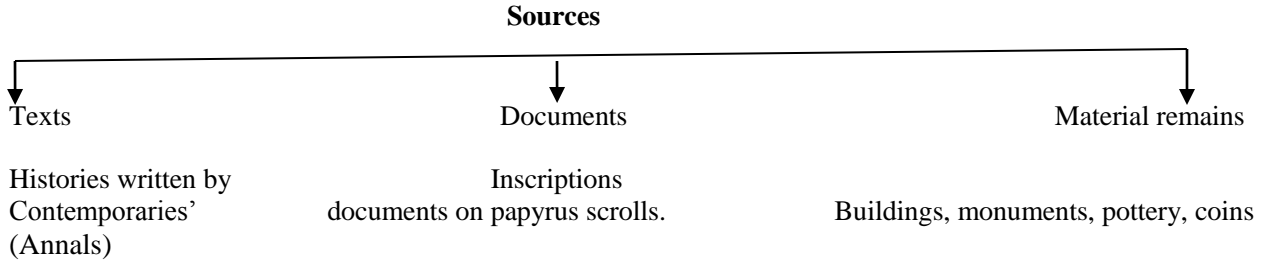


Theme 3. An Empire across Three Continents

It was the ancient Roman Empire which was spread across the three continents namely Europe, Asia and Africa.



The two most powerful empires

- The two empires that ruled between the birth of Christ and 630 CE were Rome and Iran.
- The Romans and Iranians were neighbours, separated by narrow strip of land that ran along the river Euphrates.
- They were rivals and fought against each other for much of their history.

Roman Empire

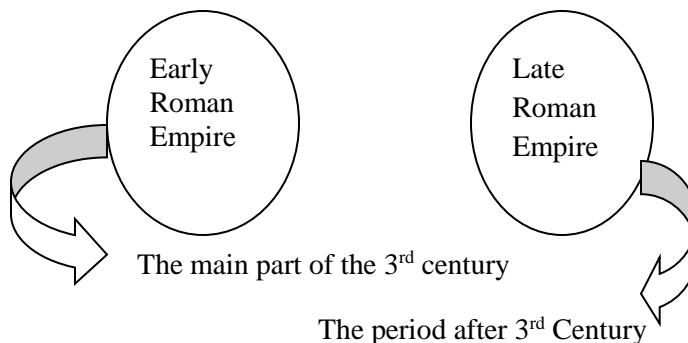
The Roman Empire stretched from Spain in Europe to Syria in the East along the Mediterranean Sea in to Africa's desert. In the north its boundaries were marked by the river Rhine and Danube. In the South by the Sahara desert.

Iranian Empire

Iran controlled the entire area south of Caspian Sea to eastern Arabia and at times large parts of Afghanistan.

The Phases of Roman Empire

- The Roman Empire can broadly divide into two phases-Early Roman Empire and Late Roman Empire.
- The whole period down to the main part of the 3rd century can be called the 'early empire'. The period after 3rd Century can be called the 'late empire'.

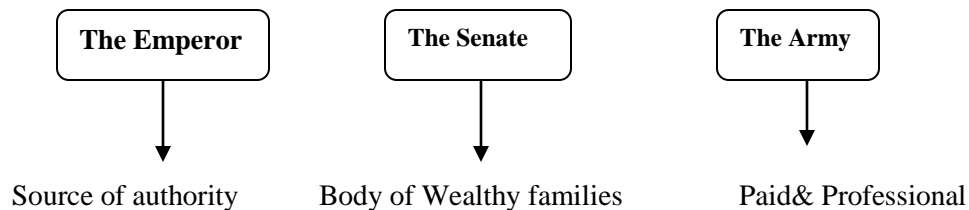


Difference between the Roman Empire and Iranian Empire

Major difference between the Roman and Iranian Empires were:

- Roman Empire had a diverse population as compared to that of Iran.
- The Parthians and Sasanians dynasties, that ruled Iran in this period, ruled largely over the Iranian population.
- Whereas the Roman Empire was a variety of territories and cultures bound by the common system of govt.
- Many languages were spoken in the Roman Empire, but for the administrative purposes only Greek and Latin were used. The upper class of east spoke Greek and those in the western part spoke Latin.
- All the people in the Roman Empire were subjects of single ruler, the emperor, irrespective of where they lived and what language they spoke.

The three main players in the political history of the empire



Features of Roman Army

The Army which was a paid and professional army where soldiers had to put up twenty five years of service. The existence of paid army was a distinctive feature of the Roman Empire. The army was the largest single organised body of the Roman Empire. It had the power to decide the fate of the emperors. The army was hated by the Senators. Thus, it can be said that the emperor, the aristocracy, and the army were the three players in the political history of the empire.

Succession to the throne in the Roman Empire

Family descent, either natural or adoptive, was the decisive factor in the succession to the throne in the Roman Empire. The army was also wedded to this concept. For e.g. Tiberius was not the natural but adopted son of Augustus.

The Augustan age

The Augustan age is remembered as the age of peace. It brought peace after decades of internal strife and centuries of military conquest. External warfare was also much less common in the first two centuries.

Administration of the vast Roman Empire

- The vast Roman Empire was controlled and administered with the help of urbanisation.
- All the territories of the empire were organised in to provinces and were subject to taxation.
- Carthage, Alexandria, Antioch that lined the shores of Mediterranean were the foundations of the imperial system.
- It was through these cities that the government was able to collect tax from the provincial countryside which generated much of the wealth.
- This shows that the local upper class was actively involved with the Roman state in administering their own territories and collecting taxes from them.
- Throughout the second and third century the provincial upper classes provided experienced officers that administered the provinces and commanded the army.
- Thus, they became the new elite of the Roman Empire. They controlled the army and looked after the provincial administration. They became much more powerful than the senatorial class because they had the backing of the Emperors.
- Emperor Gallienus consolidated their rise to power by excluding senators from military command. He did this in order to prevent control of the empire from falling in to their hands.

Meaning of Roman city

An Urban centre with its own magistrates,city council and a 'territory'containing villages under its jurisdiction.The villages could be upgraded to the status of city and vice-versa generally as a mark of favour from the emperor.

Advantages of living in the city of Roman Empire

The advantage of living in the city was that it might be better provided for during food shortages and famines in the country side. The cities had public baths and the urban population enjoyed a higher level of entertainment

The Third- Century Crisis

- The first and second centuries were a period of peace, prosperity and economic expansion. But the third century was a period of crisis.
- In 225, new dynasty called Sasanians emerged in Iran. They were more aggressive and expanding rapidly in the direction of the Euphrates.
- The Germanic tribes (barbarians) began to move against the Rhine and Danube frontiers. From 233 to 280 saw repeated invasions. The Romans were forced to abandon much of the territory beyond the Danube.
- The quick succession of emperors (25 emperors in 47 years) is a sign of strain faced by the empire in the 3rd century.

Gender, Literacy, Culture

Structure of Family

There was widespread prevalence of nuclear family. Adult sons did not live with their parents and it was exceptional for adult brothers to share a common household. Slaves were however included in the family.

Status of women

- The women enjoyed considerable legal rights in owning and managing property.
- They were married off in the late teens or early thirties.
- Arrange marriage was the general norm
- women were often subject to domination by their husbands
- Wives were even beaten up by their husbands.
- The typical form of marriage was one where the wife did not transfer to her husband's authority but retained full rights in the property of her natal family.
- Women remained a primary heir to father's property after marriage. They could become independent property owners after their father's death.
- Divorce was easy for both men as well as women.

Literacy

- The rate of literacy varied greatly between different parts of the empire.
- Literacy was widespread in army officers, estate managers and soldiers
- Casual literacy existed and it varied from place to place.

There was a wall in Pompeii which carried advertisements and graffiti, which indicates high level of casual literacy.

Cultural diversity

- The cultural diversity was reflected in many ways and at many levels.
- There was a vast diversity of religious cults and local deities, the plurality of languages that were spoken, the styles of dresses that were worn.
- The food the people ate their forms of social organisation and their types of settlement, all reflected cultural diversity.
- Different languages were spoken in different areas. Most of the linguistic cultures were purely oral, at least until a script was invented for them.
- As late as fifth century, Armenian began to be used as written form of language.
- In other areas the spread of Latin displaced the other widespread written form of languages.

Economic activities of the Ancient Roman Empire

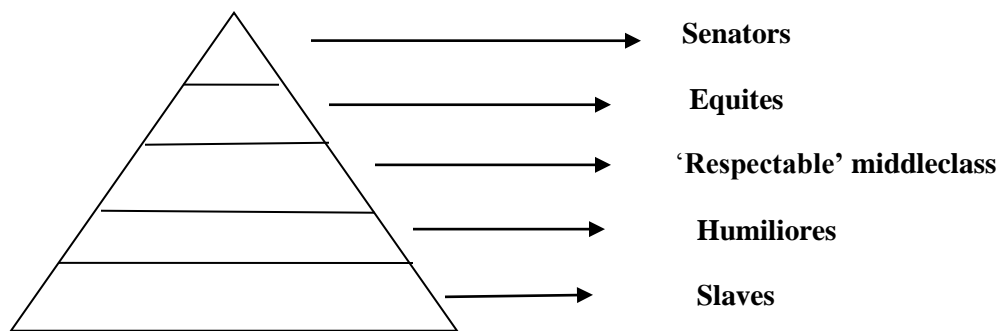
- The Roman Empire had substantial economic infrastructure of harbours, mines, quarries, brickyards, olive oil factories etc.
- Goods for trade consisted mainly wheat, wine and olive oil and they came from Spain, the Gallic provinces, north Africa, Egypt and Italy. These areas had conditions best suited for these crops.
- Spanish olive oil was a vast commercial enterprise that reached its peak in the years 140-160.

- The Roman Empire included regions that had a reputation for exceptional fertility. E.g. Campania
- Italy, Sicily, Fayum in Egypt, Galilee, Byzacium (Tunisia), southern Gaul, Baetica (southern Spain) .These area had best conditioned crops.
- The large expenses of Roman territory were in a much less advanced state.
- Transhumance was widespread in the country side of Numidia(Modern Algeria)
- As Roman estates expanded in North Africa, the pastures of those communities were drastically reduced and their movements more tightly regulated.
- Even in Spain the north was economically much less developed. In these areas peasantry who were Celtic-speaking lived in hilltop villages known as castella.
- In the Roman Empire water power was very efficiently used around Mediterranean and there were advances in the water powered milling technology, the use of hydraulic mining techniques in Spanish gold and silver mines.
- Well organised commercial and banking networks existed.
- Widespread use of money indicates that the Roman Empire had sophisticated economy.

Controlling of Workers in the Roman Empire

- **Slavery** was an institution deeply rooted in Ancient Roman world.
- Though slavery was institutionalized and was greatly used as labour but it was not always slaves that performed labour in the Roman economy.
- As peace was established in the first century, the supply of slaves declined and users of slave labour had to turn to slave breeding or cheaper substitutes such as wage labour which were easily dispensable.
- Most of the time free labour was used, as slaves had to be provided with food and maintained throughout the year which proved expensive. This is the reason that the slaves were not employed in the agriculture.
- On the other hand ,slaves and freedmen were extensively used in jobs where labour was not required in large number that is as business managers
- There was a presumption that without supervision no work would ever get done .So supervision was most important for both freed slaves and slaves.
- For a better supervision the slaves were grouped into gang of ten. So that it could be easy to see who is putting in effort and who is not.
- This method was criticised by Pliny the Elder. He was of the opinion that the slave gangs were the worst method of organizing production because slaves who worked in gangs were usually chained together by their feet.
- Although all this look harsh yet similar principles of labour control are being enforced in most of the factories in the world today.
- **Debt contracts** were a type of agreements between the private employees and their workers. In these debt contracts it was claimed that the employees were in debt to their employers and as a result were under tighter control. A large number of families went in to debt bondage in order to survive.

Social Hierarchies



Social Hierarchies

- Tacitus, a Roman historian has described the social hierarchy of the early empire.
- To him, in the early Roman Empire **Senators** were at the top.
- Next were the leading members of **equestrian** classes.
- **Respectable section** of the people who were attached to the great houses was next in the social order
- Then was the untidy **lower classes and slaves** came to the bottom
- In the fourth century by the time of Constantine I, the Senators and equities had merged in to an expanded aristocracy and at least half of the families were of Eastern or African origin.
- Like Senators, most 'knights' were landowners, but unlike Senators many of them involved in business activities like shipping, trade and banking.
- This late Roman aristocracy was very wealthy but was less powerful than purely military elites who came entirely from non-aristocratic background.
- Next in the social hierarchy was the middle class. It consisted of persons working in bureaucracy and army, prosperous merchants and farmers.
- According to Olympiodorus, a historian of the early 5th century, the aristocracy based in the city of Rome received annual incomes up to 4,000 pounds of gold from their estates.
- They also consumed grain, wine and other produce which, if sold, would have amounted to 1/3 of the income in gold. The income of the households at Rome of the second class was one thousand or fifteen hundred pounds of gold.
- Below the middle class were the vast class collectively known as humiliores. Literally it means 'lower'.
- They consisted of rural labourers, workers in industrial and mining establishments; migrant workers who worked for the grain and olive harvests and building industry; self employed artisans, who were in better condition than the wage workers; a large number of casual labourers employed in big cities, and finally the slaves.

Monetary system of the late empire

The monetary system broke down in the late empire because Spanish silver mines were exhausted and the government ran out of stock of the metal to support a stable coinage in silver. This is also led to the introduction of a new denomination in gold, the solidus.

Roman bureaucracy of the late Roman Empire

- The bureaucracy of the late Roman Empire both at higher and middle level was affluent as it drew much of its salary in gold and invested in buying land.
- There was corruption in the administration of judiciary and military supplies.
- The extortion by higher bureaucracy and the provincial governors was common.
- But the government intervened repeatedly to stop these forms of corruption.
- Laws were made to put an end to them.
- Historians and other members of intelligentsia denounced such practices.
- The Roman emperors were not free to do anything as they liked.
- By the 4th century the tradition of Roman law acted as a brake and was actively used to protect civil rights.
- Because of these laws powerful bishops could deal with powerful emperors when they were extremely harsh on civilian population.

Late Antiquity

- Late antiquity is the term used to describe the final, fascinating period in the evolution and break-up of the Roman Empire and refers from the fourth to seventh centuries.
- The period saw considerable changes in cultural, economic, and administrative levels.

Changes effected by the Emperor Diocletian in administration

- The emperor Diocletian abandoned territories with little strategic and economic importance.
- He fortified frontiers, recognised provincial boundaries and separated civilian from the military functions.
- He granted greater autonomy to the military commanders who became powerful. Constantine consolidated some of these changes and added others of his own.

Innovations of Emperor Constantine I

- The most important innovations of Constantine were in the monetary sphere. He introduced Solidus, a coin weighing 4 ½ gm of pure gold. These coins were minted in millions.
- The other innovation was the creation of a second capital at Constantinople.
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Changes in the economic life.

- The late Antiquity period witnessed considerable change in economic life.
- Monetary stability and an expanding population stimulated economic growth.
- Archaeological record shows investments in rural establishments, including industrial installations like oil presses and glass factories, in newer technologies such as screw presses and multiple water-mills.
- The period also saw a revival of the long- distance trade. All this led to strong urban prosperity.

Changes in the religious life

- There were significant changes in the religious life.
- Emperor Constantine declared Christianity as official religion of the Roman empire.(4th century)
- Seventh century was associated with the rise of Islam The traditional religious culture of the classical world, both Greek and Roman, had been polytheist. The other religions in the empire were Judaism and Islam.

Decline of the Roman Empire

- The Roman Empire was divided into eastern and western halves in the fourth century C.E.
- During the late antiquity period, the general prosperity was especially marked in the East.
- In the Eastern Roman Empire, population was still expanding till the 6th century.
- The East remained united under Emperor Justinian.
- There were wars between Rome and Iran during the 7th century.
- The East Roman Empire came to be known as Byzantium.
- The expansion of Islam has been called the greatest political revolution in the history of the ancient world.
- Large parts of the Roman and Iranian Empires had fallen into the hands of the Arabs.
- Nomadic tribes in frontier areas such as Goths, Visigoths, Vandals and others attacked the Roman Empire in the west by the 5th century C.E.
- The Germanic groups established their own kingdoms within the empire.
- With the prompting of the Christian Church, a Holy Roman Empire was formed from some of these kingdoms from the 9th century CE.

Key words

- **Republic**: The name for a regime in which the reality of power lay with the Senate.
 - **Senate** : A body dominated by a small group of wealthy families.
 - **Civil war**: Armed struggles for power within the same country.
 - **Transhumance**: Herdsman's regular annual movement between the higher mountain regions and low lying ground in search of pasture.
 - **Draconian**: Harsh (so-called because of early sixth century BCE Greek law maker, Draco who prescribed death as the penalty for most crimes)
- Dressel 20/Amphorae**: oil containers especially olive oil.