



Ancient Roman Religion

GODS AND GODDESSES

Romulus and Remus

While the story of Romulus and Remus is one of the central legends of Rome's early history it doesn't really tie in to Roman religious beliefs.

The story itself was about the founding of the City of Rome but for us, historians, it gives us a glimpse into the values of early Romans: loyalty and justice.

[Romulus and Remus origin story](#)

Gods and Goddesses

- Roman religion was influenced by contact with **Etruscans** and **Greeks**.
- Like the Greeks, the Romans adopted a pantheon of supernatural deities.
- 12 main gods/goddesses, many resembled Greek Gods.
- People regularly made **sacrifices/offerings** to appease gods and goddesses.



The Roman Pantheon

Jupiter

Juno

Neptune

Minerva

Ceres

Vesta

Apollo

Diana

Mercury

Venus

Vulcan

Mars

Use page 227 of the text to complete your notes on these Gods and Goddesses.

Gods and Goddesses

➤ Families kept statues of “**Lares**” (spirits of family ancestors) in their main living rooms.

- **Spirits** were everywhere...in fire, water plants, stones...
- **Offerings**: each day the head of household would make an offering of wine and incense on behalf of family.





Religious Beliefs and Practices

- Like the Greeks, Roman religion was based on **Rituals, Traditions** rather than on dogma (a clearly defined or written code of beliefs).
- **Festivals** were held every month, except for September and November.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Priests:

Were elected officials of the state.



- **“Pontifex Maximus”** was the chief Priest who supervised other priests.
- Some gods had designated priests called **“Flamens”**.
- **“Vestal Virgins”** were priestesses served the goddess Vesta.
- Other groups of priests, called **“Augurs”** looked for signs from the gods.

Religious Beliefs and Practices



Leonard de Selva / Corbis

- Ancient Romans believed in Omens , Curses , Spells , Astrology , and Divination.
- “**Divination**” is the practice of interpreting the will of the gods through signs and omens such as measuring the size of the sacrificed animals’ organs.

Ancient Roman Religion

DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

Death and Afterlife



- Like Greeks; the Roman Afterlife did not promise happy immortality.
- Deceased Romans passed to the underworld to **“Hades”**.
- First had to cross River Styx, which separates this world from the next and had to pay **“Charon” (The Boatman)** Relatives had to put a coin in the mouth of the deceased to pay the toll.

Charon and the River Styx



Death and Afterlife



The Funeral

- The family washed the body – anointed with oils – dressed it in white.
- The body was placed on couch for viewing.
- Mourning lamps were lit.
- A small **Cyprus Tree** was placed outside the house.
- To signify loss, the fire in the hearth was put out.

- **“Sacrifices”** were made after a death to purify the house. Poor families buried their dead in a common grave while richer families had a funeral procession, often with professional mourners.
- Another special sacrifice was made 9 days after the burial for the departed spirit.
- Every May ceremonies were held to help persuade spirits to leave the household and not to haunt it.

Death and Afterlife



SPREAD OF
CHRISTIANITY

Ancient
Roman
Religion



Spread of Christianity

Spread of Christianity

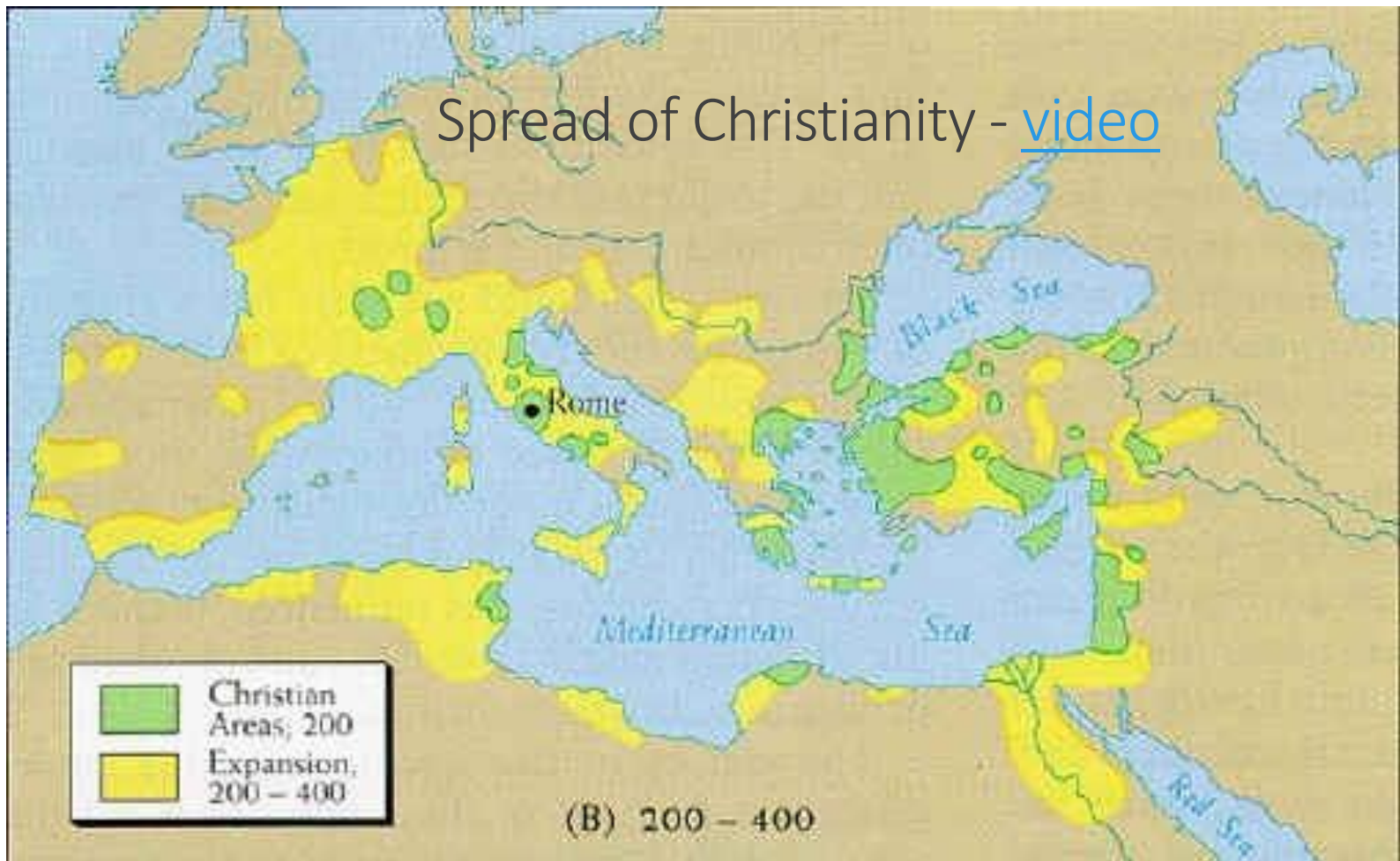


- Began in the First Century – it was first regarded as a minor Jewish sect (religious group) centered in Jerusalem.
- Originally based on Judaism a **“Monotheistic”** religion with one God who governs all aspects of life.
- God’s word was recorded in a sacred book called **“The Torah”** with Gods law **“Ten Commandments”**

- This religious style “**written laws/One God**” was unique in the world at this time.
- Supposedly, around 30 CE, Jesus Christ began teaching and preaching.
- Jesus Christ came into conflict with high Jewish leaders who felt he could not be the sole agent of God.
- He also angered Roman officials because many Roman people viewed Jesus as a savior/messiah who came to free the Jews from Roman Rule.

Spread of Christianity

Spread of Christianity - [video](#)



- Previously established religions did not promise equality or eternal happiness in the afterlife.

Why would Christianity be viewed as a threat to power control?

Why Christianity Spread

STRONG ORGANIZATION

- Christianity built strong church organization with a hierarchy of leaders. (Bishops/Priests, etc...)
- Organization became far-reaching

BREAK FROM JUDAISM

- Creates separate church from Judaism.
- Accepts everyone; slaves, nobles, Jewish or not. **(Preached Equality)**
- Everlasting life after death for the “worthy”



Spread of Christianity

- Romans were mostly concerned with the message that all were equal in the eyes of God.
- This contradicted traditional Roman values:
 - Husband over Family
 - Parent over Child
 - Master over Slave
 - Emperor over Citizens

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Spread of Christianity

"This just in by special delivery. We have skybox seats when they're burning the Christians."

Spread of Christianity

p.229-231



- Roman began prosecuting Christians as early as First Century.
- Roman Emperor Nero used Christians as a scapegoat for a huge fire that nearly destroyed the city.

Spread of Christianity

➤ Christians were considered by many to have angered the Roman gods and goddesses as Christians were blamed for floods/famines and fires, one of which burned down much of Rome in 64 CE.

➤ Despite the negative publicity (cannibalism and black magic) many people still converted to Christianity.

➤ By 3rd Century a tenth of Rome was Christian.

How did the Emperors deal with the rise of Christianity?

Persecution Accelerated Then Accepted

EMPEROR DIOCLETIAN

- Considered himself to be God-like and resented the Christians for not worshiping him.
- Declared official persecution of Christians in 303 CE.

EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

- Became Christian himself.
- Allowed Christians to practice freely
- Used state funds to build churches
- Had soldiers wear Christian monogram on their shield



Spread of Christianity

- Emperor Theodosius (the successor of Diocletian) made Christianity the official religion of Rome in 380 CE.
- Christianity became so powerful that it eventually forced Rome to outlaw all other religions.



Thoughts and Questions

Did the persecution by the Romans strengthen Christianity and encourage it to spread?

Why would the average citizen of Rome find Christianity attractive? How would their daily lives change after they converted?