**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in Culture and Civilization**

**First year, LMD**

**The Daily Life of Romans**

**Family and Society**

In the earliest days of Rome, extended families lived and worked on small farms. Family members knew what was expected of them. During the Roman Empire, family roles became even more structured—and so did roles in society.

The head of the Roman family was the father. He owned all the property and had control over other members of the household. The father’s power was limited, however, by public opinion and custom. Roman society disapproved of a father punishing his family without good **cause**.

**Women** in a Roman family enjoyed some freedoms. Like women in most parts of the world, Roman women were expected to run the household and take care of the children. But they also could inherit property, and they ran the family business when their husbands were away. Still, Roman women had little power outside the home and could not vote.

**Children** Most parents gave their children some education at home. Boys from wealthy families were often sent to **private schools**, while daughters stayed at home and learned household skills. Girls usually married by age 14, while boys married later.

**Social Classes** Over time, Roman social classes changed. The old division between patricians and plebeians evolved into upper and lower classes. Patricians and some wealthy plebeians became part of the upper class. A new middle class also developed. Prosperous business leaders and officials belonged to this middle class. Farmers formed one of the lower classes.

Slaves made up the lowest—and largest—class in society. Up to one-third of the population were slaves. Some were prisoners of war. slaves performed all jobs requiring physical labor. They worked in mines, on large estates, and as servants. Many suffered cruel treatment. Slave revolts were common, but none of them succeeded. Thousands of slaves died in these revolts, the most famous of which was led by Spartacus.

**Roman Beliefs**

Religious beliefs bound Roman society together. From the earliest times, the Romans worshiped hundreds of spirits. They believed that these spirits lived in everything around them, including rivers, woods, and fields. Roman families also believed that household gods protected them. They set up **shrines** in their homes in order to honor these spirits.

**Religious Influences**

The Romans borrowed many of their gods from the Greeks. For instance, the Roman god Jupiter, father of the gods, had many of the characteristics of the Greek god Zeus. Apollo, the Greek god of music and poetry, became a key Roman god of the same name.

**Religion and Public Life** As in ancient Egypt, religion and government were linked in Rome. Priests were government officials, and the **emperor** was the head of the church. Roman gods were also symbols of the state. Romans were expected to honor these gods in public ceremonies. Over time, even the emperor himself became a god. the Romans worshiped emperors after death. And also honored living rulers as gods.

**Life in Roman Cities**

**The Crowded City** The number of people also created problems. Rome’s center was crowded, dirty, and noisy. Much of the city’s population was unemployed and poor. These people lived in rundown apartment buildings. They had small rooms with no running water or toilets. Public bathhouses were one means of adapting to a crowded city. People dropped their trash out of the windows, injuring others walking in the streets below. Fire was also a constant danger.

**Rich and Poor** Poor Romans also had little to eat. Typical foods were bread, olives, and fruit. But the government provided free grain to keep people happy and avoid public unrest. By contrast, wealthy Romans enjoyed a life of luxury. They lived in large, comfortable homes in the countryside. They spent their time going to the theater and enjoying themselves. They also held fancy dinner parties.

**Responding to Urban Problems** The Romans came up with a number of practical solutions to some of their urban problems. They built sewer and plumbing systems to improve sanitation. They also built **aqueducts**, artificial channels that carried fresh water from springs, streams, and lakes into Roman towns. The water traveled through a system of channels and pipes. Most of these were underground but some were supported by high arched bridges. Public baths were another important part of city life. Most towns and even most Roman forts had public bathhouses.

Another famous arena was the **Colosseum**. The Colosseum was named for a huge statue, or colossus, of a Roman emperor that once stood beside the arena. In the arena, Romans could watch **gladiators**, or trained warriors, fight to the death. Overhead stretched a cloth awning (sun shelter) to protect the public from the sun. The crowd might see hunters killing unusual animals. But the most popular contests pitted (set in opposition) two gladiators against one another or a gladiator against a wild animal. The spectacles the Romans watched combined bravery and violence, honor and cruelty.



