

The Roman Empire



Quick summary



The story of how a small village grew to become one of the largest empires the world has ever seen stretches over centuries. At its most powerful, the Roman Empire spread across Europe, parts of North Africa and the Middle East. Its army was one of the most organised and skilful ever created. Romans took their technology, art and beliefs with them and had a significant effect on the culture and society of every land they conquered. However, the Romans faced struggles at home, with civil war and political **turmoil**. By the end of the fifth century, they had been attacked on several different **frontiers** and were finding it difficult to hold their vast empire together. As a consequence, the Western Roman Empire finally came to an end in 476 CE.



Conflict

Ancient Rome's success depended on its ability to win battles against invaders and neighbouring armies. The early Romans also made treaties (agreements) with neighbours and other city-states until, with their powerful, well trained army, they became the undisputed rulers of Italy. They invented new ways of fighting and were always looking to improve their **military**. As a consequence, they won more and more **territory** and set their sights beyond the Italian peninsula.



Society

Rome went through many changes in the way it was governed. Firstly ruled by kings, it then became a republic (a state without a king) in 509 BCE and was led by senators using a **constitution**. However, civil wars and arguments about how to rule went on for centuries. In 45 BCE Julius Caesar, the famous general, declared himself the supreme ruler and **dictator** for life of Rome. He was **assassinated** the following year by political rivals who wanted a return to the Republic. In 27 BCE Caesar's heir Octavian took power and was given the title Augustus, Emperor of Rome. This marked the beginning of the Roman Empire.



Main events

753 BCE: Founding of Rome
575 BCE: Rome ruled by Etruscan kings
509 BCE: Rome became a republic
27 BCE: Augustus became Emperor and leader of the Empire
476 CE: Fall of Rome



Culture and pastimes

Myths (stories told to explain customs and beliefs) were a significant part of Roman life. There is even a myth to explain how the city of Rome was founded. It tells the tale of two brothers Romulus and Remus.



Vocabulary

turmoil: a state of confusion and uncertainty
frontiers: borders between countries
territory: land controlled by a ruler
constitution: a system of laws and rules
dictator: a ruler with total power over a country
assassinated: killed for political reasons



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



Location



Main events



Food and farming



Travel and exploration



Conflict



Society



Artefacts

Romans around the world



Quick summary



Like many empires, the Romans were always looking for other regions to conquer. By expanding their **territory**, they were able to increase the money they received from tributes (taxes). Military power also meant the Romans controlled the significant, valuable trade routes that ran across and around the Mediterranean Sea. The basis for the **economy** was agriculture; vast amounts of money were made **importing** and **exporting** goods. The Romans also took their culture, traditions and beliefs to new places, and had a significant influence on Western Europe. Latin (the language of Ancient Rome) is still a part of all European languages, including English. Christianity, which at first led to the persecution and death of many followers, was eventually adopted as the official religion of the Empire.



Travel and exploration

Having a reliable and capable army was important when building an empire, but it was trade (exchanging, buying and selling goods) that made the Roman Empire powerful and **prosperous**. Trade routes were essential and the competition to control them was fierce, sometimes leading to major conflicts. The Carthaginians, from North Africa and Spain, for example, wanted to control the sailing routes between Sicily and mainland Italy. The Romans were only able to defeat the Carthaginians by building a huge fleet of ships.



Beliefs

As the Roman Empire expanded, it encountered new religious customs and traditions. Having been influenced by the Ancient Greeks, the Romans were usually comfortable with people holding other beliefs. However, they felt it was important that people **acknowledged** Roman beliefs too. When Christians refused to worship Roman gods, they were persecuted and killed, but by the fourth century CE, Romans had embraced Christianity, and it became the Empire's official religion.



Location



Main events

264 BCE: Romans rule over the whole Italian peninsula
218–201 BCE: Second Punic War with Carthaginians
58–51 BCE: Julius Caesar conquered the Celts in Gaul (modern-day France)
c.380 CE: Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire



Vocabulary

territory: land controlled by a ruler
economy: how money and trade is organised
importing: buying goods from another country
exporting: selling goods to another country
prosperous: wealthy
acknowledged: recognised



Roman Britain



Quick summary



Led by the famous military commander Julius Caesar, the Roman army first tried to invade Britain in 55 and 54 BCE. The attempt in 55 BCE failed because of bad weather. A year later the Romans had limited success, only conquering the southern Celtic tribes. They collected tributes (taxes) but made no major attempts to expand their territories. However, they were back almost one hundred years later in 43 CE under the command of Emperor Claudius. Claudius brought a much larger army and pushed north and west from the south coast. The Romans travelled as far as modern-day Scotland but were unable to keep this area under control, building a wall to keep the northernmost tribes out. Following the successful conquest of much of Britain, the Romans stayed in Britain until 410 CE.



Settlements

The Romans brought significant changes to Britain. They built over 10,000 miles of roads and built houses, forts and temples from stone rather than wood. Before the Romans arrived, most Britons had lived in the countryside. The Romans also brought bathhouses, central heating and sanitation and built one of the most famous set of defences in history: Hadrian's Wall.



Conflict

In 43 CE the Romans landed an army in Kent, on the south coast of England, hoping to extend their vast empire even further. The Roman army was very powerful and despite resistance from many British tribes, came to control most of England and Wales by about 100 CE. One of the most famous rebellions of this time was led by Queen Boudicca, the leader of the Iceni tribe. She led a huge army against the Romans in the cities of Colchester, London and St Albans. Her army was finally defeated by a skilful and well-trained group of 1,200 Roman soldiers who defeated almost 80,000 men.



Location



Artefacts

Emperor Hadrian was visiting Britain in 122 CE. He ordered a great wall, made up of 15 forts, to be built to separate Roman Britain from Scotland. The remains of many of these forts can still be seen today, giving us clues about life in Roman Britain.



Vocabulary

territories: lands controlled by a ruler
emperor: man who rules an empire
sanitation: keeping places clean with a sewage system and clean water supply
resistance: fighting back against attackers



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



Location



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Food and farming



Travel and exploration



Conflict



Society



Artefacts



Roman – clues from the past



Quick summary



From Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland to Pompeii in Italy, there is lots of evidence for **archaeologists** and historians to build a picture of Roman life. Mosaics, pottery, jewellery and coins help to explain the structure of society and give details of the beliefs of the early Romans. The **preservation** of Pompeii (and Herculaneum) have prevented the **erosion** of these essential primary sources. And thanks to the engineering skills of the Romans, ancient buildings like the Colosseum and the Pantheon, built thousands of years ago from concrete, are a significant source of historical evidence that survive to this day.



Artefacts

In 79 CE a volcano called Mount Vesuvius, in the Bay of Naples, suddenly erupted. The huge explosion sent ash, lava and fumes down onto the city of Pompeii, at the base of the volcano. The eruption was so fast and so powerful that the city was buried almost instantly. Centuries later, archaeologists discovered well-preserved artefacts and remains, including paintings and beautiful **mosaics**. These primary sources are a significant record of what life was like in Roman towns.



Society

Art was part of everyday Roman life and was used to decorate homes, temples and public places. Large paintings and murals made from tiny pieces of tile (mosaics) depicted scenes from history, mythology and daily life. They were expensive to make, so only the wealthiest people could afford them. The largest known Roman mosaic is at Villa del Casale in Sicily. It dates from the fourth century and is almost 300 square metres in size. Showing hunting and fighting scenes, it is a primary source that tells us about Ancient Roman life.



Culture and pastimes

The Colosseum, which still stands in the heart of Rome today, was built as a vast arena for the people of Rome. Emperor Vespasian started **construction** in c.70 CE and his sons Titus and Domitian completed it. It is made from concrete, a technology that the Romans perfected, and is the largest amphitheatre ever built. While the designers and **architects** were Roman, the building work was done by Jewish slaves. The Colosseum could hold an average of 65,000 people, who would come to watch violent shows between gladiators, wild animals or prisoners. The Colosseum was also home to chariot racing and plays.



Vocabulary

archaeologists: people who study the past by examining remains and objects
preservation: protection from decay or damage
erosion: gradual destruction
mosaics: pictures made from pieces of tile
construction: the building of things
architects: people who design buildings



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