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Rome and the Roots of Western Civilization

MAIN IDEA

POWER AND AUTHORITY The Romans developed many ideas and institutions that became fundamental to Western civilization.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Evidence of Roman culture is found throughout Europe and North America and in Asia and Africa.

TERMS & NAMES

- Greco-Roman culture
- Pompeii
- Virgil
- Tacitus
- aqueduct

SETTING THE STAGE Romans borrowed and adapted cultural elements freely, especially from the Greek and Hellenistic cultures. However, the Romans created a great civilization in their own right, whose art and architecture, language and literature, engineering, and law became its legacy to the world.

TAKING NOTES

Summarizing Use a chart to list the accomplishments of Roman civilization.

<i>Fine Arts</i>	<i>Literature</i>
<i>Law</i>	<i>Engineering</i>

The Legacy of Greco-Roman Civilization

Under the Roman Empire, hundreds of territories were knitted into a single state. Each Roman province and city was governed in the same way. The Romans were proud of their unique ability to rule, but they acknowledged Greek leadership in the fields of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy.

By the second century B.C., Romans had conquered Greece and had come to greatly admire Greek culture. Educated Romans learned the Greek language. As Horace, a Roman poet, said, “Greece, once overcome, overcame her wild conqueror.” The mixing of elements of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture produced a new culture, called **Greco-Roman culture**. This is also often called classical civilization.

Roman artists, philosophers, and writers did not merely copy their Greek and Hellenistic models. They adapted them for their own purposes and created a style of their own. Roman art and literature came to convey the Roman ideals of strength, permanence, and solidity.

Roman Fine Arts Romans learned the art of sculpture from the Greeks. However, while the Greeks were known for the beauty and idealization of their sculpture, Roman sculptors created realistic portraits in stone. Much Roman art was practical in purpose, intended for public education.

The reign of Augustus was a period of great artistic achievement. At that time the Romans further developed a type of sculpture called bas-relief. In bas-relief, or low-relief, images project from a flat background. Roman sculptors used bas-relief to tell stories and to represent crowds of people, soldiers in battle, and landscapes.

Roman artists also were particularly skilled in creating mosaics. Mosaics were pictures or designs made by setting small pieces of stone, glass, or tile onto a surface. Most Roman villas, the country houses of the wealthy, had at least one colorful mosaic. (See the Social History feature on pages 166–167.)

In addition, Romans excelled at the art of painting. Most wealthy Romans had bright, large murals, called frescoes, painted directly on their walls. Few have survived. The best examples of Roman painting are found in the Roman town of **Pompeii** and date from as early as the second century B.C. In A.D. 79, nearby Mount Vesuvius erupted, covering Pompeii in a thick layer of ash and killing about 2,000 residents. The ash acted to preserve many buildings and works of art.

Learning and Literature Romans borrowed much of their philosophy from the Greeks. Stoicism, the philosophy of the Greek teacher Zeno, was especially influential. Stoicism encouraged virtue, duty, moderation, and endurance.

In literature, as in philosophy, the Romans found inspiration in the works of their Greek neighbors. While often following Greek forms and models, Roman writers promoted their own themes and ideas. The poet **Virgil** spent ten years writing the most famous work of Latin literature, the *Aeneid* (ih•NEE•ihd), the epic of the legendary Aeneas. Virgil modeled the *Aeneid*, written in praise of Rome and Roman virtues, after the Greek epics of Homer. Here he speaks of government as being Rome's most important contribution to civilization:

PRIMARY SOURCE

Romans, never forget that government is your medium! Be this your art:—to practice men in habit of peace, Generosity to the conquered, and firmness against aggressors.

VIRGIL, *Aeneid*

While Virgil's writing carries all the weight and seriousness of the Roman character, the poet Ovid wrote light, witty poetry for enjoyment. In *Amores*, Ovid relates that he can only compose when he is in love: "When I was from Cupid's passions free, my Muse was mute and wrote no elegy."

Global Patterns

The Epic

While many know the epics of Virgil and the Greek poet Homer, other cultures throughout history have created their own narrative poems about heroic figures. India's *Mahabharata* tells the story of a battle for control of a mighty kingdom, while the Spanish epic *El Cid* celebrates a hero of the wars against the Moors. And while it is not a poem, *The Lord of the Rings*, the fantasy trilogy by English writer J.R.R. Tolkien, is considered to contain many aspects of the epic.

Most epics follow a pattern derived from the works of Homer. However, the emergence of epics around the world was not so much the result of one writer but the common desire among civilizations to promote their values and ideals through stories.

► Depictions of scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* (left), *El Cid* (top right), and *Mahabharata* (bottom right)

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> Analyzing Key Concepts

Western Civilization

Western civilization is generally seen as the heritage of ideas that spread to Europe and America from ancient Greece and Rome. Some historians observe, however, that Western civilization does not belong to any particular place—that it is the result of cultures coming together, interacting, and changing. Still, the legacy of Greece and Rome can be seen today.

The diagram below shows how ancient Greek and Roman ideas of government, philosophy, and literature can be traced across time. As with many cultural interactions, the links between the examples are not necessarily direct. Instead, the chart traces the evolution of an idea or theme over time.

Influence of Greek and Roman Ideas

Government	Philosophy	Literature
<p>509 B.C. Rome developed a form of representative government.</p>	<p>300s B.C. Aristotle developed his philosophical theories.</p>	<p>ABOUT 800 B.C. Homer wrote the <i>Odyssey</i>.</p>
<p>400s B.C. Greece implemented a direct democracy.</p>	<p>A.D. 1200s Thomas Aquinas attempted to prove the existence of a single god using Aristotelian ideas.</p>	<p>19 B.C. Virgil used the <i>Odyssey</i> to guide his <i>Aeneid</i>.</p>
<p>1600s England became a constitutional monarchy.</p>	<p>1781 Philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote that Aristotle's theories on logic were still valid.</p>	<p>1922 James Joyce patterned his epic, <i>Ulysses</i>, after Homer's work.</p>
<p>1776 The United States declared independence from England and began building the republican democracy we know today.</p>	<p>Present Scholars still hold conferences focusing on questions Aristotle raised.</p>	<p>2000 The Coen brothers' film, <i>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</i>, brought a very different adaptation of the <i>Odyssey</i> to the big screen.</p>

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

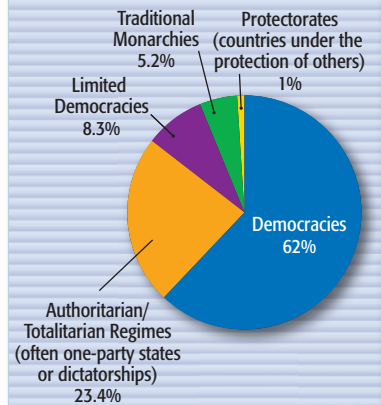
RESEARCH LINKS For more on Western civilization, go to classzone.com

> DATA FILE

DEMOCRACY

- Theoretically, 40,000 people could attend the Greek Assembly—in practice, about 6,000 people attended.
- In 1215, King John of England granted the Magna Carta, which largely influenced subsequent democratic thought.
- In the 1970s, there were 40 democratic governments worldwide.
- In 2002, over 120 established and emerging democracies met to discuss their common issues.

Current Forms of World Governments



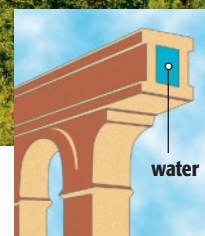
Source: adapted from *Democracy's Century*, Freedom House online (2003)

Connect to Today

1. Hypothesizing Why do you think ancient Greek and Roman culture have had such a lasting influence on Western civilization?

See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R15.

2. Comparing and Contrasting From what you know of ancient Greece and Rome, what is another element of either culture that can still be seen today? Provide an example.



The Romans also wrote excellent prose, especially history. Livy compiled a multivolume history of Rome from its origins to 9 B.C. He used legends freely, creating more of a national myth of Rome than a true history. **Tacitus** (TAS•ih•tuhs), another Roman historian, is notable among ancient historians because he presented the facts accurately. He also was concerned about the Romans' lack of morality. In his *Annals* and *Histories*, he wrote about the good and bad of imperial Rome.

Here, Tacitus shows his disgust with the actions of the Emperor Nero, who many consider to be one of Rome's cruelest rulers.

PRIMARY SOURCE

While Nero was frequently visiting the show, even amid his pleasures there was no cessation to his crimes. For during the very same period Torquatus Silanus was forced to die, because over and above his illustrious rank as one of the Junian family he claimed to be the great grandson of Augustus. Accusers were ordered to charge him with prodigality [wastefulness] in lavishing gifts, and with having no hope but in revolution. . . . Then the most intimate of his freedmen were put in chains and torn from him, till, knowing the doom which impended, Torquatus divided the arteries in his arms. A speech from Nero followed, as usual, which stated that though he was guilty and with good reason distrusted his defense, he would have lived, had he awaited the clemency of the judge.

TACITUS, *Annals*

▲ This Roman aqueduct in modern France has survived the centuries. The cross section indicates how the water moved within the aqueduct.

The Legacy of Rome

The presence of Rome is still felt daily in the languages, the institutions, and the thought of the Western world.

The Latin Language Latin, the language of the Romans, remained the language of learning in the West long after the fall of Rome. It was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church into the 20th century.

Latin was adopted by different peoples and developed into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian. These languages are called Romance languages because of their common Roman heritage. Latin also influenced other languages. For example, more than half the words in English have a basis in Latin. **A**

Master Builders Visitors from all over the empire marveled at the architecture of Rome. The arch, the dome, and concrete were combined to build spectacular structures, such as the Colosseum.

Arches also supported bridges and **aqueducts**. Aqueducts were designed by Roman engineers to bring water into cities and towns. When the water channel spanned a river or ravine, the aqueduct was lifted high up on arches.

MAIN IDEA

Clarifying

A What impact did the Romans have on our English language?

INTERACTIVE

The Colosseum

The Colosseum was one of the greatest feats of Roman engineering and a model for the ages. The name comes from the Latin word *colossus*, meaning “gigantic.” Its construction was started by the Emperor Vespasian and was completed by his sons, emperors Titus and Domitian. For centuries after its opening in A.D. 80, spectators, both rich and poor, cheered a variety of free, bloody spectacles—from gladiator fights to animal hunts.



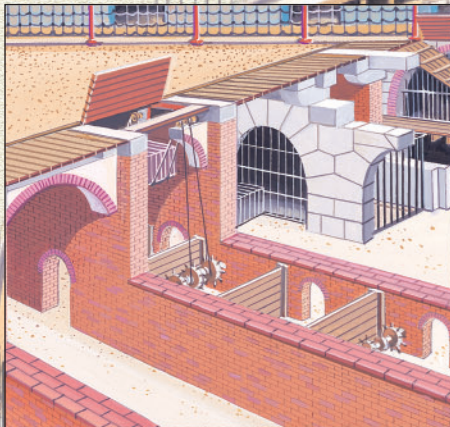
▲ The Colosseum in Rome as it appears today

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH LINKS For more information on the Colosseum, go to classzone.com

Elevators and ramps led from the cells and animal cages in the Colosseum basement to trapdoors concealed in the arena floor.

exits—giant staircases that allowed the building to be emptied in minutes



arena—central area where spectacles took place

passageways—walkways that led to seats

velarium—a retractable canvas awning that shielded spectators from sun and rain


Facts About the Colosseum

- Built—A.D. 72–81
- Capacity—45,000–50,000
- Materials—stone and concrete
- Size—157 feet high, 620 feet long
- Arena—287 feet long, 180 feet wide

entrances—80 in all

Connect to Today

1. Comparing The Colosseum has been the model for sports stadiums worldwide. How is the design of modern stadiums patterned after that of the Colosseum? What are the similarities?

 See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R7.

2. Drawing Conclusions What do the kind of spectacles the Romans watched tell us about them as a people and about their leaders?

Because Roman architectural forms were so practical, they have remained popular. Thomas Jefferson began a Roman revival in the United States in the 18th century. Many large public buildings, such as the U.S. Capitol and numerous state capitols, include Roman features.

Roman roads were also technological marvels. The army built a vast network of roads constructed of stone, concrete, and sand that connected Rome to all parts of the empire. Many lasted into the Middle Ages; some are still used.

Roman System of Law Rome’s most lasting and widespread contribution was its law. Early Roman law dealt mostly with strengthening the rights of Roman citizens. As the empire grew, however, the Romans came to believe that laws should be fair and apply equally to all people, rich and poor. Slowly, judges began to recognize certain standards of justice. These standards were influenced largely by the teachings of Stoic philosophers and were based on common sense and practical ideas. Some of the most important principles of Roman law were:

- All persons had the right to equal treatment under the law.
- A person was considered innocent until proven guilty.
- The burden of proof rested with the accuser rather than the accused.
- A person should be punished only for actions, not thoughts.
- Any law that seemed unreasonable or grossly unfair could be set aside.

The principles of Roman law endured to form the basis of legal systems in many European countries and of places influenced by Europe, including the United States of America. **B**

Rome’s Enduring Influence By preserving and adding to Greek civilization, Rome strengthened the Western cultural tradition. The world would be a very different place had Rome not existed. Historian R. H. Barrow has stated that Rome never fell because it turned into something even greater—an idea—and achieved immortality.

As mighty as the Roman Empire had been, however, it was not the only great civilization of its time. Around the same period that Rome was developing its enduring culture, different but equally complex empires were emerging farther east. In India, the Mauryan and Gupta empires dominated the land, while the Han Empire ruled over China.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Issues

B How did Roman law protect those accused of crimes?

SECTION 5 ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Greco-Roman culture
- Pompeii
- Virgil
- Tacitus
- aqueduct

USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which accomplishment do you consider most important? Why?

Fine Arts	Literature
Law	Engineering

MAIN IDEAS

3. What is Greco-Roman culture?
4. In what way did Roman art differ from Greek art?
5. What influence did Latin have on the development of Western languages?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Which principle of law do you think has been Rome’s greatest contribution to modern legal systems?
7. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Do you agree with Horace’s claim on page 178 that when it came to culture, Greece in essence conquered Rome? Explain.
8. **HYPOTHESIZING** Describe how the world might be different if Rome had not existed.
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **POWER AND AUTHORITY** Imagine you are a historian. Write an **expository essay** describing the importance of Rome’s legacy.

CONNECT TO TODAY PRESENTING A REPORT

Locate several Latin phrases still in use today. Use the necessary materials to help translate those phrases, and then explain in a brief **report** the meaning and intent of those phrases.