

Rome's social and political structure

The occupants of Roman territory fell into two groups: *cives* (Roman citizens) and *peregrini* (foreigners). Citizens had special privileges. They were allowed to vote in elections and to serve in the army; non-citizens were not. At first only people with Roman parents qualified for citizenship. Later the government began granting

citizenship to certain foreigners. These two groups were further divided, as shown below. There were three classes of citizen. These divisions began very early in Rome's history. The non-citizens included provincials (people who lived outside Rome itself but within Roman territory; see pages 26-27), and slaves (see page 53).

Citizens



The richest citizens, called patricians, were probably descended from early rich landowners and political leaders.



Equites (businessmen) were descendants of the first Roman cavalry officers (see page 14).



Plebeians (commoners) were probably the descendants of poor farmers and traders.

Non-citizens



Slaves were owned by other people. They had no freedom or rights. During the early republic there were very few slaves, but later the number grew.



Provincials did not have the full rights of Romans. They also had to pay taxes to the government in Rome. Citizens did not pay these taxes.

Families

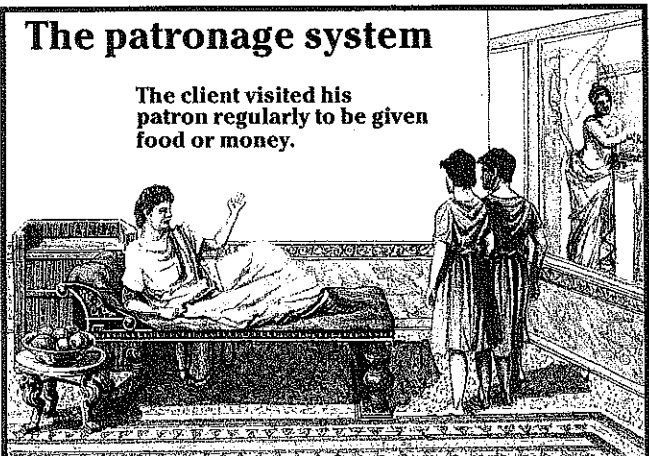
The concept of the family was very important to the Romans. Every family was led by a *paterfamilias* (father), and included his wife and children, his sons' wives and children, and all their property and slaves. When the *paterfamilias* died, each of his sons might become the head of a new family, linked by name to the old one. The resulting chain of related families formed a clan called a *gens*.



The *paterfamilias* commanded awe and respect. He held the power of life and death over the family, and looked after the welfare of its members. He also directed the family's religious activities (see page 62).

The patronage system

The client visited his patron regularly to be given food or money.



People who did not have the legal protection of a family (for example, newcomers to Rome, ex-slaves, or people who had left their own families) could attach themselves to an existing family. They were known as *clientes* (clients), and their protectors as *patroni* (patrons). The *clients* gave his *patronus* political and social support in return for financial and legal protection.

Marriage and childbirth

Young Romans had little choice about whom they married. Parents chose husbands and wives for their children, and often arranged marriages for political, business or social reasons. Girls could marry at the age of 12, but most waited until they were at least 14. There were different types of marriage contract. In republican times a woman's money and possessions could become the

property of her husband's father. Later, women controlled their own belongings and had more freedom.

The wedding day had to be carefully chosen because many days in the Roman calendar were thought to be unlucky. Weddings often took place in the second half of June, which was considered a particularly lucky period.

To celebrate an engagement, a party was held and the marriage contract was written out. The bride was given a ring for the third finger of her left hand. The night before the wedding, she offered her childhood toys to the gods at the household shrine.



On the wedding day, the bride's house was hung with flowers and ribbons. She wore a white tunic, a head-dress of flowers, and a red veil and shoes. Her hair was braided.

When the guests and bridegroom arrived the priest asked the gods if the day was a lucky one. If the answer was favourable the ceremony continued.



The contract was signed and the chief bridesmaid led the bride forward and joined her hand with the groom's. The couple prayed to the gods, and the bride promised to follow her husband wherever he went.



After the ceremony, there was a party at the house of the bride's father. Then the bride and groom led a procession of guests, flute players and torch-bearers to the groom's house. When they arrived, the groom carried the bride over the threshold.

Childbirth

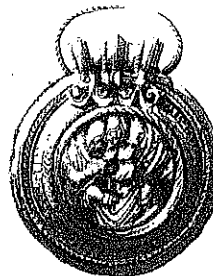
Childbirth was very dangerous in Roman times. Medical science was primitive, and we know from tombstones that women often died giving birth. Children often died when they were still very small. Women

married early partly because they believed that childbirth was safer when they were young. Some richer women, after giving birth to an heir, avoided having more children by using sponges as contraceptives.



A new baby was bathed and placed at its father's feet. The father picked up the child to show formally that he had accepted it into the family.

On the ninth day after the birth a ceremony took place at which the child was named. It was given a *bulla*, a charm to ward off evil spirits.



Becoming an adult



When a boy was about 14 years old, normally after he had finished his basic education, a ceremony was held at which he formally became an adult. With family and friends he went to the *forum*, where he discarded his childhood clothes and *bulla*. He was given an adult's *toga* and his first shave, and was registered as a citizen. A party was held to celebrate.

Education

Roman children were educated according to the wealth of their families. Many poorer children never learned to read or write because their parents needed them to work. Richer children started school when they were about six years

old, attending a *ludus* (primary school). Most children left the *ludus* at the age of 11, and had any further education at home. But girls often began preparing for marriage, which could take place when they were 12 years old.

The school day

Most schools only had one room, on the ground floor of a house or behind a shop. There was usually only one class, of about 12 children. Remains of pupils' exercises, and descriptions by Roman writers of their education, tell us about the school day.

Teachers were often slaves brought back from Greece by the Roman army. The Romans respected the knowledge and learning of the Greeks.

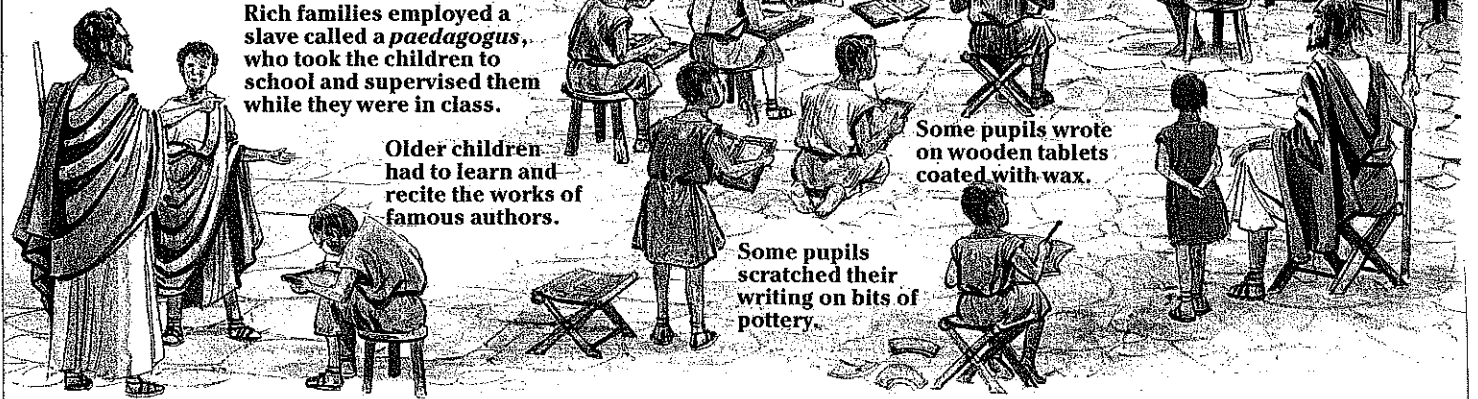
Young children recited the alphabet and practised reading and writing.

Rich families employed a slave called a *paedagogus*, who took the children to school and supervised them while they were in class.

Older children had to learn and recite the works of famous authors.

Some pupils wrote on wooden tablets coated with wax.

Some pupils scratched their writing on bits of pottery.



The grammaticus

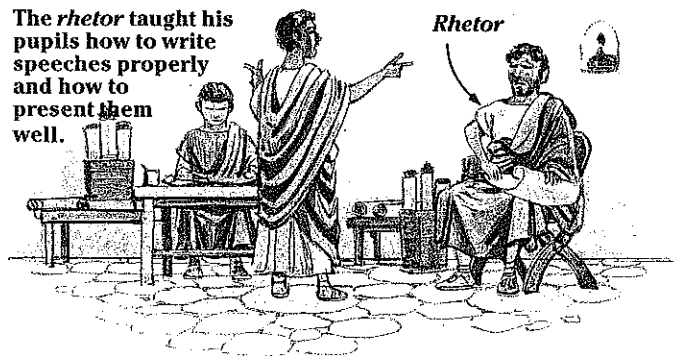
Around the age of 11 some boys went to a *grammaticus* (secondary school), where they learned such subjects as history, philosophy, geography, geometry, music and astronomy. One of the most important subjects was Greek, because Greek culture was such a big influence on Roman life. Works of Greek and Roman literature were studied in great detail. Pupils were expected to be able to imitate the styles of famous authors. Greek was also necessary for Romans because most of the best books on other subjects were written by Greeks.

Further education

One purpose of secondary education was to prepare the student for study with a teacher of public speaking called a *rhetor*. Anyone who wanted to be a politician or lawyer had to learn to speak in public. This training began when a youth was 13 or 14, and could take many years; Cicero continued his studies until he was nearly 30. If parents were very rich they might send their sons to Athens or Rhodes to learn these skills from the best Greek teachers. Only the wealthiest people could afford to give their children this education, so few poor people became politicians or lawyers.

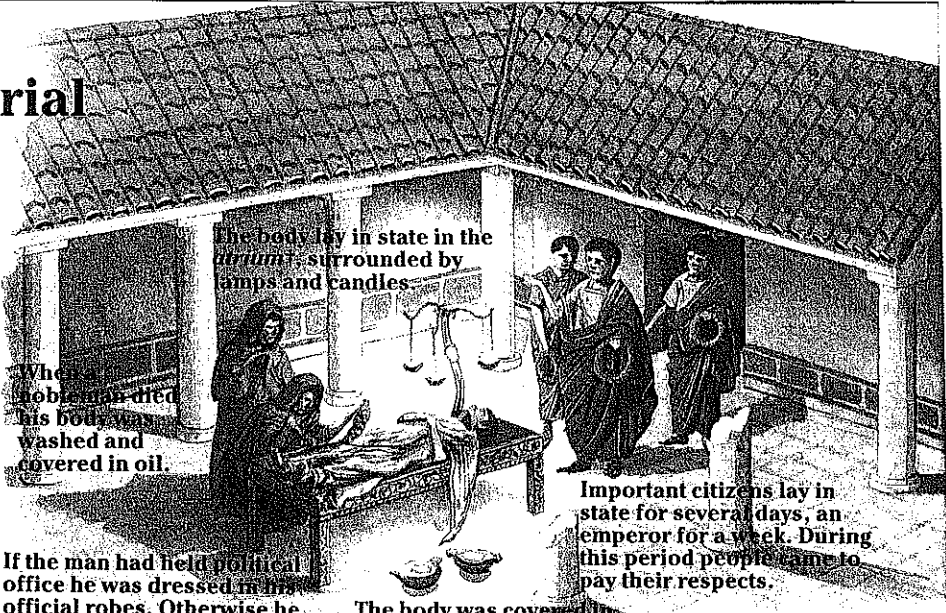
The *rhetor* taught his pupils how to write speeches properly and how to present them well.

Rhetor



Funerals and burial

When someone died, the Romans performed rituals based on their beliefs about what happened after death. Most people thought a dead person's spirit was rowed across a mythical river (the Styx), to the underworld (Hades†). The spirit was judged, then went to heaven (Elysium) or hell (Tartarus). Funerals prepared the dead person for the journey. A coin was placed under his or her tongue to pay the ferry fare to Hades. This is what happened after the death of a very important person.



The body lay in state in the *funerarium*, surrounded by lamps and candles.

When a nobleman died his body was washed and covered in oil.

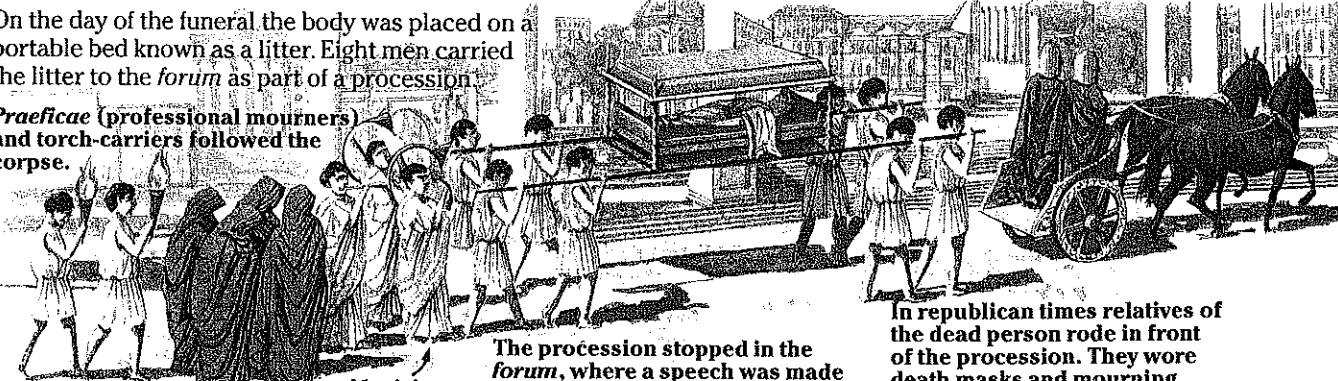
If the man had held political office he was dressed in his official robes. Otherwise he wore a *toga*.

The body was covered in flowers and wreaths.

Important citizens lay in state for several days, an emperor for a week. During this period people came to pay their respects.

On the day of the funeral the body was placed on a portable bed known as a litter. Eight men carried the litter to the *forum* as part of a procession.

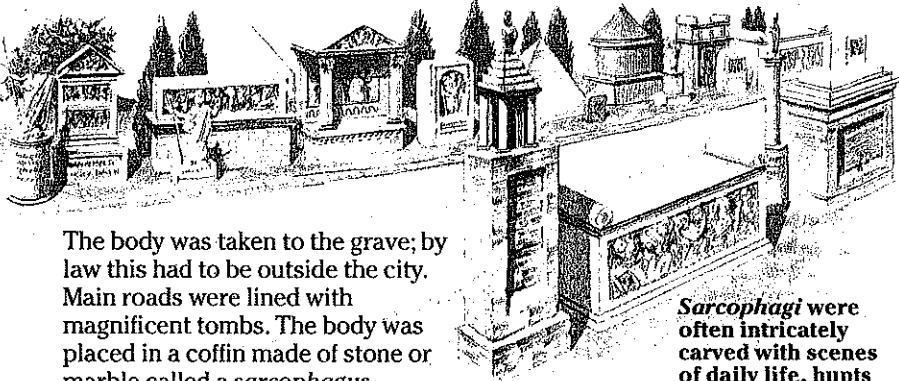
Praeficae (professional mourners) and torch-carriers followed the corpse.



Musicians

The procession stopped in the *forum*, where a speech was made in praise of the dead person.

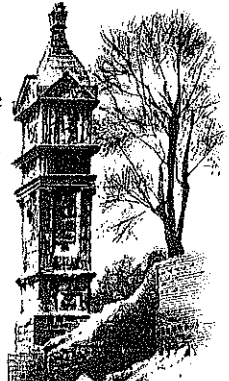
In republican times relatives of the dead person rode in front of the procession. They wore death masks and mourning robes. This practice stopped in imperial times.



The body was taken to the grave; by law this had to be outside the city. Main roads were lined with magnificent tombs. The body was placed in a coffin made of stone or marble called a *sarcophagus*.

Sarcophagi were often intricately carved with scenes of daily life, hunts and battles.

The site of the grave was marked with a tomb, monument or mound of earth. Sometimes pillars or even high towers were built, such as this one at Igel in Germany, which is 23m (75ft) high.



Sometimes, instead of burying the body, the Romans cremated it. In simple ceremonies they dug a pit, filled it with wood, and burned the body. When the fire died down they covered the ashes with earth.

In more elaborate rituals the body was burned on a ceremonial fire known as a pyre. Relatives threw clothes and food into the flames, in case the dead person needed them later.

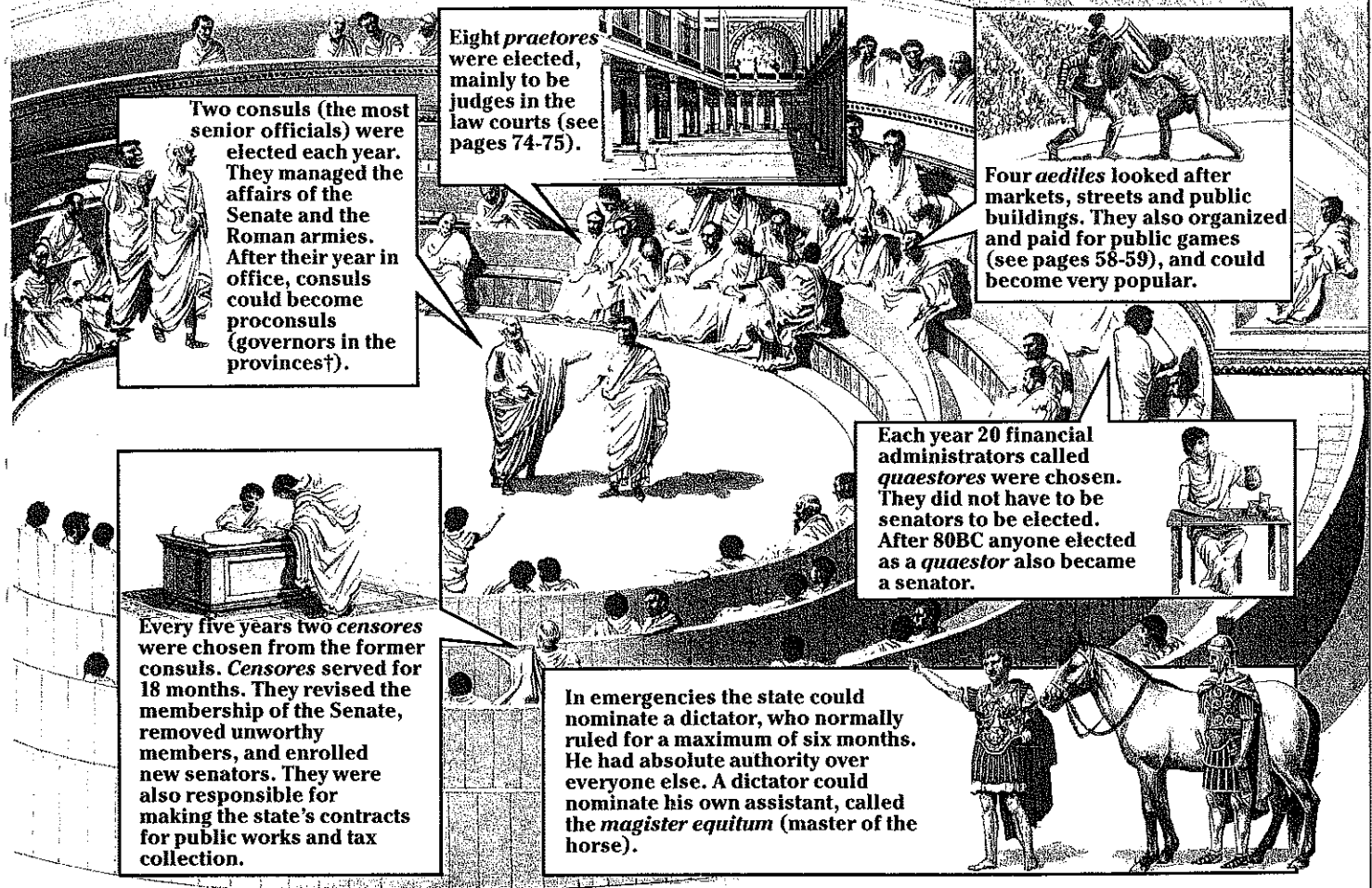


After the fire had died down it was doused with wine. The ashes were collected and placed in a jar called an urn. The urns were sometimes placed in a special underground chamber called a *columbarium*.

The government of the Roman republic

Rome was governed by the Senate, originally a group of 100 men who were leaders of important patrician families. Later the number of senators was increased; by 82BC there were 600. Senators

normally served for life. Each year citizens voted in an election, known as an Assembly, to select senators to be government officials. The various officials and their duties are shown below.



Two consuls (the most senior officials) were elected each year. They managed the affairs of the Senate and the Roman armies. After their year in office, consuls could become proconsuls (governors in the provinces†).

Eight praetores were elected, mainly to be judges in the law courts (see pages 74-75).

Four aediles looked after markets, streets and public buildings. They also organized and paid for public games (see pages 58-59), and could become very popular.

Each year 20 financial administrators called quaestores were chosen. They did not have to be senators to be elected. After 80BC anyone elected as a quaestor also became a senator.

Every five years two censors were chosen from the former consuls. Censors served for 18 months. They revised the membership of the Senate, removed unworthy members, and enrolled new senators. They were also responsible for making the state's contracts for public works and tax collection.

In emergencies the state could nominate a dictator, who normally ruled for a maximum of six months. He had absolute authority over everyone else. A dictator could nominate his own assistant, called the *magister equitum* (master of the horse).

Social change

At first only patricians could become senators, and they tried to preserve their privileged positions. But many plebeians lived in poverty, and their resentment of the patricians' power caused violent political struggles. The plebeians went on strike five times, threatening to leave Rome whenever they were most needed as soldiers. In 494BC, after the first strike, they set up their own Popular Assembly, which excluded patricians. Each year they chose officials called tribunes to protect their interests.

To pacify the plebeians, the patricians gave them the power to stop any laws passed by the Senate. The plebeians then demanded that the laws be written down and published, to stop judges using unwritten laws against them. A list of laws, known as the Twelve Tables, was published in 450BC.

The plebeians slowly won the right to stand for official positions. The first plebeian consul was elected in 366BC. In 287BC a ruling was passed stating that all resolutions passed by the Popular Assembly should become law. But during the Carthaginian wars (see pages 8-9), plebeian generals misused their power. Many people thought that only the patricians had the ability to run the country during a war. So the patricians still kept political control.

The plebeians held frequent demonstrations on the streets of Rome.

