**Mesopotamian Slaves**

Sumerians did keep slaves.  When they defeated another town or tribe in battle they would bring back the prisoners as slaves.  The king and the priests kept most slaves, but wealthy Sumerians could buy slaves to work for them.

The institution of slavery was as old as the human race itself. We know that slavery was prevalent in many of the ancient civilisations. Also in Mesopotamia, slavery was an accepted practice. It is from legal codes and other written sources that the information on Mesopotamian slavery can be obtained.

The Sumerian had a cuneiform symbol for slave, suggesting "foreign" which indicates that slaves were not from the Sumerian city states, but outsiders. Even in the Babylonian code of Hammurabi, there are references about slavery.

War was not uncommon in Mesopotamia. Mostly, war captives or prisoners of war were turned into slaves.

The origin of the practice of slavery in Mesopotamia may be traced to the development of agriculture. Agriculture required a large amount of labor force. Slaves were used in the construction of buildings, forts, roads, fortifications and other structures. Many female slaves worked in temples. Slaves were also used to carry out everyday domestic (household) chores.

The concept was that the non-slaves were superior people and the slaves inferior. Therefore, it was necessary that the latter should be controlled by the former. In the Mesopotamian social structure, slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy. A male slave was called a mountain boy and a female slave, a mountain girl.

Slaves were regarded as a commodity which could be bought and sold. They did not have rights which the normal citizens possessed. They did not receive any wages, instead were offered shelter to live. They worked for the upper classes, the king, the priests and the wealthy.

**Rome Slavery**

Slavery in ancient Rome differed from its modern forms in that it was not based on race. But like modern slavery, it was an abusive and degrading institution. Cruelty was commonplace. In hard times, it was not uncommon for desperate Roman citizens to raise money by selling their children into slavery.

When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean, they took millions of slaves to Italy, where they toiled on the large plantations or in the houses and workplaces of wealthy citizens. The Italian economy depended on abundant slave labor, with slaves constituting 40 percent of the population. Enslaved people with talent, skill, or beauty commanded the highest prices, and many served as singers, scribes, jewelers, bartenders, and even doctors. One slave trained in medicine was worth the price of 50 agricultural slaves.

Roman law was inconsistent on slavery. Slaves were considered property; they had no rights and were subject to their owners' whims. However, they had legal standing as witnesses in courtroom proceedings, and they could eventually gain freedom and citizenship. Masters often freed loyal slaves in gratitude for their faithful service, but slaves could also save money to purchase their freedom. Conditions for slaves in Rome gradually improved, although slaves were treated cruelly in the countryside.

Some harsh masters believed in the old proverb "Every slave is an enemy," so that while humane legislation prohibited the mutilation or murder of slaves, outrageous cruelty continued. Like the Stoic philosophers, Christians taught the brotherhood of humanity and urged kindness towards slaves, but they did not consider slaves equals in status.

For example, Saint Augustine opposed the principle of slavery, but did not see how the practice could be abolished without endangering the social order. Thus he regarded it as another necessary evil resulting from humanity's fall from divine grace. Other bishops were less troubled, and the early Christian church actually acquired its own slaves.

Slavery in the Roman Empire did not suddenly end, but it was slowly replaced when new economic forces introduced other forms of cheap labor. During the late empire, Roman farmers and traders were reluctant to pay large amounts of money for slaves because they did not wish to invest in a declining economy. The legal status of "slave" continued for centuries, but slaves were gradually replaced by wage laborers in the towns and by land-bound peasants (later called serfs) in the countryside. These types of workers provided cheap labor without the initial cost that slave owners had to pay for slaves. Slavery did not disappear in Rome because of human reform or religious principle, but because the Romans found another, perhaps even harsher, system of labor.

All slaves and their families were the property of their owners, who could sell or rent them out at any time. Their lives were harsh. Slaves were often whipped, branded or cruelly mistreated. Their owners could also kill them for any reason, and would face no punishment. Although Romans accepted slavery as the norm, some people.

Slaves worked everywhere - in private households, in mines and factories, and on farms. They also worked for city governments on engineering projects such as roads, aqueducts and buildings. As a result, they merged easily into the population. In fact, slaves looked so similar to Roman citizens that the Senate once considered a plan to make them wear special clothing so that they could be identified at a glance. The idea was rejected because the Senate feared that, if slaves saw how many of them were working in Rome, they might be tempted to join forces and rebel.

Another difference between Roman slavery and its more modern variety was Manumission - the ability of slaves to be freed. Roman owners freed their slaves in considerable numbers: some freed them outright, while others allowed them to buy their own freedom. The prospect of possible freedom through manumission encouraged most slaves to be obedient and hard working. Formal manumission was performed by a magistrate and gave freed men full Roman citizenship. The one exception was that they were not allowed to hold office. However, the law gave any children born to freedmen, after formal manumission, full rights of citizenship, including the right to hold office. Informal manumission gave fewer rights. Slaves freed informally did not become citizens and any property or wealth they accumulated reverted to their former owners when they died.

Once freed, former slaves could work in the same jobs as plebeians - as craftsmen, midwives or traders. Some even became wealthy. However, Rome's rigid society attached importance to social status and even successful freedmen usually found the stigma of slavery hard to overcome - the degradation lasted well beyond the slavery itself.

The Roman writer [Seneca](http://www.crystalinks.com/seneca.html) believed that masters should treat their slaves well as a well treated slave would work better for a good master rather than just doing enough begrudgingly for someone who treated their slaves badly. Seneca did not believe that masters and their families should expect their slaves to watch them eat at a banquet when many had only had access to poor food.

**Egyptian Slaves**

We might be shocked to think of slavery today, but in the time of ancient Egypt is was a common practice in many cultures and countries. Some of the slaves in Egypt were the poor of Egypt who had to sell their children into slavery. Other slaves were brought in from other countries when they won battles and wars or were the result of being sold into slavery by the people from other countries.



When we look at all of the incredible buildings and temples in Egypt, we have to realize that many of them were built using slave labor. Slaves were very important in ancient Egypt as a big part of the labor force, but they were also used for many other purposes. Many slaves were house servants, gardeners, farm labor, musicians and dancers of excellent talent, scribes (those that kept written documents), and accountants.



Records show that early Egypt was influenced by other civilizations in the area. The most advanced civilization was Mesopotamia, and their culture included the use and acceptance of slavery as a part of their lives.



It is thought that almost eighty percent of the Egyptian slaves were peasants. Every year, Egypt has a ‘rainy season’ that causes the Nile River to flood. The flooding brings in rich soil from the Nile and helps to fertilize the crops. During that three month time, it is impossible to work the fields, so many of the slaves were moved to new jobs and worked in the construction buildings. Egyptologists (the people that study Egypt) haven’t found any evidence that slaves were used to build the pyramids. The information they have found doesn’t show that there were large numbers of slaves during the ‘Old Kingdom’ when the pyramids were built.



There is not a lot of information that can be found on the topic of slaves. The Egyptians used a style of writing in pictures called hieroglyphs and each picture or ‘cartouche’ could mean one word or many words. There isn’t a cartouche that represents slaves, so Egyptologists have to do a lot of guessing based on pictures of slaves.



The children of slaves also became the property of the ‘owner’, and the owner was responsible for taking care of his slaves. It is thought that slaves actually lived a life that was more comfortable than the common peasants, because they were cared for, fed and didn’t have to pay taxes.



Slaves of the royal families were held in high regard. Many of the slaves were more educated and used for their knowledge of accounting and writing. Slaves that were servants cared for every aspect of the royal families, from taking care of the children, cooking, dressing them and cleaning for them. It is believed that these slaves were treated almost as well as the higher ranking Egyptians.



When Egypt won a war against another country, there is evidence that they brought all of the people from that country back to Egypt to become slaves. Egyptian society was mostly based on passing information from generation to generation and when slaves were added to the social structure, they adopted the same culture. The information that has been translated seems to show the largest growth in slavery during the New Kingdom era. This is when Egypt had a large number of military campaigns and wars and brought slaves back with them.



It appears to be common practice of the pharaohs to give slaves away to higher ranking officials and nobles in Egypt. These might have been as payment or a reward for excellent service. From the few records that are available, it also seems that slave owners preferred foreign slaves instead of native Egyptian slaves. Foreigners were often better educated and had more talents. Native Egyptian slaves included criminals and commoners.