

Roman citizenship essay sample

Law



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Roman Republic became one of the most powerful and ruthless Empire's on the face of the planet and to be a citizen was very appealing. This was such an admirable and highly sought after position; that it would cause envy throughout the people of that time. There were also 'pre-requisites' recorded in the requirements of becoming a Roman citizen and keeping that role. Roman citizenship itself was originally difficult to obtain but once won, life as a citizen was easier and more refined than the 'lowly freemen'.

There was a complex set of rules to be taken into account when it came to granting Roman citizenship to the people. Even the birth of a child to a citizen was not always a guarantee of citizenship as the role of the father and mother came into account. If the parents were both citizens and had a legal conubium (marriage), their child would be automatically granted citizenship and would be of the same social class of the father whereas a legionary, although a citizen, was not legally eligible for a conubium so his child would have the role of his/her mother (which was usually not a citizen) unless/until the legionary and the mother had a conubium after his service. There were obviously other ways to obtain citizenship than birthright: Freed slaves and their children became citizens, only once freed.

Citizenship was allowed to be bought, but at an extremely high price.

Full or partial citizenship was granted to Peregrini; foreigners who lived in conquered lands.

Latin people who moved to Rome were granted citizenship but theirs had the restriction of limited rights.

Auxilii (Peregrini serving as auxiliary troops) and their children would be granted citizenship as a reward for their services.

In AD 212 Rome gradually granted citizenship to whole provinces; the third-century Constitutio Antoniniana granted it to all free male inhabitants of the Empire. (Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 'nod'). In exceptional cases however, an individual could be stripped of their citizenship.

Roman citizenship had worthwhile benefits as the people would awe and chase the title throughout their lives. The most appealing would have to have been the fact that citizens were safe from the death penalty unless found guilty of treason. If accused of treason, a Roman citizen had the right to be tried in Rome. Even if sentenced to death, no Roman citizen could be sentenced to die at the cross (Jahnige 2002). For example: Two men found of guilty of the same crime, one being a citizen one not, the citizen was beheaded, whilst the other was crucified. Other legal benefits were: The right to vote - suffragium The right to make legal contracts - commercium The right to legal marriage - conubium The right to stand for public office The right to sue and be sued

The right to an appeal from the decisions of magistrates The right to trial Citizens could not be tortured Despite all these benefits, there were legal 'catches' to the role of a citizen. Citizens did have responsibilities: they were taxed, and the men needed to complete a term of military service (in fact, only a citizen could become a Roman legionary). Only a citizen could use the praenomen-nomen-cognomen set of names. Roman citizenship was required

in order to join the Roman legions, but this was sometimes ignored (Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 'nod').

As citizenship was such a desirable position, it was used as a tool and socially, citizens would feel happy with their position, being recognised by their clothes. The toga was the characteristic garment of the Roman citizen. Roman women (who were not considered citizens) and Non-citizens were not allowed to wear one (Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 'nod'). A Roman citizen was classed higher than others which would work to their favour in the markets etc as people would put them first for money and importance. Individuals who weren't citizens would have to be wary of the citizens though as due to the benefits of citizenship, non-citizens could easily be tricked into getting into trouble with the Empire law. As a tool; Roman Citizenship was used to 'bargain' with allies; The granting of citizenship to allies and the conquered was a vital step in the process of Romanization. This step was one of the most effective political tools and (at that point in history) original political ideas (perhaps one of the most important reasons for the success of Rome). (Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 'nod').

Citizens would be referred to as Romans whereas non-citizens were referred to as slaves or barbari, it was a ruthless time and the residents of the Empire were roughly divided into classes: Slaves were considered property and had only certain very limited rights as granted by statute. They could essentially be sold, tortured, maimed, raped and killed at the whim of their owners. It was the exceptional feature of ancient Rome that almost all slaves freed by Roman owners (freedman) automatically received Roman citizenship.

The natives who lived in territories conquered by Rome, citizens of Roman client states and Roman allies could be given a limited form of Roman citizenship such as the Latin Right. This amounted essentially to a second-class citizenship within the Roman state. The Latin Right is the most widely known but there were many other of such Rights.

A Roman citizen enjoyed the full range of benefits that flowed from his status. A citizen could, under certain exceptional circumstances, be deprived of his citizenship.

Women were a class apart whose status in Roman society varied tremendously over time. While Roman citizen women would come to enjoy many of the rights accorded to male citizens, Roman women could not vote or stand for office, and were, at least in theory, subject to the almost complete power of their paterfamilias. (All dot points – Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia ‘nod’)

Despite the classes of residents, there was always space for corruption, a bending of the rules, exceptions and complete abrogation of citizenship rights. For example: In Sicilia, during the governorship of Gaius Verres, a citizen demanded a trial to complain about high taxes and systematic plunder of the province, Verres refused his demand and sentenced him to treason. The citizen was flogged (torture) and then crucified (death), even though the individual kept repeating “ I am a Roman Citizen”, not one person intervened. As this was obviously a case of blatantly ignoring citizenship rights: Cicero prosecuted Verres, he simply fled Italy and his friends in the Senate never bothered themselves into ordering his arrest (Internet Wikipedia Encyclopaedia ‘nod’).

In conclusion; Roman Citizenship was the most amazing component of life at that time as it depicted who you were, what you could do, how you would be treated, what professions you could undertake, what you could name your children and even what you could wear. It had many benefits that outweighed the cons of the position but the cons definitely had to be taken into consideration to be wary of at all time. It wasn't the easiest position to obtain before 212AD but was most definitely a worthwhile one.

Bibliography

1. Hand-outs from our teacher
2. <http://www.dl.ket.org/latin1/mores/3>.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_citizen
4. <http://www.dl.ket.org/latin1/mores/law/citizenship.htm>
5. Lewis, Naphtali & Reinhold Meyer (ed.) 1966, "Roman Civilization Sourcebook 1: The Republic", Harper Torchbooks, New York
6. Lewis, Naphtali & Reinhold Meyer (ed.) 1966, "Roman Civilization Sourcebook 2: The Empire", Harper Torchbooks, New York.
7. Pamela Bradley, 1990, "Ancient Rome: Using Evidence", Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.