

# ROMAN WOMEN

The ideal Roman woman was a good housekeeper, a caring mother and an obedient wife. She ran the home, took care of her children's early education, and supported her husband in his career. In theory, Roman women had very few rights, but most of them had lots of power behind the scenes.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A Roman husband had the right to divorce his wife if she could not have children, if she became ugly or if she argued with him too much. He could even sentence her to death if she was unfaithful. A wife, on the other hand, could only divorce her husband if he deserted her, joined the army or became a prisoner of war. But although the law was very unfair, Roman history is full of examples of respectful and devoted husbands who got on well with their wives.

## WORKING WOMEN

Not all Roman women could afford to stay at home and look after the family. Some had jobs as midwives or hairdressers, while many helped out in the family shop or farm. A few women worked as acrobats or dancers, but these jobs weren't considered respectable.

## POWERFUL WOMEN

Rich women supervised large households with lots of slaves, and a wife often ran her husband's business while he was away. Many politicians' wives took an active interest in their husbands' careers. By crafty plotting and scheming, they made sure that their husbands succeeded in public life, and that their enemies were dealt with mercilessly.

*A statue of Livia - wife of Augustus - who was famous for her ruthless scheming. She ended up being declared a goddess.*

*These mosaic pictures show two Roman women exercising.*

## CHANGING TIMES

During Republican times, most women had large families and stayed at home, spinning and weaving cloth. But by the time of the Empire, some wealthy wives had different ideas about how they wanted to spend their time. Several Roman writers complained about idle women who neglected their duty to have children, and spent their time pampering themselves and attending dinner parties.

