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History of Western Civilization

2 December 2019

Essays on Ancient Rome

**Role of Mos Maiorum in Ancient Rome**

Mos Maiorum, meaning customs of the ancestors, was a set of moral guidelines that were used in ancient Rome, especially during the Republic and the early Imperial Period. They were necessary as Roman society was a combination of many cultures that had come under one flag due to a series of successful conquests and military campaigns. It worked amazingly well for quite a long period in a highly diverse society.

To understand the concept better, it should be noted that there was no common legal system in Rome before the year 500 AD, nor did the Romans had a written constitution. Under these conditions, it was the Mos Maiorum that held the entire system of governance together and provided stability to both internal and external affairs of the state. For an explanation of this point let us take the example of the government mechanism in ancient Rome. The laws that governed the daily workings were passed by the Senate, which worked under the Mos Maiorum principle of *Dignitas and Auctoritas,* which was the result of displaying the values by the senators, priests, military generals and magistrates that were needed in the service of the average citizen of the state. The *auctoritas* was very closely associated with Mos Maiorum, as the senators were excluded from the corridors of power if they violated the principle of *virtue.* *Religio and cultus* were the values of the Mos Maiorum that were used to bind the general public together in the name of different gods and mortals as it was necessary to create a sense of nationalism in a state of such diverse ethnicities. Lastly, there was the superior military might of the Roman empire followed the principle of *Disciplina* that was related to training, self-control, education, and training of a military general of the Romans.

But this doctrine also has a role in the destabilization and the fall of the Roman Empire. In the workings of the ancient Rome, there was little concern about the dreams and needs of the common folk as the state mechanism was solely designed to run an effective and efficient government as the beliefs of *gravitas and Constantia* were strictly enforced. The religious beliefs were entirely based on the principle of *Religio and Cultus* which was grounded in the ancient mythology of Greek origin. This posed a serious problem when the people of ancient Judea declared a new religion which is known today as Christianity. This led to the separation of the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves. There were also prejudices against the other conquered races that the Mos Maiorum failed to address the issues in the multicultural Roman society. To conclude the argument, the Roman began to regard themselves as the superior race due to their principles of Mos Maiorum and therefore they started to decline as their principles poisoned their minds and blinded their eyes to the needs of the time.

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**War of Carthage and Greece and Fall of Rome**

The siege of Carthage, also known as the main battle of the Third Punic War, was the clash that resulted in the destruction of Carthage at the hands of the Romans in 146 BC. Some strategists and historians view this battle as a preemptive strike by the Romans on the Carthaginians as the violated the treaty at the end of the Second Carthage War by disbanding their mercenary army. Similarly, the Romans took over Greece after Augustus Caesar overpowered Cleopatra the Seventh, and defeated her at the port city of Alexandria. In this way, the Romans of the time succeeded in destroying two great threats to their civilization, or so they thought.

After Rome occupied the territories of Carthage and Greece, they acquired all the Silver Mines of both states. This resulted in an untold amount of riches coming back into Rome. This large influx of wealth made the rich Romans wealthier than ever before. They become rich enough that their generations would have lived off their fortunes without turning over a single stone. But there was a problem. All of this wealth was ending up in the hands of the elite nobles of the time, as the poor of the Roman Empire were becoming poorer by the passing of the days. In addition to that, Roman citizens were being dragged to fight in the wars in far-flung regions of Spain and France, then known as Gaul. In their absence, their arable lands would fall into poor condition and their homes fall into ruins. The rich would then buy these devalued lands and buildings from their amassed wealth, turning the local Roman plebeians into tenant or render them homeless, in some rare cases. This trend of events had an eroding effect on the traditional Mos Maiorum in economic as well as political ways. This gave rise to the economic inequality in Roman, which gave rise to frequent events of civil unrest.

This was the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire. As the Roman elite enjoyed vast fortunes due to their captured silver mines, there was no major power in the entire Mediterranean that would keep them in check. This threat of a dangerous existential enemy at the borders was the need of the day for the Romans as they were divided internally due to the disproportionate distribution of wealth among its citizens. This tactic is still used in the modern world by nations that have huge economic gaps between their different classes, such as North Korea and Iran.

To conclude the argument, the Romans sought to prolong the survival of their Empire by amassing wealth and defeating their enemies, but as the saying goes by Jean de la Fontaine (that a person often meets his destiny on the road that he takes to avoid it), the Romans met their end by taking the steps that they used to avoid their destiny.

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