**Roman Slaves**

**History, Facts and Information about Roman Slaves**The number of slaves in Rome and through Italy, was immense. Some rich individuals are said to have had several thousands. Slaves were not esteemed as persons, but as things, and might be transferred from one owner to another, like any other effects. They could not appear in a court of justice as witnesses, nor make a will, or inherit anything, or serve as soldiers, unless first made free. The content of this article provides interesting history, facts and information about life in Ancient Rome including Roman Slaves.

**How did people become Roman Slaves?**People became slaves among the Romans by the following ways:

* By being taken in war
* By way of punishment
* They were born in a state of servitude.

**Roman Slaves - The Slave Auctions**Slaves taken in the field, or in the storming of cities, were sold at auction, “sub corona,” as it was called, because they wore a crown when sold; or “sub hasta,” because a spear was set up where the auctioneer stood. These were called Servi or Mancipia. Those who dealt in the slave trade were called Mangones or Venalitii: they were bound to promise for the soundness of their slaves, and not to conceal their faults; hence slaves were commonly exposed for sale naked, and carried a scroll hanging to their necks, on which their good and bad qualities were specified. A slave could not legally own property, but he often had peculium, unofficial possessions. A slave who had scrimped and scraped enough money together might buy his own slave to hire out. A slave of a slave was called a vicarius.   
  
**Roman Slaves and their Master**The power of the master over his slave was absolute. He might whip him or put him to death at pleasure. This right was often exercised with great cruelty. If the master of a family was slain at his own house, and the murderer not discovered, all his domestic slaves were liable to be put to death. Roman records show that no less than four hundred slaves in one household were punished on this account. There was no regular marriage among slaves, but their connexion was called contubernium. The children of any female slave became the property of her master. At certain times they were allowed the greatest freedom, as at the feast of Saturn, in the month of December, when they were served at table by their masters, and on the Ides of August.

**Punishments given to Roman Slaves**  
The lash was the common punishment; but for certain crimes they were to be branded in the forehead, and sometimes were forced to carry a piece of wood round their necks, wherever they went, which was called furca; and whoever had been subjected to the punishment was ever afterwards called furcifer. Slaves also, by way of punishment, were often confined in a work-house, or house of correction, where they were obliged to turn a mill for grinding corn. When slaves were beaten, they were suspended with a weight tied to their feet, that they might not move them. When punished for any capital offence, they were commonly crucified; but this was eventually prohibited under the rule of the Emperor Constantine.

**Roman Slaves - Freedom**  
Occasionally slaves were granted their freedom. There were several methods by which a slave could be freed:

* Per censum, when a slave with his master's knowledge inserted his name in the censor's roll
* Per vindictam, when a master, taking his slave to the praetor, or consul (in the provinces to the pro-consul or pro-praetor) said, “I desire that this man be free, according to the custom of the Romans”and the praetor, if he approved, putting a rod on the head of the slave, pronounced, "I say that this man is free, after the manner of the Romans." At this point the lictor (bodyguard) or master turning him round in a circle, and giving him a blow on the cheek, let him go; signifying that leave was granted him to go, wherever he pleased
* Per testamentum, when a master gave his slaves their liberty by his will.

A gladiator might also gain his freedom if he fought well enough in the arena.

**Roman Slaves - Freeborn Citizens**Free-born citizens could not be sold for slaves. Parents might sell their children; but they did not on that account entirely lose the right of citizens, for, when freed from slavery, they were called ingenui and libertini. The same was the case with insolvent debtors, who were given up to their creditors.

**Roman Slaves**The content of this Roman Slaves category on life in Ancient Rome provides free educational details, facts and information for reference and research for schools, colleges and homework. Refer to the Colosseum Sitemap for a comprehensive search on interesting different categories containing the history, facts and information about Ancient Rome.

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