

Student 6: High Not Achieved

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Hadrian's Baths at Leptis Magna and the Flavian amphitheatre were built by the Emperor at the time in order to gain popularity among the people of the Roman Empire. The Theatre at Leptis Magna however was not financed by an Emperor, but instead by a wealthy man in society, Annobal Rufus.

This was common in the Roman Empire, among rich or high standing men in the society who wished to gain a higher standing or increase their political influence. From the third century BC, political and social competition began to increase in Rome, and entertainment began to become more and more lavish and over the top. **The trend of financing plays and financing the building of theatres became popular, and the more entertaining the spectacle a man produced, the more public glory they achieved.** An example of this is of Rufus at Leptis Magna, who we can assume was aiming to do just that; impress the other citizens and please the crowds. This phenomenon was known as *evergetism*, doing good, where a benefactor such as Rufus was spending personal wealth to entertain the public, and received in return acclaim and prestige.

From these examples we can see something about the Roman people themselves. As we have established, there was a very fixed social hierarchy among the Roman society, and from people such as Annobal Rufus we can see that there was a constant struggle, if one was on the top of the hierarchy, to stay at the top of it. Men such as Rufus, who were of high class and social standing wanted to ensure that their lives stayed this way. In order to achieve this, it became common to use personal wealth to finance projects in society, such as theatre, or simply financing plays. These were things that entertained the people and allowed the benefactor to gain a reputation as an "*evergetism*."

At Leptis Magna, the Theatre was financed by a wealthy man who wished to gain a firmer political standing by attracting the attention of the Emperor and the Senate, and popularity among the rest of the public. In this, we can see an example of a trend in wealthy men that began to grow as social and political competition increased. **This tells us that although the Roman society was one that followed an extreme hierarchy, it was very difficult to stay at the top of the pyramid among stiff competition. The men who enjoyed the life in the upper classes were determined to stay in their place at the top, and would go to great lengths financially and politically to stay there.**

This suggests that the Roman society was corrupt, in that wealthy, powerful men were essentially able to pay to stay in their position at the top of the social hierarchy. This manipulation of the public by the upper classes is similar to the Imperial Propaganda of the Emperors, where they manipulated the people's opinions of them, building buildings such as the Colosseum to shamelessly gain popularity. The upper classes in Rome during the height of the Roman Empire are, we can say, deeply corrupt in that not only the Emperor but the upper classes were in effect controlling the lower classes, by manipulating their opinions and influencing their happiness.