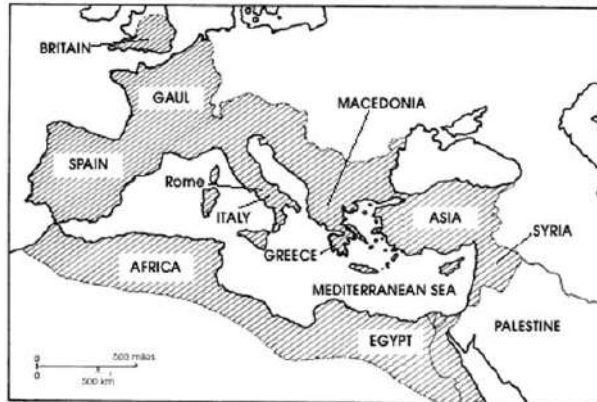


## An Introduction to *The Twelve Tables of Rome*

In 509 BCE, the Roman Republic was established in Italy. At first, the government was only made up of **patricians**, members of the landholding upper class of Rome. Later, the farmers, merchants, artisans, and traders known as **plebeians** won the right to be elected to the government too. The plebeians demanded that all of the Roman laws be written down and displayed in public so all Romans would know the rules and the punishments for breaking them. As a result, around 450 BCE the government had the laws inscribed on twelve stone tablets and placed in the Roman marketplace, called the Forum.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions: (Contextualization)

<b>Who</b> wrote <i>The Twelve Tables</i> ?	
<b>When</b> were <i>The Twelve Tables</i> written?	
<b>Where</b> were <i>The Twelve Tables</i> written?	
<b>Where</b> were <i>The Twelve Tables</i> located? Why were they located there?	
<b>Who was the audience</b> for <i>The Twelve Tables</i> ?	
What was the <b>perspective</b> of the author? (Hint: What is the main interest or goal of the author?)	

**Why** were *The Twelve Tables* written?

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## What can we as historians learn about Roman society from The Twelve Tables of Rome?

### The Twelve Tables of Rome

1	Table VIII: Laws of Injury
2	2. If one has maimed a limb and does not compromise with the injured person, let there be <b>retaliation</b>
3	[revenge]. If one has broken a bone of a freeman with his hand or with a <b>cudgel</b> , let him pay a penalty of three
4	hundred coins. If he has broken the bone of a slave, let him have one hundred and fifty coins. If one is guilty of
5	insult, the penalty shall be twenty-five coins.
6	10. Any person who destroys by burning any building or heap of corn deposited alongside a house shall be
7	bound, <b>scourged</b> , and put to death by burning at the stake provided that he has committed the said <b>misdeed</b>
8	with <b>malice</b> [intention to do harm] aforethought; but if he shall have committed it by accident, that is, by
9	negligence, it is ordained that he repair the damage or, if he be too poor to be competent for such punishment,
10	he shall receive a lighter punishment.
11	12. If the theft has been done by night, if the owner kills the thief, the thief shall be held to be lawfully killed.
12	13. It is unlawful for a thief to be killed by day....unless he defends himself with a weapon; even though he has
13	come with a weapon, unless he shall use the weapon and fight back, you shall not kill him. And even if he
14	resists, first call out so that someone may hear and come up.
15	23. A person who had been found guilty of giving false witness [lying] shall be hurled down from the Tarpeian
16	Rock.
17	
18	Table IX: Public Law
19	5. <b>Treason</b> : he who shall have <b>roused</b> up a public enemy or handed over a citizen to a public enemy must
20	suffer capital punishment.
21	6. Putting to death of any man, whosoever he might be unconvicted is forbidden.
22	
23	Table XI: Supplement I
24	1. Marriages should not take place between <b>plebeians</b> and <b>patricians</b> .
25	
26	Table XII: Supplement II
27	2. If a slave shall have committed theft or done damage with his master's knowledge, the action for damages
28	is in the slave's name.
29	

**Source:** Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources* (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1901), Vol. III: *The Roman World*, pp. 9-11. Scanned and modernized by J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Retrieved from: <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/12tables.asp>

2. What does this section from lines 3-5 of the Twelve Tables suggest about Roman society?

*"If one has broken a bone of a freeman with his hand or with a cudgel, let him pay a penalty of three hundred coins. If he has broken the bone of a slave, let him have one hundred and fifty coins."*

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3. **Treason** is addressed in lines 20-21. What is **treason**?

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4. According the Twelve Tables, what was the punishment for treason in Rome? **Why** would a government establish that punishment for treason?

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5. What can you **infer** about Roman society based on the first law from Table XI, *“Marriages should not take place between plebeians and patricians?”*

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### The Twelve Tables of Rome as a Historical Source

8. If you were a historian researching what life was like for people living in the Roman Republic, would you consider *The Twelve Tables* a reliable source? Why or why not?

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9. What other sources might help you better understand what life was like for people living in the Roman Republic?

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