



# WEIRD WARS



# ROME



## RES ROMANA: CLASS ET RELIGION

**PINNACLE**  
ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

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## CLASS

Much of the history of Rome can be broken down into the struggle between the haves and have not's. Though a form of democracy, the Roman Republic tended to weigh the votes of the wealthy far more heavily than the votes of the more humble classes. Even worse, most political offices were legally held only by the most elite. Many of the struggles of the Late Republic were due to *plebeians*, or commoners, struggling for political acceptance.

There are two interconnected systems within Roman Society. One of the oldest is the division of the Roman people into two categories: patrician and plebian. According to myth, Romulus selected one hundred men to serve as his advisors in the Senate. Their descendants were designated "patrician", since these senators were often called "pater" ("father") as part of their office. In reality, the patricians formed a noble class within the Roman Republic and controlled the Roman political system for centuries. For quite some time, the commoners, or plebeians, could not serve in most political offices or even priesthoods.

It wasn't until the Licinio-Sextian law of 367 BC that plebeians finally achieved a level of equality with patricians. Even after that point, there was always a great deal of tension between these two classes.

The reality was that the patricians dominated Rome not just politically, but economically. These ancient families tended to accumulate wealth over generations and jealously guarded their power. While some plebeians fought against the patricians' control, a great many simply saw it as part of the fabric of Roman life. These plebeians often worked for patricians, sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes grudgingly.

In the Roman military, officers were always patricians, while plebeians served as either common soldiers or officers. And there's nothing like a horde of barbarians to make every soldier feel at least some level of camaraderie with their fellow warrior. While these social divisions didn't rend the legions as greatly as Roman society as a whole, there was no doubt some level of friction on a daily basis.

By the time period of *Weird War Rome*, the patrician/plebeian division had subsided somewhat. But in its place was another system that divided Rome into several categories. Originally, two magistrates called censors would evaluate the wealth of every Roman citizen and assign him to one of three classes: senatorial (the wealthiest), the equestrian (next wealthy) and the proletariat (the poor).

It's important to note that the equestrians (so named for their ability to supply their own horse) were *not* a middle class. It's simply that they were not the most wealthy. And that a middle class in all likelihood barely existed in Roman Society. The vast majority of citizens lived hand to mouth and depended heavily on their friends, family, or patrons. Because the military provided economic stability, it became an attractive opportunity to many in the late Republic and early Empire.

There was an enormous crossover between the patrician and the senatorial/equestrian classes, so much so that the terms became nearly interchangeable. Anyone of senatorial or equestrian rank would almost certainly serve as an officer. It would simply be inconceivable to the Roman mind to do anything else.

## SLAVES

There was in fact another social class, whose labors supported the entire Roman social structure: the slaves. Rome's vast military machine captured thousands and converted them into



slaves. And these slaves powered Roman agriculture and commerce.

Romans viewed slaves in a way that would be expected. Slaves were clearly considered less important than a full Roman citizen. Even the poorest Roman considered himself above any slave. A Roman, unlike a slave, possessed political power in the form of a vote. Admittedly, many citizens often sold their votes in order to earn a livelihood, but Romans still viewed it as something valuable.

Though Roman history is scattered with various servile insurrections, Rome managed to keep these incidents to just a handful. Nearly any attempt at rebellion faced quick opposition and certain death. Rome knew that slaves outnumbered Romans in many places throughout its empire; only brutal tactics could hope to prevent an all out uprising.

## RACE

Romans were completely certain that their society and culture were superior to everyone else's. That was a considered a fact. And being a Roman meant certain things—obedience to Roman law and following Roman traditions specifically. Roman citizenship meant that one could participate in the political process of the most powerful nation in the Western World.

Romans looked at various other Mediterranean cultures and formed stereotypes, much like cultures do today. Gauls and Germans were seen as uncouth barbarians who did not comprehend finer elements of civilization (such as laws). Romans saw Greeks as effete intellectuals whose time had passed. Egyptians were superstitious and overly religious. The Parthians were a mysterious, implacable foe to be feared at all times.

Interestingly, Romans never saw these characteristics as genetic or certain. Early in the first century B.C., Rome extended



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full citizenship to everyone in Italy. And three centuries later, the Emperor Caracalla made all inhabitants of the Roman Empire full Roman citizens. In other words, the legal and even social concept of being Roman was mutable. People outside the Roman Empire could theoretically become part of it, if only they rejected their old lifestyles and embraced Roman ones.

## CITIZENSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

One of the ways Rome extended her influence and culture was through its military. For centuries, Rome enrolled





## RELIGION

non-citizens and allies into the *auxilia*. Essentially, the *auxilia* were reflections of the Roman legions but open to far more people.

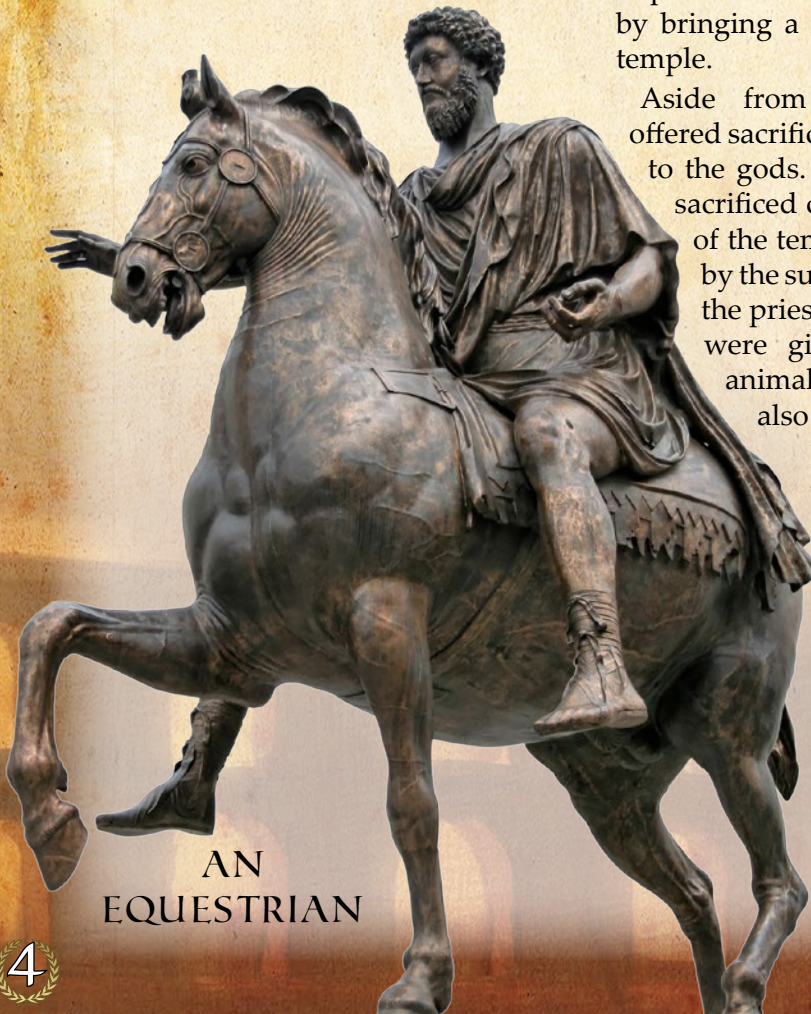
Until the Roman Empire, the *auxilia* tended to be somewhat less equipped, though this changed over time. *Auxilia* units often specialized in areas Romans tended to put less focus on, such as cavalry. Once a soldier served 25 years in the *auxilia*, he earned citizenship along with his retirement. In these years, soldiers learned not just Roman military tactics, but also Roman culture and language. The *auxilia* became a way to slowly transform various territories into Roman cultural centers by training its men generation after generation in the Roman way.

Few things were more omnipresent in a Roman's life than religion. Every day brought numerous interactions with the divine. For the most part, there were no particular observances or rituals that a person needed to follow (for example, attending a religious service once a week or prayers at specific times during the day). Instead, Romans tended to engage their gods on their own initiative and schedule.

The simplest, and most common, was the prayer. A Roman usually invoked a god or goddess and politely requested some sort of boon. The official stance was with eyes casts downward and palms raised upwards, but in practice a few simple spoken words sufficed. Prayers could be uttered anywhere, though often Romans did so in front of temples or statues. Sometimes, Romans took their requests directly to the gods themselves by bringing a note and placing it on a temple.

Aside from prayer, Romans also offered sacrifices to show their devotion to the gods. Most famously, Romans sacrificed cattle in altars set in front of the temple. The meat was eaten by the supplicant and occasionally the priest, while the fat and bones were given to the god. Other animals (goats, sheep, etc.) were also commonly sacrificed.

Nearly every Roman city was filled with numerous temples to various gods. Temples were seen as literal houses for the divine images within. Usually, only the priests were allowed into the temples. The duty of a priest was to care for the statue within by giving it offerings and occasionally changing



AN  
EQUESTRIAN



its decorations. The statue was seen as an extension of the god itself and the temple was a sort of house for it. Only the privileged few were permitted in the god's presence.

Many homes, whether full houses or even just a simple apartment, contained small idols and figurines of various gods. Romans also worshiped a special divinity, called the *lares familiares* ("the family spirits"), that looked after the household and all in it. All family members regularly prayed to and sacrificed to the *lares* to ensure good luck.

## PRIESTS

Few commoners could ever become priests. Nearly all priesthoods required patrician (i.e. noble) lineage. Unlike the modern era, most Roman priests were not full time. Their duties did not require them to be on the temple's premises at all times. And a few of the priesthoods were not even associated with a temple.

## THE GODS

By the time of the late Republic, Roman religion had fully morphed into a reflection of their Greek fore bearers. Centuries earlier, the Romans appeared to have had a far more animistic religious system. In other words, nearly every object possessed some sort of spirit. So there was a god of doors, a god of windows, a god of beds, a god of lamps and so forth. But over time, the pantheon of gods familiar throughout the Greek world slowly dominated Roman practice. Nearly every Roman god assumed the characteristics and likenesses of a Greek counterpart. The most common are as follows:

- Zeus - Jupiter
- Poseidon - Neptune
- Hades - Pluto
- Ares - Mars
- Aphrodite - Venus
- Hera - Juno
- Hermes - Mercury

It would be a mistake to think these gods were exactly the same as their Greek versions. Ares, for example, was the god of violence and irrational warfare. He was seen as the ultimate villain in most Greek myths and consequently the Greeks dedicated almost no temples to him. Mars, on the other hand, was a god worshiped on nearly the same level as Jupiter himself. Mars oversaw not just matters of war, but also agriculture and statecraft. Most likely, Mars was quite a different sort of deity at first, but slowly acquired Ares' characteristics as the Romans tried to equate their gods to their Greek neighbors.

During the late Republic, the religious world was thrown into turmoil over the arrival of very new, very different sorts of deities on Roman soil. These imports, mostly from the Eastern World, introduced Romans to an entirely different type of worship. Four major deities are generally grouped into this category. The first, and earliest, arrival, was the Magna Mater or "Great Mother." Her massive sacred rock was brought up the Tiber along with her frenzied priests. So great was their devotion that they would castrate themselves in her honor!

Second was Serapis and his consort Isis. Both were versions of gods well known to Egypt, but these gods imparted special mystic knowledge to their followers.

The third and fourth gods spread mostly in the Imperial Period. Mithras was a warrior god with close association to an Asian deity. He was seen as eternally battling forces of chaos to preserve the world.

Lastly, a small, but incredibly devoted group called Christians were perhaps the most unique of all. Unlike nearly everyone else in Roman society, the Christians worshiped only their god, but no others. This stood them apart from almost every other type of worship known at the time.



## MAGIC

The modern observer often draws a pretty strict line between magic and religion. To the average Roman, the line was much more blurry. Charms were ubiquitous in everyday life. People often wore amulets to ward off evil spirits, bad luck and illness. People could hire oracles to read their futures. Soothsayers and miracle workers cast their spells—but only for a fee. And these spells often invoked the very same gods that Romans could find in a temple down the street!

Romans had a well developed sense of witchcraft, or bad magic. Most commonly, witchcraft involved invoking foreign or odd deities for malicious acts. Almost always, such witches and spells came from Eastern locales such as Thessaly or Asia Minor.



HADES, OR PLUTO TO  
THE ROMANS

## BELIEF

Most of what we know about how the Romans felt about their religion is derived from the writings of authors such as Cicero, Livy, and even Julius Caesar. Nearly every author had a relatively similar viewpoint on Roman religion. Mostly, these authors valued the traditions of Rome because they had been passed down for centuries and Romans tended to value their ancestors highly. So if something was done in antiquity, Romans tended to keep doing it. But actually believing that the Jupiter was sitting on Mount Olympus? Or that Vulcan worked in the fires of Mount Aetna? The classical writers tended to turn their nose up at such notions.

But we must take into account that these authors all tended to be drawn from the very elite of Roman society and they did not necessarily represent the views of the great majority. And sadly, we possess almost nothing of what the “common man” actually felt about their gods. All we have are archaeological scraps here and there.

The first, and perhaps most important, piece of evidence is the sheer number of temples throughout the Roman World. It’s difficult to believe that a populace would work so hard and so long to erect enormous structures for something that had no belief attached to it. Secondly, the classical authors all testified to the *need* of Roman religion as a means of keeping society tied together. Shared, communal rituals helped provide common experiences for all Romans. But again, it’s hard to imagine millions of Romans participating in various holidays and rituals if there was no faith involved.

Lastly, we do possess a great amount of physical objects that indicate a large degree of reliance and trust in the gods. We have discovered thousands of amulets which invoke gods in order to ward off bad luck and illness. We’ve uncovered papyri that call upon the gods



to help assist people in their common lives. It appears that these spells were possessed by itinerant priests and mages that made their living by their magical invocations. We have found thousands of shards, inscriptions and graffiti on and around temples that call upon the gods to help.

## MYTH AND RELIGION

Romans managed to handle two completely different depictions of their gods in their minds. On the one hand, there were the vaguely omnipotent deities invoked in prayer, ritual and spells. Usually, this is what tends to come to mind when seeing the massive statues of the gods in Roman temples. On the other hand, Romans produced stories and myths about their gods that bordered on the profane. A good example is the god Hercules: he was revered in an ancient temple near the center of Rome's business district, but at the same time, the butt of various indecent jokes in a play of Plautus.

It's important to remember that Romans, much like other Mediterranean peoples, had a rich storytelling tradition. And they loved a good yarn and tale. Sometimes, these myths were intended to impart a moral lesson, other times a myth was nothing other than an attempt to entertain. And because there was never any formal attempt to standardize these myths and put them into text, tales of the gods kept multiplying and adapting to the needs of the storyteller.

The Roman audience didn't need or expect the gods in its myths to resemble the gods of its religion. Much to the contrary, it appeared that both types could exist simultaneously without any discord, though a few philosophers did point out this disharmony.

There was, however, a rather stern streak within Roman culture palpable in many writings. Some Romans found poetry, plays and storytelling in general as frivolous at best and amoral at worst.

Certainly an aspect of this was the fact that these media tended to depict gods in a not-so-nice light. But much of this attitude is probably a dislike of these brands of entertainment as a whole and not just the subject matter. Proper Romans, in their minds, were serious and focused wholly on practical matters.

## THE EMPEROR

The Emperor sat in a strange position regarding religion. During his lifetime, an Emperor was always given the office of Pontifex Maximus—or chief priest. And upon death, most emperors (assuming they weren't mad) usually achieved divine status and became a god honored by temples.

But during his life, an emperor was not to be worshiped as a god...in Italy. In other places, temples to honor an emperor were accepted and later even encouraged. But within Italy, this was forbidden for centuries. Romans thought that immortalizing a living person was an uncivilized act only done by barbarians. Of course someone wasn't a god while they were still living! Only a savage would imagine that!

However, the Romans cleverly got around this by worshiping not the emperor, but his *genius*. A *genius* was a sort of guardian spirit that everyone possessed. So every Roman citizen honored an emperor's *genius*, ostensibly to wish the emperor good fortune and by extension, the empire. But in practice, this became a version of the imperial cult.

## THE STANDARDS

The Roman Army was one of the most difficult existences in the world. Rome forged a military machine greater than any previous through an incredible mixture of discipline and violence. Soldiers became so attached to their units that the army's standards became sacred instruments. Those standards weren't necessarily divine in the sense that they



represented a particular deity. But the standards represented the health and very existence of a legion. As a result, Roman soldiers did nearly anything to preserve the standards—and their loss was something almost too awful to contemplate.

### FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

One of the most striking differences in the Roman military in the change from Republic to Empire was the legions' loyalty. Throughout the Republic, the backbone of the Roman military was made of Roman citizens serving dutifully the needs of Rome. The generals, appointed by the Senate, usually served a year, perhaps slightly more when need arose. The overall Roman aristocracy tended to share command of the legions between each other. But as the Roman Republic grew larger and larger, it

became more and more impractical to rotate commanders so frequently. After all, it could take months to get to a legion before a general could even take command! Even more importantly, the conquests of a Roman legion brought larger and larger spoils.

One of the contributing factors to the end of the Roman Republic was in fact the rise of generals, such as Marius, Sulla, Pompey and Caesar, whose wealth was so vast they could raise a legion all by themselves. And with the Roman war machine in full swing, these generals could satiate the army's desires with vast amounts of plunder. No longer did the legions owe allegiance to the Senate and the Roman people, now they owed allegiance to a single man. And when several of these powerful men rose to prominence at a single time, civil war inevitably followed.



AUGUSTUS AS  
PONTIFEX MAXIMUS



## AUGUSTUS

The end of the Republic and the rise of the Empire did not happen with a single event, but rather a series of small changes. Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, inherited a Roman state torn apart by these civil wars for almost a century. He immediately began putting obstacles in the way of aspiring generals to prevent them from acquiring too much glory and too much support among their legions. As a result, Augustus virtually eliminated threats to his dominance of the Roman State.

Though we call Augustus the first emperor, the term and office didn't really formalize for well over a hundred years. Augustus was considered the *princeps* or "first man of the Senate." He was clearly "first among equals" and possessed an unprecedented litany of legal and religious offices, but no Roman would consider him a "king."

For many years, Rome still considered herself a Republic, where citizens' votes actually passed the laws and the Senate still guided the ship of state. Though Augustus adroitly amassed institutional power and influence and even made it hereditary, the notion of an absolute Roman ruler was still over a century away.

## FURTHER READING

*Life in Ancient Rome*, FR Cowell

*A Day in the Life of Ancient Rome: Daily Life, Mysteries, and Curiosities*, Alberto Angela

*Cthulhu Invictus*, Chaosium Games

*GURPs Imperial Rome*, Steve Jackson Games

*The Great Fire of Rome: The Fall of Emperor Nero and His City*, Stephen Dando-Collins

## THE LEGIONS

We've found Stephen Dando-Collins works particularly useful.

- *Caesar's Legions*
- *Nero's Killing Machine*
- *Legions of Rome*
- *The Ides: Caesar's Murder and the War for Rome*
- *Blood of the Caesars*
- *Mark Antony's Heroes*
- *Cleopatra's Kidnappers*

## MOVIES ET TELEVISION

*Rome*, HBO

*Spartacus*, Starz





## AUGURIES

Romans talked, prayed, and sacrificed to the Gods constantly. Soldiers in particular asked for the deities' blessings before engaging in important actions such as battles or diplomatic missions.

In *Weird Wars Rome*, prayer and sacrifice take multiple forms. Soldiers who want to donate a Spoil to the gods receive a temporary blessing for their tribute (see the Spoils of War section in *Weird Wars Rome*). Commanders of larger forces might "take the auspices" to see if the signs and portents are in favor of battle on a particular day.

### CONSULTING THE AUGURIES

Prior to the start of a Mass Battle, the priests of any sizable Roman force (a cohort or larger) must take the auspices (watch the birds for signs from the gods), read the haruspices (examine the entrails of sacrificed animals), or any other ritual appropriate to the era.

The War Master then draws a single card and consults the Auguries Table below.

The penalty or bonus is applied to the commander's first Knowledge (Battle) roll made in the next 24 hours.

Assuming he has a choice, the commander may decline giving battle for a 24-hour period, at which point the effect expires and a new reading may be taken. Of course this may give the enemy time to build defenses, gather reinforcements, or otherwise prepare for the coming offensive.

### ENEMY AUGURIES

Enemy commanders, including non-Romans, might also consult *their* gods as well. Each side may benefit—or suffer—from the blessings of their deities.



### AUGURIES

Card	Mod	Reading
2	-2	The animal's entrails are black and cancerous. This is a poor day to start a battle.
3-5	-1	The auguries are not favorable.
6-8	—	The gods seem unconcerned in the affairs of men this day.
9-10	+1	The gods desire battle—and blood. In the Battle Aftermath stage, the victor recovers tokens only on a 5-6, while the loser recovers only on a roll of 6 (or cannot recover if they routed). Any character involved in the battle takes an additional +1d6 damage if they suffer damage.
Jack-King	+1	The gods are pleased.
Ace	+2	The gods revel in the slaughter to come.
Joker	+2	The gods embrace the coming sacrifice and find favor with the greatest warriors. The commander adds +2 to his Knowledge (Battle) roll as usual, but both sides add +2 to their morale (Spirit) rolls, ensuring great violence and bloodshed. Characters on the commander's side gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls during the Mass Battle as well.



# TALES OF THE WEIRD WARS



## WITH UTMOST DISPATCH

Legionary Titus Aetius is tasked with hunting down a deserter, his best friend of a decade and fellow soldier. But Titus isn't the only hunter stalking the dark forests of Gaul. The deserter's trail disappears in a blood-soaked and empty village. Torn between honor and loyalty, Titus must find some way to outwit his officers, save his friend, and survive whatever horror has ravaged the countryside...with utmost dispatch.



Want more tales of military horror against the backdrop of the greatest empire the world has ever known?

Look for *Without Fear* and *With Utmost Dispatch* from Wendigo Tales, available at [www.peginc.com!](http://www.peginc.com!)

## WITHOUT FEAR

Gladiator Magnus Bos remembers little before the fight with the strange gray beast of Aegyptus. Some say that battle left him addled, simple...even dumb. But it also left the Thracian without fear. Perhaps this is why the slave is purchased by a strange cabal and taken to a cursed village on a distant isle--and the strangest arena of his life.

