

The (Strange) Roman World at the Time of Christ

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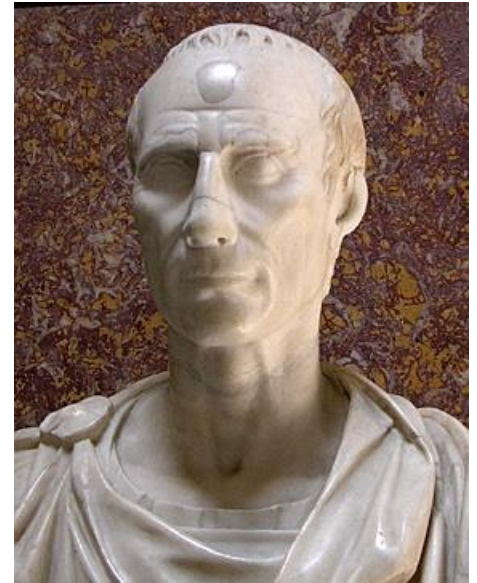
The (Strange) Roman World at the Time of Christ

1. Life in the Roman World

2. Roman Cities
 3. Lesser Beings: Women, Children, Slaves. The Elderly
 4. Religions of the Roman Empire
- Setting the Stage for Christianity

Who's Who: Julius Caesar

- Julius Caesar, Rome's greatest general and very popular
- Assassinated in 44 BC. By Brutus and 30 other Roman Senators
- His death set off latest round civil in Rome's Civil Wars
- All about power: who in the elite was going to be #1.



Who's Who: Augustus

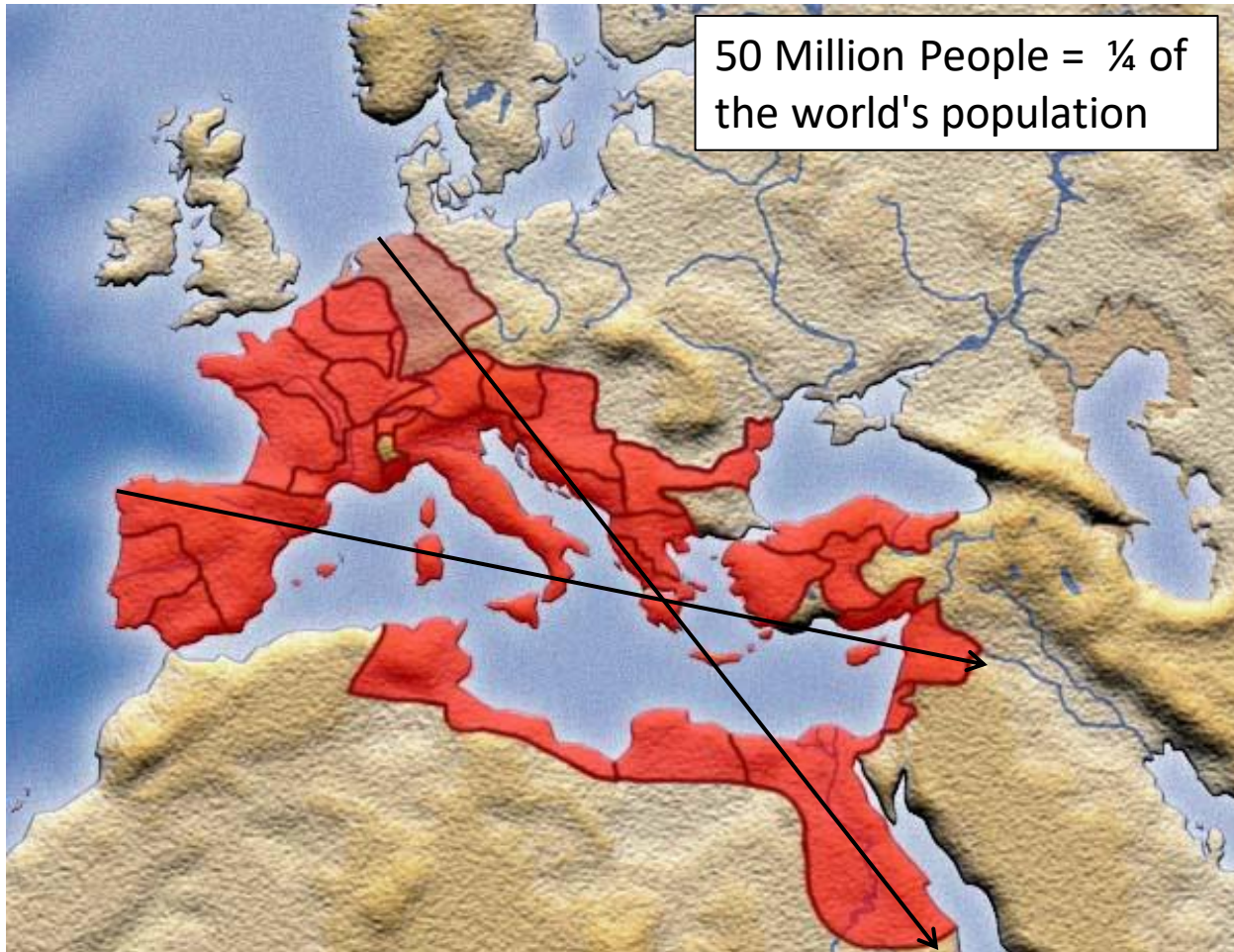
- Grand-nephew of the popular Julius Caesar.
- Defeated Marc Antony - Cleopatra, thus ending the Civil Wars.
- The Emperor at the time of the birth of Christ



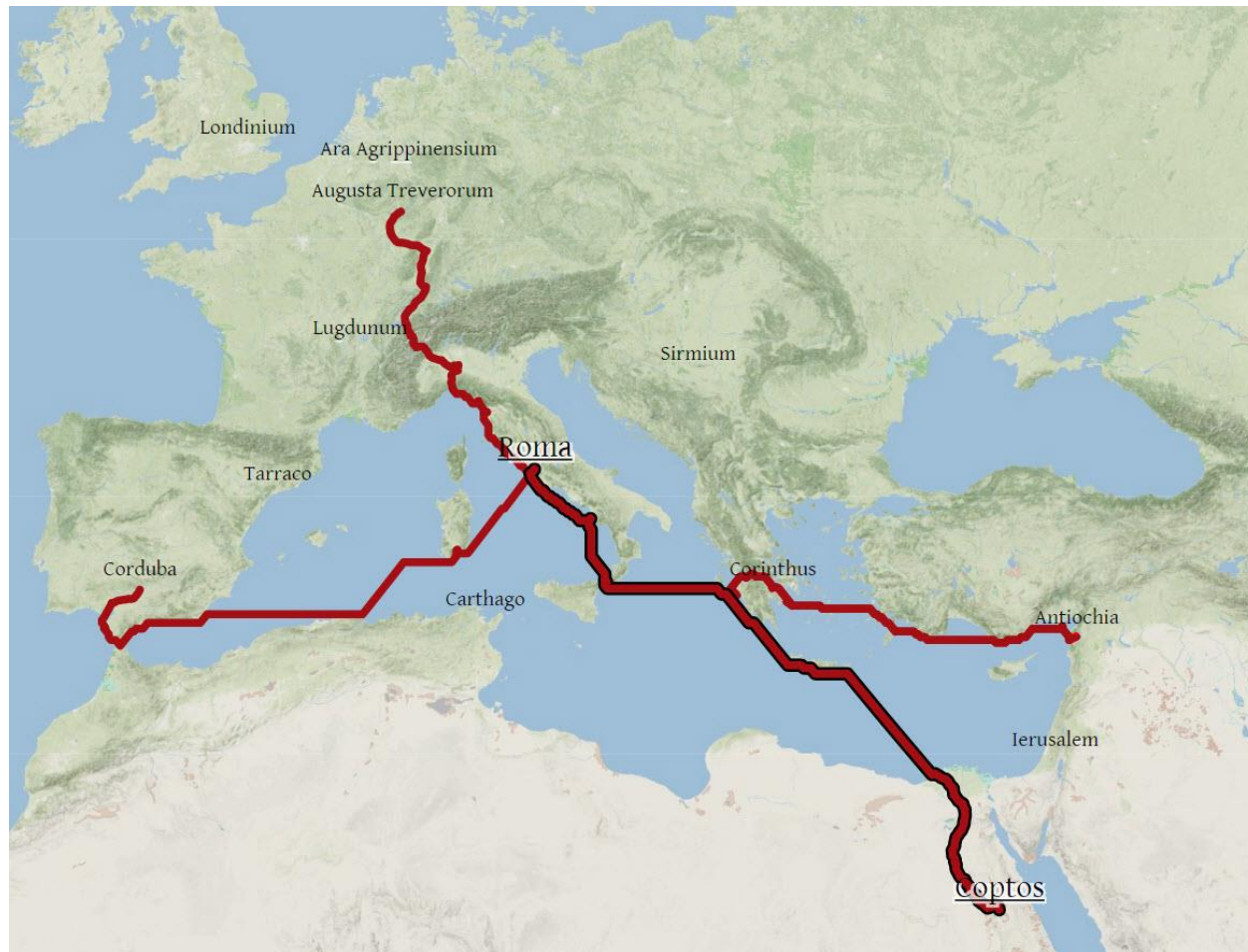
Who's Who: Herod the Great

- The Herod at the time of the **birth** of Christ (Matthew 2.1) was Herod the Great of Judea.
- The Roman Senate made him "King of the Jews" in 40 BC. Judea was a Roman client state.
- He ruled 37 years, building many civic works.
- He was not the Herod at the time of the **death** of Christ. That was one of his sons.

How Big Is It?



The Roman World: How Far Away from Rome?



Internal Collapse: The Civil Wars

- The Civil Wars were fought throughout the Empire.
- Many affected: 25% of all male citizens had served in the military by the end of the war.
- The losers **and** their extended families at each round were “cleansed.” Land grabs. Stolen wealth.
- Roman society was torn apart.

Augustus Brings Security

- Proclaims the "pax Augustus."
- He's now solely in charge, and the old elites reduced to ceremonial positions.
- Most people cheered. They were tired of the old elite. The elites alone had brought all this destruction. Everyone else now ready for security, even at the cost of some of their traditional rights.

Daily Life: A Small Business



The Grocer and His Wife

Security : the Roman Army



Peace did not mean demobilization. Pax Augustus rested on a professional Army. Strength: about 300,000.

Your Legal Status

- Your legal status determined your life:
 - free vs slave ; freedmen and freedwomen
 - male vs female
 - citizen vs non-citizen
 - the father vs children

The Marriage Ceremony



Fathers arranged marriages, for political advantage.

Augustus Says: "Make Babies"



Male Children



School Boys with Tutor

Female Children



Girl, Reading.

Divorce and Remarriage

- Either the husband or the wife could initiate divorce. Simply send your spouse a note. Divorce was a matter within "the family," not the state.
- Disincentives: The wife, if a mother, automatically lost her children to their father. The husband had to return the wife's dowry.

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2. A Roman City:

Where a Roman Wanted to Spend his Daily Life

A “Roman City” meant

- wealth
- culture
- power
- security

Mars or Dionysius?

The City Brings "The Good Life"

- Romans have a split personality: Mars or Dionysius? Restraint or excess? Which gets you the most power?
- Many chose Dionysius. What better place to have "the Good Life" than in a City?
- As one Roman writer wailed: In the hinterland: "no one sees sculptors, painters, or perfumers or money changers or poets."

He might have added : "Or hairstylists."



Fancy Hairstyles, Clothes, Jewels

...Paintings



For the Dining Room

...Sculpture



In Public Spaces and in the Home

...Learning



The Library at Ephesus

Places to Do Business and Gain Power



The Basilica

...Mass Entertainments



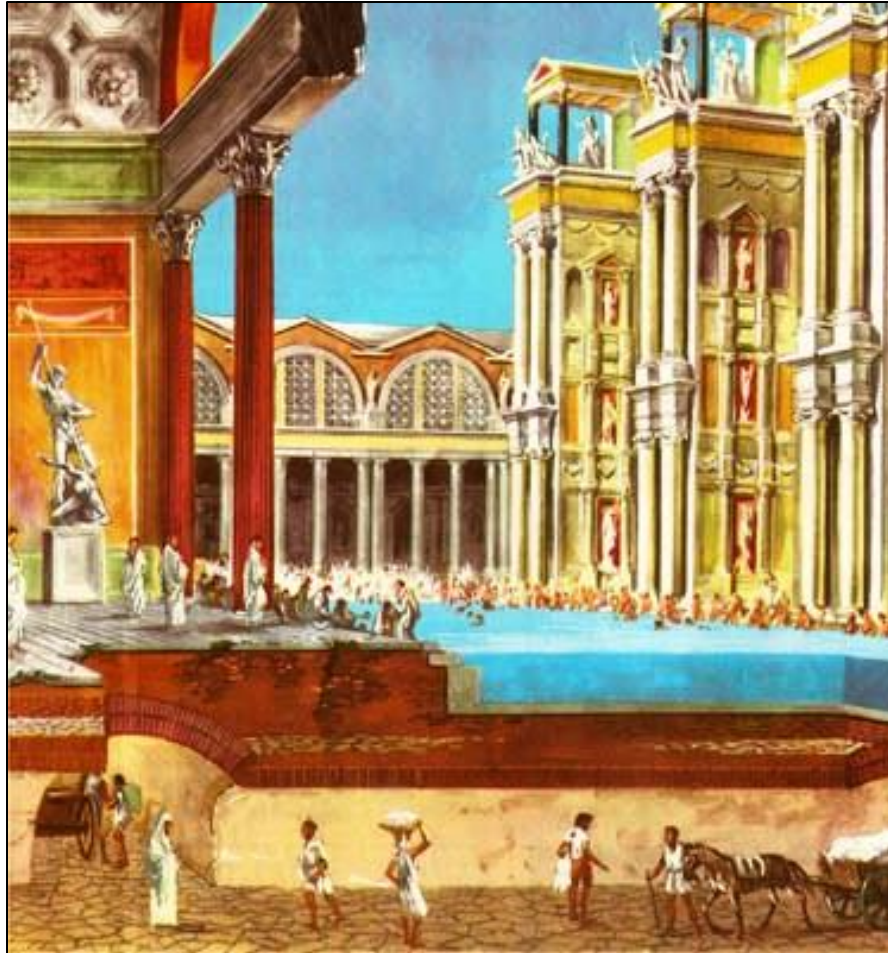
The Amphitheater

...Water



for Drinking, Sewage, and Bathing

...Places to Socialize



The Baths

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3. Lesser Beings: Women

- A female was legally bound to a male for her entire life: father, husband, or guardian.
- A woman could not
 - vote
 - hold office
 - argue for herself in court.

A Woman Could:

- inherit property : some independent wealth
- initiate a divorce
- leave a will directing her personal assets.

Livia, wife of Augustus, famously wealthy in her own right.



Identity and Women

“Julia’s”



Julia, daughter of
Emperor Augustus



Julia, daughter of
Emperor Titus



Julia, wife of Emperor
Severus

Childbirth



The Birthing Chair

Lesser Beings: Children

Fathers and Children



The father controlled the children legally.

Mothers and Children



Instilled the proper Roman 'virtues'

The Fly in the Ointment

- Still not enough children of the aristocratic elite.
- Adoption was the answer.
- Definitely not the adoption practiced in the modern world

Rome's Most Famous Adoptee



Octavian, later Emperor Augustus

Lesser Beings: the Elderly



Lesser Beings: Slaves



The Spoils of War

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Roman gods

- What good were they? They did not provide much of a creation story, or redemption, or a code of ethics.
- So what did humans want from them?

Benevolence.

The gods were capricious and powerful.

Where Could You Find a Roman god?



What Did a Roman god Look Like?



What Did a Roman goddess Look Like?



The Bulwarks of Religion

- Observing the rituals of official Roman religion was not voluntary.
- Religion rested on : the official gods, the state, and the army.

Other Religions of the Roman World

- Other religions tolerated/used/admired:
 - Etruscan
 - Judaism
 - Greek
 - Isis, from Egypt
 - Mithras, from Persia



Religio vs Superstitio

- "Religio," : ok
- "Superstitio" : not ok
- Religio meant the traditional honors paid to the gods by everyone. Religio was performed according to strict rules, by a few properly trained priests.
- Only the gods, and the priests, could see the future. Including the death of the Emperor.

Superstitio

- "Superstitio" established a direct link to the divine. Not ok, *because*: You could see the future. If you could see the future, you might control fate.

Augustus riding his
astrological moon sign,
Capricorn the sea goat.



Superstitio

Judaism; Isis

- Judaic central beliefs and actual worship practices were regarded as "superstitio."
--But Judaism was tolerated (on and off) because of its antiquity.
- Isis, as an ancient foreign religion from Egypt, sometimes allowed, sometimes banned.
- Would the Roman state classify Christianity as "superstitio?"

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Favorable Forces for Christ's Message

- Missing from the Empire: hospitals, public schools, orphanages, social services agencies.
- Missing: sense of mercy, pity for the less fortunate or the poor, obligation to help them.
- Missing: human rights. Roman law tilted toward property rights, not civil rights.

Unfavorable Forces

- The Empire meant internal stability after the crises of the Civil Wars, welcomed by almost everyone, at any price.
- The Empire was already tolerant (within limits): multi-cultural, multi-lingual, local gods
- Its Army was aggressive against external foes, again welcomed by everyone.
- The Empire was vigilant against "superstitio."

Conclusion

- Hardly anyone is going to want to upset the applecart that was the Roman World under Augustus.

Conclusion: Not obvious that Christ's message and Christianity would stand much chance of success.