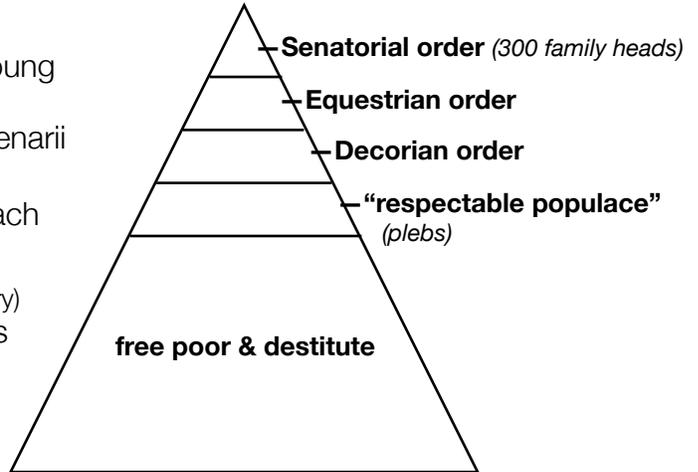


ROMAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

CLASS – (Latin, *ordo*) the group of persons into which I was born, and (with few exceptions), that in which I will die. The number of privileges and amount of honor bestowed upon me by those *under* me is determined by my *ordo*.

SENATORIAL ORDER

- Senatorial wealth was nearly unimaginable; a young man born into a senatorial family could *join* the Senate when he had property worth 250,000 denarii (685 years of work at daily wage!)
- The 2 largest senatorial fortunes known were each worth \$20 billion.
- Pliny the Younger (governor of Bithynia, late 1st century) was 21st on a list of known wealthy Romans; his worth was 5 million denarii.
- Agriculture was the only acceptable trade for a senator.



New Testament: Sergius Paulus of Cyprus, Annaeus Gallio of Achaia, and the *proconsuls* spoken of in Acts were all of senatorial order (Acts 13:7-8,12; 18:12-17; 19:”38).

EQUESTRIAN ORDER

- This order originated with the military; any citizen serving on horseback in the Roman army had to provide his own horse, weapons, and other supplies!
- The sons of senators were automatically enrolled in the equestrian order.
- The “entrance requirements” were: moral excellence, 100,000 denarii, proof of free birth for 2 generations.
- Agriculture was the only acceptable trade for a senator.

New Testament: The *tribune* Claudius Lysius in Jerusalem, and the *procurators* Pontius Pilate, Marcus Antonius Felix and Porcius Festus were all of the equestrian order (Luke 3:1; Acts 23 and 24).

DECORION ORDER

- These were the aristocrats of cities around the Empire, and the lowest of the top three orders.
- They ruled the cities of Italy, Roman colonies and other cities seeking to emulate Rome.
- Sometimes called “municipal senators” because they served in local, municipal senates.
- Unlike senators and equestrians however, there was great *inequality* among them from city to city, and even within cities.
- In the Eastern Mediterranean world, most decorions were Greeks or hellenized people.
- Imperial Rome allowed decorions to keep their wealth as long as they helped keep the *Pax Romana* and collected taxes for Rome.

New Testament: Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens and Erastus the treasurer of Corinth were of the decorion order (Acts 17:34 and Rom 16:23).

RESPECTABLE POOR

- (Latin, *populus integer*) Comprised of small land owners, shopkeepers, and craftsmen. Their status was assigned roughly by how much work they “did” through *others*.

POOR & DESTITUTE

- These were those completely dependent upon others either for opportunities to work, or for welfare.
- Rome provided next to nothing for the aged, widows, orphans, disabled or infirm.
- There were high concentrations in urban centers throughout the Empire; estimates for Rome were over 300,000!

STATUS –(Latin, *dignitas*) the net sum of the categories of honor I hold (e.g. a well-educated, wealthy, non-citizen, former slave had less *dignitas* than a poor, uneducated freeborn citizen).

Citizenship & Freedom

- wealthy freeborn citizen
- imperial freed (citizen) slave
- Imperial slave
- wealthy freed citizen slave
- poor freeborn citizen
- poor freed citizen slave
- wealthy freeborn noncitizen
- poor freeborn noncitizen
- freed noncitizen slave
- urban domestic slave
- farm slave
- mining slave

Patrons & Clients

- patrician patron
- upper-class plebian patron
- client of powerful patron
- client of weak patron

Age & Gender

- adult male, no living father
- adult male with living father
- widowed adult female with independent resources
- widowed adult female
- married adult female
- male child
- female child

NOTE: *Even wealth had “categories,” according to Cicero: inherited wealth had more honor than wealth gained in one’s lifetime, but now enjoyed, which had more honor than wealth still being accumulated.*

1. The status of a member of the elite was identifiable through status symbols, themselves legally restricted to the different ranks.
 - a. Senators had the right by law, to wear a toga with a broad purple stripe, wore a gold ring, and sat in the front seats at spectacles and public events; they also monopolized all the important priesthoods at Rome.
 - b. Equestrians wore a toga with a narrow purple stripe, wore a gold ring, were given a horse at public expense which they could display during parades, and occupied seats behind the senators at spectacles.
 - c. The usurpation of any of these status symbols was taken very seriously by the authorities (that is, the elite) and many laws, empire-wide and local, protected their usage strictly.
2. The topography of the typical Roman town reflects this social order, with the houses of the important and less important evenly distributed throughout rather than grouped into high-class neighborhoods and ghettos. The homes of clients were often in close proximity to their patron’s home.