**Some Roman Costs and Figures**

All figures are given in sesterces. Please remember that calculating costs and figures for ancient Rome is very difficult and it is very hard to be precise – it is pretty much impossible to express these in terms of any modern currency.

**Incomes in Rome**

Julio-Claudian:

Imperial income: 400 million sesterces per annum?

Day laborer’s income: 3-4 sesterces a day (city of Rome)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Roman soldier’s income: 900 sesterces a year

Equestrian estate (minimum):[[2]](#footnote-2) 400,000

Senatorial estate (minimum): 1,000,000 (from land in Italy)

Augustus’ estate at death (14 CE): over 1,000 million sesterces

Tiberius’ estate at death (37 CE): 2,700 million sesterces

GDP: Estimates vary from 10,000-20,000[[3]](#footnote-3)

Flavian:

Domitian’s (81-96 CE) imperial income: 1-1.2 billion sesterces per annum?

Roman soldier: 1,200 sesterces a year

Patrons’ payments to clients for daily visit (reign of Domitian): 6 ¼ sesterces

**Elite estates**

Titus Antistius (quaestor 50 BCE): 18 million

Marcus Crassus the Triumvir (c. 114-53 BCE): c. 200 million

Lucius Lucullus (118-56 BCE): c. 100 million

Pompey the Great (106-46 BCE): over 200 million

Cicero (106-43 BCE): c. 13 million

Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus (50s BCE-25 CE): 400,000 million

Pliny the Younger (61-112s CE): c. 16 million estate; lifetime gifts to his home town of Comum: 1.6 million sesterces

Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE): 300,000 million

Gaius Caecilius Isidorus, freedman of Gaius Caecilius (d. 8 BCE): estate of 60 million sesterces + over ¼ million cattle and oxen

Narcissus, freedman of the Emperor Claudius (d.54 BCE): estate of 400,000 million

**Costs of gladiators:**

c. 1 CE Tiberius paid 100,000 sesterces to retired gladiators to bring them out of retirement

Figures restricting costs of gladiators from the *Senatus Consultum de pretiis gladiatorum minuendis* (177 CE)[[4]](#footnote-4):

*Assiforana*:[[5]](#footnote-5) total cost can be no more than 30,000 sesterces

Public *munera*

Games costing total 30,000-60,000

3,000; 4,000; 5,000 per gladiator

Games costing 60,000-100,000

5,000; 6,000; 8,000 per gladiator

Games costing 100,000-150,000

5,000; 6,000; 7,000; 10,000; 12,000 per gladiator

Games costing more than 150,000

6,000; 7,000; 10,000; 12,000; 15,000

Gladiators from the herd: 2,000-1,000 sesterces (at least 50% of gladiators had to be supplied from the herd)

Criminals for execution*:* 600 sesterces

**Other Athletic incomes/costs:**

**Charioteers:**

Diocles (122-c.140s ce): 36 million sesterces over career

Gutta (2nd century CE): 2,150,000 sesterces over career[[6]](#footnote-6)

Eutychus (reign of Caligula): 2 million sesterces in gifts from Caligula

**Mimes:**

Unknown, but high, especially for superstars: for a mime to buy his freedom was 700,000 sesterces or so, showing the level of profit they would bring their owner. Beyond this it is hard to be sure.

**Known costs of some *munera,* *venationes,* and *ludi:***

**North Africa:**

**Carthage**: 200,000 for gladiators and *venationes* for 4 days (133/8 CE)

**Smirat**: four panthers killed for a total cost of 16,000 sesterces (mid 200s CE)

**Gor:** 240 sesterces for a boxing display

**Italy:**

**Rome:**

**Costs allocated to aediles to hold various games:[[7]](#footnote-7)**

*Ludi Romani:* 200,000 (until 213 BCE); 333,333 (212-?)[[8]](#footnote-8); 760,00 (51 CE)

*Ludi Plebii* 600,000 (51 CE)

*Ludi Apollinares*: 20,000 (179 BCE); 380,000 (51 CE)

**Other figures from Rome:**

186 BCE: M. Fulvius Noblilior (Aetolian War): 10 days of *ludi:* including a hunt with lions and leopards = 80,000 sesterces

c.160 BCE Polybius says 750,000 sesterces costs for a lavish gladiatorial show.

60-50s BCE Milo’s three fortunes: Cicero reports that Milo spent either 1 million sesterces or 10 million on one set of games.

Caligula: gift of 2 million sesterces to charioteer

Hadrian: receives 4 million sesterces from Emperor Trajan in 106 and 107 CE to celebrate his election as praetor

**Outside Rome:**

Pisaurum, N. Italy 150,000 (after 100 CE)

Aeclanum, S. Italy: 200,000 (?) (161/9? CE)

**Other prices and figures in ancient Rome:**

Rent:

1. house on the Palatine rented by Marcus Caelius Rufus for 30,000 sesterces in 50s BCE pa
2. Cicero income from two *insulae* on Argiletum and the Aventine Hills in Rome in 50 BCE: 80-100,000 sesterces
3. Cost for house of Scaurus on the Palatine purchased by Clodius in 53 BCE: 14,800,000

Entertainment:

Feasts for public (imperial period): 2-30 sesterces per head, Italy

*Sportula*:[[9]](#footnote-9) 4-20 sesterces per head, Italy. (The average person normally received about 4 sesterces.)

Wine: 2-4 sesterces an amphora for cheap wine. These varied in size, but usually contained c.26 litres.

Wheat: highly variable from 1-20 sesterces per *modius[[10]](#footnote-10)* depending on the harvest; basic price is 2-4 sesterces per *modius.*

Papyrus 2-4 sesterces per roll. There are 20 sheets in an average roll.

**Animals:**

Bears: the highest price we hear of is 1,000 per bear[[11]](#footnote-11)

For transit costs see Stanford Orbis (<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>)

**Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices (301 CE)**

African lion: 600,000 (first class)

African lioness: 400,000 (second class)

**Bibliography**

If Roman economics have caught your interest, the following are excellent places to start:

Scheidel, Walter and Stephen J. Freisen 2009. “The size of the economy and the distribution of income in the Roman Empire.*”* *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics*

Duncan-Jones, Richard. 1982. *The Economy of the Roman Empire.* Cambridge.

Temin, Peter. 2013. *The Roman Market Economy.* Princeton, NJ.

(Review: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2013/05/17/book-review-the-roman-market-economy/>)

1. Wages were lower elsewhere: in rural Egypt, for example, labourers earned c. 1 sesterces a day. However, costs of living were also lower outside Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is the annual income required to belong to the equestrian or senatorial class; many members of this class had incomes much higher than this. Senators had to have at least 1 million sesterces from land; there was no such restriction on equestrians. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 10,000 (Peter Temin), 12,500 (Keith Hopkins); 20,000 (Raymond Goldsmith), [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In addition to the cost of hiring gladiators there was also a government tax ranging from 25-33% of the total cost. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Games given to make a profit, with prices charged for admission. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As his inscription (CIL 6.10047) only lists major prizes, he presumably won far more over his career. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Extra amounts could be accessed by using the fines the aediles levied for the games and by the aediles demanding goods, etc. from Italy and the provinces. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Presumably it went up before 51 CE, but we have no idea when or by how much. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Small gifts made from patrons to clients, from emperors to the people, and so forth. These were often distributed at games. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A *modius* is about 9 litres (16 pints). 5 *modii* per month seems to have been the ration for members of the plebs; this equals about 3,000-3,500 calories per day. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. That, however, is in a 2nd century CE novel, *The Golden Ass,* and the individual is basically being extorted at the time: all of his bears had died and he really needed some for a show. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)