

Comfort in the Roman Empire



Roman daily life

- Rome was a cosmopolitan city with Greeks, Syrians, Jews, North Africans, Spaniards and Gauls, like any society, the average Roman citizen awoke each morning, labored, relaxed, and ate, and while his or her daily life could often be hectic, he or she would always survive.

Population movement

- outside the cities people lived a much simpler life (dependent on their own labor)
- the work that was available to the new émigrés was difficult to obtain
- slaves performed almost all of the menial jobs as well as many of the professions such as teachers, doctors, surgeons, and architects

- free men worked at various trades:
as bakers,
fishmongers,
carpenters
- poor women would serve as:
hairdressers,
midwives,
dressmakers



Roman shop fronts

Housing – apartment blocks

- daily life still centered on the home, and when people arrived in the city, their first concern was to find a place to live
- little attention was paid to the housing needs of the people who migrated to the city
- the majority of Roman citizens lived in apartment buildings (insulas)



Food

- the main meal of the day was in the late afternoon, from four to six
- the morning and noon meals were usually light snacks (sometimes only bread)
- there was no refrigeration, shopping was done daily
- there were no potatoes, tomatoes, corn, peppers, rice or sugar
- neither were there any oranges, grapefruits, apricots, or peaches

- the wealthy enjoyed imported spices in their meals, served by slaves
- many of the extremely poor or homeless ate rancid cereal or gruel (*avas gabona és zabkása*)
- to others the daily diet consisted of cereals, bread, vegetables and olive oil; meat was far too expensive for the average budget
- meat sometimes became available after a sacrifice to the gods as only the internal organs were used in a sacrifice
- wine was the common drink, but, for the poor, water was available

Work and leisure

- for the affluent the day was divided between business and leisure
(business was only conducted in the morning)
- most Romans worked a six hour day
(beginning at dawn and ending at noon)
- the afternoon was devoted to leisure:
attending games, the theater or the baths

- the attended games were gladiatorial competitions, chariot races, wrestling



- these were also enjoyed by the poor
- the government felt the need for the poor to be entertained
- even during times of crises, the citizens were kept happy with bread and games

- no day of rest existed in a Roman week
- during the time of Emperor Claudius there were 159 days when no business was conducted
- Emperor Marcus Aurelius considered this too extreme and decreed there had to be at least 230 days of business

Baths

- after a busy day conducting business and attending the games, citizens needed to relax
- this relaxation time was spent at the baths
- bathing was important to all Romans (usually once or twice a week)
- the baths were a place to socialize and sometimes conduct business

- a typical bath included a gym, health center and a swimming pool
- a typical bath would have three rooms: a tepidarium or relaxation room, a caldarium (hotter room) a frigidarium (cooling room)



- most were free
- slaves were used to maintain the heat in the various hot rooms as well as attend to the needs of the wealthy
- after a relaxing afternoon at the baths, a Roman citizen, wealthy or poor, would return home for their evening meal

Conclusion

- daily life in a Roman city was completely dependent on one's economic status
- the city, however, remained a mixture of wealth and poverty, often existing side by side
- the wealthy had the benefit of slave labor, serving them their evening meal, or educating their children
- the poor, on the other hand, had no access to education, lived in run-down tenements, and sometimes lived off the charity of the city.