

An Analysis of The Decline of The Roman Empire From The Perspective of Daily Life

Zhetong Zhu*

Shanghai Jinshan World Foreign Language School, Shanghai, China

* Corresponding Author Email: kitrina1122@icloud.com

Abstract. The Roman Empire created a prosperous situation in western history and experienced many major attempts and problems in western society since modern times. The rise and fall of the Roman Empire has always been a thought-provoking and important issue. This paper mainly reexamines the decline of the late Roman Empire from the perspective of life. This paper is mainly divided into two parts. The first part mainly combs the relevant research on life culture and civil life in ancient Rome in recent years from the perspective of civil life and social change. It can be seen that lifestyle has always been an important factor to measure the rise and fall of a country, whether in the period of the Roman Republic or the Roman Empire. The second part mainly analyzes the text based on Histories, and summarizes the final response of many factors to the decline of the Roman Empire in public life. This paper holds that the main manifestation of the decline of the Roman Empire is the numbness of people's life. Due to the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the social class has been destroyed, the city has become increasingly declining, and the rural atmosphere has swept through the city. The people are completely dependent on religion, and the church undertakes the function of people's moral education and ideal vision. The numbness of life became an important reason and symbol of the decline of the Roman Empire. This paper will be helpful to further discuss the root causes of the decline of the Roman Empire from the cultural perspective of daily life.

Keywords: The Roman Empire, Numbness of daily life, Histories.

1. Introduction

The Roman Empire is the autocratic monarchy which existed longest in European history. Its culture not only connects ancient period and modern times, but also integrates the East and the West features. It has distinct traditional characteristics. It also has the characteristics of openness. Meanwhile, it is also a combination of religion and secularity, within the imperial society, religion and popular culture coexisted and prospered together. Since Rome acted as a junction of Europe, Asia and Africa which connected their culture, helped the trade between those continents. It is a place where Eastern and Western cultures gather. It also has a profound heritage of ancient civilization. Make the culture of the Roman Empire become a bridge connecting the modern European culture from the ancient Greek and Roman times to the Italian Renaissance. The Romans ardently loved classical culture. They inherited the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome [1]. Even at the end of the Roman Empire, the people hoped to revive the country by reviving culture. While inheriting the cultural heritage of ancient Greece and Rome, the Eastern Roman culture also enlightened the backward nationalities that has the characteristics of openness.

The daily life of the ancient Romans is an important symbol to discuss the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. In the two or three centuries after the establish of the Roman Republic in 509 BC, the clothing, food, housing and transportation of Roman citizens were relatively simple, and most of them lived a simple life of small farmers. However, when Rome conquered many country, when they got tremendous wealth and servile slaves, great changes have taken place in the clothing, food, housing and transportation of the Romans. They gave up the traditional way of living, instead of it, they spend whole day on the delicious food and in the arena. In 215 BC, the Roman government specially published the obia law to limit citizens' excessive pursuit of high consumption of clothing and make Roman citizens tend to be equal in dressing. In contrast, after the Second Punic War, most Roman citizen were not satisfy with the scanty Roman traditional costumes, especially some noblewomen, they asked the government to repeal the obia act. As a result, they succeeded, the opia

law was abolished, and the Roman costumes became more and more fashionable. After Rome conquered Greece and the eastern countries in the 2nd century BC, the fashion introduced from different countries made the trend of luxury flourish day by day.

2. Lifestyle and Social Change

In the middle of the 1st century BC, Caesar showed the Roman people the Chinese silk captured in the war for the first time. Since then, Chinese silk was introduced into Rome and was immediately favored by the Romans. Even though, the government established several bans on the selling of silk, but both aristocrats and civilians were obsessed with Chinese silk. In order to buy Chinese silk and import luxury goods such as spices, linen and jewelry from India and Arabia, Rome paid a lot of gold and silver, resulting in a serious foreign trade deficit and a large outflow of gold and silver. As a result, there was serious currency chaos, which brought considerable damage to the normal economic life of Rome. Roman's meal also became a kind of artist.

In the early days of the founding of Rome, the Romans had three meals a day. They mainly ate some bread and cheese. Dinner would be more formal which had more dishes. However, when Roman had more communication with Greece, their eating habits totally changed. At the beginning of the 3rd century BC, silver utensils began to appear on the tables of Roman dignitaries. Banquet was of great significance in Roman social life. It was not only a social means, but also a means for homeowners to show their social and economic status. In addition, Romans also enjoyed to live in the extravagant villa. Roman houses could be distinguish into farmhouses and urban houses. That was the traditional houses of Roman. After, 2 BCE, the Romans learned to mix natural cement with volcanic ash and mud. Citizens found out the way to build the houses in a firmer way. The luxury residence like villa was a necessity for the wealthy men. The last but not the least, Roman got the most convenient sea transportation system in the world (at that time), but their coaches were slow [2].

At the end of the Republic period, the huge wealth plundered profoundly changed the traditional way of life of the Roman nation, resulting in significant changes in the Roman values, morality and outlook on life. The wealth accumulation and luxury of living and consumption of ancient Roman dignitaries reached an alarming level. The Rome Republic got it's unique way to gain resources, which is the plundering economic system. It not only led to the corruption of Roman officialdom, but also led to the values and morality of avoiding extravagance and waste based on traditional farming in personal life. After drastic changes, people began to pursue a luxurious lifestyle, even it contribute to the stability of the cities' structure. These plundered properties far exceed the needs of the expansion of production scale and the development of social production. A great deal of wealth was used for luxury and pleasure by the dignitaries, and the original qualities of diligence, simplicity and thrift of citizens were completely abandoned. For the aristocrats, they only cared about having fun and vote, but not the development of countries or the fate of the Empire. Most of Romans stopped working as the slaves could do everything for them, including farming. In order to limit the extravagance and waste of power and luxury, Rome issued a decree in 161 BC that no more than 3 people should be invited to each banquet, and even the expenditure of each meal was greatly limited. Sadly, the noblemen literally ignored those limitations. The delicacy of the Romans is not the only pleasure that the Romans spend money to pursue. The wine, perfume and flowers are also their fond objects. Simultaneously, they also imitate the consumption and enjoyment of the Orient. At the end of the Republic, the prevalence of power and luxury in ancient Rome led to the decline of social morality, and the traditional virtues that the Romans were proud of disappeared. The ancient "noble" Romans gradually became a "degenerate" nation [3]. The evolution of social morality is an important factor leading to the transformation of Rome from Republic to monarchy.

In many people's stereotype the ancient Romans advocated force and lived a dissolute and corrupt life. However, the fact was that the Rome have prosperous public life. In addition it was the essential part of Roman civilization. Yang's paper mainly answered three questions: Why could ancient Rome develop into a highly splendid civilization in the barbarous times? What drove the legions to make

their empire bigger than the United States today? And why did all the Renaissance masters regard ancient Greece and Rome as the ideal form of the city? Those all pointed to the “city” and “citizen life” development in Rome. In ancient Rome, people mainly lived in city, it caused the public form the strong city-state consciousness and patriotism. At that time, which is 2 thousand years ago. Romans could use free library, theater and squares. It was all provide by the government. Ancient Rome not only provided citizens with “urban space”, but also more crucially provided them with “public life”. It was totally contrast with the medieval. During medieval the cities belonged to the gods, but not people. The human life was holding together with the church, and the pontiff had more power than the emperor. In Rome, the building and all of the resources were serve for the citizens. Furthermore, Roman cities were incredibly big. In the ancient time because people could not abandon farming, otherwise they might starve. However, ancient Rome reached over million of citizens in an urban area. Since Rome got their unique ways to gain enough resources to feed those individuals, which is Predatory commodity economy. It was controversial topic in the researchers. The Rome city almost imported everything. However, undoubted ancient Rome was unconquerable. They were so powerful, and they turned the Mediterranean into their inland sea. The army and free people of ancient Rome had a strong pride and love for the city and country, which also contained the firmness and persistence unimaginable today [4]. This is the luxurious urban public life in ancient Rome, which many people have never imagined today.

In addition, the changes of family life in ancient Rome have attracted much attention from scholars. Roman families were usually composed of husbands, wives, unmarried children, slaves and asylum seekers. Like other ancient countries, family power was concentrated in the male parents. In the early period, the male parents had power to control everything in his family, include the livestock, other family members, slaves and money. It called *matrimonium cum manu*. The male parents could divorce his wife, could appoint the husband of his daughter, could do whatever he wanted, and his power was unlimited. On the contrary, after ancient Rome dominated the Mediterranean, with the inflow of a large number of wealth and slaves, great changes have taken place in Roman marriage and family life and perception. Because of the war, many men had to fight against other countries. So, the male parents might left home for years or died in the battlefield. Consequently, the management of family and property fell into the hands of women, and women’s power gradually expanded. After the Second Punic War, a large amount of wealth initiated to flow into Rome from the conquered places and accumulate in the rich families. The male in those wealthy families was unwilling to exchange the rich dowry for his husband’s family, so the marriage *Matrimonium sine manu* was becoming more and more popular. *Matrimonium sine manu* in Chinese means the marriage with out husband’s right. Officially, *Matrimonium sine manu* did not mean that wife had lower hierarchy then his husband. On the contrary, her father was still her legal guardian, and the married woman and her dowry were still under the control of her father. In my opinion, it just because the wife’s father did not want to lose money. Once her dad past away, then she got the right to handle enterprises’ own affairs. By the end of the Republic, the wife could purpose divorce as easily as her husband. For the early Romans, marriage was an obligation. They married for religion, but not romantic. Correspondingly, the husband and wife life was serious and conservative, and the public expression of love between husband and wife is regarded as an inappropriate behavior. In the contrast, at the end of Republic, the sexual life of Roman women also tended to be “liberalized” [5]. Meanwhile, prostitution and extramarital adultery prevailed. Chastity has been an extremely rare virtue since the early 2nd century BC. Even the king wanted control that condition, he established laws. Sadly, those laws did not impose well.

3. The Decline of Empire and the Numbness of Life: Analysis Based on Histories

In the late Roman Empire, there was a transformation from classical culture to Christian culture, which had an impact on women’s life. Through comparative research, Liu’s paper shows that women

in classical culture have more freedom, but they are in a disadvantageous position in marriage life. Christianity emphasizes strict monogamy and regards marriage as a sacrament, which limits men's arbitrary divorce and extramarital sex, so that women's marriage life can be more guaranteed. In classical culture, only men have the qualification to ask for divorce, even Roman classical culture inherits the humanistic spirit of Greek culture, emphasizes human nature and pays attention to people's secular life, which is secular humanism in essence. But this kind of humanism, only useful for the men, at the Roman society. And later, such freedom became frivolous, and the male mistress had reached a point beyond the control of the law. With the rise of Christianity in Rome, fewer people indulged in lust and more people practiced. The Christian concept of marriage gradually changed the life of the Romans [6].

In the period of agricultural civilization, people's desire is very simple, that is, food and clothing. There are many ways to achieve this goal. For example, the government can reduce taxes and change policies to encourage people to cultivate more land. However, Roman citizens chose a unique way. They pretended that life was peaceful, which sounds ridiculous. They faced different troubles and pressures, but they were completely indifferent. The Romans only knew how to pretend that everything was going well. They were indifferent to the collapse of their country and the prosperity of their neighbors.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Histories book 14 paragraph 2 verse 1, For the Isaurians 13 too, whose way it is now to keep the peace and now put everything in turmoil by sudden raids, abandoned their occasional secret plundering expeditions and, as impunity stimulated for the worse their growing boldness, broke out in a serious war [7]. And the other example listed in the book is the Persians who wanted to attack Rome city suddenly. When Romans having a celebrating ceremony the Persians started the war surprisingly. So, the soldiers against the army on the street. Fortunately, the Roman soldiers fight back, they successfully resisted the conquer. People believed that Roman Empire used to be so aggressive and kept expanded when Roman was young. The citizens only could see the advantage of the empire. In the public's cognition, Rome is a country that is quite strong and democratic. When the country getting older the problems and issues started to reveal.

On the basis of book 14 passages 1 verse 1&2, author Ammianus Marcellinus took Caesar as an example. Caesar is the founder of the Rome Empire, so it was impossible for Ammianus to experience the real event. As a result, I implied there are must somehow be exaggerated by him. As he mentioned, Caesar was the king who was easy to show his emotion and get angry. However, in ancient times, the man usually tries to cover their mood. For a king, he always showing his madness are ironic. Besides, the kings after Caesar also have this problem.

Consequently, when the country was falling, the rage of the monarch partially caused the collapse of Rome. In addition, for the political side officials' laziness, ministers tried to cover the truth and exaggerated it. They were not caring about the life quality and wishes of the peasants, the officials only care about their profit and right. Moreover, Romans were pretty inclined to behave in a hostile fashion, so current people could not imagine how to cure they treat the slaves and the prisoner from the war. At the end of Ammianus Marcellinus's The history book 14, he used a lot of paragraphs to describe the atrocities of the monarch against prisoners of war.

We can not tell how he knew that or did he suffer from that. The information we could get is when the monarch is no longer kind, the country will become uncontrollable. Then gradually toward destruction. Rome used war to conquer other land and used the laws to rule people when the country no longer have a clear mind monarch and the officers were lazy. This country is tottering.

After the ruling by a rage monarch, the citizen would be very timid and overcautious. Therefore, even there were several kings who had the hope to make the state better. In contrast, there were so many barriers to avoid him to revise the country. Since the people became numb.

Because of people's numbness, the aristocracy became more presumptuous. At the time, no one really cared about the survival of this country. The public indulged in a life of pleasure and comfort. As a result of this terrible situation, individuals relied on wine. In accordance with the book 14 passage 6 verse 9 and 25. Everyone loved wine in that period. Soldiers drunk wine to encourage

themselves to keep up high morale. Aristocrats drunk wine for recreation. The poor could only escape from reality through alcohol. The rich people could drink it at a fancy party, but peasants drunk wine in the factory. This has intensified class contradictions to a great extent. The gap between the upper class and lower class emerged. All we know was that the Roman people were aggressive by nature. So, when the wine was in a short supply the conflict became so sharp, it led to a riot.

Therefore, the main issue that caused the Rome Empire to collapse was the numbness of the people. Besides, in my opinion, the biggest effect that caused the public to present a false appearance of peace and prosperity was the issued government. According to the psychologists, the child who had an irritable father and an incompetent mother was least likely to show his urge for improvement and content with things as they were. It was exactly the situation of the Roman, they were satisfied with the existing state of affairs and reluctant to move forward. Their wishes were extremely simple. It was conceivable for a democratic state. On the contrary, when they discovered the government was in issue, they became hopeless.

Culture was placed on an unprecedented broad world background and a new social foundation in the Roman Empire. In the early 200 years of the Empire, this new environment also brought cultural prosperity to Roman society. However, the Roman Empire did not solve the problem of people's value care and moral education in culture. Especially in the late stage, this dilemma of imperial culture was exposed [8]. Of course, some scholars call this decline "cultural transformation" [9]. The fundamental reason for the decline of the Roman Empire was the victory of Christianity and barbarism [10].

4. Conclusions

This paper attempts to analyze the decline of the late Roman Empire from the perspective of daily life. Previous relevant studies have fully discussed the life culture of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, which fully shows that daily life can not only reflect a national system and social stability, but also convey people's confidence. Based on the analysis of Histories, this paper can find that the numbness of people's daily life in the late Roman Empire, which is caused by many aspects, finally implies the decline of the Roman Empire. This paper will be helpful for the academic circles to pay attention to the discussion of historical issues by the method of daily life research.

References

- [1] Wang Lingyun, On the characteristics of Eastern Roman imperial culture, Journal of Shangqiu Normal University, 2007 (05), pp.58-60.
- [2] He Libo, Daily life of ancient Romans: Taking the behavior of clothing, food and housing as an example, World culture, 2008 (05), pp. 45-48.
- [3] Shan Shan, Luxury life of dignitaries in the late Roman Republic, Journal of Hengyang Normal University, 2013, 34 (04), pp.113-116.
- [4] Yang Meng, Ancient Rome: urban life as public goods, Interior design, 2009, 24 (04), pp.55-60.
- [5] Wang Zhenxia, Changes of family life in ancient Rome, Guizhou Social Sciences, 2013 (11), pp.145-150.
- [6] Liu Wenming, On the cultural transformation and the change of women's marital status in the late Roman Empire, Journal of Capital Normal University, 2005 (06), pp.8-14.
- [7] Marcellinus Ammianus, Histories, Legacy Collection Digital Museum, 1976.
- [8] Jin Lian, Cultural dilemma of the late Roman Empire, Journal of Zhejiang University, 1997 (01), pp.45-51.
- [9] Wang Xiaochao, On the transformation of Roman imperial culture, Zhejiang Social Sciences, 1998 (05), pp.62-65.
- [10] Wang Xiaochao, An example of faith transformation Culture: on Augustine's transformation of Roman imperial culture, Christian religion research, 2001 (02), pp.8-24.