty years later women tried to have this law repealed. Livy, in his *A History of Rome*, explains how the women poured into the Forum, where the assembly was under way. They were trying to convince their male relatives to vote in favor of the repeal. The law was abolished and women had won a victory.

There were separate baths for women and men or if not so they would arrange some to bath in the morning while others in the afternoon. While for the upper classes women would accompany their husbands to dinner parties which would vary from ordinary functions (Shelton 31).

Women were able to attend religious festivals, events like circuses but they were not allowed to be seen on the stages as actors (Shelton 35). According to Ovid in his Love Affair advises men that the racetrack is a good place to meet women which evidenced that women would attend such events. It is evidence that roman women who possessed few legal rights could also possess much personal freedom, roman women were certainly not sequestered away in gynaeconitis as Athenian women were in Greece. Girls did not receive any formal education in their homes and learned to read and write. Mothers and fathers transmitted the roman culture and education to their children, never the less; it was frowned upon the women to become educated as it is in the Juvenal's writings. (Juvenal 434).

Concubine, in a Roman law was defined as woman living permanently in a monogamous relationship with a man who is not her husband (McGinn 480). the difference between concubine and marriage is that the children born by concubine follow the status of the mother though concubine could become a wife. The reason behind women becoming concubines is that they may want to become freed women of their partners.

But we will never know what the women of ancient Rome thought about their inferior social position or what they thought about the many layers of separation that existed between themselves and Roman men. The ancient

Roman world was a very patriarchal culture, with men holding all the positions of power. Women and children really did not have many rights. In reality, life must have been difficult for the majority of people in Rome when one considers all the years of war and conquer: life was not very easy for anyone. Although the Romans were not pioneers in social equality, the civilization had a great influence on both men and women who came later. They were building an empire and as the legendary H. I. Marrou stated in his book, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Marrou 293).

In conclusion, some women in the ancient roman for example Vestal Virgins were in a position to gain respect and honor priestesses whose their task was to maintain the sacred fire of Vesta. Wealthier would also gain respect by funding these ceremonies. Some writers and poets were women and men could mention their work with admiration which makes most of their work survive. Aristocratic women managed a large and complex household since wealthy couples would possess many homes and estates and even more slaves for example Julius Caesar who was away throughout 50s BC, his wife Calpurnia Pisonis would be responsible for taking care of all his assets. Another notable woman in the early roman Empire was Livia Drusilla Augusta,(58BC-AD29), was the wife Augustus, she was most powerful acting severally as his husbands faithful advisor.

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